ROMANCE, SUFFERING AND HOPE: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE WITH ABUSED WOMEN

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

This dissertation is an example of reflective clinical social work practice with abused women, using both narrative therapy and narrative research approaches. The starting point of this research project was situated within clinical practice with abused women, and in particular through listening to abused women discussing their engagements with romance novels, soap operas and chat shows. Initially concerned by the romanticization of abuse within popular cultural texts I was interested in what abused women might be learning through their engagements with such texts. An emergent design was used within this study with two women with experience of relationship violence, asking the women, through the co-narration of their own life-stories, to reflect upon where and what they had learned about heterosexual romantic relationships. I have attempted to make my subject position visible as both clinical practitioner and as researcher while writing about my engagement with the women’s narratives and through the presentation of my own narrative. I then immersed myself in the reading and re-telling of the women’s favourite popular cultural texts, Dark Rapture and Flowers in the Attic, in order to attempt to understand something of their engagement with those stories. This experience has combined with literature and practice to suggest that it might be beneficial to examine, within the therapeutic setting, clients’ engagement with popular cultural texts, reflecting upon their learning from such texts. Through this process it also became clear that it would be necessary to take up an examination of conceptions of hope. The dissertation ends with a discussion of hope and approaches for addressing hope within practice. Hope is conceived of as residing in the present, informing us of what is missing in the present. This understanding of hope would suggest that examining abused women’s hopes, as represented through some of their popular cultural engagements, could assist with the reshaping of their expectations of relationships, which would assist them in breaking problematic relationship patterns.
Acknowledgements

Before commencing this study I was only intellectually aware of the concepts of “academic community” and the manner in which no research study is completed without an array of people supporting and sustaining the primary author and researcher. Now I am also emotionally and practically aware of these concepts, and would like to acknowledge and thank the following people without whom I would not have been able to complete the requirements of the PhD programme.

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A Note about the Title

Ferguson (1983) speaks of “passionate romantic love as one of the most attractive, compelling, and dangerous emotions in our literature and, indeed, in our lives” (p. 97). She briefly describes how this type of love goes back to the beginnings of our culture, although it was not always thought of as something positive. She says that in Greek and Roman times people would pray to Venus asking to be spared from the disease of passionate love.

It was during the twelfth-century in Europe, and with the rise of “courty love” that Ferguson suggests that passionate romantic love was first thought of as one of the highest forms of love, but not necessarily as the type of love to expect within marriage. Ferguson says, “one of the biggest mistakes our Western culture ever made was to insist that passionate romantic love should always lead to marriage” (p. 97).

In terms of the title of my thesis, Ferguson reminds us of the original meanings of the words romantic and passionate. She says,

Romance came into English through French and originally referred to tales of chivalry and knightly heroes. Later, it came to mean far-fetched, often fanciful stories, quite removed from reality. Much, much later, it began to mean a “love affair.” Passion comes from the Latin word for suffering. The word, often used for Jesus’s suffering on the cross, comes from the same Latin root as patient, one who “suffers” an illness. Passionate romantic love has, then, something to do with both suffering and unreality (p. 97).

Hence the title of “Romance and Suffering” for this thesis about abused women’s stories. The women in my practice as clinical social worker and in this research have grappled with where it is they have learned to normalize suffering in romantic relationships.

Ferguson also discusses the way in which English talks of “falling in love.” However, it is Thomas Merton who portrays the problems of this term quite clearly, and so I will quote from him before moving into the body of the thesis.

We speak of “falling in love,” as though love were something like water that collects in pools, lakes, rivers and oceans. You can “fall into” it or walk around it. You can sail on it or swim in it, or you can just look at it from a safe distance. This expression seems to be peculiar to the English language. French, for instance, does not speak of “tomber en amour” but does mention “falling amorous.” The Italian and Spanish say one “enamors oneself.” Latins do not regard love as a passive accident. Our English expression “to
fall in love” suggests an unforeseen mishap that may or may not be fatal. You are at a party: you have had more drinks than you need. You decide to walk around the garden a little. You don’t notice the swimming pool . . . all at once you have to swim. Fortunately, they fish you out and you are wet but none the worse for wear. Love is like that. If you don’t look where you are going, you are liable to land in it: the experience will normally be slightly ridiculous. Your friends will all find it funny, and if they happen to be around at the time, they will do their best to steer you away from the water and into a nice comfortable chair where you can go to sleep. Sometimes, of course, the pool is empty. Then you don’t get wet, you just crack your skull or break your arm. To speak of “falling into” something is to shift responsibility from your own will to a cosmic force like gravitation (Merton: 1979 (1967), pp. 25-26).

I am not thinking of the abused women as necessarily having to take responsibility for their having fallen in love with abusers, which can shift blame for the abuse from the abusers to the victims, but I am interested in encouraging them to reflect upon these modern western notions of love that would position us as victims when having “fallen in love.”

“Hope” is also present in this title to foreshadow a topic that arose following my meeting with the women in this study, and in particular, following my engagement with their favourite popular cultural texts.
Chapter One

A Preamble, or First Introduction

This research project has changed over the course of the past six years as I conducted course work, wrote the thesis proposal, met with the women whose stories are included and throughout the writing of this thesis. When I first began to conceptualize the social work practice problem that led me to want to pursue doctoral study and research I did not believe that it was appropriate to house myself and my study within a School of Social Work. My interest lay much more readily within the Curriculum Teaching and Learning Department at OISE/University of Toronto where I could conceive of popular cultural texts as learning sites and where critical pedagogy provided discussions about empowering students, or clinical patients, to reflect upon negotiation of popular cultural texts.

Rather than leaving behind my feminist social work roots, I sought to augment my understanding of my clients through interdisciplinary study and research. In particular I have drawn upon cultural studies literature. This interdisciplinary approach resulted in a certain tension in the research process that is evident in this final written product.

Within any discipline there are differences of perspective and approach. This is true of social work and is also true of cultural studies. Therefore, it is not surprising that tensions would arise from drawing upon the literatures of these two disciplines.

My overall approach has been eclectic, which is sometimes understood to be a euphemism for “atheoretical.” Rather than being atheoretical, this study draws upon a variety of theories. Instead of being influenced by a prior commitment to a particular discipline or theory, choices I have made throughout the research process have been guided by a wish to improve clinical social work practice and to develop a research practice that is respectful of the women involved in the study.

Positioning this first chapter here as a preamble is an attempt to begin to lay bare the process and journey of this thesis. I place it here to provide a glimpse into the initial stages of the thesis narrative, providing some background research that has influenced my approach with, and understanding of, the women in this study. The completed thesis has much more of a social work practice focus than I would have initially imagined, but I believe this thesis would have been
completely different in process, content and final reflections if it had not begun with a focus on popular culture and critical pedagogy. 1

Just as Giroux and Simon (1989) situate their interest in studying popular culture as being influenced by their concern regarding the development of a critical pedagogy, I need to make explicit my interest in analyzing particular texts within popular culture. My interest has developed from my practice as a clinical social worker and particularly from providing counselling services to women who have experienced spousal violence. Victims of wife assault usually commence counselling due to a crisis in their relationship, which is often evidenced by an increase in the severity or frequency of abusive behaviours. They usually ask what they can do to improve the relationship in order for the abusive partner to be happier and, therefore, stop abusing them. In discussing the beginning stages of their relationship they often describe their partner as having been very romantic. Although they do not describe the abuse they are currently experiencing as being romantic, some women appear to interpret it as a sign that their partner cares for them and, in fact, some of the women describe being attracted to controlling and powerful men. One abused woman I was counselling told me she read certain types of romance novels, with heroines she described as “horny-angels,” in order to attempt to learn how to behave in order not to be beaten. This example led to my interest in the romantic portrayal of abusive behaviour in popular culture, and the not unproblematic negotiation of this by readers who are experiencing on-going abuse.

bell hooks (1994) points out that, although women may be saying that they want men to be non-sexist in their interactions with women, “they could not desire a brother who could not take charge, take care of business, be in control . . . The one major obstacle preventing us from transforming rape culture is that heterosexual women have not unlearned a heterosexist-based ‘eroticism’ that constructs desire in such a way that many of us can only respond erotically to male behaviour that has already been coded as masculine within a sexist framework” (p. 111).

Examining texts within popular culture, I was interested in the romantic portrayal of controlling behaviour, and the subtle depictions of power differences, which perhaps is merely the romanticization of gender difference within a patriarchal structure. I was also interested in how even very violent behaviours might be presented with an element of romance. Finally, I was interested in how women learn that once in a violent relationship they should look after and help

1 The bulk of this chapter has been published in The European Journal of Cultural Studies (Béres: 1999).
the abuser get better, rather than protect themselves.

As I began collecting texts from popular culture, that I believed were related to these concerns, an article in Chatelaine, a popular Canadian magazine, captured my attention. The article, "The Allure of The Accused," describes Lori Brown, a twenty-seven year old woman, who says she may be in love with Paul Bernardo. Bernardo is described in the article as having been "charged with two murders (and) more than a dozen rapes. To many he is evil incarnate, but to Lori Brown, Bernardo is a good-looking guy who could use a hug" (Posner: 1995, p. 47). Bernardo and his wife, Karla Hamolka, are infamous in recent Canadian memory. They were found guilty of having held captive, sexually assaulted, mutilated and murdered two teen-aged girls. Hamolka testified against Bernardo, thereby plea-bargaining for a much lesser sentence, but also calling upon "the battered-wife syndrome" to attempt to explain her involvement in the crimes. The Chatelaine article is not an example of the romantic portrayal of abuse, but it is an example of a woman being concerned for an abusive man, wanting to understand and help him. Brown says that "somebody’s responsible for these actions (murders and rapes), and it’s not all Paul. Responsible for hurting him as a child and making him the person he is. He didn’t get that way by himself" (p. 48). Michael Posner, the interviewer and writer, spoke to a forensic psychiatrist to try and understand why women are attracted to crime figures. Dr. Collins suggests that some women are attracted to the fame and the reflected fame that they receive. (Brown has been a guest on a couple of chat shows.) He also says, "people tend to have an attraction to the macabre. There’s something sexy about evil" (p. 80) and goes on to say that many of the women attracted to criminals also want to protect or save the killer. In support of the contention that popular culture fosters these attractions, Posner also spoke to a professor of anthropology, Elliot Leyton, who is quoted as saying, "It’s obvious these women are responding to messages about power and celebrity. In the distorted reality that is built into the modern experience, these killers are often presented to the public as caricatures of manly virtue" (p. 80).

