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Discursively oriented interviews are a “non-standardised” way of interviewing where “talk as social action” is explored. As a result, I focused not only on what participants said, but also on how it was said (Henning, van Rensburg, & Smit, 2009). According to Grindsted (2001), discursive semi-structured interviews are more of a conversation between the interviewer and participant. In discursively oriented interviews, a single correct answer to a question does not exist (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Rather, what is produced is one possible version (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Consequently, the interviews served more as a conversation, to discuss how these women understand intimate femicide and the issue of risk.

Furthermore, discourse analysis focuses largely on the cultural and social context of language (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1987; Willig, 2008). Therefore, while listening to the participants in the interviews careful attention was paid to how they were embedded in a certain social situation and context (Parker, 2005). What was said in the interview was viewed as formed within a set of contexts, some of which are: the actual interview, the location of the interview, the social identities of researcher and participant, our social situations, our class, racial position, as well as the country and its political history (Parker, 2005). Parker (2005) furthermore proposes that ethnographic sensitivity is vital. Thus, I was aware of the participants’ social and cultural backgrounds that could affect the content produced in the interviews (Parker, 2005). It is imperative to bear in mind that qualitative research acknowledges that our participants are not neutral or objective, as they have their own life histories that ultimately influence how they respond to the questions asked, as well as how they present themselves (Willig, 2008). Therefore, information provided by participants is always embedded in a certain context (Parker, 2005). Parker (2005) points out that an individual’s explanation of their understanding needs to be viewed in conjunction with the individual’s cultural context.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

The data in this study lent itself to discourse analysis, which is in keeping with the theoretical framework of my study, namely feminist poststructuralism. In addition, numerous researchers argue that one way of analysing data in qualitative research, consistent with feminist poststructuralism, is through discourse analysis (Gavey, 2007; Parker, 2005; Weedon, 1987). During the interviews women spoke at length about how they understand their relationships, intimate femicide and their level of risk. The discourses that women drew on were analysed using discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is an approach to the analysis of talk and other

forms of discourse that emphasise how versions of reality are accomplished through language (Bryman, 2012). Discourse analysis has grown out of an interest in language and the role of language in creating understanding (Bryman, 2012). Within discourse analysis, the focus is on language and how an individuals' understanding of experience is constructed through language, as opposed to language being descriptive of experiences (Willig, 2008). Therefore, in discourse analysis, language is depicted as constituting or producing the social world; it is not simply a means of understanding that world (Bryman, 2012).

In poststructuralist terms, the social world is construed as a text that includes the interaction of numerous codes and perspectives (Parker, 2005). Poststructuralist theory therefore provides the opportunity to explore the multiple and often contradictory discourses in which individuals position themselves (Weedon, 1987). Discourse analysis is consistent with feminist poststructuralism in that it maintains that language is always located in discourse (Gavey, 1989). As a whole, discourses 'merge' themselves together to produce a text. Therefore, the purpose of discourse analysis is to unpack the discourses that are at work in order to highlight the psychological processes that exist in a given text (Parker, 2005). Many women are influenced by dominant discourses created through language (Townes & Adams, 2000; Weedon, 1987), which shape their way of understanding issues (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001) such as intimate femicide. Thus, in my study this translated into analysing the texts of women survivors of IPV and unpacking the discourses they utilised in making sense of their level of risk and the issue of intimate femicide. This echoes Foucault's concern with understanding the ways in which discourses produce types of 'psychology'. That is, the manner in which discourses open up different ways in which to create particular types of understandings (Parker, 2005).

This study's exploration of intimate femicide has been analysed through a Foucauldian discourse analysis. One of the main ways in which a Foucauldian discourse analysis is used is to explore how discourses are reflected in people's talk about issues that affect them (Willig, 2008). It is this focus that my study utilised. Moreover, Foucauldian discourse analysts attempt to determine the availability of discourses within a society or culture and its implications for those who live within it (Willig, 2008). The discourse(s), which a person draws on, is affected by the context that she or he is confronting (Bryman, 2012). As Dillard (1982, p. 56) writes, "Our knowledge is contextual and only contextual". Thus, a woman who has experienced IPV, will understand intimate femicide and their level of risk (or have a lack of understanding), due to the situation or context she finds herself in. Foucault maintained that subjects are created in discourses (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Foucault argued that "discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject" (Foucault, 1972, p. 55). Instead, an individual does not use language to express herself; rather language speaks through

the person (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Discourses provide *subject positions*, which, when adopted, have implications for subjectivity and understanding. These constructions make available certain ways of seeing the world and certain ways of understanding the world (Willig, 2008). Therefore, discourses pertain to the exercise of power. Dominant discourses privilege those versions of social reality that legitimate existing power relations and social structures. As a result, many discourses are extremely entrenched and are seen as “common sense” (Willig, 2008). Feminists’ claim that what is referred to as “common sense” is, in reality, knowledge derived from experiences of men’s lives (Tickner, 2005). Finally, the Foucauldian version of discourse analysis concentrates on the relationship between discourses and institutions. Discourses are therefore not viewed only as ways of speaking or writing but are entwined with institutional practices, meaning the making sense of, and understanding of, social life. Whereas discourses legitimate and perpetuate existing social and institutional structures, these structures consequently also support and validate the discourses (Willig, 2008). The Foucauldian discourse analysis in this study translated into analysing the texts of women survivors of IPV and unpacking the discourses they draw on to understand intimate femicide. It involved examining how these discourses assisted or hampered the understanding of intimate femicide, specifically in the context of an abusive relationship. It is vital to highlight from the outset that I acknowledge that there is no recipe or specific way of conducting discourse analysis and that discourse analysis should rather be thought of as a sensitivity to language as opposed to a ‘method’ (Gavey, 1989; Parker, 2005). However, it is also important that I indicate how a discourse analysis was conducted in this study, which was based on the suggestions proposed by Willig (2008):

1. I immersed myself in the data by transcribing each interview and then thoroughly reading and re-reading transcripts. I also listened to the tapes while reading the transcripts, which led me not only to get a better grasp of the participants’ accounts, but to also be able to pay more attention to the words that were spoken as well as to *how* they were spoken. This process allowed me to note how different understandings of intimate femicide were represented and explained through language.

2. Deconstructing the dominant discourses in my analysis involved the following:

- 2.1. I identified all the different ways in which the discursive object, namely intimate femicide, was constructed in the transcripts. This required me to highlight all references to intimate femicide. Both implicit and explicit references were noted. The fact that there was often no direct reference to the discursive object provided great insight into the way in which it was constructed. For example, many of the participants referred to intimate femicide without directly naming it.

Here, reference to 'it' or 'that' constructs the discursive object (i.e. intimate femicide) as something unspeakable and perhaps also unknowable. Hence, I also focused on areas of the conversations where silences emerged and attempted to understand why there was a silence or why a specific question was not answered.

2.2. Once I identified all the parts of the transcript that contributed to the construction of intimate femicide, I focused on the differences between these constructions. This was done since what appears to be one and the same discursive object can be constructed in very different ways.

2.3. Thereafter, I attempted to locate the discursive constructions of intimate femicide within wider discourses. The coding of the transcripts was guided by the objectives of this study. In addition, the coding was guided by what emerged from the data as opposed to previous literature indicating what should emerge. This was done as I wanted new categories of understanding to emerge (Willig, 2008). I thus listened to what the women themselves highlighted as important. In an attempt to identify the discourses, I noted the types of discourses that women drew on and the ways in which they adopted and resisted these discourses. I also highlighted aspects of the transcripts where I observed how these discourses reproduce or challenge existing gender relations specifically in the context of a violent relationship, while also noting the social and economic context and relations of power in South Africa. For example, within the interviews, the women drew on a religious discourse when they explained that they should always forgive their intimate male partners. However, few of the women also resisted the religious notion of forgiveness.

2.4. The next part of the analysis involved a closer investigation of the discursive contexts within which the different constructions of intimate femicide were being employed. For example, I asked certain questions such as, what is gained from constructing intimate femicide in this kind of way? For instance, it could be that the women's use of a religious discourse allowed them to attribute responsibility for them staying in the abusive relationships so long to the religious notion of forgiveness. Thus, this focus allowed me to gain a clearer understanding of what the different constructions of the discursive object are capable of achieving within the text.

2.5. Having identified the numerous constructions of intimate femicide within the text, and having located them within wider discourses, I then proceeded to explore the subject positions that they offered to these women, noting contradictions and inconsistencies. I was mindful that subject positions are not static or fixed but changing, fragmented, and inconsistent (Gavey, 1989).



2.6. Thereafter, I engaged in an exploration of the ways in which discursive constructions and the subject positions contained within them open up or close down opportunities for action. By constructing certain versions of the world, and by positioning subjects within them in specific ways, discourses limit what can be understood. Thus, I asked specific questions such as: What are the possibilities for action as provided to women when drawing on a religious construction of the relationship? What can be said and done by the subjects (i.e. the women) positioned within them? Constructions of marriage as 'religious and holy arrangements' and their subject positions of responsible wives require women positioned within them to act in a responsible and Godly way with consideration for her husband and for the consequences of her actions. Therefore, by drawing on this discourse, would a woman in an abusive relationship leave her husband out of a risk of being murdered? Would she rather remain in the marriage in order to abide by her marriage vows?

2.7. The final stage in the analysis involved the exploration of the relationship between discourse and subjectivity. Discourses make available certain ways of understanding the world and construct social as well as psychological realities; in which discursive positioning plays a vital role. Once a woman adopts a particular position as her own, she inevitably begins to understand her experiences and phenomenon from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the images, metaphors, storylines and concepts, which are highlighted within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. This stage also involved exploring how these positionings impact on how she feels, thinks and understands from within various subject positions. Therefore, the types of questions that were asked include; what kinds of subjective experience may be made available to women by constructions of abusive relationships as 'forgive-able' and their subject positions of responsible, Godly women/wives? Moreover, what kind of psychological reality may be constructed by a romantic discourse that positions women as needing men in order to be complete?

Lastly, I am also aware that my own reading of the texts is influenced by my own location in feminist and psychological discourses. Therefore, I engaged in a reflexive process and reflected on my role as researcher and my contribution to the research process (Glesne, 2006), which is discussed in the section below.

### 3.6. Reflexivity

The notion of reflexivity is crucial in qualitative and therefore also in feminist research (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006). Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It involves recognising one's own subjectivity and the impossibility of remaining objective or neutral toward the research (Willig, 2008). It also involves questions that are imperative for the researcher to reflect on, such as, how does who I am influence the research process, meaning the data collection and analysis (Willig, 2008)? Furthermore, reflexivity emerging as a result of using feminist poststructuralism, has led to questioning the researcher's ability to represent and to know another (Letherby, 2003). Feminist poststructuralism for example, proposes that the category "woman" does not exist, that we cannot speak for a "woman" because no such person exists. This leads to certain questions arising such as; who should we then speak on behalf of? Can we ever really know another person (Farganis, 1994; Letherby, 2003)?

Prior to this study, I had never worked with abused women. Although I had a sense of the type of information I would receive, from reading previous studies, nothing could really quite prepare me. I began to realise that I was, although well versed with the literature, really unaware of just how much suffering so many women have to endure. Specifically, I was really shocked to see how these women bear it so bravely, as if it is merely a part of life. In addition, I had to deal with a great dissonance inside myself, as I realised there was a fine line between viewing their stories as information collected for my study and acknowledging that these stories *were* their lives. Ultimately, it is not merely information, which I have collected as part of my study. Therefore, as I reflected upon the interviewing process, I realised that on the one hand, it is that part of research where one becomes immersed in someone else's life. However, on the other hand, it is also a process whereby, as a researcher I had to conduct the interview and steer the conversation in a way that would yield valuable and rich information for my study. I felt it quite challenging at times to reach a balance between the two, particularly given the sensitive nature of the topic.

As mentioned, I aspired toward obtaining rich and "thick" data for my study, which I found challenging at times to achieve. Although this was my aim, I slowly began to realise that I could only collect "rich" information as far as my participants were willing to go. For example, I asked the same question of the women and one participant responded very surprised and said, "Wow, you asking me such a big question! I can't answer that". Consequently, in some of the interviews I found that I had to probe and paraphrase questions quite often to encourage participants to reflect and also for me to gain clarity. In addition, I found that some of the participants found it quite difficult to really think about the possibility of murder. I realised, that

some participants, had previously engaged in more reflecting than others. Therefore, I found it challenging with some of the participants, who had difficulty being able to express themselves psychologically.

Many feminist researchers insist that the researcher be placed in the same critical plane as the participant (Harding, 1987). It is believed that only in this way can researchers hope to produce understandings that are free of distortion from the unexamined beliefs of social scientists themselves (Tickner, 2005). Feminist research therefore greatly focuses on the relations of power between the researcher and researched with the aim of equalising the researcher/researched relationship (Pilcher & Coffey, 1996). However, the issue of power is complex within feminist research (Letherby, 2003). In my study, I felt the participants held the “power” in the beginning. Before and during data collection, I relied on my participants’ participation and willingness to be forthcoming in explaining their understanding of femicide. However, I realised that the researcher is largely in control of the research situation and is most often the one who holds the power. For example, I was the one who controlled the order of the questions, the tape recorder, the note taking process and so forth. I therefore concur with the many feminist researchers who argue that, despite the measures taken as a feminist researcher to level the playing fields, it is much more complicated in reality, as the playing field remains largely unequal. Further, ultimately it was I who had the time, resources, and skills to conduct the research; to make sense of their understanding and who was responsible for the final analysis and presentation of the data (Letherby, 2003). I therefore agree that it is an illusion to think that a research study is a fully participatory research project, or that participants hold an “equal” position in the relationship (Letherby, 2003).

