

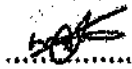
**WOMEN'S ATTRIBUTION OF BLAME IN ABUSIVE
RELATIONSHIPS**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF
THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (CLINICAL
PSYCHOLOGY)**

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (Clinical Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.


.....
M. Chesno

5TH day of JANUARY..... 1999.

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***"Society will never be free, unless women are liberated
from all forms of oppression"***

Nelson Mandela

ABSTRACT

The present research study, located in the field of social psychology and attribution theory investigated variations in causal attributions of abused women in relation to reported severity, duration and frequency of the abuse. The study aimed to expand current attributional research to incorporate global/specific attributional dimensions of blame. Although theories of learned helplessness have been linked to global attributions of blame, this relationship has been under-researched in the area of women abuse. The study also expanded locus of causality to include self or other, as well as internal (characterological) and external (situational factors). Research findings on the attributions of abused women are contradictory. The study sought to contribute to this debate and add clarity to the understanding of such attributions.

The present study involved 102 participants between the ages of 19 and 58 years, drawn from the caseloads of five prominent organisations providing services to abused women in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. Each participant completed a questionnaire based upon a research measure utilised in related research by Dutton (1994) to elicit attributions. The data were then analysed by means of statistical procedures. The study found evidence of a relation between severity of violence and partner and global attributions of blame. However, there was insufficient evidence to conclude a relation between any of the other variables studied.

The findings of the study tend to support feminist views that women do not hold themselves responsible for their abuse. This is in contradiction to the Just World View that victims are blamed for their fate, but tends to support Defensive Attribution theories which maintain that women hold their partners responsible for their abuse. However, women participating in the study generally appeared to hold stable and global attributions, suggesting that feelings of hopelessness and helplessness prevail in such relationships. This is borne out in the qualitative elaboration of the women's experience of violence and their related attributions.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The elections of 1994 marked the end of the Apartheid regime in South Africa. The present government is committed to developing social welfare policies and programmes with the goal of achieving equality and equity between men and women in social, economic and civil life (White Paper on Social Welfare, 1995). Welfare programmes advocating the elimination of all forms of violence against women have been emphasised by government ministries. Women's rights have been defined as an integral part of universal human rights (Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, (CEDAW) 1997; White Paper on Social Welfare, 1995).

In December 1996, a new constitution establishing South Africa's first Bill of Rights and advocating women's rights as human rights, was adopted in a country previously characterised by legislated inequality and severe human rights abuses. However, despite the new dispensation of gender equality, South African women "still remain second class citizens and economic, social and legal inequalities prevail" (Human Rights Watch, 1995, p.133). Women abuse is a pervasive social problem in South Africa and does not appear to be on the decline.

The violence of apartheid has extended into the family and home, and South African women face "extraordinary high levels of violence which prevent them from enjoying the rights they are guaranteed under the new dispensation". However, "without systematically addressing this gender based violence, lasting democratic change cannot be achieved" (Human Rights Watch, 1995, p.133).

Documenting the extent and nature of women abuse is crucial in bringing about necessary change. The Human Rights Watch has called on the government to fund research in collaboration with non-governmental organisations and to improve the collection of statistics and data in this sphere. However, little research has been conducted to date, and most research is generalised from small samples.

The present study falls within the realm of social cognitive psychology and investigates South

African women's attributions about women abuse. Cognitive schemata, such as attributions, have been defined as "mental structures that represent organised knowledge about a given concept" (Janoff-Bulman, 1992, p.28) as well as "complex cognitive representations of self and others which underlie much of an individual's interpersonal behaviour" (McCann & Pearlman, 1990, cited in Dutton, Berghardt, Perrin, Chrestman & Halle, 1994, p.239) including "the experience of emotion" (Mahoney, 1991 in Lutton *et al.*, 1994, p.239). These core assumptions are disrupted by traumatic experiences resulting in injury to the victim's inner world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Furthermore, cognitions mediate both the experience and reaction to aversive events, influencing the outcome and extent of trauma experienced by the victim. The victim's identity and self-esteem are eroded, affecting their post-traumatic adjustment.

In relation to women abuse, cognitions have been linked to theories of why women stay in abusive relationships (Frieze, 1979). However, little research on the woman's actual perception of the violence has taken place when one considers the high incidence of women abuse internationally. No research has been undertaken on this topic in the South African context; instead research has mainly focused on the causes and characteristics of abuse.

Attribution theory has become increasingly important in the understanding of victimisation and trauma. Research has indicated that attributional styles influence the manner in which individuals handle stress situations. However, research in the field of women abuse has tended to produce contradictory findings in this regard and reflects opposing predictions about the kinds of attributions battered women hold.

The nature of the abuse, including dimensions such as duration, frequency and intensity have been identified as playing an important role in the kinds of attributions women hold (Andrews & Brewin, 1990; Gelles, 1976; Herbert, Silver & Ellard, 1990; Miller & Porter, 1983). In addition, various other attributional positions, including Just World and Correspondent Inference Theory have also been applied to this field of attributional research. The complexity of this area of research may be due to conceptual disparities and/or methodological difficulties.

The present study seeks to contribute to this debate and to further develop understanding of the attributions of abused women.

Through documenting the experiences of the abused women it is possible to understand their experience (Walker, 1979), hopefully helping them to mediate more positive outcomes for themselves, as well as facilitating the development of effective and sophisticated preventive and rehabilitative treatment programmes.

In the Gauteng Province of South Africa, six non-governmental organisations (NGO's) provide services specifically for abused women, all of which have shelters for these women. These services include The Institute for Women's Development (NISAA) based in Lenasia; Women Against Women Abuse (WAWA) based in Eldorado Park; People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA), the oldest of these NGO's, established in 1974 and based in Berea; Helping Hands - a Christian service based in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg; Bethany - a Christian service based in the north eastern suburbs of Johannesburg; and the Centre for Peace Action based in Eldorado Park. All these organisations provide services and shelters targeted specifically at abused women. Five of these organisations participated in the research study and assisted in interviewing abused women receiving their services. Thus all participants of the study represent either women seeking refuge from abuse, and/or those seeking counselling services. These women can be viewed as a broadly representative sample of help-seeking women experiencing abuse in the Gauteng Region, and represent women from all cultural and class groups.

The study took place over an 18-month period between March 1995 and August 1996. The study aimed to investigate differences in causal attributions of abused women that may be apparent in relation to reported duration, frequency and intensity of abuse. Thus the study aimed to investigate whether attributions of blame in violent relationships differ depending on the length of time women have experienced abuse, how often the abuse took place and the severity of the injuries inflicted.

The study is divided into 9 chapters. Chapters 1-5 present a review of the literature on

women abuse and attribution theory; Chapter 6 sets out the methodology used in the study; Chapter 7 presents the results of the findings of the study; Chapter 8 presents the discussion of the results and the conclusions drawn from the research. Chapter 9 presents the overall conclusion, limitations and implications for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

WOMEN ABUSE : THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM AND ITS HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

In the early 1970's professionals as well as the general public were of the opinion that women abuse only happened to poor, working class women. Furthermore, abused women were perceived as masochists who believed that they deserved the abuse and provoked the violent behaviour (Walker, 1993 cited in Barnett & La Violette, 1993). Thus, the emphasis for change was placed on women, and few social services existed to assist abused women.

As part of the growing feminist movement and increasing social change, women abuse has more recently been identified as a pervasive social problem (Delgaty, 1985; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Segel & Labe, 1990). In the last 20 years, the dynamics of abusive relationships and their impact on women have become better understood through new empirical research and clinical data (Walker, 1993 cited in Barnett & La Violette, 1993). However, the majority of research during this time has focused on the incidence of abuse and the characteristics of those who are abused (Frieze, 1979; Liebowitz, 1992; McCarthy, 1982; O'Brien & Murdock, 1993; Pagelow 1981; Walker, 1979). In South Africa, the magnitude and scope of women abuse has been largely unacknowledged. The issue of domestic violence was brushed aside in favour of the more overt manifestations of politically related violence which characterised our society due to apartheid laws and structures (Liebowitz, 1993).

Nonetheless, recent research has resulted in a shift in emphasis by professionals and victims of abuse with regard to the perceived causes of abuse. The emphasis has shifted from individual psychopathology to the acknowledgement that causative factors in abuse are multiple and interactive and include both individual and social factors (Ammerman & Hersen, 1991; Gelles, 1976).

With this shift of emphasis in professional understanding of abuse and an increase in services, both the public and women's perception of abuse have altered. This is evidenced in women

themselves "breaking the silence" and abuse and seeking assistance far more readily (Walker, 1993 cited in Barnett & La Violette, 1993) further contributing to an increased understanding of the dynamics of women abuse. As a result, there has been a growing trend towards an integrative psychological theory and understanding of women abuse. There has also been an increased recognition of the role cognitive responses and attributions play in understanding victims' experiences of traumatic and adverse events.

In the 1970's, social psychologists studying reactions to uncontrollable outcomes began to explore whether these reactions were mediated by the individual's attributions of causality for the outcome (Wortman, 1976 cited in Wortman, 1983). Research, especially in the field of helplessness and depression, began to focus on the individual's interpretation of the uncontrollable stimulus rather than on the stimulus itself (Wortman, 1976 cited in Wortman 1983). The possibility that a person's reactions to aversive events could depend on that person's beliefs about the causes of the event became evident. This led to further research and the reformulation of theoretical models to incorporate the understanding that a person's attribution of causality about an uncomfortable outcome will determine "the type of deficit shown, how long the deficit lasts and how far the deficit generalises" (Wortman, 1983, p.203). Attributions are thus important in mediating outcome. Attributions also have an impact on broader social problems. They provide some of the understanding necessary to alleviate these problems. Attributional research has been conducted in the fields of crime, alcoholism, depression, drug use, rape, loneliness, insomnia and women abuse (Carroll & Frieze, 1979), resulting in a deeper understanding of these problems and the development of more effective treatment and community intervention programs.

More specifically, in the field of women abuse, the role of cognitive responses in the abused women's experience and understanding of the violence has gained increased recognition (O'Brien & Murdock, 1993). In cases of domestic violence, cognitive schemata or core assumptions such as attributions, beliefs, assumptions, appraisals and expectations are presumed to be disrupted by the traumatic experience (Herman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; McCann & Pearlman, 1990a cited in O'Brien & Murdock, 1993).

Attribution theory is vital in understanding psychological difficulties as well as the counselling

process (O'Brien & Murdock, 1993). Furthermore, this theory also suggests the manner in which individuals in certain cultural contexts explain events (Joffe, 1993; Semin, 1980). More particularly, attribution theory provides explanations as to how victims respond to abuse and how individuals respond to victims. O'Brien and Murdock (1993) found that counsellors' perceptions and responses to victims are also influenced by the victim's own attributional style and beliefs. Moreover, in relation to women abuse, attribution theory has provided greater understanding of why women stay in abusive relationships (Frieze, 1979; O'Brien & Murdock, 1993). Research has thus demonstrated that individuals' attributional styles influence how they cope with and experience violent and stressful situations.

Furthermore, cognitive schemata underlie all interpersonal behaviour and are central in understanding human behaviour generally. Thus a deeper understanding of abused women's cognitive schemata and more particularly their attributional styles, is essential in order for therapists to identify patterns and alter attributions in order to facilitate change, and to develop more appropriate and sophisticated preventative and treatment programs. The current research aims to make a contribution to this aspect of understanding of women abuse.

The literature review is divided into five sections. The present chapter will explore the difficulties in defining women abuse and the extent of the problem internationally and in the South African context. This chapter also explores the problem of women abuse in its historical context as well as in the South African situation. Chapter 2 follows with a discussion on attribution theory. Chapter 3 follows with an overview of the causes of women abuse within the framework of attribution theory. Chapter 4 follows with a discussion on attribution theory and victimisation. Victimisation provides the backdrop to understanding attribution patterns in the context of women abuse. This leads to an explanation of some of the predictions these theories make about attribution theory and women abuse. Although theories in relation to women abuse arise out of theories of victimisation, different attributional theories have put forward contradictory explanations. These are highlighted and discussed. The literature review ends (Chapter 5) with an exploration of specific research studies into women's attributional processes in abusive relationships.

1.1 The Problem in Defining Women Abuse

There appears to be no single term in the literature to describe the concept of violence against women. This has resulted in such violence being described as family violence, domestic violence, women abuse, conjugal assault, wife assault, wife beating, conjugal/wife abuse, spouse abuse, wife battery and battery of women (Martin, 1988; Moraff, 1982; Russell, 1988). Moreover, most of the terms do not appear to have generally accepted definitions and are usually defined by authors as they are used specifically in their writings (Moraff, 1982). Russell (1988) sees this variety of terms in many cases obscuring the male to female directionality of the act as well as obscuring the extent of the problem. Definitions in the area attempt to address both the nature of the relationship within which violence occurs and the nature of the violence itself.