The article is a popular cultural text highlighting the concerns that were guiding my interest in the romanticization of abuse. It is another example of what I see in counselling situations, but does not answer any questions as to how some women develop these attitudes, while others do not. It gestures towards causes in popular culture, without any in depth description of what exactly in popular culture contributes to this, and how it contributes.
Theoretical Terrain

Turnbull (1994) discusses concerns related to academics researching women viewing media. She begins her discussion by sketching a theoretical map in which she imagines the female audience, television and communities to be located. The map is made up of a horizontal and vertical axis. The horizontal axis represents the theoretical position of the audience in relation to the text. At one end of the continuum, she suggests, is the approach that considers the audience's position as having been constructed by the media, and at the other end is the approach that analyzes what individual audience members have to say about the media texts. (With this theoretical map in mind, it would seem as though Posner’s article would fall nearer the end of the continuum, which presents audiences as constructed by the media.) The vertical axis represents the audience's relationship to the media text in terms of socio-cultural factors. At one end of the continuum is the “mass” - determined by “socio-political factors such as race, gender, class, and the psychosexual desires which arise there from” (p. 3). At the other end is what she calls “the undetermined audience/reader as embraced by a utopian postmodernism, which regards the audience/reader as a free agent engaged in happy play with image and text” (p. 4).

Turnbull moves on to suggest a third dimension to her map, adding an axis on which intellectuals position themselves in regard to the audience. She suggests that this position is revealed by the use of pronouns - whether an “us” and “them” position is taken, or whether an overidentification occurs, assuming that “‘we’ may speak on their behalf since we too are part of the audience” (p. 7). The position that she advocates taking up is in the centre of the map, where there is a position of an unstable “I,”

It is a position which marks the confluence of all the other possibilities explored. It allows for a consideration of how our socio-cultural contexts come into play with our textual experiences, and it is therefore a discursive position in which we cannot escape the consequences of our own power relationships as academics and intellectuals (p. 8).

Turnbull’s theoretical map has influenced the position I adopted in this chapter and within my doctorate research more generally. I had been concerned by the fact that I was unsure of where to position myself on the three dimensional theoretical map that she describes. Not being completely comfortable with any of the extreme positions she has described on the map, and since
she argues that the point at which the two axes cross is the least stable, that is where I chose to position myself. I did not want to take an “us” and “them” position with regard to other members of the audience. Neither could I assume that I was reacting to images and texts in the same way as other members of the audience, since my access to various discourses increased as I pursued academic study in this area. As Turnbull says, “to assume that we may speak with authority for our community is yet another power move, silencing other voices” (p. 8).

Turnbull discusses her teaching as an area of her intellectual endeavor in which she can empower her students by providing them with discursive tools for understanding themselves and their relationship to media. As a social worker, I am attempting to empower the women who request counselling. I also believe that I can, and should, provide discursive tools to the women for understanding themselves and their context, including their relationship to media.

My therapeutic practice position has been influenced by White’s narrative approach to therapy (O’Hanlon: 1994, Sykes Wylie: 1994, Tomm: 1989, White: 1995), combined with academic study in the area of cultural studies and critical pedagogy. White takes a post-structuralist position with regard to subjectivity, believing that subjectivity is not fixed, but that it is influenced by meaning-making activity. He believes subjectivity is produced through discursive practices and that language and meaning-making activities are powerful. Unlike psychoanalysts who are pathology- focussed (O’Hanlon: 1994, p. 22) and who believe that childhood experiences shape how we interpret images as adults, White believes that images start in the present and reach backwards, finding other elements with which to resonate. These texts, with which people engage, may contribute to people’s meaning-making in current situations, and these images may then move backwards in time, finding memories with which to resonate, which then consolidate the meanings. White gives an example of this process by describing how an adult incest survivor will make meaning of her memories of abuse, by possibly thinking that it proves that she is bad and unlovable. That meaning is then expressed in her daily life by her being abusive towards herself. By adding a “loving herself” storyline, she can then reinterpret the past experience. While in this new territory, she can look back at the abuse and give it a new meaning, by realizing that she was a victim of abuse. This new meaning will then shape new experiences - it might lead to rage and a passion for justice. White suggests that new meaning will give new expression and new action (1995). He suggests that therapists need to provide people who are consulting them
with a scaffold on which to build new meanings. This is done by externalizing the problem, situating the problem within the client's social context and politicizing it, while broadening the person's audience, by involving as many others in the process as possible, in order to attempt to minimize the reliance on the therapist. If people need to be provided with scaffold-like frameworks in order to make meaning of their current situations and their past experiences, I wonder if it is possible that abused women are seeking out popular cultural texts, which can be used as frameworks for making meaning of, and rationalizing, their abusive situations. As opposed to the general perception of abused women as being passive and victim-like, my experience of abused women has been that they are actively engaged in attempting to understand and improve their situations. My concern was that they find popular cultural texts that may reinforce, rather than challenge, their positions within abusive relationships.

Mercer's description of complicit pleasure (in Bennett et al: 1986) is useful to keep in mind. He represents the act of engagement with a particular text as a double helix in motion. He considers one half of the double helix as representing power, and the other half pleasure. It is then possible to visualize the relationship between power and pleasure as being made up of points of persuasion, resistance and negotiation. This explains how, despite being in a position of resistance to depictions of control of women, I may still enjoy certain texts, and why I am concerned that abused women could be in positions of persuasion, or negotiation, with those same depictions. I do not believe reading or viewing these texts will make any of us who are already in resistance to the notion of being controlled, vulnerable to abusive relationships necessarily, but I am concerned for those women who are already in abusive relationships.

The Subtle Romanticization of Control

I think I have been clear, but want to reiterate before moving on to the examination of texts, that I have considered the possible meanings that could be taken from these texts by women who are attempting to make sense of their context of living with an abusive partner. I do not assume that anyone else would take these same meanings. I want to make it clear that while I have witnessed domestic violence as a child, I have not experienced spousal violence. I write as a social worker, concerned with the practice problem of how to deconstruct meanings that
assaulted women have already made regarding controlling behaviour being romantic, and their need to take care of their partner.

Due to comments made by women in counselling sessions, I first looked at the messages presented in romance novels. What struck me as I read romance novels was the similarity they shared with the story of Beauty and the Beast. Walt Disney's theatre and video release of Beauty and the Beast has obviously been very successful, and the paraphernalia accompanying it continued to fill toyshops and children's clothing departments for years after its release. The video's cover displays a quote from Sneak Previews saying, "The best movie I have seen this year, period. The best for adults. The best for kids." Broadway's Disney's Beauty and the Beast also played at The Princess of Wales Theatre in Toronto for several years. The advertisements suggested that this romance is suitable for adults and children; that the whole family will enjoy it. Why is it so popular?

There is some difference between the original story of Beauty and the Beast and the Disney version. Adams (1986) has completed a thorough analysis of the reading of the original version of Beauty and the Beast and the negotiation of affect and cognition in its reading by an eight year old girl. He breaks the text down into signifying units, describing grammatical units, affect signified, results, propositions and signifiers of each. He then provides the child's version of text, using the same units. He suggests that by displacing affect onto a signifier in the text the child makes her way through the text. Although he suggests that Beauty and the Beast is meant to direct the reader to think about marriage, guilt and herself, the eight year old child actually uses it to think about her mother. He says, "postponing the grim reality she will one day face, she stays as a child attached to her father and finding every reason to distrust her mother" (104). What is useful about his study is that he points out the impact of the reader's affect and cognition on the meaning taken from the text, regardless of what the intended purpose of the text might have been.

Giroux and Simon (1989) propose using the notion of consent while attempting to understand how people "negotiate elements of place and agency as a result of their investments in particular relations of meaning constructed through popular forms" (p. 15). They suggest that an over-reliance on ideology critique limits our ability to understand hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggles and the "production and regulation of desire ...as important (to) the
construction of meaning” (p. 18) within those struggles. They quote Grossberg as saying,

It is only if we begin to recognize the complex relations between affect and ideology that we can make sense of people’s emotional life, their desiring life, their struggles to find the energy to survive, let alone struggle. It is only in terms of these relations that we can understand people’s need and ability to maintain a “faith” in something beyond their immediate existence (p. 18).

It is as if Grossberg is speaking about abused women. They are struggling to survive, since there is often a real danger that they will be severely beaten, if not killed, but they carry on struggling, since any alternative options may be limited, by maintaining a faith in the power of heterosexual love and marriage. I have worried that through the romanticization of abuse in popular cultural texts, their involvement in abusive relationships may be reinforced. An abused woman’s reading of Beauty and the Beast would, therefore, be different from that of an eight year old’s or even of an academic’s, since her affect and environment of which she needs to make meaning will be different.