Further, as this study is couched within a poststructuralist framework, it is important that the workings of power are not overlooked (Weedon, 1987). In South Africa, race, class, and gender have historically served as lines along which divisions have been ensconced (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, 2011). It must be acknowledged that these differences may have created distance in some respects between me, as the researcher, and the participants. Thus, they might not have felt comfortable verbalising their opinions. Moreover, language may have been a hindrance especially for the African-language speaker (Elizabeth). The racial and class differences, as well as language issues, could have symbolised my power as researcher within the interview context. Prior to conducting data collection, I knew there was a possibility that I would be different from the women I would be interviewing in terms of age, race, educational level and

socioeconomic status. I am a 25 year old, White<sup>2</sup> woman, residing in a middle-income community. I have completed Honours and am currently completing my Masters in Psychology. My participants were older than me (except one) and were racially different from me. In addition, they were of a lower socio-economic status. However, only after having conducted my interviews did I reflect deeper on what these differences *actually* mean, beyond their superficiality. I became truly saddened when I realised that, although we were of the same sex, that these women had grown up in homes with limited educational opportunities (one woman had only completed standard four) and who had to endure hardships in life, which is very much a result of the Apartheid era (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, 2011; Cooper et al., 2004).

How then, do I begin to write unfrivolously about who I am and how *who I am* influenced my topic of choice, while avoiding what has been termed “ethno-narcissism” (Glesne, 2006, p.195) or “egotistical self-absorption” (Letherby, 2003, p. 143)? As I write up this section, I am very aware of using reflexivity as a form of self-therapy or as a way to focus more on myself than on my participants. However, as a researcher, I am inseparable from my study as well as from my topic of choice. I am also aware of the question of how much to expose about my family life, as they are not privy to the anonymity that my participants are. Nevertheless, after a long and difficult debate within myself, once I recognised that my family life had been influential in my topic of choice, I realised that I could not ignore it or omit it from my study (Glesne, 2006).

According to Willig (2008), part of reflexivity involves reflecting on the reasons for choosing the particular topic. During the research process, I began to question what had brought me to my topic. Why abused women? Why intimate femicide? I began to question whether who I am, as a result of certain life-experiences, had influenced the conceptualisation of this study. I initially thought in a very superficial manner, for example, that I have no firsthand experience with IPV or with intimate femicide. My father did not murder my mother, and my mother did not murder my father. Neither was my mother a survivor of IPV. I could not understand why I had so passionately chosen this topic. Believing that everything happens for a reason and that nothing is left to fate, and as writing up this section on reflexivity had forced me repeatedly to turn inward, I decided to think about the one pivotal experience in my life and how it could be linked to my decision.

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<sup>3</sup> The term “White” is used to refer to one of the racial categories constructed by the apartheid government of South Africa. However, although originally used as an apartheid racial designation, this category is currently still used in South Africa (Green, Sonn, & Matsebula, 2007). Once again, my use of this term is not intended to represent race as fixed or unchanging (Weedon, 1987).

When I was ten years old, my mother decided that she did not want me anymore. She had met a new man and had decided that she wanted to live alone with him. She had decided that her time spent caring for a child was finished. Words cannot begin to explain the sheer devastation, heartbreak, and loss that I felt. I had lost my mother. Before that, I was raised in a single parent household, with only my mother. She was not only my mother, but also my father and my best friend. My world revolved around my mother. In a second, my rock, my sense of security, happiness, warmth, comfort, and love was ripped out of my life. I spent many years being extremely angry not only at my mother but also with this man who had “stolen” my mother from me. During the course of this study, I began to think whether my topic *is* somehow linked to this experience. Does the perpetrator in my study resemble the man who took my mother away from me? Does the act of, the man murdering his female partner in intimate femicide, resemble my experience of my mother’s boyfriend taking her away from me? Does the murder signify the loss I felt?

Finally, I believe that it is important to end off with a question that I have been grappling with: Am I able to really and accurately represent the sensitive stories that have been placed in my care? Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as in a crisis of representation, in which researchers ask, whether they can ever really represent the experiences and understandings of another. According to Glesne (2006), it needs to be acknowledged that all textual presentations are in a sense fiction and thus no true representation ever exists. Bruner (1984, p. 7) as cited in Glesne (2006) writes that “a life as lived is what actually happened... A life as told is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the social context”. Often one might readily acknowledge that the research tale; the stories, cannot be separated from the participants (Glesne, 2006). However, as my study is couched in a poststructuralist framework and analysed by means of discourse analysis, I believe that it is imperative to point out that the research tale can also not be separated from the teller (Glesne, 2006). Thus, an account not only of my participants, but also of me as the researcher was important. It is worth acknowledging that each story is told from one perspective, while acknowledging the researcher’s pivotal role as the one who imparts the story (Glesne, 2006).

### **3.7. Validity**

Validity is a core aspect that all studies aspire to attain in order to indicate scientific rigor (Willig, 2008). In qualitative research, the relevance of validity is a domain that remains highly contested within the field of scientific research (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Pyett, 2003). Indeed the major point of contention in the debate around the scientific legitimacy of qualitative research is the concept of validity. Quantitative researchers often highlight qualitative research’s lack of

adherence to validity measures and thus, regard qualitative studies as unscientific. Proponents of quantitative research use the lack of adherence of qualitative research to validity measures to claim them to be unscientific (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In addition, a common critique of qualitative research from the perspective of quantitative research is that qualitative research is less rigorous and hence less valid. However, this is not necessarily true (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

According to Willig (2008), validity refers to the extent to which the researcher researches what she or he aims to study. It is the extent to which the data collection and data analysis answers the research question (Willig, 2008). Morse, Baret, Mayan, Olsen and Spiers (2002) propose that a vital task in achieving validity in qualitative research is ensuring coherence between the research question and the methods used. Morse et al. (2002) refer to this as 'methodological coherence', which was a key consideration throughout the course of this study. In order to achieve this methodological coherence, I engaged in purposive sampling. This ensured that the selected participants, namely women survivors of IPV, were the most suitable participants to shed light on the research topic, which was to explore how women survivors of IPV understand intimate femicide and their level of risk (Morse et al., 2002).

Willig (2008) posits that due to their flexibility and open-endedness, qualitative research methods provide the space for validity issues to be addressed. For example, in this study the qualitative data collection technique, namely semi-structured open-ended interviewing, provided participants with the opportunity to shed light on their understandings of intimate femicide, which was explored by my research. Moreover, the fact that the interviews were also open-ended enabled me to ask numerous questions to gain clarity. I would often repeat or paraphrase the same question and explain my understanding of the participant's answer to them to see if I had understood them correctly. In addition, I feel that it is imperative to point out here that I attempted to conduct follow up interviews as part of ensuring validity, so that I could ask participants if my interpretations were correct. However, both social workers decided that it would be best for the participants if follow up interviews were not conducted for fear of secondary traumatisation.

Further, qualitative data collection takes place in real-life settings and consequently the data collection for this study took place at two safe havens. Due to the data collection taking place in real-life settings, there is no need to extrapolate from an artificial setting, such as the laboratory, to the real world. This promotes validity because the participants under study have not been removed from their natural context. This also provides qualitative research with high ecological validity (Willig, 2008).

Lastly, as outlined above, I engaged in reflexivity. Part of engaging in reflexivity also meant that I wrote in a journal in order to keep a record of my thoughts or insights, termed memos, throughout all stages of the study (Lasch et al., 2010). This was done to ensure that the entire research process was continuously scrutinised to promote validity (Willig, 2008).

### **3.8. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations in qualitative research refer to an engagement with the nature of relationships with participants (Glesne, 2006). It therefore concerns the morality of human conduct (Edwards & Mauthner, 2005). A fundamental feature of qualitative and thus also of feminist research is to resist the potentially exploitative aspects of research (Letherby, 2003). Therefore, it was imperative to adhere strictly to ethical guidelines.

The ethical considerations of this study fell under those stipulated by the University of the Western Cape. I initially obtained permission to conduct this study from the Higher Degrees committee, which requires that all research proposals undergo rigorous ethical scrutiny in order to be ethically cleared. Once this was done, I sought permission from the two safe havens to conduct research at their organisations. However, Glesne (2006) reminds us that ethics is not an aspect of research we can forget once we have satisfied the demands of institutional review boards and other gatekeepers of research. Thus, I ensured that once I had recruited all my participants that I provided each participant with an information sheet that outlined the aim of my study (see Appendix A). In addition, informed consent was obtained from each participant using a consent form (see Appendix B). Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, I felt that it was vital that participants knew that I would do my best to keep their information confidential. As part of maintaining confidentiality, I ensured that the research locations of the two organisations were safeguarded (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Moreover, I asked participants to grant written permission (in the form of a consent sheet) for my supervisor and potential examiners to read some of the extracts from their interviews. In addition, I also informed them of the possibility that I would publish an article, which would be made publically available, in which I would continue to uphold their confidentiality and to ensure anonymity.

Further, I sought to obtain each participant's permission for the interview to be audio-recorded. I informed them that they would be guaranteed anonymity and that they were not obligated to answer any question that they did not feel comfortable with. I felt that it was important that the participants understood that the study was voluntary and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any point in time, without consequence. In addition, in order to

minimise secondary traumatisation, I ensured that counselling (from both social workers) would be available to participants after the interviews. Lastly, participants will also be provided with feedback about the study, where they desire.

### **3.9. Significance of the Study**

Although a great deal of groundwork has been done internationally on intimate femicide, a dearth of research has been conducted in South Africa, specifically focusing on women's understandings of intimate femicide and their level of risk (Mathews et al., 2008). Through my review of existing literature, I have not come across a study that focuses on the discourses women draw on to understand intimate femicide. The majority of the research that I consulted was quantitative in nature (Abrahams et al., 2009; Mathews et al., 2004; Mathews et al., 2008), which indicates a need for more qualitative research on intimate femicide. Quantitative studies do not fully represent women's understandings of intimate femicide and lack the ability to explain the intricacies and dynamics at play in the formation of their way of understanding this phenomenon. Quantitative studies do, however, highlight the significance of the femicide problem in South Africa and present the reader with statistics that indicate the size of this social ill. However, how do we explain how a woman understands intimate femicide, especially a woman who has experienced IPV? How do we explain the ways in which such women understand their level of risk? Hydén (1999) suggests that knowledge about how women understand IPV and intimate femicide can help to shed light on what is needed in order to end violence against women. This study therefore aims to address this gap in research and thus also endeavours to provide women survivor's of IPV with an opportunity to explain how they understand this crime. This will be explored in the following chapter.

### **3.10. Conclusion**

The methodology used in this study, which is positioned in a feminist poststructuralist framework and informed by Foucauldian discourse analysis, was outlined in this chapter. As feminist poststructuralism is consistent with the use of discourse analysis, it provided a way for me to meet my aim of exploring how women survivors of IPV understand intimate femicide. I began with a discussion of the research design, followed by a discussion of the procedure, participants, the data collection methods used, and the data analysis. Thereafter, I discussed reflexivity, validity, ethical considerations, and the significance of my study. In the next chapter, I present the analysis of the interviews.



## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The following chapter on the analysis is threefold. The first section analyses the silences that emerged when women attempted to construct and understand the term intimate femicide. The second section presents an account of how women understood their level of risk of intimate femicide within an abusive relationship. Finally, I present the discourses that these women drew on in an attempt to make sense of intimate femicide.

### 4.1. Understanding the Term Intimate Femicide

As mentioned, the first objective of my study was to explore how women survivors of IPV construct and understand the term intimate femicide. Before I could find out whether these women were aware of the word, I first had to establish whether they knew what IPV was. The reason for this is that, in order for women to be able to name and understand intimate femicide, they first need to have knowledge about IPV (Mathews, 2010). The majority of the women whom I interviewed had never heard of the term intimate partner violence. Only one woman had heard of these words before at NICRO (South African National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders) where she previously sought advice. As Carol explains:

Before my marriage I didn't know about it [the term intimate partner violence]...on the end time of my marriage, I went for help and I learnt about it and then I learnt about that word... (Carol).

Consequently, I also found that none of the women whom I interviewed had heard of the term intimate femicide before. The women explained, however, that they thought it is vital for women who are in abusive relationships to know that there is a term for this phenomenon:

It's [intimate femicide] a strong word! And meaning by it is, you don't have to...be in it [an abusive relationship] that you can get out of it...So the name says it...there is help. (Mellissa).

If she knew [about the term intimate femicide] then...would be able to...recognise maybe the...extremity of "is this person really trying to hurt me? Or kill me?"...I didn't have a name for it. I do now...I think that is the name that you...can say, your partner is trying to kill you, that is the...correct word. (Waseema).

The fact that none of the women had ever heard of the term intimate femicide, coincides with the finding that intimate femicide, the most extreme manifestation of violence against women, is still not understood, even though violence against women has received a great deal of attention as a public health and human rights concern (Widyono, 2008). Similarly, in their research on women who were in violent relationships, Grauwiler (2008) and Kelly (1988) found that women were unable to name the abuse that they experienced. This inability indicated a lack of access to a language that they could use in order to explain their abusive experiences. This was also found in my study, where women showed difficulty in naming their abuse:

I wanted *it* to stop. (Elizabeth and Waseema).

I just had enough of *this*. (Jamie).

I thought *it* was my fault that *everything* happened... You get used to *stuff*.  
(Evelyn).

He enjoyed doing these *things*. (Carol).



In the interviews, the women tended to rely on the use of pronouns, such as *it*, *this* and *everything* to refer to the violence they had experienced as opposed to actually naming or describing the abuse. These pronouns do not capture or express their abuse and instead are used in such a way that these women do not need to explain their abusive experiences. It is also interesting to note that not only do these pronouns evoke the sense that these women do not have words to accurately capture what their intimate male partners have done, but that these words are very neutral and non-specific. When reading these extracts, these words provide a sense of an inability to express the gravity of the abuse as these pronouns do not capture the seriousness, danger, pain and suffering that these women had to endure. In addition, these pronouns may also be used by these women as a way in which to distance themselves psychologically and emotionally from the abusive experiences.