Some authors see wife abuse as part of the broader field of family or domestic violence and the above terms are often used interchangeably (Moraff, 1982). Family violence is defined by Pleck (1981) as "consisting of sexual coercion or threats or the use of intentional physical force with the aim of causing injury" (cited in Flemons, 1989, p.2). Moraff (1982) defines domestic violence as an act or threatened act of violence, including forceful detention of a person, resulting in physical injury. He further adds that this violence takes place between a person who is married, or has been married, or with whom such person has cohabited or cohabits with. While these definitions emphasise physical injury, they also take into account that the threat of physical injury is also abusive.

Chez (1988) further extends the definition of domestic violence to include "physical and/or psychological abuse of one family member against another" (Chez, 1988, p.1). Indeed, according to Chez (1988), abuse encompasses verbal harassment, physical attack with or without a weapon, sexual assault and murder. While the terms abuse and battery are often used interchangeably (Moraff, 1982), the latter may obscure lesser degrees of abuse such as throwing, hitting, pushing or twisting arms behind backs (Russell, 1988). In summary, abuse includes a continuum of behaviours ranging from slapping and hitting to beatings, marital rape, coerced sex and assault. However, phenomenological consensus on what constitutes a violent act or abuse disintegrates when considering psychological injury and fear for one's life (Wiggins, 1983).

Psychological abuse can occur without accompanying physical abuse and can be as damaging as physical abuse (Barnett, 1993; Segel & Labe, 1990; Walker, 1988). It can include deprecating comments, ridicule, accusations, threatened suicide, threats of kidnapping or harm to children and enforced isolation of women from family and friends (Martin, 1988). Moraff (1982) defines the term *abuse* as not necessarily denoting physical action, but describes it as an act of commission as opposed to omission. Thus, abuse as opposed to the term violence appears to encompass both physical and psychological aspects.

1.2 A Definition of Women Abuse

For the purposes of this study the term women abuse will be used to denote the concept of violence against women in relationships, whether legally married or not. The term *woman* is used to denote the female partner, and the term *husband*, *man* or *partner* to denote the male partner. The term women abuse means "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether liberty occurring in public or private life" (The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women Article 1 & 2 cited in Human Rights Watch, 1995, p.127). Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to the following: physical, e.g. slapping, pushing, assault with a deadly weapon; sexual, e.g. rape, coerced sex, forced sexual acts, unusual sexual acts (forced); destruction of property, e.g. breaking furniture, harming pets; and psychological, e.g. ridiculing, name-calling, threats, taking money (Barnett & La Violette, 1993). Thus a broad definition of abuse, encompassing both physical and psychological threat of injury, has been used in this study.

1.3 The Extent of the Problem

Women abuse transcends class, age and race and occurs at all socio-economic levels (Barnett, 1993; Martin, 1988; Segel & Labe, 1990; Vogelmann & Eagle, 1991). However, statistics in the area of women abuse are difficult to obtain. This is due to the under-reporting of the crime, the lack of uniformity in the definition of abuse and the taboo nature of the subject (Barnett, 1993; Human Rights Watch, 1995; Segel & Labe, 1990; Vogelmann & Eagle 1991). Under-reporting occurs as a result of a number of factors such as the normative perception of

abuse by both individuals and authorities; the humiliation and shame women experience (Dangor & Seedat, 1992); economic dependence on abusers; fear of retaliation and difficulty in obtaining legal assistance and convictions. The abuse is also obscured, in that it takes place in the "private domain" of the family (Barnett, 1993; Dangor & Seedat, 1992; Dobash & Dobash, 1978; Vogelmann & Eagle, 1991). Moreover, lack of uniformity in definition results in women abuse being categorised as "assault", "disturbing the peace" or "relationship problems", thereby further obscuring its incidence (Vogelmann & Eagle, 1991). The fact that welfare organisations tend to describe women abuse as "marital problems" and the police as "general assault" (Angless, 1990 cited in Barnett 1993) compounds the problem.

Walker (1978) has suggested that one half of all couples experience abuse. It is estimated in the United States that 2 to 6 million domestic parties are involved in violent episodes. "An incidence of one episode per couple per year equates to a frequency of one violent act every 5 to 16 seconds" (Chez, 1988, p.1). Straus (1978), in a study of family violence in the United States, estimated that 1.8 million women were battered a year. He further estimated that nearly 50-60% of all married couples experience physical abuse in which spouses are beaten in the course of the marriage. Violence not only occurs in marriages but also in cohabiting and dating relationships (Barnett, 1993; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1991). Studies have also found that a large proportion of violence takes place when the women is divorced or separated from her partner, as well as in the process of separating and leaving.

The problem of women abuse in South Africa appears to conform to general African and Western trends (Segel & Labe, 1990; Vogelmann & Eagle, 1991). Musasa, a public education, counselling and research project based in Harare, Zimbabwe, estimated that one in three women suffer from physical abuse. One-third of a sample of 927 women suffered psychological abuse, one in six had been choked, strangled, intentionally burnt or assaulted with a weapon, more than one-third reported economic abuse, including being intentionally deprived of money and prevented from working (The Star, 11 December 1996). Lawrence (1984 cited in Vogelmann & Eagle, 1991) found that women abuse was the second highest reported crime in the Mitchells Plain area of Cape Town and constituted 15% of all reported crime in the area. The Rape Crisis Centre (a non-governmental organisation working with women abuse in Cape Town) estimated in 1992 that one in three women is battered (Human

Rights Watch, 1995).

The Advice Desk for Abused Women in South Africa estimated that one in four women is forced to leave her home because of life-threatening situations. POWA (People Opposing Women Abuse, a non-governmental organisation dealing specifically with women abuse in Gauteng, South Africa) and The Co-ordinated Action for Battered Women estimate one in six women is abused by her partner (Human Rights Watch, 1995). Furthermore, social workers in organisations such as Child and Family Welfare, South African National Council for Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Mental Health and Family and Marital Association of South Africa, report women abuse as commonplace among their clients (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991). Thirty-eight percent of women responding to research carried out by the Women's National Coalition reported they knew of a woman who had been abused. At a symposium on women abuse held at the University of Pretoria in 1988, it was estimated that violence was present in 50-60% of marriages (Lawrence, 1984 cited in Vogelman & Eagle, 1991), while Segel & Labe (1990) reported that violence is widespread in South Africa, occurring across all socio-economic and racial groups.

POWA reported that a total of 6046 persons received gender sensitive counselling on the issues of rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment between July 1996 and March 1997 in the Gauteng region. One thousand nine hundred and twenty-six people received gender sensitive, individual counselling. A total of 17 women and 32 children were resident in their shelter during this time. NISAA (Institute for Women's Development, a non-governmental organisation) also dealing with violence against women in Lenasia, Gauteng, reported a total of 1366 telephone contacts in relation to domestic violence from March 1995 until March 1996; 528 counselling sessions in relation to women abuse, as well as 267 shelter admissions, in their short-term shelter for abused women (NISAA, 1996; Personal Communication). Research implemented in Soweto in 1994 found that one in three women attending a clinic for any reason have experienced some form of battering from her partner (Human Rights Watch, 1995).

Women abuse in South Africa may take place in 30% to 60% of marital relationships as is reported in American studies. The white paper on social welfare estimates that one in six

women are abused in South Africa. In addition, women in South Africa are significantly economically disadvantaged; 33% of families are headed by women, and are considerably poorer than other types of families (POWA, 1996). The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing further estimated that 60% of women in developing countries experience some form of abuse. Two surveys carried out in Cape Town in 1990 and 1991/2 found that violence in the home represented one-third of all interpersonal violence and the most likely place for women to be assaulted was in the home (Human Rights Watch, 1995).

The Human Rights Watch further reports that the types of abuse South African women face in the home are the same as those faced by women all over the world. This includes verbal abuse, humiliation and degradation; emotional abuse in which they are threatened with violence, economic deprivation, withholding access to their children; and physical abuse which includes hitting, choking, burning, stabbing and restricting freedom of movement. In a study carried out in Alexandra Township, Gauteng, in 1993, it was found that fists, knives, traditional weapons, bottles, hammers, axes, screwdrivers and bricks were all used to assault women (Human Rights Watch, 1995). Thus, women abuse in South Africa is rife and appears to be a tolerated form of behaviour within a patriarchal society. In exploring the historical development of women abuse in the next section it is obvious that women abuse has existed for centuries as part of the patriarchal framework within a patriarchal society.

1.4 The Historical Development of Women Abuse

Social historians have documented both informal and formal sanctions encouraging women abuse since the turn of the century (Dobash & Dobash, 1978; Martin, 1988; May, 1978; Pleck, 1987 cited in Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). In fact, it is only a hundred years since wife abuse was legally repudiated in the United States of America and Britain (Dobash & Dobash, 1978; Martin, 1988). In early 19th century America, a husband was allowed to hit his wife physically as a form of discipline without fear of prosecution for assault. The legendary "rule of thumb" law restricted the width of a discipline instrument to the length of the man's thumb (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Martin, 1988; May, 1978).

Women abuse has developed alongside the broader development of the family unit, dating

back to the Roman Order of 753 BC (Dobash & Dobash, 1978; Frieze, 1979; Martin, 1988; May, 1978; Patel, 1992). The family unit was the major social grouping in the Roman Order. Marriage was restricted to the upper classes who owned property that needed to be controlled and inherited. Women were purchased by the upper class and treated as additions to their husbands' properties. They were slaves over whom the husband had the right of life and death. The wife was responsible for bearing and raising the children and she was subjected to beatings or death if she behaved contrary to her husband's wishes or the social code at that time. In this way, subordination of women was enforced (Dobash & Dobash, 1978, 1992; Martin, 1988).

Throughout Western history, the hierarchical structure of society and the nuclear patriarchal family has been maintained through social institutions and supportive ideologies (Barnett, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1978; Liebowitz, 1992; Martin, 1988; Segel & Labe, 1990). As the law developed during the late 18th-century and early 19th-century, permission was provided for husbands to use violence against their wives. They could chastise and restrain them within reasonable bounds. A husband could serve a wife with "impunity" and not in a violent manner (Dobash & Dobash, 1978, 1988; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; May, 1978). This view of the wife as property to be chastised was maintained right up until the 20th-century (ibid.). Judeo-Christian beliefs further encouraged male domination and authority and legitimised the subordination of women through marriage (Martin, 1988). Moreover, the development of the nuclear family unit and monogamy further institutionalised marriage and the oppression of women. The tacit acceptance of violence within marriage became a further method of maintaining the nuclear family unit (ibid.). Towards the end of the 19th century, small efforts were first made to protect the victims of women abuse. Feminists in Britain and the Suffragette Movement began to lobby for the suffrage of women which would bring relief from the "miseries of wife beating" (May, 1978).

Despite continued lobbying and small concessions granted by the courts, women abuse continued largely unchallenged until the First World War propelled a renewed interest in family life (May, 1978). However, it was not until the mid-1970s and the emergence of the Feminist Movement that the seriousness and censure of women abuse came to the fore (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Martin, 1988; May, 1978; Walker, 1983). Nevertheless, the

subordination, control and domination of women as reflected in historical development still prevails in many of our social and cultural institutions today (Barnett, 1993; Barnett & La Violette, 1995; Dobash & Dobash, 1978; Martin, 1988; May, 1978; Segel & Labe, 1990).

1.4.1 The South African Context

Women in South Africa constitute slightly more than half of the South African Population (Convention for The Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, (CEDAW), 1997; White Paper on Social Welfare, 1995). They have suffered social, economic and political disadvantages under apartheid rule (CEDAW, 1997; White Paper on Social Welfare, 1995; Patel, 1992). Black women especially have been sexually, racially and economically exploited. Fifty-seven percent of the female population were forced into rural areas as a result of influx control under the apartheid regime (Patel, 1992). These women became primary caretakers of children, the elderly, the disabled and the mentally ill and relied on their male partners working in urban areas for financial support. In urban areas, women were faced with overcrowding, inadequate housing and poor child and health care services. They were also frequently victims of rape and abuse (Patel, 1992). In many instances, they were sole providers for their children and lived under considerable strain. In the declining economic conditions of the 1970s and 1980s, women were forced into unskilled, poorly paid positions in the job market (Patel, 1992) and illiteracy and poverty are still major obstacles to women's advancement (CEDAW, 1997; White Paper on Social Welfare, 1995).