**Disney’s “Beauty and the Beast” Storyline**

In Disney’s Beauty and the Beast, Belle is shown as enjoying books with adventure and romance, wanting something more exciting than her boring provincial life. Gaston, the handsome village hunter wants to marry her because she is the most beautiful woman in the village, but she thinks he is a boorish lout and his description of her as his wife, cooking and darning for him and having his children does not appeal to her. So far so good. One day, her father loses his way in a forest and takes shelter in the Beast's castle. We have been told already that the Beast had been a handsome spoiled young prince who would not allow an ugly old hag to take refuge in his castle. However, she had actually been a beautiful enchantress in disguise, testing the prince, and she put a spell on his castle, turning him into a beast and all his servants into objects, such as teapots, candlesticks and clocks. She has given him an enchanted rose and told him that if he has not learned how to love, and if he is not loved, by the time he is twenty-one, the final petal will drop from the rose and the spell will never be broken. When the Beast discovers that his servants have given Belle’s father refuge he is furious, believing him to be a spy, and throws him into a dungeon. When the father’s horse returns home, Belle is worried and goes looking for her father. The horse leads her to the Beast’s castle and she finds her father and is worried that he seems ill.
The Beast finds them together and is furious, frightening Belle. Despite her fear, she asks the Beast to keep her, and let her father go since he is so ill. The Beast allows this exchange. This shows Belle as a strong, brave woman. (Most abused women are also strong, brave women; not merely victims, but rather struggling with ambivalence and difficulties of interpretation where their relationships are concerned.) The Beast is encouraged by his servants to be kind to Belle in the hope that the spell might be broken, but he continues to be angry and controlling, and finally Belle attempts to escape because he has frightened her so badly. (Abused women also often attempt to escape several times, before they finally leave for good, or before their partners are willing to engage in treatment.) While escaping, the wolves in the forest attack Belle and her horse, but the Beast comes to her rescue, becoming injured himself in the process. He is badly hurt and Belle could have escaped as he lay unconscious, but she helps him back to the castle and takes care of his wounds. (Violence often escalates after a woman attempts to escape, followed by “empathy” and a desire to help her abuser.) They argue, the Beast saying that she should not have tried to escape and Belle saying that he should not have shouted at her, but they thank one another for their help. They begin falling in love with each other at this point, although Belle is still worried about her father. The Beast loves her so much by this time that he cannot keep her a prisoner any longer and he lets her go to see her father. The town’s folk, led by Gaston, decide to attack and kill the Beast, because Gaston is jealous of Belle’s concern for him. Gaston almost succeeds in killing the Beast because the Beast does not think that Belle will return and so is not protecting himself. Belle returns then and Gaston falls from a high wall of the castle. As the final petal of the rose drops, it looks as if the Beast has died, but Belle says that she loves him and the Beast turns, miraculously, back into a handsome Prince. It ends happily, with Belle and the Prince dancing in the ballroom and everyone smiling on. For a viewer who is living in a violent relationship, who needs to maintain faith in something beyond her immediate situation, this story suggests that if she acts in a loving way towards her abusive partner, he might learn from her how to be loving, and might turn into a prince for her. This text might give her hope and a faith in the power of love to help her partner change, winning her consent to the power dynamics within heterosexual relationships.
The Use of the “Beauty and the Beast” Storyline in Self-Help

Robin Norwood’s book, *Women Who Love Too Much* (1985) has sold over three million copies and has been a New York Times Bestseller. It is aimed, according to the back cover, at women who believe that “being in love means being in pain,” and asks “why do so many women become obsessed with the wrong men - men who are emotionally unavailable, addicted to work, alcohol or other women - men who cannot love them back?” The reader is told that “If you constantly find yourself loving men you want to change, (this book) is for you.” Norwood also comments on *Beauty and the Beast*. She says,

“Beauty and the Beast,” like every fairy tale that has endured centuries of telling and retelling, embodies a profound spiritual truth in the context of a compelling story. Spiritual truths are very difficult to comprehend and even more difficult to put into practice because they often *go against* contemporary values. Accordingly, there is a tendency to interpret the fairy tale in a way that reinforces the cultural bias. By doing so, it is easy to miss its deeper meaning altogether . . . The cultural bias that this fairy tale *seems* to underscore (is) that a woman can change a man if she loves him enough (p. 138).

She goes on to give accounts of how women have been attempting to change their partners behaviours, and how they are not attracted to nice men, but only attracted to the “roller-coaster” ride they experience with men who are emotionally unavailable for one reason or another. The women describe how they have been attempting to change their partner, all to no avail. Norwood then describes what she believes is the real spiritual truth being told in *Beauty and the Beast*. She says the point is that Beauty demonstrated acceptance of the Beast and was rewarded. She says,

Remember, in the fairy tale, Beauty had no need for the Beast to change. She appraised him realistically, accepted him for what he was, and appreciated him for his good qualities . . . Because of her attitude of acceptance, he was *freed* to become his own best self. That his true self just happened to be a handsome prince (and perfect partner for her) demonstrates symbolically that *she* was rewarded greatly when she practices acceptance (p. 177).

Norwood is not necessarily directing her comments towards women who are living in abusive situations, but the fact is that abused women are reading her book. I am just as concerned by what Norwood suggests is the real spiritual truth of *Beauty and the Beast*. Abused women are generally already too accepting of the abuse. When they are not rewarded for their acceptance in the way that Belle was rewarded, they then blame themselves for not having “done
it properly.” This type of “pop-psychology” book merely adds to liberal and therapeutic discourses already in circulation that suggest that the individual should take responsibility for the part her own behaviour has in her abuse and if things don't go as she wishes she only has herself to blame.

I had the opportunity to discuss my thoughts regarding Beauty and the Beast with a college tutorial of twenty first-year university students, studying “Perspectives on Film.” Although a couple of young women understood my concerns, the majority focussed on how romantic the story was, how independent Belle was (as are many romance heroines) and how plush the seats were in the Princess of Wales theatre when they went to see the stage production. The majority of the students appeared to have difficulty stepping into a position that allowed them to critique the possible meanings abused women could be taking from the text, because they had enjoyed the romance of it so much.

The “Beauty and the Beast” Storyline in Other Popular Cultural Texts

I believe that the Beast is romanticized through the love story that is played out before he turns into a prince again, but also because he turns back into a prince. Beauty and the Beast also plays itself out in serial romances, such as Harlequin Romances, and in narratives like Rebecca, and Wild Orchid, to name just a few. In these story-lines, just as in Beauty and the Beast, the hero is initially controlling and distant, if not blatantly abusive, and has been hurt in his past by a woman, or women, which has contributed to his distant and unloving manner. By being loved by the heroine, he can heal from his past experiences and become the perfect partner for her.

Miles (1988), in describing her enjoyment of reading Harlequin romances, mentions that a friend said, “Look at you!” as she sat reading a Harlequin with a grin of pleasure on her face. The same thing was said to me as I watched one of the opening scenes in Wild Orchid, several years ago. It is hard, in retrospect, to know what appealed to me about the scene, which involved the hero, played by Mickey Rourke, walking the heroine into a restaurant and to their table. He is watching her and smiling, and obviously attracted to her and only thinking of her. It turns out that he had left the dress for her to wear and has choreographed the whole evening. He is extremely controlling, and stages several explicit sexual encounters, which he observes, and which he has the heroine observe. She becomes more attracted to him, and discovers that her employer
is also in love with him, but has found him emotionally unavailable and has started playing controlling sex games herself. He is unable to be sexually active, due to an unhappy childhood and previous “bad experiences” with women. After he explains to the heroine his reasons for being unable to love her, and after she has shown him, by her encouragement to try, that she loves him regardless, they are able to make passionate love, and ride off into the Rio sunset on his Harley. (He is also a self-made millionaire of course). When I first saw this film it appeared to be like a film version of one of the sexually explicit Harlequin or Silhouette Romances with the underlying storyline of Beauty and the Beast made more modern by the acceptance of women’s sexuality.

My own subjectivity seems to have changed somewhat, since when I first watched the film, I enjoyed and found romantic the hero’s obvious attraction to the heroine and his control of the situation in the initial scene in which they meet. Having been interested in the romantic portrayal of controlling behaviour in popular culture for several years, this image is becoming less appealing to me. Why does controlling behaviour have to be portrayed in romantic ways? One possible answer is so that it may win women’s consent to the power dynamics within a heterosexual relationship. The first-year students, as well as some of the women I counsel, appear to react as though “romantic” is by definition unproblematic. However, I believe the intersection of power and pleasure requires that romance be examined closely.

The Romance of Vampires

As I collected texts from popular culture, which I felt romanticized abuse (this was often an affect rather than a cognition, which I later needed to analyze more rationally) I picked up a copy of Tribute (November 1994), a magazine available in Canadian cinemas. It contained an article about the film production of Interview with the Vampire. There was something about the photographic depiction of Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt, who starred in the film, which seemed to romanticize the vampire characters. I became curious, therefore, in how the portrayal of vampires could contribute to the romanticization of abuse. The abuse by vampires, of course, is much more violent and blatant than the subtle forms of control which are romanticized in other formats and genres, but I was equally interested in how these frightening portrayals of abuse could also be
romanticized.

I recalled, as my interest in the romanticization of abuse in vampire texts was developing, that when I had read Bram Stoker's Dracula several years earlier, I had been surprised by how much I enjoyed the book and how romantic I had found it. The 1992 film version, Francis Ford Coppola's Brm Stoker's Dracula, is very much more romantic than the original text, adding a romantic love relationship between Mina and Dracula.

In his book, Reading the Vampire, Gelder (1994) completes a thorough analysis of vampire texts, examining the various manifestations of the vampire. He presents an interesting account of society's changing anxieties and how these are shown in changes in the vampire text. This argument is similar to that of Zipes' (1983), regarding changes over time in the text of Little Red Riding Hood, and also reminds me of Thurston's (1987) description of the demand for erotic romances by modern women on a quest for new sexual identity. They present fascinating historical accounts of the changes in texts. These are descriptions that could be placed, using Turnbull's theoretical map, furthest away from the end of the continuum that considers audiences as having been constructed by the media.

Kathy White (1985) says, "film critics Roger Ebert and Gene Siskell explain the recent increase in violence against women in R-rated movies as a male reaction against the women's movement" (p. 3). Gelder (1994) has not looked specifically at the romanticization of control, although he does describe Coppola's Bram Stoker's Dracula as having departed from Stoker's original text, in so much as it has been publicized as a "New Age" love story, with the caption "Love Never Dies." I find it interesting that despite Gelder's thoroughness, showing the changes of "otherness" as called upon in the vampire texts over time, he has not mentioned the changes in the romanticization of Dracula over time. Even in suggesting that Coppola's film version is more of a love story than other versions, he does not explain possible reasons for this.