In addition, Evelyn's use of the word 'stuff' and Carol's use of the word 'things' suggest that they do not have access to words that can adequately capture the events that have previously occurred in their relationships. According to the Collins Dictionary, the term 'stuff' refers to "a substance or group of things as stuff" (Hanks, Makins, Fox, Adams, & Grandison, 1996, p. 707). In contrast, 'things' refer to "objects that one need not, cannot, or does not wish to give a specific name to" (Hanks et al., 1996, p. 742). These definitions suggest that these words do not refer to

anything in particular. Therefore, it may be the case that the words ‘stuff’ and ‘things’ were used in order to refer to abusive experiences, which to Evelyn and Carol are unnameable, highlighting their lack of access to words to name their experiences. This could also suggest that they were unable to draw on a discourse that could accurately explain and capture their experience. Women are able to form an understanding of their experiences by drawing on the cultural and social discourses available to them (Wood, 2001). Kelly (1988) posits that in order for a phenomenon to exist socially, there needs to be words available with which to name it, otherwise without a name, the phenomenon is socially invisible. Moreover, without access to a language that can explain and describe the abuse, it is difficult to even begin to think about and understand intimate femicide. It is vital that women have access to a language and to a discourse in order to be able to name and understand this phenomenon. Kelly (1988) argues that hegemonic discourse does not provide women with names, labels, and terms with regard to violence perpetrated against them by their intimate male partners. Thus, this results in intimate femicide being left silent and unnameable (Kelly, 1988). Without therefore knowing that the above excerpts were said by women who had previously been in abusive relationships with their male partners, one may not realise that these women are referring to their violent experiences.

Further, Glass, Annan, Bhandari, Bloom, and Fishwick (2011) propose that the lack of awareness of the term may also be because women who experience IPV are often economically and socially dependent on their intimate male partners, which decreases their chances of accessing information about abuse. Therefore, many women in abusive relationships also have limited access to much needed resources to increase their safety. Abused women are also often isolated from friends and family and therefore lack social support (Glass et al., 2011), a finding consistent in this study:

I wasn't allowed to go to friends and family. (Mellissa).

I had to stay at home the whole day. I couldn't go out and see friends and family (Evelyn).

Moreover, the perpetrator's coercive control, coupled with a lack of knowledge of legal rights and services available for IPV survivors, can further hamper these women's ability to access information on intimate femicide. Additional factors exist which may serve as barriers to a woman's ability to access information, such as stigma attached to abuse, fear of the abuser, expectations of maintaining familial harmony, and not breaking the marriage (Glass et al., 2011). It is also imperative to highlight that a woman's ability to name and understand IPV and intimate

femicide is also linked to public awareness of violence against women (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Common conceptions provided by public education campaigns on IPV tend to emphasise extreme images of abuse (Grauwiler, 2008). This may result in a woman's inability to name her experience as abusive if she feels that she does not or cannot identify with or fit the images of the 'abused woman' (Grauwiler, 2008).

Lastly, the participants in my study's lack of knowledge about IPV and intimate femicide cannot exclude an examination of the relationship between knowledge and power. Not having access to a language that can accurately label IPV and intimate femicide is a further form of dominance over women. This is because it renders women powerless since they do not have words to explain the abuse they experience and which they are at risk of. Foucault (1972) highlights the link between knowledge and power, proposing that they have a mutual relationship, working to strengthen each other. A lack of knowledge is one strand within the larger web of power (Foucault, 1972). Women's lack of knowledge enables men to maintain their position of power and control over their female partners. If women in abusive relationships were equipped with more knowledge about intimate femicide, perhaps they would be more likely to end their abusive relationships or to end their relationships sooner.

#### **4.2. Understanding the Issue of Risk of Intimate Femicide Within an Abusive Relationship**

The second objective of my study was to ascertain how women survivors of IPV understand the risk of intimate femicide within an abusive relationship. It is extremely difficult for women who are in abusive relationships to make sense of their situation if they do not have access to a term or words with which to name their experience (Gavey, 1996). For example, the women whom I interviewed tended to use '*that*' and '*it*' to refer to the possibility of murder:

No, I didn't think *it* would really ever happen and he would ever do *it*. (Jamie).

He won't do *that*. (Evelyn).

Since the women in my study were unaware of the term intimate femicide, they struggled to understand the risk of intimate femicide within the context of an abusive relationship. Moreover, these women were unable to identify their level of risk accurately during their relationships, in part because they were initially unable to label their relationships as abusive. Instead, they would view themselves as being in relationships with men who were good but only did bad things from time to time. According to Chung (2005), many women are only able to define relationships as

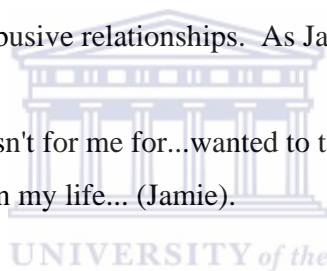
violent or abusive after the relationships have ended. I found this was the case for the women in my study. As Carol and Sheila explain:

I didn't see it as an abusive relationship. (Carol).

Uh yes, it's more difficult [to label the relationship as abusive] because saying that [being in a relationship with someone who is good but just does bad things occasionally] it suits me... it's more comfortable. (Sheila).

Sheila explained that it is much easier to admit to herself and to label her relationship as abusive now that she is out of the abusive relationship and at a shelter. In addition, I found that the issue of risk constituted a very grey area for these women. They explained that only now, once they are out of their abusive relationships, are they able to comprehend that there is a relationship between IPV and intimate femicide. Therefore, acknowledging that they were unable to recognise their risk while in their abusive relationships. As Jamie explains:

I can see now that if...it wasn't for me for...wanted to taking my own life, I think he would probably...have taken my life... (Jamie).



I then asked Jamie if she realised the risk while she was in the abusive relationship and she said:

No, I realise it now. (Jamie).

Many of the women did not even think of the possibility of murder, but rather concentrated on the possibility of their partners changing for the better, as Jamie explains:

...when you're in that kind of relationship...it's different then...only when you out [can you realise the risk of murder]...because...I didn't like really think that [murder can happen]...like my thinking back then was, things is gonna change, things is gonna change even if things didn't change, I still believed it's gonna change... (Jamie).

In contrast, the women explained that they may have thought to themselves “this man might kill me” during abusive episodes. As Jamie explains:

The only time...I'll think of that [the possibility of murder] is when...he was beating me...then I'll think “oh my word, this man is really gonna kill me”....And then the next day he would apologise and he'd say he'd never do it again he's sorry and that. Then I'd forget about you know, the murder and stuff like that and that it could really happen.... (Jamie).

Jamie explains that, like for many of the women, after the abuse, life would tend to go back to “normal” and the women would forget about the possibility of murder. Moreover, many of these women viewed abuse and murder as separate entities. They experienced the abuse and therefore knew that their male partner was capable of abuse, yet could not picture him as a murderer or as someone capable of murder.

You know when you hear murder you're thinking NCIS...you thinking, pathology lab....You seeing a crime scene or whatever, nobody ever expects their home to be their crime scene—I don't think I really expect my home to be a crime scene—I wouldn't want to look at it like that. (Waseema).

That time [during the relationship] I just said to myself “he's not that type of person he won't kill me”. (Evelyn).

One participant in particular—Sheila—was unable to even think of the possibility of murder when it came to her soon to be ex-husband. When I asked her about abuse and murder, she responded by saying:

Wow! You asking me such a big question! I can't do for that [answer the question]. No...I can't say...I don't know really. (Sheila).

I sensed that it was extremely difficult for her to think of the possibility of murder. In Elizabeth's case, she explained that she did not realise that she was at risk until she saw a doctor and received some valuable advice.

The doctor said to me “the advice I give you, because you said you did try to run from this man and then he following you everywhere. I think you must go to Cape Town...because...he's going to kill you really. Because the first time he was trying to burn you, with his own children in the house. Now the second time now, he's trying to cut your money. I think this man...the third time he's going to kill you”... and then I decide to come to Cape Town. (Elizabeth).

These women’s stories underscore the widespread strand underlying the thought processes of many abused women: that of hope, as the women spent many years hoping that their intimate male partners would change. When love and abuse co-exist in intimate relationships, it is often the case that the notion of hope is central to decisions about staying with or leaving an abusive partner (Wood, 2000; 2001). For many women the final decision to leave the abusive relationship tends to occur only after all hope is lost (Fraser, 2005). Moreover, the belief that love can conquer all and produce change in another may make it extremely difficult for women to sever ties with abusive intimate partners (Fraser, 2008). This is particularly salient as women who do not fully understand the risk of their abusive situation are not in a position to make plans for their safety (Campbell, 2004). Therefore, many women may be murdered before they reach the point of losing all hope. This may explain why some women in abusive relationships do not understand the dangerous position that they are in, as they are still holding on to the hope that their men and therefore, their relationship will change (Fraser, 2005). The interplay of ideas about love and abuse affect not only a woman’s ability to identify her experience as abusive, but it also influences her understanding of her available options for safety (Donovan & Hester, 2010; Fraser, 2005, 2008; Wood, 2001). Thus, a woman’s vulnerability to femicide is increased and her access to safety is limited by her continuous belief in hope and love (Towns & Adams, 2000).

### 4.3. Discourse Analysis of the Understanding of Intimate Femicide

The third objective of my study was to investigate the discourses that women survivors of IPV draw on to understand intimate femicide. From this investigation, the following discourses emerged.

**4.3.1. Hegemonic gender discourses.** In the interviews, women's stories were embedded with gendered discourses. When talking about a woman's role in the relationship they explained:

...she have to clean the house...look after the children, satisfy her husband with a lot of things. I don't mean about sexually but I mean his coffee, his tea, keep him clean, do everything that she have to do, you know in the home. (Sheila).

[A woman's role is] to honour her husband and know that he's the head of the house. (Mellissa).

Implicit in the traditional gender role discourse, is the notion that women need to adopt a subject position that embodies submissiveness, passivity, and selflessness (Boonzaier, 2005; Towns & Adams, 2000). Consequently, these discourses provide men with the subject position of dominance in the household (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Jackson, 2001). Traditional patriarchal gender discourses position men as being in control and holding an authoritative position and women occupying a submissive and subservient position (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000). In addition, the traditional patriarchal gender discourse presents these positionings as natural and as the way it should be (Wood, 2001). As stated by the participants:

He must be...like they say he's the roof... (Sheila).

Yes, definitely, I think he...should actually be [the head of the household]...and to just support his wife... (Jamie).



Moreover, many of the women mentioned that one aspect of the man's role in the relationship is to protect his wife and family. I felt that this was ironic as the women were in shelters because of the abuse they had experienced at the hands of their intimate male partners:

...to protect the family...and to see the family safe... (Jamie)

...look after his wife...he has to protect me. (Sheila and Evelyn).

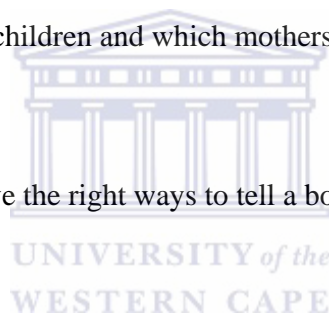
Many women are socialised to believe that the man is in charge, whereas women need to be appropriately deferential. Women might "accept" that a man has the right to control or discipline his partner (Wood, 2004). As Sheila explains:

For me, I *thought* that that is the way [that a man has the right to control a woman or to discipline a woman using violence]. Yes it *was* okay... (Sheila).

Sheila's use of the words *thought* and *was*, in other words, her speaking in the past tense, may indicate that she no longer believes abuse is acceptable. In addition, the fact that she now stays at a shelter may also highlight her belief that abusive is unacceptable. However, through analysing Sheila's previous way of thinking, one could conclude that for many women who are still in abusive relationships, that they might believe that abuse is acceptable and that a man is merely resorting to violence as a means of exerting control and that he would never resort to murder. She would therefore be unable to identify her level of risk accurately (Wood, 2004). Overall, the women's explanations of what constitute a woman and man's role reflect the South African patriarchal society in which we live (Dageid & Duckert, 2008). Women face the societal expectation of filling a compliant and subordinate role (Dageid & Duckert, 2008), whereas men fulfil the societal position of the authoritarian and controller (Jewkes et al., 2009). According to Jewkes et al. (2009), South African men are raised to see themselves as superior to women and taught that men should be respected by women. With most men believing that women should submit to their control, physical violence is often used against women to demonstrate male power (Jewkes et al., 2009). Unfortunately, the use of such violence often ends in murder (Mathews et al., 2004).

**4.3.2. The patriarchal family discourse.** As part of the traditional gender role discourse, was a dominant patriarchal family discourse, which emerged in these women's stories. Within westernised societies, the dominant family discourse prescribes that a traditional two-parent, nuclear family is the norm and perhaps the best family structure for the wellbeing and development of children (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Lubbe, 2007). This discourse is also evident in South Africa, which has a family-based society with a culture that values the traditional family. The traditional nuclear family—widely accepted to mean a legally married, two-parent, heterosexual couple—has been the norm and benchmark against which other types of family arrangements have been measured (Lubbe, 2007). Families that are different from this norm, such as single parent families, are positioned as deviant or unfavourable for the wellbeing of children (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). In addition, within this dominant patriarchal family discourse, children are positioned as needing their biological fathers as father figures (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) explain that within the patriarchal family discourse fathers are positioned as possessing an essential quality that only they can provide to their children and which mothers are unable to provide. As Mellissa explains:

...you as a mother don't have the right ways to tell a boy...then the father can come in there. (Mellissa).



The women in this study provided the men with the position of the father figure who is needed in the family, which was linked to the absence of a father in their own childhoods:

I accepted the fact that...he was abusing me...I stayed in the relationship for...the children because I knew what it was like not to have a father. To grow up without a father. (Jamie).

...I didn't wanted to raise my kids without a father because I never had a father that raised me. So I wanted to give my kids the best... (Mellissa).

Mellissa explains that she wanted to remain in the relationship, albeit abusive, as she believed that for her children to be able to grow up with a father was the “best” she could give them. Women often remain in abusive relationships to adhere to society's description of what a family should consist of (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). A popular view is that the most favourable child-rearing environment occurs in families with two married parents who are

biologically related to their children. Many women believe a two-parent family structure is necessary for successful child development and that the absence of the father would have serious adverse consequences. However, the presence of a deviant father in a conflictual, nondivorced family may be more destructive than the absence of a father in a mother-headed home, especially when children witness physical violence (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). As Sheila and Jamie explain:

...he [her ex-husband] just strangles me and I couldn't get breath and my daughter of six years old was also there in my room, but...she's used to that... (Sheila).

...he [her ex-boyfriend] was sitting on me and he was literally strangling me...and the children they were sitting there you know and they saw this... (Jamie).