South Africa is a largely patriarchal society, with inequality between men and women entrenched in a variety of legal, institutional, linguistic and economic policies (Segel & Labe, 1990). A judge of the constitutional court is quoted as saying "It is a sad fact that one of the few profound non-racial institutions of South Africa is patriarchy" (CEDAW, 1997, p.1). Despite changes to the apartheid structure, South African women remain second-class citizens. Economic, social and legal inequalities persist. Women are subject to widespread violence that prevents them from enjoying the rights to which they are ensured by the constitution. The legacy of violence which characterised apartheid has resulted in extremely high levels of violence throughout society, including the home (Human Rights Watch, 1995). In fact the overt political violence of apartheid obscured the interpersonal violence which pervaded our society. "It remains true that the high profile of political violence occurs against the

backdrop of largely invisible, yet endemic, interpersonal violence" (Scedat, Terre Blanche, Butchart & Nell, 1992, p59).

Furthermore, levels of violent crime in South Africa are high, and directly affect the prevalence of wife abuse (CEDAW, 1997; Segel & Labe, 1990). There is an exceptionally high level of crime in the Gauteng province of South Africa (Human Rights Watch, 1995). "South Africa has the highest per capita figure for violent death recorded in any country not at war" (Human Rights Watch, 1995, p.88). Crime rates provide a useful index of people's feelings of despair and entrapment (Segel & Labe, 1990).

"Violence in the home, like crime on the street, is a product of the sense of entrapment and insecurity that results from high levels of structural and institutional violence" (ibid., p.254). This is particularly evident in South Africa where violence has its roots in apartheid. In many ways, it is viewed as the only means of conflict resolution, and its use is widespread and seldom results in outrage (Segel & Labe, 1990). Thus the problem of women abuse in South Africa is a pervasive social problem which needs urgent attention.

The following chapter explores the basic concepts of attribution theory in order to contextualise the attribution processes of abused women.

CHAPTER TWO

ATTRIBUTION THEORY

2.1 Attribution Theory : An Overview

Attribution theory provides a theoretical perspective for understanding people's perceptions and ideas as to why things occur (Frieze, 1979). It developed out of work done by social psychologists, specifically the discipline of social or person perception, and is built on the premise that before a person can make a causal judgement he or she has to first perceive the event (Heider, 1958 cited in Frieze & Bar-Tal, 1979; Weiner, 1972 cited in Frieze, 1979). The desire to make sense of the world further underlies the need for attributions, as people need to explain events in order to make sense of their lives and the world around them. Furthermore, they spontaneously seek these causal explanations for events and quickly move from a level of description and classification, to a level of explanation (Joffe, 1993). While, the scientific world is preoccupied with correlations, "lay people tend to infer causality" since this allows for far more effective control over situations (Heider, 1958 cited in Frieze & Bar-Tal, 1979; Joffe, 1993).

The attributional process involves the cognitive processes of categorising information and making judgements and evaluations. People make attributions about their own feelings and beliefs based upon the availability of information about their present and past reactions and relevant stimuli (Nisbett & Valins, 1971; Nisbett, 1970 cited in Frieze, 1979). Attributional theories attempt to explain the different beliefs people hold about the causes of success and failure, as well as why good or bad events take place (Weiner, 1972 cited in Frieze, 1979) within a particular social and cultural context (Joffe, 1993; Semin, 1984). Attributional theories also provide explanations as to how behaviour and motivation are affected by the beliefs people hold about events (Kelley & Michela, 1980 cited in Finchilescu, 1992).

Attributions themselves have been correlated with behaviour implicated in certain social problems such as marital conflict, depression, crime and drug abuse (Finchilescu, 1992; Frieze & Bar-Tal, 1979).

There is no coherent theory of attribution but a set of models unified by the fact that they seek causal explanations for behaviour. The writings of Heider (1958), Jones and Davis (1965), Kelley (1978) and Weiner (1972) have laid the groundwork for attribution theory as it is known today. According to Heider (1958, cited in Finchilescu, 1992) and Frieze and Bar-Tal (1979), the lay person is like a "naive scientist" searching for rational and logical explanations based upon observed data. Heider (1958) further postulated that people attribute causes of an action to either internal factors (factors based on the dispositional qualities inherent in objects and people), or to external/environmental factors (aspects of the situation or context surrounding the action) (Finchilescu, 1992; Frieze & Bar-Tal, 1979). This categorisation then renders the perceiver's world more controllable, stable and predictable.

Thus, when an individual observes another's actions, there is an attempt to determine whether the action was caused by the actor or by the environment. In attributing the event to the actor, the person tends to ascribe the action to certain dispositional characteristics of the actor. The individual further has to consider the extent to which internal factors, rather than environmental forces, were responsible for the effects of their own as well as other's actions. Heider further suggests that individuals not only distinguish between the person or environment, but also distinguish between personal and impersonal causality. Impersonal causality refers to external causal effects that are unintentional, whereas personal causal effects refers to internal causality where a person intentionally produces an outcome. The perceiver thus often tries to determine whether the outcome of an action is the result of the actor's intention. The actor is held responsible for personally caused effects and these effects provide information about the dispositional qualities of the actor (Frieze & Bar-Tal, 1979). People are however, more likely to employ combinations of both internal and external causality under certain conditions, especially those involved in complex interpersonal relationships (Hewstone, 1989). This primary categorisation of attribution into internal/external causality appears to be central to the theory.

Classical attribution theorists adopt the dichotomy on internal and external causality as their distinguishing feature. Much attention in the different models of attribution is focused on the heuristics and distortions involved in exploring the nature of people's explanations

(Finchilescu, 1992). It is clear that in the context of interpersonal violence, and more particularly wife abuse, causal attributions of this kind are likely to be made by participants and observers. Four models of Attribution Theory dominate the literature concerning women abuse. These are the Just World Theory, Defensive Attribution Theory, the Correspondent Inference Model and Weiner's Theory of Role Attribution. Each of these will now be explored in more detail.

2.1.1 The Just World Hypothesis and Defensive Attribution Theory

The Just World Hypothesis assumes that individuals internalise a principle of equity and fairness along with the belief that people 'get what they deserve' or, after the fact, 'deserve what they get' (Shaver, 1970, p.113). If individuals are good and hardworking they will then be protected from misfortune (Frieze & Janoff-Bulman, 1983; Howard, 1984; Lerner & Miller, 1978; McCaul, Velton, Boyetchko & Crawford, 1990; Miller & Porter, 1983; Shields & Hanneke, 1983). In this way the core assumption of personal invulnerability and the world as meaningful and comprehensive is maintained (Shields & Hanneke, 1983). The Just World View according to Janoff-Bulman (1983) is an attempt to maintain a sense of control over the environment. Thus members of society often tend to blame victims, in order to maintain their belief that this is a just world that is, unpleasant incidents do not happen if they are not in some way deserved (Finchilescu, 1992; Shaver, 1970, 1986; Wortman, 1983). According to Shaver (1970), the Just World hypothesis is an example of a defensive attribution. Defensive attributions are asserted when individuals need to vicariously protect themselves by blaming the victim. By locating the source of blame in the victim, one avoids facing the possibility that a similar event may happen to oneself. Research in this area has found that the degree of blame attributed to the victim increases with the severity of the misfortune they have experienced (Walster, 1966 cited in Finchilescu, 1992). However, if there is a high personal similarity (where personal characteristics are shared by the actor and observer) there is little victim-blame, and if there is high situational similarity (the situation of the actor approximates the situations of the observer) then there is a greater tendency to victim-blame (Finchilescu, 1992). This would seem to indicate that personal identification mediates defensive attributions whereas highlighting of situational vulnerability heightens the need to distance oneself from the victim through this mechanism.

Researchers into the Just World Attribution perspective have found that observers tend to blame victims for their fate. They have also discovered that there is a tendency for self-blame amongst victims themselves (Shields & Hanneke, 1983). Victims seem to blame themselves in order to maintain this belief in a just world (Wortman, 1983) as well as to feel more personal control over their actions. Furthermore, it is likely that observers' beliefs influence victims' own attributions of self-blame. According to Shields and Hanneke (1983), self-blame is quite prevalent amongst rape victims, and research has also indicated a tendency for self-blame (for undesirable outcomes) among women in general. Thus, while women may be blaming themselves in order to feel more in control of their situation, they may do so as a result of "victim-blame" and having internalised the principle of fairness and equity. Women therefore believe they receive that which they deserve. In contrast to the Just World Theory, the Correspondent Inference model shifts from an emphasis on actions to an emphasis on dispositions. Thus the victims' or assailants' actions and the intention behind the action become important, and are seen to correspond to a stable dispositional quality in the actor. This will be further explored in the following section.

2.1.2 The Correspondent Inference Model

The Correspondent Inference Model is a theory about the way in which people arrive at dispositional explanations of a certain behaviour. What a person does is perceived as corresponding with a long-lasting trait or dispositional quality which the person possesses. Jones and Davis (1965) expand on Heider's emphasis on actions. They propose that the task of the explainer is to discount the operation of external or situational constraints on the individual's behaviour. The more external constraints can be discounted, the more the behaviour is likely to be due to internal or dispositional aspects of the actor. The observer also assumes that the actor is aware that his or her actions will produce an effect. Whether or not a correspondent inference is made is affected by how normal or typical the observed action is considered to be (Finchilescu, 1992).

A number of factors, therefore, contribute to the development of correspondent inference attributions. First, the perceiver is more likely to make a correspondent inference if the observed action or the consequences of the action are perceived as relatively unique or uncommon (the principle of non-common effects). Secondly, social desirability has the same

effect in that a behaviour that is not considered normative or typical in society will be attributed to dispositional causes. Behaviour which meets the observer's expectations through target-based expectancy (having previous knowledge of the particular actor), or category-based expectancy (behaviour which is seen as typical of a social group or class to which the actor belongs) or role-based expectancy (expectations concerning conformity to conventions surrounding a particular role that the actor plays) would not result in dispositional attributions.

Furthermore, if the actor's behaviour has hedonic relevance, in that it positively or negatively implicates the observer, a correspondent inference will more likely result. If an action is also perceived to be directed at the observer (personalism), then a stronger correspondent inference will also result (Finchilescu, 1992; Frieze & Bar-Tal, 1979).

Jones and Nisbett (1972 cited in Frieze & Bar-Tal, 1979) further conclude that people tend to "attribute their own actions to the constraints of a situation and the behaviour of others to their personality" (p.14). Thus perceptions of actor and observer are different. Actors in making attributions about themselves have knowledge of their past history and more distinctive data available to them. They have more awareness about their own feelings and reactions to specific situations and stimuli in the environment. Therefore, the actor can view his/her behaviour in the context of past behaviour in response to different and similar situations, making the environmental cause more salient.

The observer, on the other hand, views the behaviour in relation to how it differs from others in the same situation, making idiosyncratic features in the actor more salient. The observer further uses information about his/her own internal reactions to stimuli to infer their own feelings about the action.

Thus, the Correspondent Inference theory emphasises the intention of the actor. Focusing on the traits and attitudes of the actor, Correspondent Inferences are therefore applicable to actions within the actor's control. According to Finchilescu (1992), it is not a popular area of research but constitutes one of the first attempts to formalise Heider's (1958) ideas. In relation to women abuse, the Correspondent Inference theory highlights the importance of the intention of both the actor and victim. According to this theory, one would therefore predict

that the violent behaviour would be attributed to an internal or personal disposition of the partner or victim. In this way the observer takes cognisance of the dispositional qualities of the actors involved and links the cause of the abuse to corresponding traits in both the victim and the perpetrator. This notion is extended in Weiner's theory of role attribution which will be further explored in the following section.

2.1.3 Weiner's Theory of Role Attribution

The Correspondent Inference theory describes the cognitive processes which lead to the development of explanations. Weiner's theory of role attribution argues for the role of attributions in motivating behaviour and affecting emotions. Building on Heider's (1958) notion of internal and external causality, Weiner (1972, 1974 cited in O'Brien & Murdock, 1993) introduced a third dimension to this structure namely, controllability of the cause. According to Weiner, locus refers to the "location" of a cause, internal or external to the person; stability refers to the temporal nature of a cause, varying from stable (invariant) to unstable (variant); and controllability refers to the degree of volitional influence or control that can be exerted over a cause (Finchilescu 1992; Frieze & Bar-Tal, 1979; Harvey, 1989; Hewstone, 1989; Weiner, 1972, 1974 cited in O'Brien & Murdock, 1993). Weiner argues that the meaning of a cause may change over time, perceivers and situations. But despite the change in interpretation of events the underlying dimensions (i.e. locus, stability and controllability) are constant (Weiner, 1985 cited in Hewstone, 1989).