Viewing the 1931 film version of Dracula, with Bela Lugosi in the lead role, I was interested to see that Dracula had not been romanticized in this early production. It made me wonder if Ebert and Siskell's argument that the increase in violence against women in the media is a backlash against the women's movement could also offer an explanation of the changes in the romanticization of abuse over time. The women are portrayed in much more passive roles in the 1931 version, suggesting that they do not need to be controlled any more than they are already
controlled, and that their consent to be controlled does not need to be won, since they are already passive, therefore control does not need to be romanticized. In a 1979 version of Dracula, with Frank Langella in the lead role, Dracula is romanticized and sexualized. In this version the narrative departs from Stoker's original text, reversing the characters of Mina and Lucy. Lucy, who in this version is engaged to Jonathan Harker, falls in love with, and is sexually attracted to, Dracula. In this version, Lucy is a very strong character and the romanticization of Dracula appears to be heightened in order for him to win consent from her to control her. Coppola's (1992) version takes it one step further, combining both my interests: the romanticization of control and abuse, and the portrayal of abusers in a sympathetic manner.

Coppola's "Bram Stoker's Dracula" Storyline

As Gelder (1994) describes, Coppola's version presents Mina as the reincarnation of Princess Elisabeth, "once the young wife of Vlad the Impaler who took her own life when she was falsely told that her husband had been killed in battle" (p. 90). The film starts in 1462, and a narrator, Van Helsing, played by Anthony Hopkins, describes the fall of Constantinople. He says that the Muslim Turks swept towards Transylvania, threatening Christendom. We are told there was a Romanian knight there, from the sacred order of the dragon, known as Dracula. Elisabeth is described as his bride, whom he prized above all things. After the battle, Dracula says, "God be praised. I am victorious," and he kisses a cross. The Turks are vengeful, and shoot an arrow through the castle window, sending a note to Elisabeth, telling of Dracula's death. She leaves a note, saying that all is lost if her prince is dead, and that she hopes that God will reunite them in heaven, and then commits suicide. As she throws herself into the river, Dracula can be seen realizing that something terrible is happening. He whispers, "Elisabeth," and races back to the castle, where he finds her laid out in a chapel. The priest tells him that she is damned because she took her own life. Dracula screams and asks if this is his reward for protecting God's church. He renounces God and shouts that he will rise from his death to avenge her death. He starts turning over artifacts in the chapel, puts his sword into the cross, which starts bleeding, and then drinks the blood, saying, "The blood is the life and shall be mine." The blood starts seeping out of statues and candles and starts pouring its way throughout the whole chapel. His expression seems that of horror as well as rage. I believe this opening cannot help but set the stage for empathy for
Dracula, (and disappointment in the Church perhaps), suggesting his overwhelming love for Elisabeth excuses his behaviour. Later in the film, when Jonathan Harker is with Dracula in his castle in Transylvania, Dracula sees Mina’s picture. She looks like Elisabeth, and he cries as he says, “The luckiest man who walks on this earth is he who finds true love.” He later also says, “Yes, I too can love. And I shall love again.”

The love story between Dracula and Mina begins when Dracula arrives in London. Dracula is shown as an elegant, young man, walking in London, when he sees Mina. A romantic melody begins to play (“Love Song for a Vampire”), and he whispers, “See me. See me now.” Mina turns slowly and sees him, indicating the amount of power he has over her. After she comes out of a store, he asks her for directions, but she does not want to help him immediately, though she soon feels guilty and apologizes for her rudeness, at which point he introduces himself to her as Prince Vlad. “A Prince, no less,” she says. “I am your servant,” he replies. Later he says to her, “Do not fear me. I have crossed oceans of time.” It looks at this point as though he is overcome with passion, but he struggles against the urge to bite her. She moves away from him, but a wolf, which has escaped from the zoo, almost attacks her, and Dracula commands the wolf to leave her. He then tells Mina to come and stroke the wolf, which she does. He says, “He likes you. There is much to be learned from beasts.” This first scene between Mina and Dracula shows a romance developing between them, but also highlights Dracula’s power, which he uses to attract Mina. It hints at the power that could be Mina’s, to tame and learn from wild beasts, should she be willing.

The next scene in which Dracula and Mina are together is in a private dining room of a restaurant. Dracula is pouring her a drink and saying, “Absinthe is the aphrodisiac of the soul. The green fairy who lives in it wants your soul. But you are safe with me.” She asks him to describe his homeland to her, and he says that it is the most beautiful place in the world. She then goes on to describe it and he says that she describes it as if she had seen it. She explains that it is like a voice in a dream that she cannot place, and that it comes to her when she is alone. She then asks of the princess, and as before, she answers her own question by describing what had happened to Elisabeth and says, “Tears of heartbreak.” Dracula is also crying by this time. They hold each other and he catches her tears, which turn into diamonds in his hand. This scene verifies for them what Dracula has suspected: that Mina is Elisabeth reincarnated, and that their
love has never died. As they dance together, Jonathan is shown escaping from the castle in Transylvania. The next scene shows Mina receiving a letter from Jonathan, asking her to come immediately to Romania to marry him. She says, "My sweet prince - Jonathan must never know of this."

When Mina and Jonathan return to London, married, Mina says she feels dead, "except for this tiny hope that lives in me that I might see my prince." Renfield, who is both a servant of Dracula and patient of Van Helsing, tells Mina she is the bride his master covets, and later Dracula comes to Mina in her bedroom. When she sees him she says, "Oh yes, my love. You found me. My most precious love. I want this. I want to be with you always." He tries to explain to her that she does not know what she is asking for, and holds her hand to his chest, showing that he has no heartbeat. He says, "I am nothing - lifeless, hated and feared - I am dead. I am the monster. I am Dracula." She initially hits him, crying that he killed Lucy but then says, "I love you. God forgive me, I do. I want to be what you are, see what you see, love what you love." He answers, "To walk with me, you must die to your life and be born to mine. You are my love and my life always. Then I give you life everlasting, love eternal, the power of the storm. Walk with me - to be my loving wife for ever." He bites into her and then has her begin to suck his blood from a gash he has made in his chest, but then stops her saying, "No, I cannot let this be." "Please, I don't care," says Mina, and he responds, "You'll be cursed to walk with the shadow of death for all eternity. I love you too much to condemn you." She chooses to continue, however.

This film is filled with religious imagery, and Dracula is presented as a Christ figure at times, and although my focus, for this current discussion, is the romanticization of Dracula's controlling behaviour, I am beginning to believe I will need to address the issue of religion and spirituality within my on going work with abused women. I believe that abused women watching Bram Stoker's Dracula would be less affected by the religious imagery than they would be the romantic relationship, however, in discussion with Doug Freake (Professor of Humanities at York University) recently, he wondered whether people's faith in God, or some greater power outside of themselves, had more recently been transferred to a faith in romantic relationships. When I see my clients, with or without experience of abuse, grappling with issues of existential isolation (Yalom: 1980) and suggesting that they are terrified of being alone, wanting to be in any
relationship, even a bad relationship, rather than being alone, I think that Freake might have a good point. One client very clearly articulated having lost his interest in his own creativity as a pianist and all faith in some greater power, because he felt more alive, more connected to life, when in a romantic relationship with a woman he had hoped would be a soul mate. After only four years of marriage, she asked him to leave, and he reported feeling that he has nothing to contribute to the world, that life is meaningless unless he is in a romantic relationship. Another client recently articulated a terror, as a forty-five year old woman, of having to be alone for the first time on a weekend because a relationship had just ended. It is as if these clients have put all their faith in romantic relationships to give them meaning in life. This will be taken up further in chapter six, when I discuss conceptions of hope, separateness, connectedness and existential isolation.

The narrative continues much like Stoker’s novel, with Van Helsing hypnotising Mina, in order to gain entry into Mina’s connection with Dracula. As Dracula is nearing his castle, he senses that Mina is nearby and says, “Mina, you are here. My love.” Mina, calls upon the winds and the clouds, and urges Dracula, who is in a crate on a wagon, to out run Jonathan and Quincy, who are attempting to reach him before the sun sets. The sun sets just as they all arrive at the castle, and as Dracula bursts out of the crate, Jonathan slashes at Dracula’s neck and stabs him in the chest. Mina points a rifle at Jonathan and Van Helsing, yelling, “When my time comes, will you do the same to me?” Jonathan tells the others to “let them go - our work is finished and hers is just begun.”

In the chapel, where the story first opens, Dracula, in the form of an old man, says, “Where is my God? He has forsaken me. Finish it.” “My love,” whispers Mina and they kiss. Mina, as a narrator, then says, “There, in the presence of God, I understood my love could release us all from the powers of darkness. Our love is stronger than death.” Dracula then turns into the handsome prince again at this point and says, “Give me peace.” She stabs him and a mark made on her forehead by a sacramental wafer, disappears. She then chops off Dracula’s head and the film ends.

Even in this final scene of *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, I cannot help but be reminded of the story of *Beauty and the Beast*, as the love (and acceptance) between Mina and Dracula is able to turn the beast back into a prince. If the endings of these two films are viewed one after the other,
a striking resemblance can be observed: the backdrop, the race against time, before the last petal of the rose drops in the one, and before the sun sets in the other, lighting and magical change from beast to prince, with the heroine looking on. Although it is necessary for Mina to kill Dracula, she says that their love is stronger than death. Although Dracula, who can be considered the romantic hero, is killed in this narrative, which is not the norm within a romance text, the viewer generally, and abused women more specifically, are encouraged to interpret the message as being that love never dies, love forgives all things and love sometimes means pain and death.