Many women believe it is better to remain in an unsatisfying, conflict ridden marriage for the sake of the children, instead of getting a divorce. Although, growing up in a home where both parents are present can be beneficial for the children, it can be adverse in cases where the father is abusive (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Children who grow up in families where there is abuse and high marital conflict exhibit many of the same adjustment problems as children from divorced families (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Many women may remain in an abusive relationship in order to give their children what they never had, which is the opportunity to grow up in a home with both a mother and a father. However, this focus on and desire to uphold the traditional two-parent, nuclear family; may cloud their ability to understand intimate femicide and to understand that they are at extremely high risk of femicide. In fact, Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) argue that physically abusive, conflictual situations are the most harmful to children and suggest that divorce should be the most frequently selected option, as opposed to remaining in a violent marriage.

**4.3.3. Dominant prescriptions of femininity.** The women's stories were also rife with an internalisation of dominant prescriptions of femininity. As Jamie explains:

...for me it was like...I had two children but it was like having three children, because I had to pamper them, I had to pamper him, I had to see that he is happy, I had to see that they're happy. (Jamie).

According to Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004), the line between “wife” and “mother” is often unclear. Positioning the self as the mother is associated with traditional feminine practices where nurturance and selflessness are underscored. Alternatively, by constructing their partners as childlike and needing support, women simultaneously construct themselves as stronger. Although empowering, representing the man as needing care, contributes to keep women in their abusive relationships out of feelings of concern for their partners (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004), which might ultimately serve a fatal function. In addition, many women have been taught to “stand by their man” (Dobash & Dobash, 1981) regardless of how men treat their women (Towns & Adams, 2000). Mellissa explained that she believed she had to remain in her marriage:

Through thick and thin. (Mellissa).

Many women may remain with their partner in spite of physical abuse, not realising that they are at risk of femicide. They may therefore remain in the relationship until they become a victim of intimate femicide (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Dobash & Dobash, 1981).

**4.3.4. Discourses of the “good wife.”** In line with the notion of femininity, a woman may believe she needs to adopt the feminine construction of the “good wife”, as a “good” wife should accept a caring role regardless of her partner’s abusiveness (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Evident in women’s stories was an internalisation of the expectation that they should love their partners even if they are abused by them (Wood, 2001). Adhering to dominant prescriptions of femininity can serve as a trap to women in abusive relationships by normalising dominance and violence in men, and vulnerability in women (Boonzaier, 2008; Jackson, 2001). According to Wood (2001), this relates to women positioning themselves as responsible for changing their partners’ violent behaviour (Wood, 2001). As the women explain:

...I thought I could change him... (Evelyn and Jamie).

...For thirty years I thought I could change him... (Mellissa).

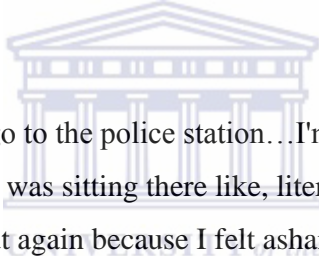
Many of the women believed that their partners could change and therefore did not want to be responsible for sending their abusive partners to prison. For example, Waseema spoke about her previous abusive relationships and explained:

First of all I didn't want to...make cases against anybody because I didn't want to put anybody in jail... (Waseema).

Sheila explained her inability to report her ex-husband to the police as something she did not want to have on her conscience:

...if I'm going to the police, I would visit him because my conscience is gonna, you see? I did locked him up and that will stay in my brain. (Sheila).

Sheila explaining that she does not want her husband's imprisonment on her conscience evokes a sense that the punishment of prison might be too much for him to pay for the abuse he perpetrated. This positions the experience of jail as more damaging and far worse than the abuse she experienced. In contrast, Evelyn's story highlights the conflict many of the women experienced between wanting protection and being a "good wife", as dictated by the dominant discourses of the "good wife":



...I said to him "I'm gonna go to the police station...I'm gonna report you"...I went to the police station. I was sitting there like, literally crying and I had a black eye and I just walk out again because I felt ashamed, and I went back and I said "you'll change you will change"...I thought I could change him. (Evelyn).

There is a sense of responsibility for the man's wellbeing conveyed in this discourse, which positions the woman as a "bad wife" if she sends him to jail. This notion once again highlights that many women might not fully understand the strength of the IPV and intimate femicide relationship (Abrahams et al., 2013). In addition, research has found that few women take out protection orders against their male partners and tend not to report their partners to the police (Jackson, 1997). According to Mathews et al. (2004), the conviction of a male partner for the murder of his intimate female partner is more likely if there is a history of reported IPV. Perhaps if more men had been imprisoned for IPV, more women would still be alive today, and if more men are imprisoned for IPV in future, more lives could possibly be saved.

**4.3.5. Resistance to discourses of femininity.** Some of the women whom I interviewed resisted traditional constructions of passive femininity and authored a more active discourse, which offered a position of empowerment (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). For instance, these women would take on an active role by drawing on the police services for help and assistance.

However, the women's stories regarding the police mainly highlighted their loss of faith in the police system. Elizabeth said:

I phoned for the cops, but the cops they didn't come. They said they coming but they didn't come...I went there [to the police station] and then I tell the police but...they said I must sit there. I was sit there about four hours, I don't get help. (Elizabeth).

Waseema's story further highlights how the police often do not take women's abusive situations seriously:

...when I called the police they said...“this is a domestic problem, they can't do anything...” (Waseema).

While, Mellissa openly expressed her loss of faith in the police:

...I ran to the police station and I made a case against him [her ex-husband] and what really disappointed me is at that time the police even failed me because they didn't do their jobs well... because the police promise you all the things when you tell them [about the abuse] but it's like, they doesn't take it real...seriously, you know...the cops can't help me... (Mellissa).

Abuse subjects women to an illegal action and forces them to confront their own helplessness and powerlessness, and in so doing also requires them to engage in actions, aimed at protection and resistance (Hydén, 2005). Therefore, by phoning the police for help, these women indicate their belief in themselves as having agency and ability to do something to alleviate their abuse. Their accounts present a discourse of shifting positions between powerlessness and agency, which could indicate a move toward drawing on a feminist discourse that promotes the empowerment of women (Hydén, 2005). However, the women's stories also highlight the insensitivity of the police to the needs of women who experience IPV (Jackson, 1997). Their stories indicate that the police often do not regard IPV as a crime (Jackson, 1997). The contemptuous treatment of women by the police can result in a reluctance to turn to the police for help (Jackson, 1997), which might prevent women from drawing on the police as a source of knowledge and information about IPV and intimate femicide. In addition, few abusive perpetrators are punished effectively and women often have little faith in the system (Jewkes et al., 2009). As a result, the

realisation that the police cannot or will not protect them, might force women to reappraise the situation, which could result in less women reaching out and seeking help (Angless, Maconachie, & Van Zyl, 1998).

**4.3.6. Resistance to the traditional religious discourse.** With the desire for more agency came a tendency to resist the traditional religious discourse. I found many of these women vacillated between wanting to save their relationships or marriages and wanting to leave their intimate male partners, which created feelings of guilt for the women who valued their religious beliefs. The women described their internal conflicts about trying to uphold religious values in contrast to their desire to leave their abusive relationships. For example, after first positioning herself within the traditional religious discourse by going to the pastor for help and advice about her abuse, Sheila then begins to position herself outside of the religious discourse by saying:

...my aunt, she phoned me and said my husband said the pastor wants to have a chat with me...and he wants to pray for our marriage and I said no. He can pray for my husband but he must leave me alone. (Sheila).

By saying that the pastor must “leave me alone” Sheila is highlighting her sense of “giving up” on the pastor’s ability to help her. In contrast, Jamie appears to position herself outside of the religious discourse by expressing that she does not believe a woman who is abused should remain in a relationship to abide by a commitment she has made to the Lord:

...there was times...when I was in church and the priest would talk about like...if two people did get married, you made a commitment to God and that you would stay by your husband...through everything...a wife should...stay with her husband no matter what he does and that...But...I don't think...that in my situation I could've done that... (Jamie).

Women in abusive relationships could make significant strides in understanding intimate femicide when they begin to recognise the limitations inherent in religious discourses, and explore new subjectivities that confront issues of power and control in intimate relationships. However, although there was a tendency among many of the women to position themselves

outside of the religious discourse, it was not uncommon for some of the women to accept and abide by the religious discourse.

**4.3.7. Religious discourse.** Religion is often supportive of traditional roles and strictly advocate adherence to these roles (Ahmed et al., 2009; Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003, 2004; Shefer et al., 2008). As Mellissa and Evelyn explain:

...according to the Word of God, I can only speak to you in that line, is the husband is the head of the house... (Mellissa).

...The man is the superior one according to the Bible... (Evelyn).

The women's decisions to remain in abusive relationships were often tied to religious construction of the sanctity of marriage and to their religious beliefs that marriage is sacred and eternal (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). As Mellissa explains:

I was like "God wants me to be here" [in the abusive relationship] and I need to pray and I need to trust God. (Mellissa).

Tied into the religious construction of the sanctity of marriage is the notion that religious leaders were more concerned with getting the men to stop drinking and doing drugs, as opposed to assisting with the stopping of the abuse. This finding is similar to Giesbrecht and Sevcik (2000) who found that it is not uncommon for religious leaders to deny the severity of the abuse. As Sheila explains:

...he [the pastor] spoke to my husband "why don't you stop the things that you doing, drugs and...drinking". I did ask him many times for advice [about the abuse]...I also spoke to the pastor, I said "this guy he's not even long out of jail so just speak to him because see what he did" and my face was standing out here and he said he's going to speak to my husband...but I can't say you anything, I never see...the pastor...speak to him about it... [about the abuse]. (Sheila).

Sheila explained that the pastor was willing to help her husband to stop his drug and alcohol abuse, yet he was not as forthcoming in assisting with the IPV. Sheila explained that the pastor knew about the abuse, yet recommended she remain with her husband. The pastor would see the



marks on Sheila's face but would still offer to pray for her marriage. The observation in this study that religious leaders were reluctant to condone divorce and rather supported reconciliation is consistent with the finding by Levitt and Ware (2006):

They [religious leaders] told me to stay in the relationship and give it another try. (Waseema).

Their [religious leaders] advice was for me to go and see a counsellor and work on our relationship. (Carol).

The religious leaders appear to draw on what seems to be a conservative religious discourse, through their reluctance to condone divorce and support of reconciliation, which also reinforces religious constructions of the sanctity of marriage and a husband's authority in the household (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). It is also argued that it may be disempowering for abused women to be confronted with a religious discourse from religious leaders that supports forgiveness (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Tied into the religious notion of forgiveness, was the women's belief that they had to stay in relationships where men were physically violent to demonstrate that they were abiding by the Lord's word (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). Women in abusive relationships may not realise that their religiosity could prove fatal. I found that religiosity significantly influenced how some women understood the issue of abuse and intimate femicide. Therefore, it is vital to acknowledge the religious identities of women and how such identities affect their understanding of abusive relationships and intimate femicide.

Lastly, I personally feel that it is important that I point out that religious discourses may also provide much needed support to women who are in abusive relationships (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). For example, it is not uncommon for religion to function as a meaning-making framework that can provide women with the insight and social support to get through their abusive relationships and to help them rebuild their spiritual identity after abuse (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000).

**4.3.8. Partial resistance to discourses of heterosexuality.** According to Chung (2005), many women believe in the notion that a male partner's behaviour reflects on the female partner's identity. This interdependence of identities can trap women into speaking about and presenting their partner's behaviour in a way that does not tarnish their own identities (Chung, 2005). It could explain why many women are reluctant to speak of their partners' behaviour as violent or abusive (Chung, 2005). In the sample of women I interviewed, I found that this was not always

the case. Many of the women were not ashamed or embarrassed to share their stories with their friends, as they argued that the majority of their friends were also in abusive relationships. As the women explain:

They [friends] always said “oh wowers you going though that”—um—“he's doing that to you, did you hear that he's doing like that to me”... we'd share our stories...My neighbours they can hear—on that side [in the area where she stayed]—they used to that because they also...got that bad experience, like if my husband goes on like this... and their husband also, it's like they [the men] are challenging each other...So everyone is dealing with the same thing. (Sheila).

My one friend...she is still married and she also went through abuse and...she stucked to her husband through everything...and I always looked up to her...And I told myself, well, maybe it should be like that, you know? And then I also fell into that... They [her friends] were in the same situation that I was in. So it just had to be so, you know...everyone around me was in abusive relationships. (Jamie).

Alternatively, Evelyn was unable to tell her friends about the abuse. She explained that for her to be honest and share her story with friends, she first needed to be honest with herself, which she was unable to do.

You don't want to admit to people like you in this [abusive relationship] because, you lie to yourself... firstly, you lie to yourself...cause then [being honest meant] I'd also have to face my own demons inside...I knew I had to leave but I was still trying, saying to myself—lying to myself—“ag, he won't do it” [murder]... (Evelyn).

On the other hand, Carol explained that she would not tell her friends and family about the abuse in order to protect her husband's reputation as he was a police officer:

He would keep the gun to my head several times but he was in the police force. I didn't wanted his name to be smuttered around at work also because he can lose his job. (Carol).

Stories of police officers assaulting their partners are sadly far from unique. According to Vetten (1995), policemen are more likely to kill their female partners than men employed in other occupations. A study conducted by the Independent Complaints Directorate (ICD) in 2009 indicates that in 2007 the ICD recorded 24 femicides by male South African Police Service members accounting for 40% of femicide deaths (Bruce, 2010). In addition, the ICD found that a substantial number of femicide cases involved South African policemen using service pistols to murder their partners (Bruce, 2010). Many women might not realise that South Africa has one of the highest rates of intimate femicide and firearm related deaths (Abrahams, Jewkes, & Mathews, 2010). As a result, they may rather attempt to “protect” their partners from the law or from losing their jobs, and could therefore sadly fall victim to intimate femicide (Jewkes et al., 2009).