Hewstone (1989) argues that the value of Weiner's theory lies in its development of the internal-external distinction. For example, in relation to achievement and motivation, ability and effort can be viewed as internal causes of achievement, but ability can also be classified as stable or uncontrollable and effort as unstable or controllable. Thus, the attribution of a failure due to lack of effort will have different implications from those of an attribution due to lack of ability. Lower expectancies of success in the future arise from lack of ability attributions which are stable (Weiner, 1976 cited in Hewstone, 1989). Unstable lack of effort attributions may protect self-esteem, implying that exerting greater effort would result in success (Hewstone, 1989). Weiner's three dimensional structure has been further extended to include intentionality (Weiner, 1979), globality (Abramson *et al*, 1978) and excusability (de Jong *et al*, 1988 cited in Hewstone, 1989).

Globality has been widely researched and developed especially in relation to depression. Globality encompasses far-reaching (global) versus specific implications. According to Seligman and Teasdale (1978, cited in Weiner, 1981), internal, stable and global attributions foster feelings of depression. People who exhibit this kind of attributional style blame their setbacks on personal shortcomings (internal) which they further view as permanent (stable) and from which they then draw far-reaching conclusions (global) about their personal worth, resulting in hopelessness and depression.

Weiner's most important contribution to the field of attribution is in elaborating motivation and emotion. Weiner argues that not only do ascribed causes influence feelings, but some emotions can be elicited without intervening thought processes. Weiner distinguishes between outcome-dependent affects (e.g. happiness or sadness following particular outcomes, such as success or failure) or attribution-linked affects influenced by specific causal attributions. Outcome-dependent affects depend on the attainment of a goal, whereas attributional linked affects are influenced by the specific causal attribution of the outcome (Hewstone, 1989). Thus, if an outcome is negative, one would make attributions in order to make sense of it. This aspect of Weiner's theory is important to the examination of causal attributions of abused women and how they make sense of abuse which is negative and unexpected.

Weiner specifies the roles of each of the three dimensions for his general theory of motivation and emotion. In terms of locus, success which is attributed internally will result in greater self-esteem, as opposed to success which is attributed externally (Hewstone, 1989). Conversely, failure attributed internally will result in lower self-esteem than failure which is attributed externally. Thus, in relation to women abuse, if the woman feels she has failed in the relationship and her behaviour or personality (internal factors) results in the abuse (perceived failure), she will tend to have a low self-esteem.

The major importance of the dimension of stability is in relation to changes in the expectancy of success or failure in the future (Weiner, 1976 cited in Hewstone, 1989). Feelings of hopelessness may result when failure is attributed to internal and stable causes (Hewstone, 1989). As such, the abused women who feels that the abuse is due to stable factors, such as

personality, may then experience affective feelings of hopelessness and depression. This may result in passivity, or, on the other hand, she may realise she cannot change her partner's behaviour and will have to endure or leave the relationship.

Controllability of the cause relates to sentiment towards and evaluation of others and the environment. If negative outcomes for other people are perceived as controllable then censure towards the victim may be elicited. If negative outcomes for other people are viewed due to causes perceived as uncontrollable then pity may be elicited. The issue of controllability has been developed in later theories of victimisation and specifically those relating to globality (Abramson, 1989 cited in Hewstone, 1989; Peterson & Seligman, 1983; Walker, 1978) and is discussed more fully in a later chapter.

Much research on depression and learned helplessness, stemmed from Weiner's theory. The occurrence of uncontrollable negative events leads to depression via the expectancy that future outcomes are independent of one's own responses. There is a perceived "non-contingency" between one's response and desired outcomes. Abramson (1989, cited in Hewstone, 1989) proposed that people who make internal, stable and global attributions for negative outcomes are predisposed to depression. Furthermore, the more internal the cause, the lower the individual's self-esteem. The more stable the cause, the more chronic the helpless deficits are expected to be; the more global the cause, the more the helpless deficits are expected to generalise across situations and become less controllable (Hewstone, 1989). Thus, if the abuse is perceived to be due to global factors, the woman may feel more helpless. The violence may seem to generalise across all situations and viewed as less controllable. Thus, causal attributions give rise to cognitive, judgemental, behavioural and affective consequences. Causal attributions also have three functions namely: regulation of control, self-esteem and self-preservation.

Weiner's model makes possible the link between attributions and behaviour on the part of abused women in terms of the three dimensions of locus, stability and globality. Thus, an abused woman who perceives the violence as external to herself (e.g. holds her partner to blame), internal to her husband (personality factors), stable (not open to change) as well as global (affects all areas of her life) will realise the situation she is in is unchangeable. She is

therefore more likely to want to leave the abusive relationship or seek help. Frieze (1979) has demonstrated that attributions are in fact correlated with the abused women's plans to leave the relationship. This aspect of attributional research is elaborated upon in Chapter 5.

In summary, the models discussed have all developed out of Heider's (1958) "naive" psychology and theory of causality. They all build upon the notion that individuals attribute causes of actions to either internal (dispositional) factors or external (situational) factors. This question of internal and external causality is central to the research study and provides a foundation for understanding how abused women perceive partner violence and what processes take place in forming specific attributions. Global and stable factors also assume significance in contributing to an understanding of the attributional processes of abused women in that stability and globality have been linked to helplessness and depression. Attributions to global factors also imply that the violence affects all areas of life and that causes may not be specific to the violent situation.

Having discussed the basic concepts of attribution theory, the perceived causes of women abuse within the context of attribution theory are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

PERCEIVED CAUSES OF WOMEN ABUSE

This chapter explores the causes of women abuse within the context of attribution theory (as elaborated upon in Chapter 2). The perceived causes of women abuse are explored in terms of Weiner's dimensions of locus of causality and stability of causality. Theories associated with locus of causality are explored under the following categories: causes associated with the woman; causes associated with her partner; joint causes and societal causes (section 3.1). Stability of causality is discussed in relation to women abuse in section 3.2.

3.1 Causes Associated With The Woman

3.1.1 Intra-Individual/Psychological Theories

Aspects of Psychoanalytic Theory, the Stockholm Syndrome, Learned Helplessness and Social Learning theory are some of the models which provide theories of causation of women abuse. In the decade between 1970 and 1980 most theories on women abuse tended to blame the victim. Psychoanalytic theories provided the earliest explanations of women abuse and described abused women as passive, aggressive, masochistic, submissive and controlling (Barnett & La Violette, 1993; Barnett, 1993; Deutsch in Frieze 1979; Frieze, 1979; Russell, 1988). Such theories maintained that personality factors developed in formative years predisposed these women to submission to violence (Russell, 1988). Psychiatric diagnoses outlined in the DSM-III diagnosed such women as dependent personality disorders (Barnett, 1993; Russell, 1988). Abused women were also described as depressed, fearful and overwhelmed (Rosewater, 1988 cited in Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Walker, 1979).

Intra-individual theories also cite difficulties in relation to self-esteem, stress and history of family violence as causes of abuse (Carlson, 1984). However, the focus is on how these factors are internalised. Gelles (1974), for example, postulated that women may internalise and accept family violence, believing that they deserve to be hit. Such views are sometimes endorsed by counsellors and social workers who may also hold the victim directly or

indirectly responsible for the abuse (Aner, 1985; Andrews & Brewin, 1990; O'Brien & Murdock, 1993; Segel, 1985; Segel & Labe, 1990). Battered women's reluctance to leave abusive relationships may be interpreted as personal complicity in the abuse, rather than understood as having more systemic origins. Thus, intra-psychic theories argue that abuse is more likely to be experienced by particular women either because of enduring personality traits or because of an internalisation of victim status related to family history. The Stockholm Syndrome theory has attempted to offer a more sophisticated and perhaps less pejorative explanation for the adoption of a victim role.

3.1.2 The Stockholm Syndrome

The Stockholm Syndrome suggests that abuse involves a process in which a woman becomes emotionally controlled by the abuser. The woman is seen to identify with the aggressor, largely because he is viewed as having the power of life and death over her. She feels 'benevolent' and 'grateful' towards the abuser for allowing her to live, and thus denies her feelings of rage and internalises his viewpoint (Barnett & La Violette 1993; Segel & Labe, 1990). Thus, a complex set of intra-psychic processes result in a maladaptive positioning in relation to the abusive relationship which may become enduring. A further theory, which emphasises the possible origins of submission to victimisation, is that of 'Learned Helplessness' based in Social Learning Theory.

3.1.3 Learned Helplessness and Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory provides a theoretical perspective that implicates women in their abuse. Victim behaviour is seen as a learned and conditioned response stemming from past experiences of abuse. It is postulated that on the basis of past inescapable abuse some women will tolerate the abuse, anticipating that there is no means of escape (Gelles, 1979; Martin, 1988; Russell, 1988; Walker, 1978). Extending this theory, Walker (1978) propounds a theory of Learned Helplessness referred to as the "Battered Women Syndrome" which views abuse as linked to "The Cycle of Violence". Walker's theory suggests that a woman becomes conditioned to a violent situation and, therefore, feels powerless to effect change in the situation. Learned helplessness results in a lack of motivation, apathy, depression and difficulties in problem-solving (Barnett, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1978; Flemons, 1984; Gelles, 1974; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Martin, 1988; Russell, 1988). This attitudinal set in

turn renders her passive, which confirms the belief that she has no efficacy to change the situation.

Critics argue that intra-individual theories neglect societal influences, such as economic dependence, and may be seen as victim blaming (Frieze, 1979; Russell, 1988). In ascribing the responsibility for abuse to women, victim blaming and lack of sympathy for their position may result (Frieze, 1979; Gelles, 1972; Martin, 1988; Russell, 1988). If women like, or at best do little to resist, being beaten, they deserve little sympathy (Frieze, 1979). In addition, women who are held to blame for their actions will also feel more humiliated and unable to seek help (Heider, 1958 cited in Frieze, 1979). If women are held responsible for bringing about domestic violence, they are then by implication responsible for changing their situation.

When such perceptions are held, women tend to be referred for psychological treatment of personal problems. In focusing attention on the woman in the partnership, such theories remove responsibility from the man and the social structures which maintain the violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Frieze, 1979; Russell, 1988). Theories associated with these alternate views are now addressed.

3.2 Causes Associated With The Batterer

Intra-individual theories also provide an account of causative factors associated with the batterer. These theories hold that the male possesses certain characteristics and personality traits that make him prone to violence. Batterers have been described as domineering, unassertive and as having an excessive need for control (Dutton, 1994). They appear to fear intimacy and have dependency conflicts (Barnett, 1993). The psychiatric diagnoses applied to them include anti-social personality disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder and paranoid, passive aggressive and borderline personality types (Deschner, 1984 cited in Russell, 1988; Barnett 1993). Concurrent alcohol problems are also present in many men with these personality problems (Tolman & Bennett cited in Barnett, 1993).

Some authors have distinguished four types of abusers. These include the controller who perceives his wife as an object of control; the defender who overprotects his wife, the approval seeker with poor self-esteem who seeks continual approval from his wife, and the incorporator who needs his wife to define and validate himself (Elbow, 1977 cited in Barnett,

1993). Pizzey (1974 cited in Frieze, 1979) holds that abusers are basically violent people. Some authors also hold that abusers were frequently abused as children and witnessed violence at home (Roy, 1977; Straus, 1977 cited in Frieze, 1979). As such, they learned this form of behaviour through modelling. An aspect of social learning theory thus also provides an account of why abusers abuse (Frieze, 1979; Russell, 1988).

Other "husband" associated causes include low frustration tolerance and poor impulse control; bad temper; insecurity about success at work and alcohol abuse (Allen & Strauss, 1975; Gayford & O'Brien, 1971; Prescott & Letko, 1977; Scott, 1974 cited in Frieze, 1979). Gelles (1974) also found that men with college education in lower level jobs were violent, while men who cannot fulfil their job expectations are also more violent. Unemployment also appears to be a causative factor. Men whose social status was less than that of their wives' fathers, were also found to be abusive (Gelles, 1974). Gelles further suggested that men compensated for inferiority and/or associated with wives with superior verbal skills, by using physical force.

Intra-psychic theories and social learning theory therefore argue that the abuse takes place on the part of particular men, either because of enduring personality traits or because of specific societal and social factors which led to the internalisation of violent behaviour as normative. In terms of social factors, men may see their aggressiveness as part of normal masculine behaviour. This impacts on the woman who may also see the abuser's behaviour as normative, or who may feel less able to control his behaviour, resulting in feelings of helplessness and depression. Moreover, these views often result in less judgemental feelings towards the men. Whilst these dimensions may be conceptualised under the rubric of social learning theory, they are also elaborated upon later within the framework of feminist theory.