Springboard into the Research with Abused Women

My attempts to understand the meaning-making behaviours of abused women engaged with popular cultural texts and my interest in the romanticization of abuse in popular culture began to move into the background to a certain degree as questions of how to improve clinical social work practice moved into the foreground. I have attempted to position myself in the centre of the theoretical terrain, not willing to take an “us” and “them” position, nor to speak for abused women as “we.” Not believing that texts cause certain effects in viewers, but also not believing that all viewers are completely able to negotiate or resist texts freely, I have attempted to highlight aspects of popular cultural texts that could be perceived as romanticizing control and abuse, and which could elicit empathy for the abuser. I have done this by looking at the subtle portrayal of control in a romantic manner, primarily in the Beauty and the Beast storyline, as well as looking at the love story in the Dracula narrative. It appears as though the romanticization of control and abuse, and empathy for the abuser, have become more prevalent in the more recent Dracula texts, which concerns me, although I am not convinced of why this might be so.

This first chapter represents what was my first step towards looking at the fostering of empathy for the abuser and the romanticization of control in popular cultural texts, showing how some viewers may interpret them. The next step involved meeting with abused women to discuss their own stories and asking them to reflect upon where and how they had learned what to expect from romantic heterosexual relationships. Although I chose Beauty and the Beast and Bram Stoker’s Dracula as popular cultural texts that I thought would be important to review as possible sites for the romanticization of abuse and as sites of negotiation for abused women, I asked the
women in my research group to tell me which texts they had found important in their lives. One woman spoke of having loved *Flowers in the Attic*, and another woman talked of her fascination with vampire romances generally, and with *Dark Rapture* more specifically. These two texts will be discussed in chapter five, following the women’s narratives.

I had hoped that this research would have demonstrated a form of social work practice that facilitates the negotiation of discourses within popular cultural texts, but rather, through a closer reading of the women’s favourite texts, I realized I needed to consider the topic of hope before my practice was able to adjust in such a way as to take into account my clients’ engagement with texts.

In the next chapter I present a more traditional form of thesis introduction, discussing related literature and studies, and describing underlying theories, assumptions and research design. I also discuss my choice of writing style and format.

In chapter three I present my own partial narrative as an attempt to locate myself as researcher/practitioner, showing also how I had hoped to engage the women in this study regarding a negotiation of varying discourses.

In chapter four I present the narratives of the women who participated in this study. In chapter five I present the plots of the women’s favourite texts, explaining my particular reasons for engaging with the texts in the manner I do. This then led me to examine concepts of hope, which could improve clinical practice. Concepts of hope are then presented in chapter six.

Having chosen an emergent design for this study, the majority of theoretical discussion comes in the final two chapters; chapters six and seven. Chapter six contains the discussions regarding hope and in chapter seven I present my reflections about the research study, process and other questions that could be taken up in the future.
Chapter Two

Second Introduction

To be a good liberating educator you need above all to have faith in human beings. You need to love. You must be convinced that the fundamental effort of education is to help with the liberation of people, never their domestication. You must be convinced that when people reflect on their domination they begin a first step in changing their relationship to the world (Freire in Shor: 1993, p. 25).

Simon (1992) comments that introductory quotations are often taken as emblems, asserting a set of principles that prick one's conscience, and which run the risk of being taken as symptomatic of a discourse of authority and arrogance. He states that he, rather, attempts to use them as reminders of things otherwise too easily forgotten. I do not want to suggest a discourse of authority, yet this above introductory quotation is an important example of what I have attempted to keep in mind as I have grappled with how to ethically write of women's stories in my thesis. In doing this, I am attempting to present a sense of the broad objective that has influenced the specific goals and the particular interventions of my research.

In this chapter I will explain my research question, theoretical grounding, research methodology, conceptual framework and research design. Throughout this chapter I will also present the findings of previous research that assists in situating my interests and research project. I will attempt to discuss not only why I have felt compelled to study abused women's negotiation of learning sites, but also why I have felt compelled to write about them in the particular manner I have chosen.

This study could be described as a piece of action research since I have focussed on attempting to understand and solve a practice problem, but also as being both narrative and critical. I have combined reflective clinical practice with participatory and critical research approaches as I used a narrative therapy approach to construct a learning setting in which the women were encouraged to engage in critical analysis to improve their situations. (See Brown and Tandon (1983) for a full description of both action and participatory research.)

The narrative of the research process, the women's stories and the texts with which they engaged have all been presented in a narrative format. I have used what Polkinghorne (1995)
would describe as narrative analysis, versus analysis of narrative, since I have not looked for themes to classify, but rather have looked for a meaningful account of these women’s struggles to live free from violence in their intimate relationships.

I believe there is a need for this type of study, not only due to the frequency of wife assault and the difficulties inherent with empowering abused women to reflect upon their relationships with abusive partners, but also because this research problem had not previously been pursued in this manner. Much of the literature I have come across in my role as a clinical social worker has relied upon a behavioural model and the concept of “learned helplessness,” within the cycle of violence (Walker: 1979, The Inter-Agency Committee: 1990). The only study I have discovered within academic circles that attempts to examine the problem of why abused women return to their violent partners has been conducted by a Freudian psychotherapist (Celani: 1994), who suggests that the majority of abused women could be diagnosed as having borderline personality disorder (p. 138). Celani, using object relations theory, has described how he believes abused women are attracted to abusive men due to childhood experiences with a rejecting mother.

Medical model, labelling and “mother-blaming” aside, Celani’s study is driven by a specific (Freudian, and object relations, in particular) theory. The study that I developed, on the other hand, was formed with certain goals in mind, related to improving practice and encouraging the abused women to critically reflect and change their relationships to the world. Whereas Celani concludes by admitting that his model of psychotherapy is “enormously time-consuming, expensive, and does not insure success” (p. 206), and whereas he blames social policies that block intervention until parents have nearly destroyed their children (p. 209), the study that I constructed attempts to move away from a position that privileges outsider-expert knowledge and rather engaged the abused women, themselves, in commenting upon their lives. I acknowledge that an empowerment model suggests that someone with more power is attempting to empower those with less power, but I am constantly aware of, and grappling with, how to most ethically use my power as both therapist and researcher.
The Story of my Practice Experience: "the starting point" and "the problem"

The starting point of my research interest was situated in my practice as a clinical social worker, and was generated when I was employed as a member of a Domestic Violence Team in a family counselling agency within a large metropolitan city. (This team is now referred to as the "Violence Against Women Team" in order to make more explicit the violence that women experience in these "domestic" situations.) The supervision I received and the consultation with which I was involved were very much influenced by feminist theory and I understood wife assault as occurring within a patriarchal society where men had greater access to power and where wife assault was "merely" an example of men's misuse of power and control. Using a feminist perspective to understand wife assault as a misuse of men's power and control in the patriarchy, led to a certain degree of frustration, as the women appeared stuck within traditional hierarchical power relations and uninterested in the process of self-empowerment. This led me to be concerned at a very early stage in my professional social work career with the potential misuse of social work power when "empowering" women to do what the social workers thought to be in their best interests. I worried that this did not provide the women with any new relationship experiences, because this therapeutic relationship could easily slip into "bullying" for the sake of "empowerment" (Gary: 1991, Burstow: 1992, Pressman, 1994.) At times, women would leave an abusive situation for the benefit of their children, but their ability to focus on their own needs seemed to have been lost. From my involvement in an inter-agency support group for facilitators of abused women's groups it also appeared as though the abused women often minimized the violence and defended their abusive partners from their radical feminist social workers.

The minimization of the violence, which I observed, is consistent with the findings of research that Hyden (In Riessman: 1994) conducted regarding "woman battering as a marital act." From "141 cases of repeated assault or aggravated assault in which a woman was the victim and her husband the perpetrator (which) were reported in one of Greater Stockholm's police districts. . . (she) located a balanced sample of 20 couples who became informants" (p. 96). Over a two year period she conducted 59 interviews with the women, a male colleague conducted 30 interviews with the men, and together they conducted 54 conjoint interviews with the couples.
She reports that by asking open-ended questions she encouraged the couples to develop narratives of their relationships, in order that she might gain an understanding of how they made meaning of the act of violence within the relationship. She reports that the narratives followed one of the following patterns:

1. Neutralization of the violent act in a jointly constructed account that encompasses hope for a good life.
2. Neutralization of the violent act in a jointly constructed account that alters the meaning of the act.
3. Rejection of the violent act in an individually constructed account. This involves dissociation from the other or from oneself (p. 106).

Hyden suggests that one of the defining features of a violent marriage appears to be the manner in which husbands and wives together construct a pattern that neutralizes the violence. She comments that it is tragic that the survival of the marriage is grounded upon minimizing the significance of the violence, paving the way for further wife battering. I believe that the romanticization of abuse may contribute to the neutralization of abuse, by altering the meaning of the abuse and providing hope for a good life at the same time.

It was common practice, when I was part of the Domestic Violence Team, to ask women about the beginning stages of their relationship, the first, last and most severe incidents of abuse. I became more aware over time that abused women often described the beginning stages of their relationships as very romantic. This observation is consistent with comments made by Harrison and Laliberte (1994) in a presentation regarding their research with military wives. They interviewed wives of Canadian military men and found that not only was there a higher incidence of wife assault and child abuse in the military but that military men were also described as having been much more romantic than civilian men. Although the initial behaviours in the abusive relationships were described as romantic, romantic behaviours often have an element of control to them. For example, one woman talked of her partner calling her and telling her to dress up because he was planning to take her somewhere, but would not tell her where. At other times women would talk of their partners surprising them by meeting them after work in order to take them home. After the violence in the relationships had escalated the women reconsidered these
romantic behaviours and perceived them rather as being the first signs of the more severe forms of control and abuse that were to come later. Being met after work was no longer appreciated when it was clear that it was being done in order to limit the woman’s free time with her colleagues. Jealousy, also, at first might be understood as proof of love, but later experienced as a method of control as women were told to dress a certain way or told not to talk to other men.