Finally, the fact that the majority of these women were not ashamed or embarrassed to share their abusive stories with friends, reiterates the finding that South Africa has one of the highest rates of IPV (Shamu et al., 2011; Thaler, 2012). Moreover, their ability to be so open and to share their experiences is reminiscent of how common IPV is in South Africa (Gass et al., 2010). It also reminds us that we live in a society in which these abusive behaviours are widely viewed as normal and where social norms render the use of violence in many circumstances to be legitimate (Jewkes et al., 2009). However, this study also highlights that although IPV is so widespread in South Africa; women in abusive relationships are still unable to identify their relationships as abusive and remain unable to fully understand IPV and intimate femicide.

**4.3.9. Romantic discourses.** The women’s accounts of their relationships were infused with romantic discourses. The romantic discourse emerged in two forms. The first is the fairy tale romance discourse, which involves an idealised form of romantic discourse. The second is the dark romance discourse, which is the malevolent form of romantic discourse (Wood, 2001).

**4.3.9.1. Romantic fairy tale discourse.** Romantic and fairy tale love has a powerful influence on how women attempt to make sense of their relationships (Chung, 2005; Jackson, 2001; Wood, 2000, 2001). The women drew on the following discourses in their attempt to simultaneously maintain the romantic fairy tale discourse and understand intimate femicide.

**4.3.9.1.1. Dual Masculine Identities.** The romantic discourse constructs men as having dual identities: the beast and the prince (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). The man is depicted as behaving in an abusive manner toward his female partner (as a “beast”) and then behaving in a prince-like manner by showing his softer side (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). In the interviews, many of the women invoked dual masculine identities in speaking about their partners:

He just took out this cutting knife and he just started cutting me...and I didn't go to the doctor, he doctored it himself...he bathed me...and...literally pick me up and put me in the water and I said to myself “he must really care for me, he loves me”. (Evelyn).

In Evelyn's extract, her ex-boyfriend is first viewed as a “beast” when he abuses her and afterwards her view of him changes when he “doctors” her and looks after her. The splitting off of the good from the bad is evident in Evelyn's extract. This dual construction or ‘splitting’ has previously been found by Boonzaier and de la Rey (2003); Jackson (2001); Towns and Adams (2000); and Wood (2001). This finding is also consistent with cultural resources found within the romantic fairy discourse that represent male partners as embodying a dualism, such as in the *Beauty and the Beast* (Jackson, 2001; Towns & Adams, 2000). In addition, the fact that Evelyn ends up ‘siding’ with the ‘good’, the notion that he really loves and cares for her, illustrates that the overarching romantic fairy tale discourse is so strong that it presents the idea of the good, prince-like qualities of the man conquering his violent beastly qualities (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Wood, 2001). Moreover, portraying the abusive man as a “beast” and then as a “prince” may hamper women's ability to understand the many complex and often manipulative factors affecting abusive relationships. As a result, it might prevent women from understanding intimate femicide and the link between abusive relationships and intimate femicide.

*4.3.9.1.2. Minimisation.* The romantic fairy tale discourse proposes that love can conquer all (Wood, 2001). Within this discourse, the abuse is seen as acceptable since it is not as bad as it could have been (Wood, 2001). In other words, women in violent relationships minimise the abusive behaviour by believing that the abuse is not as bad as that experienced by other women (Smith & Randall, 2007). As Sheila explains:

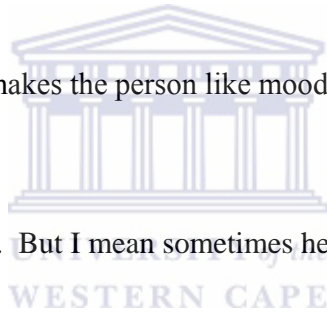
One lady she's got a terrible life...and she's not from Cape Town she's from P.E.  
so she don't have any family here...she's got it very bad. (Sheila).

Engaging in minimisation can be incredibly “dangerous” to women in violent relationships if they view their own abuse as less serious relative to that experienced by other women, as they would be unable to realise the severity of their situation and comprehend their level of risk. This also indicates their lack of understanding the femicide phenomenon and the solid relationship between IPV and intimate femicide (Gass et al., 2010; Jewkes et al., 2009; Seedat et al., 2009).

Minimising or denying the gravity of the abuse is often employed by women in violent relationships as a way to cope psychologically with how badly she is being treated (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Kelly, 1988; Towns & Adams, 2000; Walkerdine, 1996). Psychological discourses provide women with a discursive framework where the man's abuse is almost viewed as excusable since it is not as bad as the abuse inflicted by other abusive men. A fairy tale romance is thus maintained within a psychological discursive framework, as the women attempt to make sense of IPV by adhering to beliefs that bolster the romantic fairy tale discourse (Wood, 2001, 2004).

4.3.9.1.3. *Not the real him.* Many women also tend to understand the violence by dissociating the abuse from the “real man” and attributing it rather to factors that he does not have control over, such as substance and alcohol abuse and his own early childhood abuse. By attempting to understand the abuse within a romantic fairy tale discourse, these women resisted positioning their partners as criminals or abusers.

It's the drugs...because it makes the person like moody and everything.  
(Evelyn).



It was because of the drugs. But I mean sometimes he's a cool outjie! (Sheila).

Sheila positioned her husband as someone who is generally not violent by stating that the abuse was due to the drugs and not because of him as a person. Thus, she viewed the abuse as not caused by “him”, as he is often a “cool outjie” (cool guy), but by his drug use. This finding is consistent with Boonzaier and de la Rey’s (2003, p.1012) finding that women create a split between the “sober/good husband” and the “drunk/beast” when talking about the abuse received when the male partner is under the influence of either drugs or alcohol. In addition, Towns and Adams (2000) proposed that women rationalise their partners’ abusive behaviour by creating a split between the good and bad persona. These characterisations place the blame on the drug or alcohol intake and not on the men. As Jamie explains:

He would grab me by my hair, he would drag me outside and he would hit me,  
but he would be under the influence of drugs. (Jamie).

In the above extract, Jamie’s use of the word “*but*” acts as means to use drugs as a justification for the violence.

I just stayed in the relationship and I accepted...it was part of, you know, whenever he would drink he would hit me...the next day he would apologise, it was part of our life. (Jamie).

Jamie believed it was almost normal (“accepted”, “part of our life”) that her boyfriend would hit her when he drank alcohol, as if consuming alcohol and abuse naturally go together. Moreover, many of the women would go so far as to provide their partners with money for drugs. Some of the women succumbed to doing drugs with their partners, thinking that by giving them money or doing drugs with them would stop the abuse:

I evens give him drugs money... (Sheila).

By supporting his drug habit...by giving him money and I made the choice to smoke with him...I just said to myself perhaps if I smoke with him, things will change...we used to tik together...It never crossed my mind [the possibility of murder]...No, I weren't thinking actually like he's um, he's going to murder me, that time. That didn't cross my mind. I just made excuses for him... “it's the drugs”... “it's because he's on a trip now, he's high, um that's why he's going on like that”. (Evelyn).

The women’s stories indicate an unawareness of substance and alcohol abuse as a factor that increases the risk of intimate femicide (Aretakis, 2008; Sonis & Langer, 2008; Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2012; WHO, 2012). Research has found that men are more likely to be violent if they abuse substances (Abrahams et al., 2013). In addition, perpetrators are often found with high blood substance and alcohol content at the time of the crime (Muftic & Baumann, 2012; Seedat et al., 2009). Sadly, the women interviewed were unaware of what an immensely significant risk factor drug and alcohol abuse is for intimate femicide.

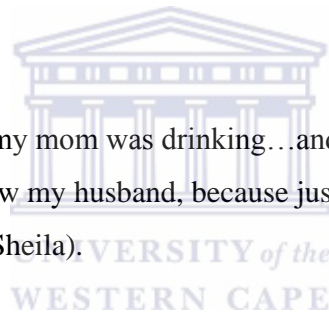
*4.3.9.1.4. Early childhood abuse.* In investigating the intergenerational transmission of abuse, a plethora of studies have found that witnessing or experiencing physical abuse in the family-of-origin appears to be a significant factor for the later perpetration of IPV in intimate relationships (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Corvo & Carpenter, 2000; Cui, Durtschi, Donnellan, Lorenz, & Conger, 2010; Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Sappington, 2000). The intergenerational transmission of abuse is frequently explained from a social learning perspective (Corvo &

Carpenter, 2000). Social learning theory posits that children observe and learn that abuse is an acceptable way of dealing with conflict from their parents, which increases the likelihood of them modelling and repeating the abusive behaviour in later relationships (Corvo & Carpenter, 2000; Ehrensaft et al., 2003). Furthermore, having witnessed or experienced violence in childhood may result in more acceptance of violence (Abrahams et al., 2013). In the interviews I conducted, the women often drew on psychological discourses of intergenerational transmission of abuse to understand their male partners' violence. By drawing on this discourse, men were positioned as victims of the abuse they experienced as children and not as perpetrators of the abuse they inflicted. As Sheila explains:

He [her ex-husband] also came out of an abusive childhood. His father also abuse his mom so I've got a soft spot for him. (Sheila).

These women also drew on their own childhood to explain why they had initially entered into the relationship.

The time when I grew up, my mom was drinking...and...I...just get involved with this boyfriend, like now my husband, because just to get out of the house...life was tough... (Sheila).



I actually rushed myself into my marriage because, I was in a...family that was very nasty...and I just wanted to get out so I tell my husband "when are we gonna get married" because I wanted to get out of the situation I was in, getting married then I'll be better off if I'm gone, but today I said to myself I shouldn't have done that, I should ma' rather have taken that, rather use me as a servant, stop rushing, but it's now too late I can't take it back. (Carol).

In addition, there was a tendency for the women to draw on family members to understand the abuse. For example, Elizabeth explained that after her ex-husband attempted to burn her house down with her and her children inside, her ex-husband's mother blamed Elizabeth when the police went looking for him.

They [police] went to his parents, they going to fetch him. And his mother, the way she was shouting and then she said [to her son] "I told you about this woman, you must leave this woman, you see now, you're going to prison! You're

going to prison...you going to die now in prison"...she blamed me. (Elizabeth).

His mother [ex-boyfriend] was always protecting him. "Yes, but you must remember Evelyn, he grow up in a abusive environment because the daddy used to beat the mommy." And he's just now doing it to me. (Evelyn).

The use of the word "just" indicates that the mother of Evelyn's ex-boyfriend viewed the abuse Evelyn was experiencing, in a sense, as a natural part of the cycle. The women's interviews highlighted that advice from family could be dangerous if that advice serves to normalise the abuse. Drawing on this discourse could hamper abused women's ability to understand intimate femicide and subsequently to understand their level of risk:

The first time he did it [abuse] I made a case against him. Then, his whole family came to my doorstep...and they were threatening me that if I don't pull the case back they were gonna burn our place down, his sisters was going to stab me. And I was scared and then I went and then I pulled the case back. (Jamie).

Jamie's initial desire to make a case against her boyfriend indicates her desire to position herself in a discourse supporting women's rights against violence. However, Jamie eventually decided to withdraw the case after his family pressurised her. By demanding that Jamie withdraws the case against her abusive boyfriend, his family can be positioned as complicit in his abuse of her (Hydén, 2005). In addition, the pervasive nature of a dominant familial discourse appears to take precedence over the less dominant discourse of women's rights. This may indicate that the women's rights discourse and the support structures around it are not strong enough or dominant enough to supersede the familial discourse, which the woman is confronted with. Moreover, Jamie positions herself in two discourses: one of powerlessness and another of women's rights. Although these discourses are not mutually exclusive, it appears as if they present two distinct types of positions, one which is active and the other passive. However, it is not only the advice from the male partner's family that serves to normalise the abuse and to keep the women in their relationships:

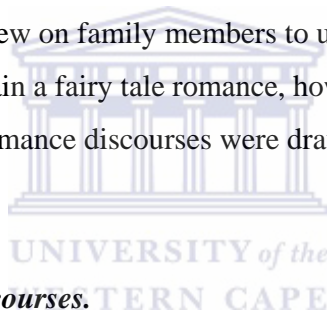
My mother also witnessed the abuse and she was actually the one that always told me that "no, stay in the relationship because of the sake of your kids" and then she would tell me "what are you going to do if the man is gonna leave you?" and I would listen to the things that she say (Jamie).



My family, they've got soft spots for him [ex-husband], like now they shamed for him [feel sorry for him] it's...like I'm on the wrong side and he's right because he don't see his children [as she lives with her children at the shelter]. (Sheila).

These women are faced with pressure from family to forgive and remain with their abusive partners. This finding is similar to a study conducted by Hydén (2005) who found that women often have mothers and mothers-in-law who appear to be “co-offenders” of the abuse, as they convince the women to forgive the violence and to remain with their abusive partners. In addition, the women’s stories also indicate the widespread community or societal acceptance of abuse (Jewkes et al., 2009). This may also allude to the enormity of the lack of awareness and knowledge around IPV and intimate femicide.

In sum, to continue drawing on the fairy tale romance, women viewed their male partners as having dual identities (the beast and the prince), positioning men as not to blame for their abuse, which they attributed to drugs and alcohol; or due to their partners’ negative childhood experiences. These women also drew on family members to understand the abuse. These discourses enable women to maintain a fairy tale romance, however, when a fairy tale romance was not possible to uphold, dark romance discourses were drawn on.



#### **4.3.9.2. Dark romance discourses.**

**4.3.9.2.1. Abuse as a normal part of a relationship.** The dark romance discourse offers an alternative discourse and insists that men are occasionally violent, that abuse is a normal part of a relationship and an invalid reason to leave the relationship (Wood, 2001). The position provided to women is one of acceptance toward IPV. I found that many of the women I interviewed drew on this discourse:

I thought that, the abuse...that maybe it's part of life...and I'd told myself, “well, maybe it should be like that”. (Jamie).

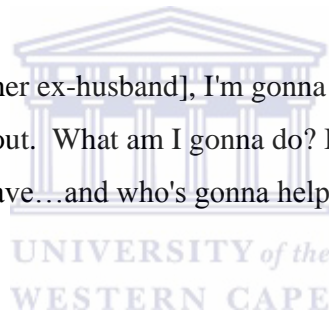
I think it must be like that [abuse]. For me, I think life is like that... (Sheila).