If violence is seen as a result of personality disposition or intra-psychic factors, this suggests that psychotherapy will help by placing responsibility on the man and lessening blame on the woman. The woman who understands her partner's violent behaviour to be due to intra-psychic factors may realise that she is not to blame. However, she may also feel that these factors cannot change and as a result become passive and depressed.

Attributing blame to the man's pathology may also have the effect of reducing batterers to one unitary clinical category and in so doing oversimplify the problem. It may also have the effect of removing responsibility from the batterer and placing blame upon his pathology. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that for some men the violence is a result of pathology (Barnett, 1993). The next section examines theories which view abuse as an interactive phenomenon.

3.3 Joint Causes of Abuse

Some theories such as systems theory; co-dependency and theories of addiction provide further explanations for women abuse. These theories hold both the husband and wife jointly responsible for the abuse (Frieze, 1979).

Systems theory, according to Russell (1988) explains abuse in terms of the inter-relationship between the victim and the abuser and places the abuse in an interactional framework with circular causality. Flemons (1989), talks about the 'cyclic bond' between the abuser and the abused, a "run away escalation of assertion and submission" (Erchack, 1984 cited in Flemons, 1989, p.4). Flemons (1989), also cites Walker's cycle of violence theory as an example of the recursive patterns which keep the abuser and abused together. Partners, according to Gelles (1974), may also become attuned to each other's vulnerability and learn what upsets the other, provoking mutual violence.

Systems theory, according to Russell (1988), holds that violence results from the partners' complementary needs to maintain a particular kind of homeostasis (Coleman, 1980; Cook & Fantz, 1984, cited in Flemons, 1989; Strauss, 1973 cited in Stahly, 1978). Thus both spouses contribute to the escalation of anger and abuse and its enactment.

Hepburn (1973), cited in Stahly (1978), suggests that all interpersonal behaviour, including violence, is constructed by the participants within a specific situation. Hepburn constructed a set of relational rules which explain violence. These include threat to social identity and claiming behaviour. In interpersonal relationships individuals socially locate one another in mutually acceptable ways. If negative evaluations are received, the person whose identity is being re-evaluated feels threatened and will react with violence. The claims made by one partner on the other in a relationship are ways of organising the attention and behaviour of the

other, in order to meet all needs of the couple. If the claims are met, the relationship is perceived as stable, however, if one partner rejects an established claim, violence may result in an attempt to enforce the desired behaviour (Stahly, 1978). Battery may represent a response to such unsatisfactory interactions.

Critics of systems theories maintain that they fail to take into account the historical context of women in a patriarchal society. While family theories attempt to be universally applicable for all humans, they fail to take into account power differentials based upon the economic dependence of women. They also fail to take into account women's socialisation to emotional attributes that are not akin to a naturally healthy adult, and the institutional nature of society that systematically denies women's rights to protection or power (Barnett, 1993; Russell, 1988). Generally systems theory recognises the role violence plays in maintaining homeostasis, but fails to acknowledge the oppression of women within this context (Dobash & Dobash, 1978; Flemons, 1989; Martin, 1988; Russell, 1988).

3.4 Societal Causes of Abuse

Some theorists have taken a macro level approach to wife battering (Barnett, 1993). Socio-cultural theories pertaining to women abuse fall under two categories namely, the general social orientation, which sees wife abuse in the context of the general violence in society and the feminist orientation, which places abuse in a social, political and economic context of sexism (Barnett, 1993). According to both views, socialisation plays a major role in promoting spouse abuse. However, there is disagreement over whether socialisation in terms of violence or socialisation related to sex roles is the problem (Romero, 1985 cited in Barnett, 1993).

3.5 General Violence in Society

Women abuse, according to this view, is seen as an extension of the violence which pervades society. The use of violence as a problem solving device and as a means of resolving conflict is condoned in the media, education, discipline, sports, toys and in the choice of role models (Pagelow, 1985). The family is also seen as a likely environment for violence (Strauss, 1977). Violence is often used as a means of disciplining children, teaching children that it is acceptable for powerful people to hit those who are less powerful, as well as that it is

acceptable to hit those you love (Gelles, 1974, 1976). Gelles (1974), argues that the family can therefore be seen as a training ground for violence. Many features of family life increase the possibility of violence occurring in the home (Strauss, 1977 cited in Frieze, 1979); such as spending large amounts of time together, or having divergent and conflicting interests. The high degree of emotional involvement in families may also exacerbate any difficulties which arise. Furthermore, family ties are also difficult to forsake once a family is viewed as the private domain of the family members and precludes outside interference. Norms and values within a patriarchal society further uphold the nuclear family as private. Women are viewed as property (as previously discussed) and the right of the husband to chastise his wife is preserved (Dobash & Dobash, 1978, 1979; Frieze, 1979; Martin, 1988). Wife beating is not a deviant or pathological act, but an accepted form of behaviour (Dobash, 1988).

Critics of this theory maintain that the individual, as opposed to the violence inherent in society, is implicated in actually enacting abuse. This perspective ignores the fact that violence does not occur randomly in the family. The male to female directionality of the act, and the fact that women suffer more brutally is obscured (Russell, 1988). Also, many abusers only use violence against their wives as opposed to expressing it more generally. This broad social perspective also ignores the power imbalances that exist within the patriarchal nuclear family. Feminist theories address these issues in their views of abuse.

3.6 Feminist Theory

The feminist explanations of abuse are in essence a catalogue of the consequences of patriarchy as previously discussed. Patriarchy equates male dominance with the natural order. Men have more power than women and the father is recognised as the head of the family (Russell, 1988). Theoretically, patriarchy consists of two major components. Firstly, it is a structure in which men have more power and privilege than women, and secondly, it incorporates an ideology that legitimises this arrangement (Smith, 1990 cited in Barnett, 1993). Gender roles are clearly defined and maintained within the family with usually the father/husband the accepted breadwinner and the mother/wife the primary person responsible for childrearing and housework (Russell, 1988; Segel & Labe, 1990). This division of labour results in an unequal balance of power based on gender roles (Barnett, 1993). Men are viewed as the dominant class, having access to material and symbolic resources which exclude

women, while women are devalued as secondary and inferior. The relative power of operating in the public versus the private domain is very evident in the family or marital relationship.

Violence then becomes a visible form of control wielded by men over women (Bograd, 1984). Violence serves to maintain the status quo and the subordination of women. Thus, in sum, it is male striving for dominance and control, together with a need to demonstrate privilege and power that results in women abuse (Barnett, 1993; Russell, 1988; Segel & Labe, 1990). Furthermore, historical cultural traditions and current social institutions maintain abuse and violence as they sanction male domination (Bograd, 1984). Bograd argues that in this context, the responsibility for abuse lies completely with men and is based upon the premise that no woman deserves to be beaten. Men are also viewed as entirely responsible for their actions (Bograd, 1984; Flemons, 1989).

Critics of this view fail to take into consideration individual and cyclical factors contributing to abuse. However, wife abuse cannot be explained satisfactorily in terms of individual psychopathology nor as an automatic expression of patriarchal society, although both may contribute to the problem (Barnett, 1993). Violence and abuse must in fact be seen as complex and multidetermined.

Having explored the perceived causes of women abuse in terms of the dimension of locus of causality, a further dimension, the perceived causes of abuse in terms of stability of causality will now be briefly examined.

3.7 Stability of Causality

The second most commonly deployed causal dimension within the Weiner framework is that of stability of causality. Stable causes, such as one's family background or personality factors, are causal factors in the present which will, however, continue into the future (Frieze, 1979). Thus, attribution to a stable factor produces little expectancy of change (Mc Mahan, 1973; Weiner & Others, 1972 cited in Frieze, 1979). For example, if violence is considered to be due to a man's generally aggressive personality, then his partner may expect to be beaten again, as his personality is unlikely to change in the future. Unstable causes, however, lead to

an expectancy of change. Frieze (1979), cites several examples of stable causes of behaviour attributed to the woman which include inter alia; she allows it; she wants to be beaten; she enjoys it; she is dependent or she is incompetent (see Table 3.1). These stereotypes result in victim-blame and feelings of shame and responsibility. Unstable attributions include explanations such as she was cheating on him; she provoked the violence; she did not perform her household duties properly; she shouted at him; she humiliated him or she did not do what he asked or wanted. Thus unstable attributions are changeable, they provide one with a greater sense of control and a woman would thus feel she had a far greater chance of preventing the violence under these circumstances. Stable/unstable causal attributions may be attributed to both partners or even the relationship.

In terms of factors attributed to male partners, stable factors could include his parents who were violent with each other, he has a violent personality, he was beaten as a child, he is a bully or he needs power. Unstable factors would include essentially abuse attributed to unusual or changeable circumstances which would not be expected to continue. However, abuse attributed to the women's or the husband's personality would be expected to be repeated. Joint responsibilities in this area of stable/unstable attribution include: both have problems, they have a pathological relationship (stable factor); they were frustrated at the time (unstable factor) and they did not get along (uncertain). Environmental attributions include the stable factors of cultural acceptance, laws that are not helpful and the acceptance of one's role in living in a poor family. Examples of stable and unstable causal explanations for abuse are shown in Table 3.1. Certain attributions are not readily codeable into either extreme and hence are listed as uncertain (i.e. intermediate) factors.

Little research has been done on the stable attributions of causality people hold for women abuse (Frieze, 1979). However, Walker (1979) and Frieze (1979) suggest that most women see the cause of the violence they have experienced as due to stable elements in their partner's personalities. Some aspects of stability/instability are also implied in the kinds of causal theories previously discussed.

TABLE 3.1: Possible causal explanations for why women are beaten by their husbands in terms of internal/external and stable/unstable factors

Internal/External to the Wife

<i>Stable</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Unstable</i>
She allows it. She wants to be beaten; She enjoys it. She is incompetent. She is dependent.	She provokes him. She cannot leave.	She was cheating on him. She provoked him. She did not perform her household duties properly. She yelled at him. She embarrassed him. She didn't do what he wanted.

Internal/External to the Husband

<i>Stable</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Unstable</i>
His parents were violent with one another. He has a violent personality. He was beaten as a child. He is a bully. He needs power. He is insecure. He is responsible. He grew up that way. He cannot control his emotions. He is an alcoholic.	He is taking out his frustrations on her. He cannot cope with pressures. He wants her to leave him. He is threatened by her. He wants to prove he is a real man. He wants to keep her in line.	He was drunk. He was frustrated. He was unhappy. He had job pressures.

Joint Responsibility

<i>Stable</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Unstable</i>
They both have problems. They have a pathological relationship.	They do not get along.	They were frustrated at the time.

Environmental

<i>Stable</i>
Cultural acceptance of wife-battering. Laws are not helpful. Part of living in a poor family.

(Source: Frieze, 1979 p.83)

Conclusion

No one theory can account for the complexity of women abuse. A "myriad of factors" operate in a dynamic environment which give rise to violence and support the relationship of the individuals when the violence is present (Martin, 1988). Although efforts have been made to group the causative factors within attribution theory, specifically within the dimensions of locus of causality and stability, the author acknowledges that there may be overlap between the different theoretical models and constructs. This section has attempted to cover the major theoretical models on the perceived causation of women abuse. These range from intrapsychic to broad systemic models. Intra-individual theories have become less popular, whereas more systemic theories, such as the feminist perspective, have gained greater credibility. However, aspects of most of the theories have explanatory value in certain cases. An appreciation of the breadth of explanatory frameworks available also ensures that the complexity of the abused woman's position is understood. The following chapter explores attribution theory and victimisation more specifically.

CHAPTER FOUR

ATTRIBUTION THEORY AND VICTIMISATION

Research studies and theories on attribution in relation to women abuse tend to emerge from broader studies of victimisation. Predictions are also made as to how women should react, and as to how they may attribute blame, on the basis of these theories. These will now be explored.

4.1 Victimisation

Victimisation is defined by Wong and Weiner (1981, cited in Howard, 1984) as a negative and unexpected experience which is most likely to produce causal attributions. Most research studies on victimisation tend to focus on victims and observers of accidents, as well as people subject to rape, crime, severe illness and marital violence. Janoff-Bulman and Frieze (1983) suggest that victims share common reactions and psychological experiences. Victimisation forces individuals to reassess the basic assumptions and expectations that they hold about themselves and the world around them. Janoff-Bulman and Frieze suggest that individuals hold three types of assumptions which are disrupted by victimisation of a traumatic nature.

- a) the belief in a personal invulnerability
- b) perceptions of the world as meaningful and comprehensible
- c) the view of self as positive

It is these factors which influence the kind of attributions people hold about victims. Both observers' and victims' perceptions are influenced by these assumptions.