One woman, whose common-law partner was on probation for assaulting her, initiated counselling for herself because she was concerned that she was also beginning to have trouble controlling her own anger. Over the course of several counselling sessions she described a chaotic childhood, difficulty at school with her peers and her developing attraction to “bad guys.” This is the woman mentioned in the first chapter, who also talked about her ongoing engagement with romance novels and described herself reading romance books in order to attempt to learn how she should behave in order for her partner not to beat her. With this woman’s statements in mind, regarding how she was consciously using romance texts as a part of a curriculum for herself, I began to listen more carefully to other abused women’s statements regarding the popular cultural texts with which they were engaged. Sufficiently curious, I read some serial romances and viewed some soap operas and was not overly surprised by how controlling, and sometimes abusive, the romantic heroes were in these texts. I was concerned that reading romance and engaging with popular cultural texts that present controlling and abusive behaviours in a romantic light could cause a woman to interpret her partner’s violent behaviours as romantic, or as proof of his love for her. As Turnbull (1994) has described it, the discourse that was most readily available to me as a member of the non-academic community at that time, was one of disapproval. As she says, “it is all very well for academics and intellectuals to talk about pleasure and resistance, but are these terms available for people, especially women, to talk about their television viewing . . .?” (p. 6).

At that point I decided to apply to a Ph.D. programme where I could further investigate this interest and attempt to understand the role romance texts might play in some women learning to label controlling behaviours as romantic. One inconsistency, at that time, with my concerns that there might be some direct causal relationship between reading romance, learning that controlling behaviours are romantic and becoming involved in an abusive relationship, was that I
had witnessed domestic violence as a child, had read romances as an adolescent, had ambivalent feelings regarding the romantic portrayal of controlling figures but was not in an abusive relationship. What had saved me, I wondered? There could not be a direct cause and effect relationship between reading romance and interpreting controlling and abusive behaviours as romantic if this had not resulted in my involvement in an abusive relationship. None the less, my first step was to complete a textual analysis of a serial romance for the purposes of a qualifying research paper. Through the process of completing the paper, my understanding of “discourse” and the negotiation of subject positions within discourses expanded and I began to realize that my concerns regarding how abused women have learned to romanticize abuse and learned about heterosexual love was a much more complicated research area than I had initially imagined.

Weedon (1987) states that the way in which we live our lives, and how we give meaning to the social relations which structure our lives, depends on the range and power of discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests they represent. From this post-structuralist point of view, I wondered which discourses had been available to the abused women who had learned to romanticize abuse. Through the process of beginning to write my own narrative account I was able to reflect upon my negotiation of the subject positions within the discourses offered to me at a girls grammar school in England, church, family, adolescent activities and romance reading. My particular desires and expectations of a relationship, and those of abused women also, are influenced by a variety of discourses.

According to Statistics Canada, a National random survey of women showed that, 

Since the age of 16, one in two Canadian women has suffered some form of physical or sexual violence. Of these women who had ever been married or lived with a man in a common-law relationship, 29% have been physically or sexually assaulted by a marital partner at some point during the relationship (Statistics Canada: 1994, p.2).

Schlesinger et al (1992) verified through their research that previous experience of violence had an “extraordinary importance . . . in shaping interpretations, (of viewing television and film)” (p. 32). They showed episodes of EastEnders, Crimewatch UK, Closing Ranks and the movie The Accused to groups of women who had experienced violence and to groups of women with no experience of violence. They then compared answers to questionnaires and comments
made in discussion groups and found that the two groups had significantly different reactions to the programmes and the movie.

Thurston (1987) argues that romantic fiction, as a modern mass entertainment medium, rivals popular television programmes for audience size and repeat exposure, and as such, needs to be taken seriously. In the introduction to Christian-Smith’s (1990) *Becoming a Woman Through Romance*, Michael Apple states,

Sales of adult romances account for more than two hundred million dollars annually. Over twenty million people read them in over ninety countries . . . (T)his makes romance fiction “the most lucrative segment of paperback publishing today”. Adolescent romances themselves now constitute the third most widely read books by teenagers and represent 35 percent of the total non-adult book sales at the major national bookstore chains (p. x).

He then points out that a great many adolescent romance books have also “taken a significant place in the school curriculum. Generally seen as high interest/low ability books, they are often used as reading material for those girls who are doing poorly in school and who need to be ‘kept interested’ in the reading process” (p. xi). Grescoe (1996) states Harlequin Enterprises, “that controls up to 80 percent of the series-romance market, as the largest paperback publisher in the world” (p. 2), “sells 176.5 million books a year in 23 languages in more than 100 international markets . . . - a total of three billion books in less than half a century” (p. 3).

Since research findings indicate that 29% of all women have been assaulted by their partner, experience of violence has an effect on interpreting popular cultural texts and the market for romance is extensive, I believe my concerns regarding abused women’s negotiation of the discourse of romance deals with a problem concerning a large segment of our society. However, despite studies that have examined the ideologies present in romance texts (Modleski: 1990, Miles: 1988, Creed, 1984) and Radway’s (1991) ethnographic study of a group of romance readers, no previous studies have examined abused women’s negotiation of the discourse of romance over time or where else they have negotiated expectations of heterosexual romantic relationships. As Giroux and Simon (1989) suggest, an over-reliance on ideology critique limits our ability to understand hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggles and the “production and regulation of desire ... as important to the construction of meaning” (p. 18) within those
struggles. I did not believe it was necessary to complete further ideological critiques of texts separate from any practice. I wanted my study to take up issues of ideology in terms of meaning-making behaviours within clinical practice.

**Abused Women’s Attitudes**

A few studies appear somewhat closer to my research interest, but still do not cover the particular focus that has interested me. Chambliss et al (1992) conducted a small scale study that investigated abused women’s attitudes about themselves, the abusive relationship and about love more generally. They hypothesized that abused women would score lower on a self-esteem scale and higher on both a Love Scale and an abbreviated Dominance and Romanticization Scale than non-abused women. In support of this hypothesis, they did find that emotionally and physically abused groups of women scored significantly lower in self-esteem and were more likely to endorse beliefs of dominance and romanticization than the non-abused groups. The abused women did not score significantly higher on the Love scale. Chambliss et al wished to explore “the tendency to interpret dominance as an expression of romantic intensity” (p. 4). Their study presents an overview of other psychologically focussed research that has looked at abused women’s characteristics. One such study, conducted by Henton (1983), examined romance and dating violence in high school students and found that,

While only 4.4% of the victims and 3.0% of the aggressors interpreted abusive behaviours as meaning ‘hate’, a surprising 26.5% of the victims and 31.3% of the aggressors interpreted abusive behaviour as meaning ‘love’ . . . The researchers discuss the widely accepted practice of physical punishment for disciplining a child and the possibility that this “same attitude toward ‘controlling by hitting’ may carry over into other loving relationships as adults”. . . Further, “the struggle to integrate acts of violence as an acceptable component of couple interactions without sacrificing one’s relationship ideal might necessarily include a search for positive reasons to explain why the physical abuse occurred”. . . Many respondents described and analysed their situations in ways that suggested that they were protecting romantic illusions rather than allowing the violent episodes to shatter their romantic ideals (p. 8).

This is consistent with Hyden’s (In Riessman: 1994) research regarding the need to “neutralize the violent act” in order to maintain hope for the relationship. What is interesting in Chambliss et
al’s study is that they found that the abused women reported significantly less loving feelings towards their partners than the non-abused women did. The researchers suggest that this showed that love addiction does not provide a convincing explanation as to why an abused woman stays in an abusive situation. The abused women did hold very traditional views of home, marriage and family life and believed that they should stay married at all cost. So, although the abused women did romanticize abuse, and held traditional views about the relationship, they loved their partners less than non-abused women loved their partners. Although their study was a psychological study, Chambliss et al conclude that “perhaps abused women have been socialized to believe that it is romantic for a man to be jealous over a woman. These women may have been taught that they should devote their energy and loyalty almost entirely to their man” (p. 16).

Although the description presented by Chambliss et al of abused women’s perception of dominance is consistent with observations I have made in my clinical practice, their study is limited and does not explain how abused women have learned to romanticize abuse. It is too easy to simply gesture towards women’s socialization as being responsible for this. What aspects of their socialization? How do women negotiate this attempted socialization, since not all women believe that controlling and abusive behaviours are romantic? What can be done in practice to empower women?

Power and Romantic Relationship Longevity

Felmlee (1994) conducted a study to investigate power balances in heterosexual dating individuals and the correlation between power and romantic relationship longevity. She had thought that “since an ethos of egalitarianism... permeates the United States” (p. 275) that “we should perhaps expect such an ideal to be most evident among the most youthful and informed segment of society” (p. 267). She hypothesized that her study of college students in dating relationships would have shown equality of power between genders as related to relationship longevity. She presented questionnaires to 185 male and 413 female undergraduate students at two Midwestern American universities, initially at the beginning of a semester and then again at the end of the semester. The students were asked to answer questions about their current or most
recent relationship if they were not currently in a relationship. Questions were asked regarding who had most power in the relationship, who made most of the decisions, who was more emotionally involved and who appeared to be getting the most out of the relationship. Answers were provided using a Likert scale from 1 to 7, where 1 meant, “I have the most/make the most, etc” and 7 meant, “My partner has more/makes the most, etc”. They were also asked when their relationships had begun and how long the relationships had lasted. Felmlee states that her findings indicated “that the higher the perceived power of the male partner, relative to the female, at the beginning of the survey period, the lower (was) the subsequent relationship break up rate” (p. 288). She states that this would perhaps have been expected if she had been surveying married couples, if the males earned more money and the women felt dependent if they were at home raising children, but this was unexpected in college-aged men and women. In her concluding remarks she says that “our society is still one in which males have more power than do females, and in spite of egalitarian ideals, this facts filters down to influence even the most intimate relationships in individuals lives” (p. 293). Her study is consistent with my clinical observations but again there is no attempt to explore how women learn to accept, neutralize or romanticize this power difference that appears to be related to remaining in a relationship longer, nor how to improve practice.