I just took a knife and I just stab him and they [the hospital staff] said to me “you could have killed him” and I said “there's nothing wrong with it. He did it to me...so I just did it back to him”. It [the abuse] was normal for me that if there's arguments you like just like hit it right or...you fight it out... (Evelyn).

Evelyn highlights the stark reality where so many people believe that conflict can be resolved by violent, coercive or power-based behaviour (Ehrensaft et al., 2003). According to Jewkes et al. (2009), social norms support the use of violence and in doing so, desensitise us to the use of violence and render the use of violence in many circumstances as legitimate. The widespread use of violence against wives and girlfriends has created a society where these behaviours are widely viewed as normal (Abrahams et al., 2013; Jewkes et al., 2009). However, defining a high risk (in terms of femicide) relationship as normal, may contribute to women remaining in the relationship, thereby increasing their risk of being murdered (Mathews et al., 2004). In addition, the finding that South Africa has one of the highest rates of femicide, could also point toward our society's desensitisation of and acceptance of violence in intimate heterosexual relationships (Abrahams et al., 2013).

4.3.9.2.2. *A woman needs a man in order to have value.* The dark romance discourse insists that a woman needs a man in order to have financial value (Wood, 2001). As Carol explains:

I was scared if I lose him [her ex-husband], I'm gonna loose out on a lot of things financially I'm gonna lose out. What am I gonna do? I'm gonna go down, I'm gonna loose everything I have...and who's gonna help me? Who's gonna support me? (Carol).



Many women in abusive relationships rely on men for their financial contribution to the relationship or to the household (Abrahams et al., 2009; Booysen & Summerton, 2002). This is tied to the reality that many South African women are in a disadvantaged position, earning on average less than half than that of men (Booyesen & Summerton, 2002). The majority of the women I interviewed were either unemployed or in low-income jobs. Unemployment and low income have consistently been identified as risk factors for intimate femicide (Aretakis, 2008; Campbell, 2004; Mathews et al., 2004; Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2012). A lack of economic power enables the widespread abuse of women (Booyesen & Summerton, 2002) as society has constructed a situation where many women are dependent on men for economic stability (Smith & Randall, 2007). In a cross-sectional retrospective national mortuary-based study in South Africa conducted by Mathews et al. (2008), it was found that 60.6% of intimate femicide victims were unemployed. As was evident in the extracts, unemployment and poverty may make it more complicated for women to leave abusive relationships (Sonis & Langer, 2008). Moreover, women who are financially not in a position to leave could be at an increased risk of being

murdered, as the longer they remain in their abusive relationships, the higher their risk of being murdered (Abrahams et al., 2009; Jewkes et al., 2009).

*4.3.9.2.3. I allowed or deserved it.* Within the dark romantic discourse, many of the women believed that if they could find what they were doing wrong, they could make amends and stop the abuse (Smith & Randall, 2007). Moreover, the women tended to blame themselves for their partners violence and accepted their partners blaming of them (Wood, 2001):

I was more blaming it [the abuse] on myself, well he says that, it's because of me that he's beating me and... I was blaming myself, well maybe it's me, maybe I should listen to him more, you know...things like that, so, ya, I blamed myself actually. (Jamie).

I feel I'm to blame...cause somehow I must have provoked him to do that.  
(Evelyn).

Within this dark romance discourse, the women positioned themselves as being to blame for, and deserving of, the abuse, which could be dangerous as a woman's self-blame may act as a factor to keep her in an abusive relationship (Wood, 2001). Within this dark romance discourse, the intimate male partner is positioned as a perpetrator in the relationship, only because the woman 'allowed' him to be abusive (Towns & Adams, 2000). Drawing on the notion that the women allowed the abuse, further serves to position the woman as both responsible for acting in ways that brought on this violence and as having the power to 'cure' the male partner (Towns & Adams, 2000). This once again relieves the man of blame for the IPV and instead positions women as being accountable for the violence and in so doing places women as a type of 'co-offender' of the abuse (Hydén, 2005). In order for women to be able to understand the complexities of intimate femicide, it is crucial that they first learn to deal with and overcome self-blame and realise that they are not responsible for the abuse and that the abuse is out of their control (Smith & Randall, 2007).

**4.3.10. Discourses of perfect love.** According to Towns and Adams (2000), included in the perfect love discourse is possessive love.

He got so obsessive that...he told me that, if he can't have me no one can and if I ever leave him one day, he will kill me! He was more possessive of over me.

(Jamie).

It was like he was obsessed with me...I was scared because I was never alone he was always there where I am it's like he was thoroughly watching me what I'm doing ... watching what's my next move. (Mellissa).

My husband is a very possessive...if I pass someone I must look in the ground otherwise I get a smack or I get something in my face. (Sheila).

According to Towns and Adams (2000), this possessive love refers to instances where the man “loves” the woman so much that the idea of another man having her or the idea of her leaving him can drive him crazy and lead to violence. Women’s resistance against the violence to which they are subjected (by means of leaving) can be analysed by Foucault’s analysis of power relationships (Hydén, 1999). According to Hydén (1999), resistance is always present in dominated people, but they seldom dare show their resistance openly. Therefore, we might assume that the oppressed accept the dominance of their superiors. However, when the abused woman leaves her intimate male partner, the resistance is expressed clearly and openly. She has fractured his sphere of dominance (Hydén, 1999). Many researchers have found that a woman leaving the relationship is at significant risk of intimate femicide (Aretakis, 2008; Dixon et al., 2008; Goussinsky, & Yassour-Borochowitz, 2012). When battered women take the initiative to leave their abusive partners, the act of leaving is viewed as a key act of resistance as ending an abusive relationship means dissociating powerfully from the violence (Hydén, 2005). The act of leaving does not necessarily always meet with success and may have serious consequences if a man attempts to prevent the woman from leaving him. Men often become more violent after the separation (Hydén, 2005). However, many women use aspects of romantic love to divert attention away from behaviours that could be interpreted as male control, favouring interpretations of jealousy, love and commitment (Chung, 2005). In the interviews, I found that many women interpreted jealousy as an expression of the man’s love. As Evelyn explains:

You just walking in the road and...just greeting another person, but to him you like making eyes for the other person, they [men are] possessive some of them...like he [ex-boyfriend] controlled me...I had to stay at home the whole day. I couldn't go out, when he came from work, then he would ask me “where were you, what were you doing”...and, “why do you dress up, you going nowhere”. And I was basically wearing for like six years, just tracksuit pants and

takkies...it made me feel good [his jealousy]...and I just...said to myself, “he must really really care about me, he wants me...for himself”. (Evelyn).

Understanding jealousy as an expression of the man’s love may encourage women to stay in the abusive relationship (Towns & Adams, 2000). Therefore, drawing on the perfect love discourse would prevent women from accurately understanding their relationship and their level of risk.

#### **4.4. Summary**

This chapter has highlighted the silences that emerged when women attempted to construct and understand the term intimate femicide. In addition, I have presented an analysis of how women understand their level of risk of intimate femicide within an abusive relationship. I explored the insidious dominant discourses that affect women's understanding of intimate femicide, as well as women's resistance to these discourses, and the emergence of alternative discourses. Having presented an analysis of the findings, I will now proceed with a discussion of my study’s findings, limitations, and make recommendations and suggestions for future research.



## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I provide a short overview of the main findings of the study and how they relate to the theoretical framework used, namely feminist poststructuralism. In addition, I present the strengths and limitations of the study and provide a discussion of the findings and subsequent recommendations. This chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

### 5.1. Summary of the Core Findings in Relation to Feminist Poststructuralism

Through the use of feminist poststructuralist theory and discourse analysis, three main findings materialised in the women's accounts: 1) silences emerged when women attempted to construct and understand the term intimate femicide; 2) difficulty arose in attempting to understand the issue of risk of intimate femicide within an abusive relationship; and finally, 3) a discursive battle emerged between the positionings offered by dominant and marginalised discourses.

As previously mentioned, the first objective of my study was to explore how women survivors of IPV construct and understand the term intimate femicide. First, it was vital for me to establish whether these women understood the term. Often the meaning of words such as *abuse* and *battering* are used uncritically in research as analytic categories that are defined before the commencement of research. The accounts of women who have been victimised are then noted within these predetermined categories which frequently results in a failure to take note of the complexity of women's definitions and understandings of phenomena impacting them (Kelly, 1988). I found that the women I interviewed had never heard of the term intimate femicide before. Feminist researchers argue that the patriarchal structure of language might prevent women from naming abuse experienced at the hands of intimate male partners (see Gavey, 1989, 1996; Kelly, 1988; Weedon, 1987). MacKinnon (1983) theorised that the patriarchal content of language as well as dominant patriarchal discourses do not contain words and discourse that enable women to talk about and understand abuse by male partners and, which, therefore, forms a further means of oppressing women. Kelly (1988) argues that terms need to be developed to enable women to name and define phenomena affecting their lives. Weedon (1987) suggests that it is within language where forms of change in society and their political consequences are defined and contested. Therefore, language is the place where change should start. For this to happen, the first step is the ability to name a phenomenon. Moreover, language is the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity is constructed, which is related to a sense of power (Weedon, 1987). The ability to define and understand the term intimate femicide is empowering for women, which is linked to the assumption within poststructuralism that language constitutes our social reality (Weedon, 1987). Becoming aware of the term intimate femicide is the first step in the complex and multifaceted web of abusive relationships, which may serve to educate and

empower women so that they may take action before it is too late. Therefore, as women acquire language with which to name this phenomenon and begin to understand what intimate femicide means, they also begin to understand their abusive experiences a bit more (Weedon, 1987). Imparting information exposes women to a new way of understanding their abusive experiences. According to feminist poststructuralism, this is the meaning of the practice of consciousness-raising developed by the Women's Liberation Movement (Weedon, 1987). In summary, if women have a language with which to construct and understand IPV and intimate femicide, it may enable women to become more assertive and take more control in negotiating their safety. The acquisition of knowledge could work toward shifting the power balance and empowering women in abusive relationships, which could serve to weaken men's power in heterosexual relationships (Weedon, 1987).

In addition, the silences that emerged with regard to femicide may be embedded in the historical experiences of the construction of abuse (Gillespie et al., 2013). Gillespie et al. (2013) remind us that a few years ago, women did not have a term or a word with which to name their abusive experiences that occurred at the hands of their intimate male partners. It was not until the 1970s that claims by activists belonging to the battered women's movement convinced the public to acknowledge the condition of "wife abuse" as a social problem and women subjected to this condition as "battered women" (Gillespie et al., 2013).

It is extremely difficult for women who are in abusive relationships to make sense of the position that they are in, especially if they do not have access to a term or to words with which to name their experience (Gavey, 1996). Therefore, since the women in my study were unaware of the term intimate femicide, they struggled to understand the issue of risk of intimate femicide within an abusive relationship. Instead, these women's accounts highlighted their faith and hope in their male partners' ability to change. Hence, women were much more focused on constructing men as having the ability to change and hoping that the men would change for the better, as opposed to concentrating on the possibility of murder. Since a feminist poststructural framework encourages openness to the contradictions, diversity, and multiplicity of lived experience (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1987), I am able to acknowledge the difficulty that women encountered in attempting to understand their abusive experiences (Gavey, 1996).

Further, the third objective of this study is best understood through a narrative approach that sheds light on how existing, discrete findings cohere within culturally endorsed and supported discourses. The stories told by the women in this study are both personal and social. They are personal in that their accounts are constructed by particular women to describe their individual understandings of intimate femicide. However, they are also social as they reflect and embody culturally produced, sustained, and approved discourses of gender and romance.

The women's accounts of their abusive relationships were embedded within gendered discourses. Implicit in the traditional gender role discourse is the notion that women need to adopt a subject position that embodies submissiveness (Boonzaier, 2008; Towns & Adams, 2000). This discourse provides men with the subject position of dominance in the household (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; Jackson, 2001), which relates to women's belief that men have the right to be in charge, resulting in an "acceptance" of ensuing abuse (Wood, 2004). Therefore, many women in abusive relationships might believe men are merely resorting to violence as a means of exerting control and that men would never resort to murder, which clouds women's ability to accurately identify their level of risk. A dominant patriarchal family discourse, which is part of the traditional gender role discourse, emerged in the women's stories. Within this discourse, the family is viewed as the basic unit of social order. In addition, the power relations in the family, where men have more power than women, are seen as part of the natural order. However, the values underpinning the dominant gendered discourse and the patriarchal family discourse are problematic as they urge women to make the best of their oppressive family life. These discourses do not address the power relations that keep women trapped in abusive relationships. Instead, they offer only one subject position to women, that of a long-suffering wife/partner (Weedon, 1987). Major changes need to take place in the development of new discourses that speak about roles within the family to facilitate a shift in women's power in heterosexual relationships. For example, this shift should entail a more balanced power dynamic between wife and husband, where being a woman does not automatically mean adopting a subject position that embodies submissiveness and where being a man does not mean adopting the subject position of dominance in the household (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004; 2008; Jackson, 2000; Towns & Adams, 2000). Moreover, such a shift could be facilitated through the development of discourses and texts as a way of changing oppressive gender relations, as opposed to simply representing them. These discourses and texts should include the deconstruction of hegemonic discourses and the problematising of these discourses that constrain women's identity and keep women oppressed (Burns, 2009). Burns (2009) further maintains that political action and resistance to stereotypical oppressive behaviour can emerge from developing discourses and texts, which can open up new and equal ways of being in a relationship for women.

In addition, the women's stories were rife with an internalisation of dominant prescriptions of femininity. Many women abided by the notion that it is a woman's duty to "stand by her man" regardless of how she is treated (Dobash & Dobash, 1981; Towns & Adams, 2000). Many women might remain with their partners in spite of physical abuse, not realising that they are at risk of femicide. In line with the notion of femininity, a woman may believe that



she needs to adopt the feminine construction of the “good wife,” as a “good” wife should accept a caring role regardless of her partner’s abusiveness (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Therefore, evident in women’s stories was an internalisation of the expectation that they should love their partners even if they are abused by them (Wood, 2001). Adhering to dominant prescriptions of femininity could possibly serve as a trap to women in abusive relationships by normalising dominance and violence in men and vulnerability in women (Boonzaier, 2008; Jackson, 2001). According to Wood (2001), adhering to dominant prescriptions of femininity is tied to women positioning themselves as responsible for changing their partners’ violent behaviour. Women also drew on discourses of perfect love, where possessive love was often constructed as “perfect” love, a finding consistent with Towns and Adams’ (2000) study. In the interviews, it emerged that many of the women understood jealousy as an expression of their partner’s love. However, understanding jealousy as an expression of love could encourage women to stay in the abusive relationship (Towns & Adams, 2000). Therefore, drawing on the perfect love discourse would prevent women from accurately understanding their abusive relationship and their level of risk.