Attribution theory, therefore, attempts to seek causal explanations from both the victim and observers of these crimes. These explanations involve judgements about causality, responsibility and blameworthiness. The concept of blame is central to the relationship between attribution and victimisation and will be further explored and clarified.

4.2 Defining The Concept Of Blame

In order to achieve conceptual clarification, it is essential to define the concepts of responsibility, blameworthiness and blame in the blaming process.

Shaver (1985) defines the assignment of blame as a form of social explanation. "It is the outcome of a process that begins with an event having negative consequences and involves judgement about causality, responsibility and possible mitigation" (Shaver, 1985 cited in Joffe, 1993, p.704). The key feature of this definition is that judgements of responsibility or blameworthiness are made after the occurrence of events with negative outcome. Shaver suggests three steps in the blame process: judging causality, assessing responsibility, and blaming. He makes a distinction between causality and responsibility and defines responsibility as having a distinct moral quality. The cause of an event, on the contrary, is the antecedent that is sufficient for the occurrence of the event (*ibid*, p.700).

Shaver (1975, 1985) and Shaver and Drown (1986) suggest that responsibility does not always follow from causality and is a label which is applied "to the outcome of a process". Responsibility implies justification and accountability for conduct which goes beyond the focus of the causal explanation. Causality is dichotomous, whereas responsibility is a variable along a continuum (Shaver & Drown, 1986). Thus, responsibility is not a unitary concept and can incorporate legal and moral accountability for an action. Responsibility is inextricably linked to personal rather than environmental or situational forces (Shaver, 1985 cited in Joffe, 1993). The implication is that the actor had a choice, and with self-control could have avoided the outcome (Joffe, 1993). The notion of human volition is thus fundamental to these definitions (Joffe, 1993), and the meaning of causality and responsibility can differ between actor and observer (Shaver & Drown, 1986).

Shaver (1975) and Shaver and Drown (1986), distinguish blame from responsibility and judging causality. They define blame as the attribution made after the perceiver assesses and does not accept the validity of the offending person's justification (disagreement) that the act was morally wrong, or excuses (claim of mitigation of one sort or another) for an effect that the perceiver believes was intentionally brought about. "True blame, however, is reserved for those whose intentional actions bring about harm, provided that there is no satisfactory excuse

or justification for the action taken" (Shaver & Drown, 1986, p.701). Thus, a victim may have participated in causing his or her suffering, and may bear some responsibility for that negligence. According to this view, it is therefore not possible for a victim to be objectively blameworthy for the occurrence of the crime, unless the victim intentionally behaved in a manner which produced suffering. However, this does not imply that victims never blame themselves or are never blamed by others. Whilst their blame-worthiness may be less clear cut than that of the perpetrator, they may still be regarded as carrying a degree of responsibility and thus as blameworthy along a corresponding continuum.

Whilst the concepts blame and self-blame are often used interchangeably they nevertheless need to be distinguished from one another. Self-blame, according to Shaver and Drown (1986), is an outcome of "an intensely personal dispute" (p.701). Victims ask themselves whether they produced, or failed to resist, the instance of suffering or victimisation and whether they were morally accountable.

In assigning blame, individuals in general are perceived to have either caused the event or failed to stop its occurrence. The perceived responsibility of actors in a specific context, on the other hand, involves the perception of evil intent and the absence of an acceptable excuse for behaviour (Shaver & Drown, 1986). That is, people tend to make less pejorative attributions about victims or aggressors in general, than they do about individuals in specific situations, that is, the 'actors'. The actor, with self-control, can be expected to have the capacity to avoid negative outcomes. The actor, therefore, is imagined to have been aware of the consequences of their actions, and failure to act in accordance with this is perceived as blameworthy.

Shaver (1985) cited in Joffe (1993), empirically established the notion that blame relates to the voluntary nature of the action. Thus, the presence of choice or self-control is the distinguishing feature of Shaver's conception of both human causality and responsibility (Shaver, 1985 cited in Joffe, 1993). However, Joffe (1993) proposes that "establishing responsibility is a sufficient condition to establishing blameworthiness" (p.69). She argues that there is little distinction between responsibility and blameworthiness, because "if you are responsible for an action, you have to carry the blame for it" (Joffe, 1993, p.69).

Joffe asserts that ascribing responsibility to human agency is therefore a necessary component of blame. She further argues that this ascription of responsibility to human agency results as a consequence of the ideology of individualism, where individuals are held responsible for their actions. Thus blaming-type explanations of causality may be influenced by broader social beliefs or ideology.

Blame and responsibility have an intrinsic link in societies influenced by capitalism and/or protestantism. Notions of self-control and control of one's destiny are central to both the protestant work ethic and capitalism, and these cultural assumptions about the individual play a large part in casting blame (Farr, 1987; Ichheiser, 1949 cited in Joffe, 1993).

Such assumptions support Defensive Attribution theory and Finchilescu's (1992) assertion that the degree of blame attributed to the victim increases with the severity of misfortune they have experienced as discussed in section 2.1.1. However, individuals do make errors when explaining the causes of certain events and casting blame. They either overestimate the role of dispositional factors or they underestimate the role of situational factors in explaining negative events. The worse the negative event, the greater the responsibility assigned to the other person (Walster, 1966) because of a greater need to distance oneself.

Alicke (1992) further argues that causal influence is a prerequisite for ascribing blame and responsibility. He suggests that in cases of multiple causation, the observer partitions causal influence amongst a variety of possibilities and assesses the relative influence of each. He suggests that the relative degree of culpability in an act would influence the resulting perceptions of causation. He thus introduces the notion that when undesirable forces contribute to an undesirable outcome, individuals select the most blameworthy act as the primary causal factor.

In relation to the specific situation of women abuse, Porter and Miller (1983) highlight the importance of distinguishing between blame for causing domestic violence as opposed to blame for not being able to modify such violence. Brickman *et al* (cited in Wortman, 1983) suggest that victims of undesirable life events may cope more effectively if they believe that they are not responsible for an event, but believe that it is their responsibility to deal with the

event once it has taken place. This assists the individual in transforming their environment without berating themselves for their role in creating the problem.

Shaver and Drown (1986) highlight the conceptual confusion inherent in research on self-blame which affects construct validity. For example, they argue that the research by Janoff-Bulman and her associates (1983) on rape victims did not explicitly distinguish between causality and blameworthiness. Wortman (1983) states that researchers tend to compare those who blame themselves for a victimising experience with those who blame the other. Consequently, they fail to accurately define the underlying attribution (Porter & Miller, 1983; Shaver & Drown, 1986; Wortman, 1983). Furthermore, accuracy of attribution may also be difficult to judge as it may depend on information only available to the victim (Miller, Smith & Uleman, 1980; Semin, 1980; Wortman, 1983).

Shaver and Drown (1986) also suggest that most research conducted on self-blame in the past does not actually qualify as research on blame at all. They suggest that what has been measured as behavioural self-blame is actually a self-attribution of causality. Characterological self-blame is lacking in intentionality, a key feature of blame, and thus becomes a self-attribution of responsibility. Rephrased in this way, self-attributions then gain more construct validity.

Assignment of blame is a central component of the Just World Hypothesis, Defensive Attribution Theory and Weiner's theory of role attribution. In examining these theories, blame and responsibility are assigned to both victims and observers, resulting in theories of victimisation. Women abuse can be considered a form of victimisation. Much debate surrounds the attribution processes of abused women and the assignment of blame. These will be discussed in relation to the different attributional theories and the kinds of attributions these theories predict abused women make. These include victim-blame and self-blame.

4.3 Blaming the Victim

According to Defensive Attribution Theory, individuals blame the victim in order to prevent having to entertain the possibility that negative events may happen to themselves. They attempt to maintain a sense of self security and control by means of distancing themselves

through blaming (Kanekar & Vaz, 1983 cited in McCaul, Velturn, Boyetchko & Crawford, 1990; Kelley, 1978; Thornton, 1984). The extent to which the victim is blamed will also depend on the extent to which the observer believes he or she could find themselves in a similar situation (Shaver, 1970 cited in Thornton, 1984). For example, in terms of rape, men tend to blame women more than women do (Calhoun, Selby, Cann & Keller, 1978; Cann, Calhoun & Selby, 1979; Kanekar & Vaz, 1983, cited in McCaul *et al* 1990). This would be in keeping with the fact that women may feel a greater identification with victims of rape.

The Just World and Defensive Attribution theories both view self-protective needs as the motivation for victim-blame, providing a strong argument for the basis for victim blaming. In the case of women abuse, one would therefore predict that the woman (that is, the victim) tends to be blamed for the abuse. However this extrapolation fails to take into account societal factors which may lead to differences in attributions about different types of victims (Howard, 1984; Semin, 1980). Most research studies which have identified victim blaming have been conducted in relation to sexual assault, where the victims are overwhelmingly female.

Howard (1984), in a study of societal factors influencing victim-blame, did not find adequate support for the Defensive Attribution theory and the notion that men blamed female victims more than women. She found that men blamed men more and women blamed women more. Victim-blame was found to be consistent with societal stereotypes about women and men. That is, victim gender also appeared to influence attributions through social stereotypes.

Research and explanations of victim blaming, such as those described in the Just World and Defensive Attribution theories, focus on the psychological motivations of the attributor and have generally been explained as a self-protective need (Howard, 1984). However, in addition, attributors who tend to blame the victim have some influence on how a victimising experience is appraised by the victim. Such appraisals by others also influence the victim's behaviour and coping attempts following the crisis (Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983; Wortman, 1983). Thus, the holding of attributions by society or observers is not neutral in its impact on victims.

In terms of Heider's theory (in Frieze, 1979), related to Defensive Attributions, people tend to attribute good things to themselves and bad things to the other. This theory suggests that the actual victim would not blame herself but rather blame society or her partner for the abuse. However, the relative weight of personal versus general social attributions, such as Just World theory, means that the nature of attributions may sometimes appear contradictory or represent a process of relative assessments.

Miller and Ross (cited in Frieze, 1979) and Lerner and Miller (1978) suggest that it is reasonable for people to take more responsibility for good things they intend to happen, than for something bad they hope to avoid. Furthermore, people tend to accept more personal responsibility for successes and expected events as opposed to unexpected events and failures.

Subjects experiencing success are also more likely to relate their own efforts to their successes rather than to their failures (Frieze, 1979). In interpersonal contexts they tend to blame the other for events they perceive as failures. Thus, an abused woman could be expected to blame her partner or society for the abuse, as she attributes "bad" things to the other rather than to herself. Moreover, external factors as opposed to internal factors should be held accountable for the abuse. This kind of view was borne out in a laboratory study by Veroff and Melnick (1977, cited in Frieze, 1979) where a large sample of adults were asked about life problems. They found that women reported more marital difficulties than men and were less likely to see themselves or their behaviour as responsible, attributing more blame to their partners. Both men and women attributed external circumstances and joint problems as the major cause of their problems, rather than internal factors. Thus Heider's theory related to the dimension of internality/externality would tend to predict that abused women would be more likely to hold their partners to blame for the abuse.

Society holds the victim to blame in order for its members to have a better sense of control over their world, and the victim too holds society or her partner to blame in an attempt to maintain better control over her world. But, despite the obvious possibilities of blaming the other, the victim, or external factors for the abuse, there is disagreement in attribution literature about where blame should be, and is, placed, particularly in circumstances where competing premises are operating. Most of the literature, especially in relation to illness,

accidents and rape, points to the likelihood of self-blame among victims (Andrews & Brewin, 1990; Frazier, 1990; Frieze, 1979; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983; Janoff-Bulman, 1983; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Porter & Miller, 1983; Shaver & Drown, 1984; Shields & Hanneke, 1983). Wortman (1976 cited in Porter & Miller, 1983) suggests that people blame themselves when victimisation occurs in order to maintain their belief in a Just World. Thus it appears that generally, social attributional determinants tend to predominate over personal determinants. This will be further explored in terms of abused women's attributional tendencies.

4.4 Self-Blame

According to Lerner and Miller (1978), the need to satisfy one's belief that events are "just and orderly" will also result in blaming one's misfortune on one's own character or actions (p.1043). This motivation may override other tendencies in attribution making. Lerner and Miller suggest that self-blame serves a defensive purpose of "denying the intolerable conclusion that no one is responsible" (p.1043). Lerner and Miller further conclude that some circumstances are more likely to result in victim-blame and other circumstances in self-blame.

Individual differences, as well as circumstances, will play a role in this. For example, Phares and Wilson (1972 cited in Lerner & Miller, 1978) concluded that individuals with an internal locus of control were more likely than people with an external locus of control to believe that victims caused their own suffering. In addition, as expected, a positive correlation exists between internal locus of control and belief in a Just World. Thus, both belief factors are likely to enhance the likelihood of self-blame in a victim.