**Romanticization of Abuse/Romanticization of the Heterosexual Relationship**

I spoke briefly to Harrison, following the presentation she and Laliberte made regarding their research with the wives of Canadian military men (Harrison and Laliberte: 1994), about my interest in the romanticization of abuse and she suggested that the romanticization of the heterosexual relationship was perhaps just as important. I believe these two interests are closely related. Looking back on my practice I can see that issues regarding desire and the construction of femininity and the heterosexual relationship were underlying the difficulties inherent with attempting to empower abused women. I have, through the process of writing about the stories with which the women have engaged become more convinced also that as social workers attempting to empower abused women, we need to be more aware of their meaning-making
behaviours and how they may maintain faith and hope in their relationships through changing the meaning of the violent acts. I believe that as we point out the extent of violence they are experiencing there is a danger that the women will begin to despair as they lose that hope in the heterosexual romantic relationship that has been sustaining them. It will be necessary to examine how we might be able to reconstruct as well as deconstruct their meaning-making behaviours and their hope in order to assist the women in developing a more empowering type of hope. This will be discussed in detail in chapter six.

Theoretical Grounding

Weedon’s Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory (1987) was initially instrumental in the development of my notion of subjectivity, which underlies my approach to research. She describes subjectivity as “precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (p. 33).

McRobbie (In McRobbie and McCabe: 1981) and Walkerdine (1990), while validating my concerns about the impact of reading romance and the development of girls’ “neurotic search for a ‘fella’”(McRobbie: 1981, p. 116), also acknowledge the contradictions present in romance. McRobbie points out in her earlier work that romance presents a commitment to fun and pleasure as compensation for the pain and suffering which makes up most of a girl’s (and woman’s) life (1981, p. 120). McRobbie’s more recent work (1999) has highlighted drastic changes in girls’ magazines, and she suggests of these new magazines that “there is an energy and vitality in magazines like Just Seventeen, a self confidence and openness to the world rather than a retreat from it”(1999: p. 46). She admits, however, that there are as many feminists who continue to believe girls’ magazines are “unacceptably and irrevocably sexist” (1999, p. 47).

Thurston (1987) describes the “romance revolution,” suggesting romance texts have become more sexually explicit as readers have demanded these changes. This approach seems to suggest that popular culture can be viewed as influenced by people’s own self-making, suggesting that the audience perhaps has more control over the text than would be argued by structuralists who might suggest that the text causes certain results in the audience. However, as Bennett et al
(1986) point out,

In Gramsci’s conspectus, popular culture is viewed neither as the site of the people’s cultural deformation nor as that of their cultural self-affirmation or... of their own self-making; rather it is viewed as a force field of relations shaped, precisely, by these contradictory pressures and tendencies (p. xii).

In considering abused women as existing within a force field of relations, with contradictory pressures and with contradictory subject positions offered to them, I began to see how complicated it would be to attempt to develop a picture of how abused women have negotiated, and continue to negotiate, their way through these possibilities. Giroux and Simon (1989) draw upon Gramsci and the concept of hegemony in their descriptions as to why the study of popular culture is relevant to schooling, (and which is why it is also important to any clinical practice, I would argue) suggesting it is imperative that we gain an understanding of how consent to the current power structures is won. They say,

The notion of consent rightly points to the ways in which people are located within and negotiate elements of place and agency as a result of their investments in particular relations of meaning constructed through popular forms. At work in this notion are the central questions of what it is that people know, how they come to know, and how they come to feel in a particular way that secures for the hegemonic or counter-hegemonic order their loyalties and desires (Giroux and Simon: 1989, p. 15).

They suggest that much of the radical analysis of culture has either focussed on the deconstruction of the ideologies inherent in texts or on readers’ responses and how they make meaning of them based upon their own experiences. They move on to say that what has been missing and what needs to be addressed is how these texts/cultural forms can be “understood as mobilizing desire in a way that elaborates how such forms are engaged” (p. 16). This has influenced my approach to the women in the study and my approach to reading their favourite texts, which are discussed in chapter five. I have not provided an objective deconstruction of the ideologies in these texts, and neither have I relied solely on the women’s responses to, and reports of, the texts. Rather, I have engaged with the texts keeping in mind my overriding goal of improving clinical practice. Therefore, I have attempted to immerse myself in the plots, which is what the women appeared to have done, looking for clues as to what else I needed to know in
order to understand their engagement with the texts and the possible “mobilization of their desire” through their engagement. I needed to investigate concepts of hope, which I present in chapter six.

My approach to this study also addresses some of those issues that Radway (1991) points out she did not pursue within her study of romance readers. She states, “What I was trying to explain was the fact that the . . . women apparently felt an intense need to be nurtured and cared for and that despite their universal claim to being happily married (a claim I did not doubt), that need was not being met adequately in their day-to-day existence” (p. 13). “I neither asked questions of their husbands nor did I probe very deeply into the issue of whether romance reading actually changes a woman’s behaviour in her marriage” (p.101). Radway says she constructed her study based on a series of concerns regarding interpretive communities (p. 7). She says, “I sought to contrast the then-current interpretation of romances produced by trained literary critics with that produced by fans of the genre . . . it was only when the women repeatedly answered my questions about the meaning of romances by talking about the meaning of romance reading as an activity and a social event in a familial context that the study began to intersect with work being done in Britain” (p. 7), in cultural studies. She goes on to say,

Indeed, it was the women readers’ construction of the act of romance reading as a ‘declaration of independence’ that surprised me into the realization that the meaning of their media use was multiply determined and internally contradictory and that to get at its complexity, it would be helpful to distinguish analytically between the significance of the event of reading and the meaning of the text constructed as its consequence. Although I did not then formulate it in so many words, this notion of the event of reading directed me toward a series of questions about the uses ‘to which a particular text is put, its function within a particular conjuncture, in particular institutional spaces, and in relation to particular audiences’. What the book gradually became, then, was less an account of the way romances as texts were interpreted than of the way romance reading as a form of behaviour operated as a complex intervention in the ongoing social life of actual social subjects, women who saw themselves first as wives and mothers” (p. 7).

She says that she would now suggest that her study was exclusively preoccupied with gender and the patriarchy, and she would now want to ascertain how other social variables might
intersect with gender "to produce varying, even conflicting, engagements with the romance form." (p. 9). She suggests it might even be interesting to study similarly situated women who are not interested in romance to determine the discursive competencies present, or missing, that "render the romance incomprehensible, uninteresting, or irrelevant" (p. 9).

While Radway’s initial interest in the romance text was based upon the text and the interpretation of the text, she reports having needed to move away from that initial interest in order to take into account the women’s focus on the act of reading. My interest in the act of reading is based within my clinical practice and wanting to improve practice with abused women. I was not as interested in pursuing a textual analysis, nor focusing solely on the women’s interpretations of the text in comparison to a feminist interpretation of the text, as I was in examining abused women’s reports of engagements with texts, looking for clues as to how this might inform and improve clinical practice. Due to my particular concern in improving practice, I asked the women in my study questions about their childhoods, relationships and marriages, which Radway did not. I attempted to situate their reading within the greater context of their interpretations of previous experiences to examine the manner in which these interpretative practices intersected.

**Research Question and Methodology**

In wanting to study abused women’s development of a faith in the heterosexual relationship and the interpretation of controlling behaviours as romantic, I needed to use a research methodology which would allow me to ask a “how?” question, rather than a “which?” question. Shulman (1981) suggests “what distinguishes methods from one another, usually by virtue of their contrasting disciplinary roots, is not only the procedures they employ, but the very types of questions they tend to raise” (p. 6). Quantitative approaches tend to ask “which?” rather than “how?” or “why?”

I became aware that the problem I had been experiencing in practice with abused women was a pedagogical/practice problem. I had become interested in discovering how women learn to romanticize abuse, but I was also interested in developing a method of research and practice for
engaging women in the critical reflection of how they have learned to romanticize and neutralize controlling and abusive actions. I wanted the experience of being involved in the research study to be empowering for the abused women; firstly by generating new knowledge that was either recorded, or commented upon, by abused women, and secondly by providing a model for liberating educators and therapists who are interested in having the disempowered “reflect upon their domination (and) begin a first step in changing their relationship to the world” (Freire in Shor: 1993, p. 25).

There have been many influences on the development of my research design, in addition to those already mentioned. Comstock (1982), Schon (1983), Carr and Kemmis (1986), Heilburn (1988), Connelly and Clandinin (1990), Bateson (1990), Witherell and Noddings (1991), Parry and Doan (1994) and White (1995a, 1995b) have all impacted on how I wished to pursue this inquiry. Of course, discussions with colleagues, fellow students and professors have all had impacts on my thesis journey as well. Haug (1987) and Arelis (1996), however, have presented descriptions of a model of inquiry that they have used and which I believed was appropriate as an approach for my research with abused women. It is a model that allowed me to co-construct their narratives, while focussing on how they had learned to romanticize abuse, without making assumptions about where and how they had done so.

A Collective Work of Memory: the “how” of lived feminine practice

Haug is the editor of Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory (1987), although fourteen women, primarily academics, worked together, describing their process as a collective one. They state that the question they wanted to raise was the “‘how’ of lived feminine practice” (p. 33). They decided to focus on the process of development of feminine sexuality. They say that if they had focussed on the more familiar and broader area of sexual socialization the results may have been more concerned with sex education or sexual training in regards technique, but they felt results in these areas would not have been as liberating. They argue that “it is not simply some lack of information or technical facility that bars our route to fulfilment, but in some mysterious way, it is we ourselves . . . and, again, ourselves as whole persons in relation
to the world, that demand to be taken into account in relation to questions of human happiness, up to and including happiness in the sexual domain" (p. 34). This argument is similar to my concern about how the hegemonic order has won consent from abused women. Additionally, the collective of women problematizes scientific knowledge. They say that in challenging the separation of scientific knowledge from everyday experience they believe they were challenging an academic canon. They go on to explain,

The very notion that our past experience may offer some insight into the ways in which individuals construct themselves into existing relations, thereby themselves reproducing a social formation, itself contains an implicit argument for a particular methodology. If we refuse to understand ourselves simply as a bundle of reactions to all-powerful structures, or to the social relations within which we have formed us, if we search instead for possible indications of how we have participated actively in the formation of our own past experience, then the usual mode of social-scientific research, in which individuals figure exclusively as objects of the process of research has to be abandoned . . . Indeed memory-work is only possible if the subject and object of research are one and the same person . . . Since what interests us is the human potential for liberation, we conceived of human beings in collective and cooperative terms . . . Our intervention is itself an act of liberation (p. 35).