Some of the women I interviewed resisted discourses of femininity and rather authored a more active discourse that offered a position of empowerment (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004). For instance, they would take on an active role by drawing on the police services for help and assistance, which highlights these women’s belief in having agency and the ability to do something to alleviate their abuse. Their accounts thus present a discourse of shifting positions between powerlessness and agency and could indicate a move toward drawing on a feminist discourse that promotes the empowerment of women (Hydén, 2005).

Moreover, many of the women resisted discourses of heterosexuality. I found that the women were not ashamed or embarrassed to share their stories with their friends, since they argued that the majority of their friends were also in abusive relationships. Tied to the move toward the desire for more agency, was also a tendency to resist a traditional religious discourse. Many of the women positioned themselves outside of the religious discourse by disagreeing with the religious notion of obedience. However, some of the women also accepted and abided by the religious construction of the sanctity of marriage, which supports findings by Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004). In addition, religious leaders urged women to remain with their abusive male partners (see Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Knickmeyer et al., 2003; Levitt & Ware, 2006; Lundgren, 1998). It is important to be mindful that there are discourses about relationships, love, and marriage inherent in religious institutions. Therefore, it is imperative to explore how these institutions support particular discourses that influence understandings of IPV and intimate femicide. This study shows religion can be a powerful social institution that supports and maintains discourses that shape women’s lives and relationships by

offering “appropriate” subjectivities and ways of thinking (Weedon, 1987). Within heterosexual relationships, women’s understandings of intimate femicide might be complicated by the availability of multiple identities, which may create inner conflicts (Fraser, 2005; Weedon, 1987). For example, these multiple identities may refer to the subject position of the infinite ‘carer’ on the one hand, and the position of protector of oneself, on the other. Embedded in these identities are certain instructions about how women “should” be, feel, think, and act—instructions that are often so contradictory that they create inner conflicts (Fraser, 2005). An inner conflict may arise as a result of wanting to adopt both subject positions. The desire to adopt both subject positions could possibly be attributed to the fact that relationships and marriage are influenced by social institutions such as the church and discourses that romanticise the (patriarchal) family (Fraser, 2005). In contrast, more women may want to draw on a feminist discourse that promotes their empowerment and protection (Hydén, 2005). Feminist poststructuralism provides a framework to analyse these details of discursive fields to uncover the regimes of power and knowledge that are at work in women’s lives and in the overall production and maintenance of existing power relations (Weedon, 1987).

The women’s accounts of their relationships were infused with romantic discourses. The romantic discourse emerged in two forms: As a fairy tale romance discourse and as a dark romance discourse (Wood, 2001). The fairy tale romance discourse consisted of four sub-discourses. The first fairy tale romance discourse, *dual masculine identities*, constructs men as both beast and prince (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Portraying the abusive man as a “beast” and then as a “prince” may prevent women from fully understanding their abusive relationships (Towns & Adams, 2000). As a result, it may inhibit women from understanding intimate femicide and most importantly, the relationship between abusive relationships and intimate femicide. The second fairy tale romance discourse, *minimisation*, was used by women to minimise the abusive behaviours toward them by believing the abuse was not as bad as it could have been, or not as bad as the abuse experienced by other women. This observation has been shared by Wood (2001) and Smith and Randall (2007). Viewing their own abuse as less than that experienced by other women, prevents women from realising the severity of their own situation, and therefore hampers them from realising their level of risk (Gass et al., 2010). The third fairy tale romance discourse, *not the real him*, was used to dissociate the abuse from the man who perpetrated it. The abuse was rather constructed as occurring because of drugs or alcohol. This dual construction or “splitting” has been found by earlier feminist researchers such as Boonzaier & de la Rey (2003) and Towns and Adams (2000). The last fairy tale romance discourse, *early childhood abuse*, positioned the abusive men as victims of the abuse they experienced as children and not as perpetrators of the abuse they inflicted. This was similar to Boonzaier’s (2008) finding

where women drew on discourses of intergenerational transmission of abuse to explain their experiences of IPV. Furthermore, positioning the abusive man as a victim also appeared to lead to women protecting men from punishment and imprisonment. When women could not sustain belief in the fairy tale amidst continuing violence, another culturally sanctioned narrative was available to them.

The dark romance discourse was composed of three sub-discourses. The first dark romance discourse, *abuse as a normal part of a relationship*, was used to construct men as occasionally violent and therefore leaving a relationship as a result of abuse was positioned as an unacceptable course of action (Wood, 2001). This discourse appeared to be influenced by dominant conceptions of femininity, which prescribe that it is a woman's responsibility to stay with her husband even if he abuses her. This discourse supports findings by Boonzaier and de la Rey (2003) as well as Towns and Adams (2000). According to Wood (2001), constructing abuse as a normal part of a relationship is filled with hegemonic gender discourses where men hold the position of power and, as a result, violence is viewed as a normal way in which to resolve conflict in heterosexual relationships (Ehrensaft et al., 2003). The second dark romance discourse, *a woman needs a man in order to have value*, was used to construct men as needed, especially because of their financial contribution within the relationship. The positioning of women as acquiring (financial) value through men is a finding in line with the work of Boonzaier (2008) and Towns and Adams (2000). According to Abrahams et al. (2009), women who are not in a position to leave their relationships due to financial reasons may be at an increased risk of being murdered over the long term. This is because the longer they remain in their abusive relationships, the higher the risk of being murdered (Abrahams et al., 2009).

Finally, within the dark romance discourse, the third narrative drawn on was *I allowed or deserved it*, which is characterised by self-blame for the abuse. Within this discourse, women blamed themselves for their partners' violence and accepted blame attributed to them by their partners. Self-blame in abusive relationships is a finding in line with the work of Hydén (2005); Smith and Randall (2007); Towns and Adams, 2000; and Wood (2001).

In line with Gavey (1989), there appeared to be evidence of a *discursive battle* in women's attempts at understanding intimate femicide. This discursive battle ensued between the different positionings offered by dominant and marginalised discourses. By drawing on discourses that are in conflict with each other, the women's stories appeared inconsistent and contradictory (Gavey, 1989). However, feminist poststructuralism acknowledges that subjectivity is produced through discourses that are multiple, possibly contradictory, and unstable (Gavey, 1989). Poststructuralist theory asserts that discourses often provide dynamic, different, and contradictory subject positions. Therefore, it is almost impossible to speak of a coherent,

unified, and stable sense of self. Poststructuralism thus assumes the subject is fragmented, contradictory and inconsistent (Weedon, 1987).

As found by Gavey (1989; 1996), this study has demonstrated the value of feminist poststructuralist theory when investigating women's talk about abuse and intimate femicide in heterosexual relationships. Feminist poststructuralism allowed me to acknowledge and explore the contradictions and inconsistencies in women's stories. It showed that these women position themselves as both passive and as active agents of resistance. These women shifted from positioning themselves as helpless and to blame for the abuse to positioning themselves as able to protect themselves by seeking help and assistance. Having briefly summarised the core findings of this study in relation to feminist poststructuralism, I now turn to an analysis of the strengths and limitations of this study.

## **5.2. Strengths of Feminist Poststructuralism**

At an epistemological level, this study shows the value of poststructuralism to feminist theorising in psychology. Locating my study in a feminist poststructuralist epistemology proved fruitful as it enabled a critical analysis of gendered norms. A feminist poststructuralist epistemology allowed me to explore the complex patterns and processes of power that emerged throughout my participant's stories, where dominant discourses on heterosexual relationships provided the context within which these women positioned themselves throughout the interviews.

Moreover, not only does feminist poststructuralism give credence to women's active resistance to oppression and thus to patriarchal power, it offers promising ways of theorising about change that are crucial to feminism (Gavey, 1989). In addition, feminist poststructuralism works well with the discourse analysis of existing discursive fields and related subject positions (Gavey, 1989).

A further advantage of this epistemology rests in the notion that subjectivities are socially produced in socially specific ways through language and discourse. Feminist poststructuralism has shown that women's subjectivities are far from fixed. In the context of IPV, it has shown that women construct numerous forms of subjectivity that are filtered through dynamic social, historical, and cultural moments. At certain times, women are able to construct themselves as victimised by a controlling male partner and, at other times, women are able to draw on discourses of agency, power, and resistance. Feminist poststructuralism is valuable in that it permits us to acknowledge and even embrace contradiction, multiplicity and inconsistency (Gavey, 1989). Thus, I concur with Gavey (1996) who suggests that our academic endeavours should afford us a stance that allows for competing discourses of subjectivity. Women might therefore identify with, and conform to traditional constructions of femininity, or they may resist

or challenge these (Gavey, 1989). Finally, feminist poststructuralism provided a broader and dynamic understanding of IPV and intimate femicide, which goes beyond individualistic and reductionist understandings of the problem (Boonzaier, 2008; Gavey, 1989). As Gavey (1989) maintains:

What feminist poststructuralism offers us is a theoretical basis for analysing the subjectivities of women in relation to language, other cultural practices, and the material conditions of our lives. It embraces complexity and contradiction and, I would suggest, surpasses theories that offer single-cause deterministic explanations of patriarchy and gender relations (p. 472).

### **5.3. Limitations of this Study**

**5.3.1. Theoretical framework.** A limitation of feminist poststructuralism is that it does not focus on the individual. Feminist poststructuralism holds that female experience is dependent on social and linguistic processes and is constituted by them. As such, it does not give priority to individual female experience (Gavey, 1989). According to Gavey (1989), it is necessary to give priority to these experiences and to develop theory that is firmly situated within these experiences. A second possible objection to poststructuralist theory is its relativism (Gavey, 1989). The theory suggests that there is no objective basis for distinguishing between true and false beliefs, which may result in power alone determining the outcome of competing claims to truth (Flax, 1987). Gavey (1989) suggests that this may be a frightening prospect to those who are oppressed. However, Weedon (1987) reminds us that our understandings are always subjective, which is also true for persons being interviewed. This was important in my own study as I aimed to explore the subjective understandings and meaning-making of intimate femicide for women survivors of IPV.

**5.3.2. Methodology.** Although the interviews were conducted in English, many of the interviewees were not mother tongue English speakers. A lack of fluency in English may have influenced and limited the type of accounts these women were able to present. A further limitation of my study is that no White women were interviewed. I interviewed six Coloured women and only one Black woman. I had hoped to have a racially diverse sample of women, as different race groups often have differing attitudes and beliefs about abusive relationships that frame their perspectives and understandings (Amar, Bess, & Stockbridge, 2009). Therefore, assessing awareness and knowledge of intimate femicide in a diverse sample of women survivors

of IPV is essential for gaining a comprehensive insight into their understanding of intimate femicide (Gerend & Magloire, 2008).

#### **5.4. Discussion and Recommendations**

Despite the limitations of this research, this study has provided vital information on women's understandings of intimate femicide. In particular, this study has shown that femicide is cloaked in silence. Women who have survived IPV, struggle to name and understand intimate femicide. Tied to this lack of understanding of intimate femicide is the lack of understanding of IPV. In order for women to have a complete understanding of intimate femicide, they first need to understand what IPV is. Many women admitted they were unable to label their relationship as abusive while in the relationship. Therefore, women need to understand the nature, patterns, and cycle of abuse to recognise and label it as abuse. Understanding the escalating nature of abuse is important in the formation of an adequate understanding of intimate femicide. Moreover, understanding what exactly constitutes abuse can help survivors to recognise and verbalise concerns (Westbrook, 2009). The lack of understanding of intimate femicide has significant implications for policy and practice within South Africa as it indicates a lack of knowledge and access to information. I, therefore, strongly recommend that health care providers, such as social workers and psychologists who work at shelters in South Africa, help abused women by educating them about IPV and intimate femicide. In addition, I suggest shelters provide workshops on femicide and that awareness campaigns that address intimate femicide be promulgated among women.

Many of the women I interviewed acknowledged that they were unable to identify their level of risk while in the abusive relationship. This finding underscores the notion that women in abusive relationships, who are at the greatest risk of being murdered, will continually underestimate the degree of their vulnerability until they are informed of the high risk of homicide while in an abusive relationship (Westbrook, 2009). This underestimation of vulnerability makes it vital for women who reside in shelters to receive information about the relationship between IPV and intimate femicide (Abrahams et al., 2013). In addition, numerous researchers have found that women who leave abusive relationships might remain at risk of femicide (Goussinsky & Yassour-Borochowitz, 2012; Weizmann-Henelius et al, 2012), which reiterates the necessity to educate and inform women who reside at shelters about femicide. Not only is it imperative that women identify their level of risk, but it is vital that they pay attention to their fears and seek help if they feel that their lives are in danger (Abrahams et al., 2013). Finally, health care professionals, as well as members of the South African Police Service (SAPS), need to take note of a woman's fear as a legitimate and important sign of increased risk. It is crucial

that they immediately engage in safety planning that includes risk reduction strategies, such as placing a woman in a shelter or removing the abuser by incarceration (Campbell, 2004).

Furthermore, the majority of the women explained that they remained in abusive relationships since they did not know where else to go. They were unaware that there are shelters available for abused women, which could offer them and their children refuge. Research has found that for many women, having nowhere to go is a major reason for not leaving the abusive relationship (Angless et al., 1998). Therefore, the process of seeking help is often complicated for women due to a lack of information about shelters, which might place them in a life-threatening situation. As a result, it is imperative for women who are in abusive relationships to know that there are shelters that offer help. In the United States, for example, the declining rates of intimate femicide has been associated with an improvement in service provision, with nearly every community having access to domestic violence hotlines and emergency shelters for women and their children (Campbell et al., 2007). The availability of such community-based resources enables women to access services and secure safety before IPV becomes lethal. Consequently, I recommend more campaigns in communities to inform women of places of safety. Finally, I believe it is crucial that police, when responding to domestic violence calls, distribute information to survivors and inform them of available shelters nearby. This provision of advice should be mandatory (Westbrook, 2009).