In terms of self-blame, Lerner and Miller suggest that people may choose to suffer as they may believe that they deserve this fate as a result of societal attributions. They may also alter their perceptions in order to develop a sense of control and order in their lives. Janoff-Bulman and Frieze (1983) further suggest that self-blame results from a need to impose meaning on significant events, and can serve to give meaning to events which may otherwise be incomprehensible. Thus, despite its detrimental implications in other respects, self-blame may be a preferable explanatory attitude to challenging an overarching perception of the world as controllable, predictable and 'just'.

Attribution processes of abused women are complex and contradictory (Frieze, 1979; Shields & Hanneke, 1983). Some research has found a tendency to self-blame (Frieze, 1979; Hilberman & Munson, 1977, 1978; Walker, 1977 cited in Shields & Hanneke, 1983) whereas other studies have not (Frieze, 1978; Knoble & Frieze, 1979 cited in Shields & Hanneke, 1983). Frieze (1979) suggested that these contradictory findings may be due to a tendency to self-blame in relation to the first violent episode changing to partner-blame over time. This contradicts research and theory on the frequency of self-blame in sexual assaults, especially with regard to rape. However, the high rate of self-blame found in rape victim studies may be due to the fact that non-marital rape is almost always a one-off event, whilst women abuse involves repeated acts of violence leading to shifts in blame over time (Andrews & Brewin, 1990).

Miller and Porter (1983) suggest that repeated acts of victimisation result in both behavioural and characterological blame changing over time. In cases of severe and repeated violence, attributions have to be inferred from multiple observations, repeated over time. The meaning of the attribution also becomes important. A rape victim is unlikely to blame herself for the cause (i.e. intention) of the rape, but may blame herself for the occasion of the rape. However, an abused woman who holds herself to blame may do so in an attempt to exonerate the perpetrator for his actions (Miller & Porter, 1983), knowing that she is already engaged in a relationship with him and she needs to continue to be so. Thus, the implications of self or other blame in the context of a committed relationship are quite different from those in most rape situations.

Defining oneself as a victim can be functional and adaptive, especially if it involves behavioural self-blame as opposed to characterological self-blame (Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983; Porter & Miller, 1983). Behavioural self-blame relates to attributions which are controllable and changeable. This then provides the victim with the hope of avoiding victimisation in the future (Janoff-Bulman, 1979; Wortman, 1976 cited in Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983). Victims therefore believe that by changing their own behaviour they will avoid future victimisation. In this way, they then maintain their belief in personal control and reduce their anxiety. Characterological attributions (where personality or character is held responsible) result in far more distress as well as helplessness, depression and lack of

motivation (Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983; Wortman, 1983). Behavioural self-blame is thus advantageous in many situations in that individuals re-establish their view of the world as orderly and comprehensible and are able to see themselves as once again invulnerable.

Behavioural and characterological blame are analogous in many ways to the dimension of stability postulated by Weiner's (1972) theory. Thus, this theory will be discussed in relation to the attribution processes of abused women with specific emphasis on locus of stability and globality.

4.5 Weiner's Theory of Locus of Stability, Globality and Victimisation

Abused women's attributions are influenced by the specific type of abuse situation. Both the severity and frequency of violence in the past, (in cases of childhood factors), and within the current relationship, may affect the causal attributions that women make for a particular act of abuse (Frieze, 1979). Factors within abuse situations can be classified according to Weiner's theories of locus of causality, stability and globality. According to Frieze, locus of stability plays a more important role than that of locus of causality in the abused women's attributions.

The notion of characterological blame, as previously discussed, is analogous in many ways to the dimension of stability postulated by Weiner (1972). Stability (non-changeability of the cause) leads to the expectation that things will not change, whereas instability implies that there could be change. Thus, unstable causes may be equated more strongly with behavioural attributions. Thus, it may be that abused women attribute the abuse to unstable factors in themselves, which allows them to hold onto the hope or possibility of change in order to prevent further abuse. For example, an abused woman who believes she was abused because she failed as a wife may plan to change her 'wifely' behaviour, anticipating that this may end the abuse.

Attribution theory suggests that events which are consistent with past experience tend to produce more stable, internal (self) attributions (Frieze & Weiner, 1971; McArthur, 1972; Orvis, Cunningham & Kelley, 1975 cited in Frieze, 1979). Therefore, a woman who has been abused in the past may be more likely to attribute the cause to stable factors in herself (her personality) or to the stable characteristics of her partner or men in general.

Alternatively, a woman may feel abuse to be the result of a particular behaviour of her partner's or of his mood. If the behaviour was unexpected or related to a 'mood', she may attribute it to unstable circumstances, which could change (Feather & Simon, 1971 cited in Frieze, 1979).

Generally, Frieze (1979) argues that hope for the future is linked to having unstable attributions. If the violence is seen as something which can be changed (unstable), there will be more hope than when it is perceived as stable. However, as previously discussed, such attributions may change over the course of an abusive relationship. Thus, an attribution at one point in time may not necessarily predict attributions at another point in time. However, it is clear that stable attributions and attributions based on confirmation of past experience are less likely to change over time. Fear of increased violence in the future will almost certainly be related to more stable and global causal attributions, resulting in feelings of helplessness. Specific attributions, as opposed to global attributions, would allow a woman to experience more hope for the relationship as the implication is that her situation could change.

Global causes are seen as more encompassing and generalisable, as opposed to specific causal attributions. A global attribution would imply that relationships in general tend to result in difficulties (Frieze, 1979). It may also imply that the cause of violence affects all areas of her life and not only the abuse incidents (Dutton, Burghardt, Perrin, Chrestman & Halle, 1994), resulting in feelings of helplessness. This would be further compounded if a battered woman held both global and stable attributions. However, attributions can also be unstable and global, for example, men in general might sometimes but not always be in a bad mood (Frieze, 1979). Helplessness is most likely to occur if attributions are internal (self), global and stable (Frieze, 1979). Internal attributions may create more feelings of helplessness as they are usually predominantly global and stable as well. This triad is obviously the most detrimental attributional set for victims and particularly for women attempting to make sense of abusive relationships. External attributions coupled with global and stable attributions may imply that the violence will never change and affects all areas of a woman's life. As such she may have to reconcile herself to it, seek help or leave.

In addition to the three dimensions discussed, the situational characteristics of the abuse such as duration, frequency and severity of violence also influence abused women's attributions. These will now be discussed.

4.6 Severity of Abuse

Severity of abuse (that is, the extent of abuse or dangerousness of the situation) is one of the most important situational factors related to the type of attributions abused women hold (Andrews & Brewin, 1990). However, among individuals who define themselves as victims, there are great differences as to how severe they perceive their victimisation to be (Miller & Porter, 1983).

Because of the abused women's extensive experience with the abusive partner's behaviour, Dutton *et al* (1994) suggest that understanding her appraisal of the situation is essential. "Dangerousness" may be considered "a complex construct involving not only the occurrence of a given behaviour (for example, hit, shove, punch, point a gun), but one's subjective impression of it as well (for example, attribution of causation of violence, perception of both motivation and inhibitors to violence)" (Dutton *et al* 1994, p.250).

While a particular gesture may not necessarily be objectively defined by a casual observer as dangerous, the message of intimidation and danger may be clearer to the person who has been forced through past experience to understand its meaning. Thus, a woman whose partner points a loaded gun at her, will interpret this based upon her belief that her partner is willing to pull the trigger as opposed to the woman who sees the behaviour as an attempt to frighten her without the expectation of it going further. Thus attributions affect cognitions about violence and the severity thereof, further affecting reactions to the violence. Thus the meaning attached to the abusive experience influences its psychological impact, especially cognitive schemata (Dutton *et al*, 1994).

Dutton *et al* (1994) define severity of abuse as the objective meaning of the traumatic experience, but highlights the importance of including subjective meaning attached to the abuse by the women. Both these factors are important in understanding the cognitive schemata of abused women.

Miller and Porter (1983) suggest that perceived severity of victimisation and duration of victimisation were particularly relevant to the blaming process, resulting in varying degrees of self-blame or partner-blame. These factors also lead to different causal questions victims may ask about the violence.

Research by Miller and Porter into self-blame in victims found that the extremity of their partners' violence was pointed to by many women as a means of exonerating themselves for blame for their violence. The more extreme the abuse was perceived to be, the more confident women were that their partners were responsible for the abuse. These findings concurred with Frieze's (1979) finding that increased severity of violence towards the women is associated with increased partner-blame by the wife. People are also seen to be more responsible for actions when the consequences of their actions are severe. Thus, the greater the injury, the more the partner and factors internal to the partner will be held responsible (Andrews & Brewin, 1990; Frieze, 1979; Shields & Hanneke, 1983).

Severity of abuse has also been linked to the range of reasons accounting for why women remain in abusive relationships. Gelles (1976) and Rounsaville (1978) found that women who remain with their abusive partners have suffered less severe abuse. Furthermore, women who lack the economic means to leave an abusive relationship tolerate abuse as long as it does not become too severe (Strube, 1988).

However, research in the area of severity and frequency of violence and attributional styles of abused women may be overshadowed by social influences (Andrews & Brewin, 1990).

4.7 Duration and Frequency of Abuse

If the abuse was totally unexpected as well as having never occurred in the past, a woman might attribute it to unstable factors. This would result in initial feelings of self-blame, for example, if she believed that the abusive incident took place because she was tired from having to work overtime or her partner had been informed that he was being retrenched. The feelings would be further compounded if the women had no previous experience of abuse in childhood or if she had no contact with other abusive women.

Miller and Porter (1983) suggest that women who had been repeatedly abused tended to differentiate among a number of types of self attributions of blame. Blame was not only taken "causing" or "occasioning" the abuse, but also for not being able to modify it or for tolerating it (p. 146). The longer the abuse continues the more the woman is likely to attempt to avoid or modify the abuse. The failure of these efforts in modifying the abusive behaviour may lead to self-blame attributions. However, if the duration of violence increases, the abused woman may assume less responsibility for causing the violence, but more responsibility for its continuance (Brickman, Rabinowitz, Karuza, Coates, Cohn & Kidder, 1982 cited in Miller & Porter, 1983), resulting in less blame attributions. However, duration of violence, according to Miller and Porter, results in another causal question and consequently another source of self-blame: "why does the woman tolerate the violence and stay in the relationship? Indeed, self-blame for causing the violence and self-blame for tolerating the violence may be related inversely in battered women" (p.146).

Furthermore, traumatic victimisation such as rape, or a one-off incident of abuse, may be more likely to provoke a causal analysis than chronic types of victimisation. This may account for the variability in the relationship between causal attributions that are elicited from victims and measures of adjustment and affect (Miller & Porter, 1983). Shields and Hanneke (1983) suggest that victims of violence occurring over an extended period of time, may result in the tendency of wives to attribute their partners' abusive behaviour to internal rather than external causes.

Although some literature exists in the area of duration and frequency of abuse, as cited above, the literature is scanty and requires greater verification and clarity. Some studies, such as Andrews and Brewin's (1990), appear to link frequency of violence to their assessment of severity of violence. Thus, in rating severity of violence, the frequency of the violence was taken into account. Such measures then tend to conflate the impact of severity of frequency in some form of intensity measure.

This study therefore aims to expand current attributional research into situational/contextual variables, in this case more specifically the nature of abuse: The nature of abuse in this study

incorporates the dimensions of duration, frequency and severity of abuse. These factors are further elaborated upon in Chapter 5 on the research findings relating specifically to abused women.

Having looked at the major theoretical premises pertaining to the current study, it is useful to discuss some of the difficulties inherent in attributional theory and research.

4.8 Difficulties Inherent in Attribution Theory

Although attribution theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding people's reactions to adverse events, including reactions of both victims and observers to women abuse, there are some inherent difficulties in the theory.

Responses to traumatic events are affected by a person's mental representation or construction of the event. Research has shown that individuals often hold a distorted view of events. This distortion stems from the ambiguity of the event, the uniqueness of individual knowledge structures and human beings' inherent limitations in their capacity for information processing and storage. Human responses are therefore affected by how information is interpreted or represented in memory, as opposed to the objective context. The conditions under which cognitive processes are elicited also need to be clarified (Semin, 1980; Wortman, 1983).

Attribution theory has also been criticised for the specific assumptions it makes about everyday epistemology (Semin, 1980). The notion of the person as the "naive scientist", as suggested by Heider (1958), is criticised as it disregards the social context as well as the "complex heritage of centuries of pre-interpreted experiences distilled in human beings and constantly and systematically handed down to their offspring, called culture and custom" (Semin, 1980, p.391). These pre-interpreted experiences provide inter-subjective guidelines to interpret events, which are lost in the view of the individual as a "statistician and raw data processor" (Semin, 1980, p.291). This view further implies assumptions of rationality in everyday life. It contains a prescriptive stance regarding the evaluation of self-knowledge and knowledge of others. It therefore, according to Semin, verges on ideology in its interpretation of everyday explanations of events.

Thus, attribution theorists attribute agency to their models, even though these models may be representative of the external cultural context within which they were constructed (Joffe, 1993; Semin, 1980). Within this context, "cause effect" terminology is taken for granted as part of everyday life (Semin, 1980, p.269). This appears particularly true for attributions in relation to women abuse, which are formed in a patriarchal social context, as well as within a capitalist protestant culture as previously discussed. Thus, attributions are affected by the social reality and cultural context within which they take place. In this way they may represent cultural norms and not necessarily the individual's idiosyncratic point of view.

In terms of specific attributional theories, especially the two-fold causal classification of attributing causes to internal or external factors, Semin (1980) suggests that the dichotomy of internal and external is inadequate in describing the diversity of attributions made in everyday life. Dispositional and situational causality encompass broad definitions affecting their generalisability and construct validity (Miller, Smith & Uleman, 1981). The terms tend to confuse both researchers and participants and fail to take into account responsibility and freedom. At times it is also confusing when authors use the terms internal to mean self, and external to mean other, as opposed to internal being characterological and external situational. For example, a person can hold the other (external) responsible due to either internal (characterological) or external (situational) factors.

Dispositional causes include stable traits and attitudes as well as unstable moods and feelings and deliberate choices and desires. Situational causes include choices presented by the environment as well as stable environmental factors such as task difficulty and coercion through social control, thus adding to the confusion. Their inter-relatedness and interdependence also confound the dimensions of causality. These dimensions of internality and externality may also represent the broader social and cultural reality in which the attribution takes place (Semin, 1980).

Semin suggests that causes should rather be defined as occurrences (behaviour which happens in a person) or actions (behaviour done by a person). The lack of a "heuristically fruitful and analytically consistent distinction" inherent in the internality/externality dichotomy results in an inability to distinguish between content and process with respect to social behaviour"

(Semin, 1980, p.298). This results in difficulty in measurement, and low convergent validity with open and closed ended attribution measures. Freely chosen dimensions might be more representative (Miller, Smith & Uleman, 1981).

Attributions in close relationships are also particularly complex (Fincham, 1985; Kelley, 1983). Close relationships are difficult to define and are influenced by numerous factors. There appears to be little agreement as to when people are in a relationship with each other and what comprises closeness. Marriage appears to be one determinant of closeness, and attributions in marriage are seen as interdependent in that they are learned and sustained in close relationships. There is, however, no one attributional factor common to all research and theory in this domain. Kelley (1983) further argues that attributions tend to function to preserve intimate relationships. Explanations given by couples, therefore, revolve around concern for the relationship and cannot be understood in isolation from this context.

There is a lack of research testing basic attribution processes in the context of ongoing behavioural sequences such as those occurring in close relationships. This makes it difficult to judge their significance for interpersonal interactions. "Indeed the simple minded questions posed regarding attributions in relationships reveals a paucity of basic attribution research relevant to them" (Fincham, 1985, p.228). Thus, Fincham argues that the future of attribution research lies in expanding research conducted in the area of close relationships. Such research promises to enrich both Attribution Theory and the understanding of relationships.

Having presented some of the cautions in assessing and conducting attribution research in general, the following chapter focuses on research conducted in the more specific frame of attribution and women abuse. This should provide some basis of comparison for the present research.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH FINDINGS SURROUNDING THE ATTRIBUTIONS OF ABUSED WOMEN

The research findings pertaining to abused women will be discussed in two sections. The first section (5.1) will look at findings in relation to self-and partner- blame, as well as to locus of causality (internality and externality). The second section (5.2) will look at research findings in relation to locus of stability and locus of globality. Frieze (1979 cited in Shields & Hanneke, 1983) notes that "the attribution processes of battered women are interesting in that they tend to produce conflicting findings and make contradictory predictions about the kinds of attributions battered women hold" (p.515). According to the Correspondent Inference model, the battered woman is likely to attribute the abuse to internal causes but more specifically to the personal disposition of the partner, that is, causes internal to the partner. In contrast, according to the Just World View, victim-blame would be more prevalent. However, it seems that research in this area tends to identify both kinds of attributions. Some of the complexities of these attributional findings are discussed as follows.

5.1 Research Findings Surrounding Self/Partner-blame/Locus of Causality

Gilbert and Webster (1982, cited in Barnett & La Violette 1993) found a common theme emerging from interviews with women who had experienced some kind of assault such as rape, battery and incest. They found a tendency to self-blame as well as a denial of the magnitude of the event. Women denied their own feelings of anger and revenge. They felt unable to fight back or set limits and found it difficult to modify their partners' behaviour. Thus, their attributions seemed to reflect a need to justify their impotence in the situation and to be able to live with this.

Dutton, Burghardt, Perrin, Chrestman and Halle (1994), in a research study on battered women's cognitive schemata, found that self-blame and internal attributions for the cause of prior violence were important in explaining the battered woman's difficulty in trusting herself. The adaptive potential of self-blame suggested by Janoff-Buhaman (1983) was not evident in

her sample. Instead, self-blame appeared to be maladaptive and related to the abused woman's difficulty in trusting herself, especially when paired with the expectation that violence would recur.

Frieze (1978) and Knoble & Frieze (1979 cited in Shields & Hanneke, 1983) did not find victim-blame with regard to a hypothetical case of women abuse among men, non-battered women or battered women. This was in contrast to the expectations of the Just World hypothesis. Frieze (1979), in her study entitled "Perceptions of Battered Wives", found that there was initially a tendency to self-blame among abused women regarding the first violent episode, but that this shifted to partner-blame the longer the women remained in the relationship. Shields and Hanneke (1983) suggest this initial orientation may be due to the woman initially needing to protect her partner and wanting to remain in the relationship. However, this need may change with continued abuse. Self-blame attributions in Frieze's study were generally made in relation to unstable factors in the women who felt that they did not do what their partner wanted and that they could therefore change their behaviour and hopefully modify the source of the violence (Frieze, 1979). Frieze's study contradicts studies in which self-blame has been pervasive, indicating that it may be circumscribed to unstable factors (Ball & Wyman, 1978; Hilberman & Munson, 1978; Walker, 1988). However, the study may have been under-representative of self-blaming women who did not wish to acknowledge their feelings of responsibility and therefore did not choose to participate in Frieze's study. Such potential sample biases beset almost all the studies in the area and may be partly responsible for non-equivalence in findings.

Shields and Hanneke (1983) also investigated attribution processes in violent relationships. They hypothesised that research focusing on early victimisation would produce attributions suggesting external causes for a husband's violence (i.e. external to him). Research focusing on late victimisation would produce attributions suggesting that internal causes were responsible for a partner's violence (i.e. internal to him). Furthermore, women who are in violent relationships may be less likely to attribute a man's violence to internal causes if they wish to remain in the relationship, and therefore need to hold a positive image of him.

Shields and Hanneke in their study of attribution processes in violent relationships conducted in-depth interviews with 85 violent husbands and 92 partners of violent husbands. Husbands, wives and partners were asked why 'in general' they thought the husband had been violent with different figures in his life. His friends, his family, his father and his wife were included. The data were then classified in terms of either internal or external attributions. Joint responsibility was identified as an external attribution due to its focus on the relationship as opposed to the person. They then compared the attribution processes of husbands and wives.

Their findings in relation to wives suggested that they have a clear tendency to see their partners' behaviour as caused by factors internal to him, as opposed to husbands who hold high external attributional styles. Wives attributed their husbands' violence to internal causes, such as anger, personality or intoxication. Labelling intoxication as an internal factor is, however, controversial as this could be viewed as an external cause as it is not intrinsic to the personality or a personality trait, but induced by external factors such as drugs or alcohol. However, their study appears to view substance abuse as reflective of a personality predisposition. Shields and Hanneke's findings correspond with the Correspondent Inference Model (Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & McGillis, 1976 cited in Shields & Hanneke, 1983). However, the findings were not consistent with research finding victim-blame or a tendency to self-blame among victims. The findings are, however, consistent with Frieze's (1979) study of battered and non-battered women which found husband-blaming to be strongly prevalent.

Shields and Hanneke's study gives support to the notion that there may be a tendency towards self-blame attributions for early abusive incidents in relation to spouse abuse, but more partner-blame regarding attributions for the partner's general violent behaviour. Shields and Hanneke expected more partner-blame attributions from their study especially as they studied violent behaviour in general situations and not only spousal violence.

Barnett (1993), in a study of 12 abused women in a shelter in South Africa, explored whether the loving contrition phase of Walker's theory of learned helplessness was applicable to this sample. From interviews with battered women she concluded that batterers did not appear to take responsibility for their violence and attributed their violence to characteristics of the

women. Despite these men blaming their wives, the wives did not hold themselves responsible for the violence. After a violent incident, the women in Barnett's study reported that they tried hard to make sense of the violence and desperately attempted not to provoke further abuse, suggesting that at this point they held unstable attributions. However, as the violence escalated, the women realised that they could not control the violence and began to attribute blame more clearly to the men. These findings appear to support Frieze's (1979) findings, as well as Shields and Hanneke's (1983) findings that there is a shift in partner-blame over time, that is, increased partner-blame with increased duration of abuse. The findings also concur with Andrews and Brewins' (1990) argument that self-blame occurs initially, but that the frequency and severity of violence influences attributions, possibly in a different direction.

Herbert, Silver and Ellard (1991) conducted a study with 130 women on the manner in which women cope with abusive relationships and the reasons for which they stay. As part of their study they explored attributions for positive behaviours and for the abuse. They also explored the effects of "frequency of severity" of abuse and duration of abuse on attributions.

Of the sample of 130 women who participated in Herbert *et al's* study, 34,4% were women who were currently involved in an abusive relationship and 65,6% were no longer in the abusive relationship. Of the women who remained in the relationship, 50% had left on at least one previous occasion. The modal response for the sample with regards to the frequency of abuse amounted to "once a month or less". Seventy-eight percent of the women reported experiencing emotional, verbal and physical abuse. Of these, 76,7% felt that emotional/verbal abuse was more difficult to deal with than physical abuse. Over 70% of participants reported that their abuse started in the first 2 years of their relationship.

Results of a discriminant function analysis suggested that abused women who stay with their partners tend to use cognitive strategies as a means of survival. These women attributed more positive aspects to their relationships and perceived little or no change in the frequency or severity of the abuse and in the amount of love expressed. They also felt the relationship was not as bad as it could be, maintaining their perception of the relationship in a more positive light. However, Herbert *et al* note that the positive relationship appraisal appears to be

unrelated to the frequency of moderate or severe abuse experienced. Thus women appear to be able to focus on the positive features of the relationship despite the frequency of physical abuse experienced. However, frequent verbal abuse results in less positive appraisal. Women also appeared to be realistic about the high possibility of the abuse recurring in an already physically abusive relationship.

Herbert *et al*, concluded that the abuse literature which consistently characterises abused women as having low self esteem, being depressed and being in a state of learned helplessness, results in the implicit assumption that women who are no longer in abusive relationships will have improved self-esteem and psychological well-being. However, the results of their research suggests that leaving the abusive relationship does not in fact necessarily result in psychosocial adjustment and improved self-esteem and that compensatory mechanisms may be employed to protect self-perceptions for those who stay in such relationships.

Herbert *et al*'s results are considered speculative because of the flaws in the sample and the data obtained. For example, the impact of time on the memory of women who were no longer in the abusive relationship may have resulted in a bias in recall which could have affected the results.

In addition, as mentioned, Herbert *et al* proposed that women using cognitive processes to view their relationship in a positive light use this strategy to help them cope with the abuse. This supports Janoff-Bulman's (1983) notion that some form of cognitive re-appraisal may be adaptive and not necessarily pathological. However, as indicated, Herbert *et al* note that the women believed the abuse would continue in the future. As such, while the cognitive strategies employed may help in coping with the abuse within the ongoing context of the relationship, women continue to experience both psychological and physical victimisation. Thus, positive appraisal of abusive relationships may ultimately be self-destructive.

Thus, Herbert *et al* concluded that women still involved in their abusive relationship use cognitive strategies to help them to perceive their relationship in a positive light. For these women, positive appraisal is unrelated to whether or not they have ever left their partners in

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