According to The Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998, the police are obligated to assist a survivor of domestic violence. However, this study has shown that although the Act provides the police with responsibilities, many women still experience police services as ineffective (Mathews & Abrahams, 2001). The women's stories indicate that the attitude of police officers suggests that IPV is viewed as a private matter (Mathews & Abrahams, 2001). Police officers' refusal to consider IPV as a crime often leads either to a failure to respond to a domestic disturbance or to an ineffective response (Angless et al., 1998). As a result, the contemptuous treatment of women by the police can result in a reluctance to turn to the police for help (Jackson, 1997).

South Africa has one of the highest reported femicide rates worldwide yet there is a tendency for police members to be unhelpful concerning IPV cases (Gass et al., 2010; Mathews et al., 2008). This could be due to the fact that the South African police force remains overwhelmingly dominated by men (Newham, Masuku, & Dlamini, 2006), which may further highlight the problems women experience by living in a patriarchal society. Many men and, therefore, also policemen, might advocate ideologies of male superiority, which legitimise the disciplining of women by men. Adhering to these ideas could lead policemen to believe that husbands and boyfriends are justified in using violence to solve problems in the home (Jewkes, 2002). I recommend future police training related to IPV be enhanced as the police force is an

important component in ensuring justice for women. A better-educated police force could send a strong message to men that such violent acts will not be tolerated (Seedat et al., 2009). It is vital that IPV, as well as femicide, be given a much higher crime priority by the SAPS (Abrahams, Mathews, Jewkes, Martin, & Lombard, 2012). Abused women need social recognition and therefore need police, as representatives of the legal system, to condemn the abusive male partner's actions (Angless et al., 1998). It is imperative that South African women perceive the police as a reliable source of assistance so that they will call on them in times of need. If more women get appropriate assistance from the SAPS, perhaps more lives could be saved.

The blame, however, cannot always lie solely with the police service. Addressing violence against women is the responsibility of a range of service providers of which the police is but one sector. Research shows medication is often the only source of assistance that abused women receive from health care providers (Angless et al., 1998). Waseema explained that she went to the hospital emergency room after her boyfriend strangled her because she did not receive help from the police. She was given a variety of medication including Valium, Librium and aspirin in order to cope with the abuse and that this was the only assistance she received. However, medication of this sort may have a demotivating effect and may contribute to women not leaving the abusive relationship (Angless et al., 1998). There is a need for women to be screened for risk and to receive referral to a shelter. Psychological support and counselling services for women who have experienced violence need to be strengthened (Seedat et al., 2009). Overall, survivors of IPV desperately need accurate, current, appropriate, and contextually useful information about intimate femicide. This recommendation is further supported by this study's finding, which indicated that the women who were interviewed were unaware that substance and alcohol abuse are significant risk factors for intimate femicide (Aretakis, 2008; Jewkes, 2002; Muftic & Baumann, 2012; Weizmann-Henelius et al., 2012). Police and shelter staff, who are the governmental and private sector first-responders, need to make substantial efforts to provide relevant information (Westbrook, 2009).

Deep-seated changes in attitudes toward women and their place in society are vital to prevent and reduce violence against women. It is crucial that public awareness and violence prevention efforts have changing attitudes as their primary focus (Johnson, 2005). It would be greatly beneficial to develop public policies specifically geared toward the prevention of intimate femicide (warning systems, risk measurement, effective protection) in a variety of settings and involving third parties such as family and neighbours in the process. Furthermore, the generation of information through the media about the relationship between IPV and intimate femicide, and of femicide in general, is needed to raise awareness among women (Westbrook, 2009).



Finally, it is important that religious figures and community leaders address IPV and intimate femicide and condemn this behaviour (Jewkes, 2002). If religious institutions were to engage with the issues surrounding IPV, it could be a valuable resource for prevention. As Rogers (2003) argued, although religious practitioners are often guilty of ignoring IPV, they have the ability to assist women in leaving abusive relationships. Religious patterns of beliefs can be altered and challenged so that they no longer influence women to tolerate abusive relationships for fear of breaking religious values. In addition, religious leaders should begin to challenge convictions, such as “forgiveness within the sacred bond of marriage will heal all”. Religious leaders need to become more sensitive to the fact that certain scriptural passages can hamper women from fully understanding IPV and intimate femicide. Overall, it is vital to bear in mind that every health care provider, police officer, religious figure, and those who impart information, could save a life - increasing this possibility is imperative (Westbrook, 2009).

### **5.5. Future Research**

Intimate femicide is not an intractable social problem or an inevitable part of the human condition. We can do much to address and prevent it. Concerning future research, I would recommend conducting more South African research into problematising dominant discourses that constrain abused women’s possibilities and choices in relation to violent male partners. Further research into the creation of new discourses in South Africa that contribute to disrupting the power of dominant patriarchal discourse will be invaluable. Attempts at problematising hegemonic discourses and developing alternative and much more empowering discourses for women that consider the specific South African context, might be beneficial. I suggest the creation of texts, including films, novels, comic books, and fairy tales that challenge dominant concepts of gender as presented in South Africa, which may enable women to take up new subject positions and draw on discourses that encourage resistance against male perpetrated violence against women (Burns, 2009). Parker (2005) suggests some discourses are open to change and revision, which should consist of exploring how discourses and texts could change oppressive gender relations. This should also include the deconstruction of hegemonic discourses and investigating possibilities for change within these discourses (Parker, 2005).

Western culture’s traditional ideology is woven seamlessly into discourses that women in abusive relationships draw on to understand both IPV and intimate femicide. Central to traditional gender ideology is the notion that women need to be subservient. This has led to the authorisation of men’s violence. As currently crafted, these discourses encourage women to tolerate horrifying abuses. The gendered romance narratives which are currently legitimated provide insufficient stories of individuals and relationships (Wood, 2000). These discourses are in

desperate need of revision. I argue here that revision – even of powerful and long-held narratives – is not merely a hypothetical possibility. There is evidence that change has occurred over and over in human history. One of the main ways we reinvent who we are is by creating new discourses, which we are able to use in order to make sense of our lives. For example, feminists produced a new narrative of sexual harassment when they coined the term in the early 1970s, which has subsequently gained both social and legal standing (Gavey, 1989).

Furthermore, Fisher (1987) insists that people are not limited to simply accept the stories already established in a given culture. Human beings have the ability to create and adopt new discourses that better account for their lives (Fisher, 1987). Discourses are rooted in and thus supported by, the larger culture. Therefore, cultural structures and practices must work hard at authorising new discourses for women to draw on – ones that report violence as unacceptable, ones that represent women as complete with or without male partners, and ones that narrate men as responsible for their actions. In order to formulate new discourses and to discredit ones that condone abuse, it is vital that institutions operate together. Families, schools, universities, and the workplace must place power on new narratives and diminish the acceptability of harmful ones (Weedon, 1987).

The media is another cultural institution that has a great deal of power in rewriting toxic discourses, which women draw on to understand intimate femicide. It is often the case that the media actually reproduces dangerous gender and romance narratives. For example, Cuklanz (1996) highlights that movies frequently present a romantic ending as the resolution to an abusive relationship. However, in reality this is more than often not how abusive relationships end (Abrahams et al., 2013; Gass et al., 2010; Jewkes et al., 2009; Seedat et al., 2009). In sum, it is vital to remember that the discourses authorised by a culture are not permanent or fixed. Narratives are constantly revised as individuals and institutions decide that existing ones are insufficient to explain and direct our lives (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1987). Fortunately, the human capacity for recreating the social world means that not only is it possible to imagine new narratives, but that it is therefore also possible to bring into existence new discourses that allow a better understanding of IPV and intimate femicide.

Furthermore, as previously highlighted, a limitation of this study was that the interviews were conducted in English, while many of the interviewees were not mother tongue English speakers. Therefore, it may prove beneficial to conduct interviews with women in their mother tongue as this may elicit different accounts. In addition, as indicated in the first chapter of this study, there was a focus on gender as an axis of social oppression. Therefore, in terms of future research that could be conducted in South Africa, a recommendation would be to conduct research on women survivors of IPV with a focus on the multiple forms of oppression impacting

these women. Such studies would expand on intersectionality theory, the structural causes of IPV and explore the complex role that culture plays in understanding IPV and intimate femicide. Moreover, these studies could examine how other forms of inequality and oppression, such as racism, intersect with gender oppression, while also focusing on the simultaneous, multiple and interlocking oppressions of women survivors of IPV and how this influences their way of understanding intimate femicide (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Lastly, the extent and seriousness of intimate femicide in South Africa is not abating (Abrahams et al., 2013). Thus, continued research is necessary to explore the unique manifestations of and solutions to the problem. Despite the proliferation in recent years of research on intimate femicide, a paucity of attention has been paid to women's understandings. Thus, as this study has highlighted, there is a need for more qualitative studies with diverse samples of women to be conducted on women's understandings of the crime. For example, an in-depth qualitative study focusing on whether women understand the risk factors for femicide, their experience with the police and health care providers, and so on, may also be a valuable contribution to this body of research. Furthermore, I recommend that research be undertaken to explore new methods for providing information about intimate femicide to survivors of IPV. Future studies need to address the information needs of IPV survivors who are not already in the shelter system or in contact with police departments as their information needs may be quite different from those survivors identified in this study.

## **5.6. Final Words**

This study makes a vital contribution to research in the area of intimate femicide. I strongly believe this study endeavours to break women's silences with regard to this crime, where women's voices have largely been consigned to the periphery. I hope this study will encourage other researchers, particularly feminist researchers, to continue conducting research on intimate femicide from a woman's perspective. Intimate femicide is the most serious form and consequence, not only of IPV, but also of gender inequality. To eradicate these crimes, our society desperately needs to place a much higher value on women's lives. It is my hope that this study will contribute to a larger scholarship, which may strive for equality for women, so that as women, we can live in a country where we are able to enjoy the security, freedom, and protection, which is enshrined in our constitution. To ensure this, as researchers, we must be tireless in our efforts to attain peace. We must address the roots of violence. Only then will we transform the past century's legacy of "violence against women" into a cautionary lesson.

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## APPENDIX A



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### **INFORMATION SHEET**

**Project Title:** An exploration of the discourses women survivors of intimate partner violence draw on to understand intimate femicide.

#### **What is this study about?**

This is a research project being conducted by Bianca Dekel at the University of the Western Cape. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a woman who has experienced intimate partner violence. The purpose of this research project is to explore how women who are survivors of intimate partner violence understand intimate femicide.

#### **What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?**

You will be asked to participate in a one on one interview which will last approximately one hour. The interview will ask questions about intimate partner violence and intimate femicide. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded.

#### **Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?**

I will do my best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, the information will be totally private. However, with your permission the audio recording will be heard by a transcriber, if I choose to have one. Extracts from the interview will be read by my supervisor and examiners. No names will be used so there is no way you can be identified for participating in this study. The information will be anonymous and treated confidentially. I will protect your identity. Furthermore, if I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will also be protected to the maximum extent.

#### **What are the risks of this research?**

There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project.



**What are the benefits of this research?**

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the researcher learn more about intimate partner violence and intimate femicide. I hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of women's understandings of intimate femicide.

**Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

**Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?**

Every effort has been taken to protect you from any harm in this study. If however, you feel affected in any way by the questions asked during the interview, you will be referred for counselling.

**What if I have questions?**

This research is being conducted by Bianca Dekel, from the psychology department at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Ms Bianca Dekel at: 076 940 3941. Email: 3218135@uwc.ac.za

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Head of Department: Dr. Andipatin  
Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences: Prof. H. Klopper  
University of the Western Cape  
Private Bag X17  
Bellville 7535

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee.

**APPENDIX B**



**UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE**  
Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

*Tel: +27 21-959 3712*

**CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Research Project:** An exploration of the discourses women survivors of intimate partner violence draw on to understand intimate femicide.

The study has been described to me in language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

**Participant's name**.....

**Participant's signature**.....

**Witness**.....

**Date**.....

Should you have any questions regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact the study coordinator:

**Study Coordinator's Name: Ms. Bianca Dekel**

**Telephone: 076 940 3941**

**Email: [3218135@uwc.ac.za](mailto:3218135@uwc.ac.za)**

**Supervisor: Dr. Andipatin**

**Telephone: 021 959 24 54**

**Email: [mandipatin@uwc.ac.za](mailto:mandipatin@uwc.ac.za)**

*Thank you for volunteering to participate*

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### **Biographical questions**

1. Are you currently in a relationship, married, or in a long-term committed relationship?
2. How long have you been in this relationship?
3. How long were you previously in the relationship that brought you here?
4. How old are you?
5. How old is he?
6. Do you have children with him?
7. If so, how many children do you have?
8. What religion are you?
9. Was he religious?
10. Where do you normally stay when not residing at the shelter?

#### **Opening questions: Questions about IPV**

11. Have you heard of the words “intimate partner violence”?
12. Explain what you see as forming intimate partner violence?
13. Have you experienced intimate partner violence? Elaborate.

#### **Questions about intimate femicide:**

14. Have you heard the words “intimate femicide” before?
15. If yes, where did you hear the term for the first time?
16. If yes, what is your understanding of the term?

#### **Questions about risk:**

17. Do you think that intimate partner violence will lead to intimate femicide?
18. If a woman is in a relationship with a very abusive man, do you believe that she is at risk of intimate femicide?
19. You were in an abusive relationship at one point in time. Do you believe that you were at risk of becoming a victim of intimate femicide?

**Questions about discourses:**

20. Why do you think a male partner would murder his wife or girlfriend?
21. What do you believe is the man's role in a relationship?
22. Growing up, were you taught about how a girlfriend or a wife needs to act in a relationship?
23. Do you consider yourself to be religious? If so, what has religion taught you about being in a relationship?

**Closing questions:**

24. Do you believe that if a male partner is abusive that he can change?

*[During the interview, I will follow up on comments made by the interviewee and I may ask her to elaborate on things said].*

*[At the end of the interview, I will thank the interviewee for her participation].*