Each of the women in the collective wrote of incidents they remembered that were related to the focus of their research, and then the stories were discussed and analysed as a group. They provide techniques for triggering memories, for assisting with the writing of memories and also regarding the usefulness of analysing stories together, but the suggestion remains that in each situation where this approach is used a certain degree of imagination and creativity will be required to adjust it for the specifics of the people and focus involved. Arelis (1996) used these same memory-work techniques to explore with a group of fellow public-school teachers their own memories of girl-hood reading. They focussed on what was read, where and how. She reported in her presentation that some of the women wrote of the enjoyment of hiding their reading of sexually explicit romances, but while she spoke about the techniques of her research she did not discuss any relationship between affect and ideology that might have been discovered through this research process.
Narrative Therapy

Training I have received regarding the techniques of a Narrative approach to counselling was useful when co-constructing and deconstructing narratives with the women in this study. White (1995a,b), who has been instrumental in the development of Narrative Therapy, has described the impact on his work of Foucault, Bateson and poststructuralism generally. He believes that subjectivity is not fixed but is influenced by meaning-making behaviour and discursive practices. White believes that images start in the present and reach backwards, finding other elements with which to resonate. By personifying and externalizing the problems that bring people into counselling, he provides them with a method of opening up multiple story lines and multiple possibilities.

Parry and Doan (1994) suggest that therapy, and specifically narrative therapy, occurs within the discipline of hermeneutics, proposing that this field be called “clinical hermeneutics”. They challenge therapists to acknowledge “that in the intersubjective and even the intrasubjective realm in which therapy takes place, all is interpretation” (p. 22). They go on to suggest that the major tasks of a postmodern therapist are to encourage people in the “legitimizing of their own stories” and in the liberating of “the many stories that have been censored into oblivion by the tyranny of a single, dominant story - one, moreover, that has been falsely identified as the self” (p. 27). Calling upon White’s techniques, they suggest looking for the lost stories; those stories which are unique and which have been previously unnoticed, but which can provide an alternative story to the problematic story that initially brought the person into therapy. They, in fact, provide a list of tools for helping people become authors of their own narratives, stressing the importance of story re-vision also. They state that “deconstruction and re-vision are not separate processes, but are equally important and inescapably linked . . . It is one thing to be a catalyst in the deconstruction of clients’ . . . mythology; it is another to provide them with the opportunity to revise their stories in such a way that these will be more in line with what they want” (p. 45). For example, therapeutic intervention can assist women who have experienced sexual abuse as children and/or spousal violence to move from a dominant storyline and subject position of “victim” to that of “survivor”. The women, by critically reflecting upon their experiences, move
from a position of self-blame to realizing that the perpetrator of the sexual abuse, and perhaps the social structures in which sexual abuse occurs, are responsible for the abuse. This approach seemed to be consistent with the aims I held for this research to be a liberating and empowering experience for the women who participated in the co-construction of their narratives.

**Reflective Practice and Critical Research**

It was through the process of conducting a piece of action research, reflecting on my own practice, that I became adamant that my thesis should also include a component related to practice, involving women in reflecting upon their domination. Griffiths and Tann (1992) identify five different levels of reflection associated with reflective practice. The fifth level of reflection, which they describe as "retheorizing and reformulating", is made up of a cycle of "act-observe-systematically-analyse-rigorously-evaluate-retheorize-plan-act". The first three years of the Ph.D. programme was a time of evaluating and retheorizing as my notion of subjectivity and my understanding of the manner in which popular cultural texts may be negotiated changed. My approach to counselling, the development of my use of narrative techniques, my growing sensitivity to the alterity of the women who request counselling and an even further heightened awareness of the need to empower clients in their ability to critically reflect themselves, has also changed. As I completed the writing of this thesis this component related to practice became even more important, as if I had come full circle. I am now finally able to bring my findings from the research back into my clinical practice, where my practice problem and research question originated.

Comstock (1982) defines critical research in the following manner:

Critical research begins from the practical problems and ideologically distorted understandings of groups that are dominated and frustrated by present social conditions. It proceeds through interpretive, empirical, and dialectical phases of analysis with the intent to inform the emancipatory practices of these groups. It is a method of *praxis* for it combines disciplined analysis with practical action. It is aimed not merely at understanding the world, but at changing it. Instead of objectifying people and society, it enables its subjects to reappropriate their life-world and become self-conscious agents of socio-historical progress. It is democratic, rather than elitist and it *is* enlightening instead of mystifying. Such a
critical research is the basis for critical theories that have practical utility in the political struggle for freedom (p. 388-389).

**Narrative Research**

Riessman’s chapter, “Making Sense of Marital Violence: One Woman’s Narrative”, (In Riessman: 1994), attempts to provide answers to how a woman makes sense of her experience of marital violence and how she tells of these experiences, wanting to learn about the actions and emotions of women who are sexually abused in a marriage and how they move from the position of victim to survivor. She states “by storifying a life we bring order to random happenings, make sense by reconstructing and reinterpreting” (p. 114). She goes on to say that narrative analysis is well suited to understanding the process of meaning-making behaviour because, she says, “it lays bare the interpretive work narrators do in collaboration with listeners” (p. 115). She, therefore, presents detailed transcriptions of research interviews with a woman who tells of how she decided to divorce her violent husband who had raped her. Riessman then analysed three transcripts as texts, looking for the performative aspects, which assisted the woman in making sense of her decision and defend this decision against what others (neighbours, legal and religious systems, and possibly the interviewer) might think. She concludes by saying, “just as in therapy the client and clinician only have access to narrative truth, not historical truth... but that through talking and listening, a woman has rendered the sorrows of a life heroic and meaningful... The teller has attempted to heal wounds that only narrative can bind” (p. 131).

**Method of Writing**

Lather and Smithies (1997) have demonstrated an attempt to write about women in such a way that the act of conducting research and writing about others, as a particular form of science, is also reflected upon. Lather says of their research,

Methodologically grounded in qualitative/ethnographic and feminist poststructural research in the human sciences, this project enacts an interest in what it means to tell the lives of others. Both within and against conventional notions of social science research, the goal is not so much to represent the researched better as to explore how researchers can “be accountable to people’s struggles for self-

Lather also says that she and Smithies have explored methods of writing, which would not position them as “experts ‘saying what things mean’ in terms of ‘data,’ but rather as witnesses giving testimony to what is happening” to the women in their study (p. 125). I discuss this further in chapter four as I write about the women in my study. Lather and Smithies write using a split text, in order to provide transcripts of the sessions with the women at the top of each page and then excerpts from their own diaries at that bottom of each page in order to lay bare their thoughts and emotions through the whole process of listening to the women’s stories. They intersperse chapters of a more theoretical nature that do not employ the split text. Lather also provides within these more theoretical chapters discussions of the image of the angel, which is a metaphor that became important to her over the course of the study. In the final chapter the women’s reactions to the use of the split text and their stories are included showing that the split text was not unproblematic for them. Some of them reported finding it very difficult to read, having to choose which part of the text to continue reading and having to flip back and forth. Lather chose to keep the text as she initially had planned because, in fact, she wanted to problematize the act of reading about Other. I have experimented with the use of alternate fonts when writing of the women’s stories to indicate those times when I am commenting more specifically about my thoughts and feelings regarding the women’s stories. This maintains more of a flow in the writing, but this is not the reason I have chosen to write in this way. The way in which I have approached this emergent study has positioned much more of the conceptual work at the end of the study rather than at the beginning and so thoughts arose as I was writing the stories much more than through the process of engaging with the women in my meetings with them. I often find in my therapeutic work that it is when I come to complete recording/reports after the initial three meetings with my clients that I come to conceptualise the problems that have brought them to counselling and the potential solutions. I think through the process of writing often and this is what I have attempted to illustrate through my writing style in this thesis.

It is important to also mention that, having re-read the women’s stories, it became clear that at times I have commented without a change of font. Rather than going back through the stories and trying to put all my comments into the alternate font, I have left the chapter as it is.
This is because as I wrote the chapter that includes the women’s stories I chose when to change fonts, and so the current choices of font indicate certain tensions. I am obviously present throughout the whole re-telling process and my subjectivity affects the choices of how I have told the women’s stories even without changing fonts. It is interesting to note those times that I thought to change font and those times that I did not think to change font.

**Reading Foucault for Social Work**

Chambon, Irving and Epstein’s (Eds.) (1999) *Reading Foucault for Social Work* highlights the relevance of Foucault’s thinking on social work theory and practice. Their suggestions about how to critically reflect upon social work knowledge and practice are both exciting and challenging, since I believe this is what I have been attempting to do through my study, while focussing on a particular area of practice with abused women.

**The Current State of Social Work**

Epstein’s opening chapter uses Foucault’s genealogy as an approach to examining social work. She describes Foucault as “an historian of ideas. He starts his histories with an appraisal of the present condition of the ideas. He then traces backwards (‘genealogy,’ ‘history of the present’) the events, beliefs, aims, uses, trajectories taken by these ideas in practice in the world, to see how events shaped ideas and how ideas shaped the events” (Epstein in Chambon et al: 1999, p. 13). Epstein has her own way of stating the present condition of social work however. She says,

So what is this craft that is practiced by the wives, sisters, mothers, and lovers of middle-class men? What is this craft that gives away tax payer money to the morally unfit and socially deviant and performs acts of pious healing to the grieving and troubled? That “counsels” the confused and badly informed and, in its role of “mental health professional,” treats those who are mentally ill and emotionally disturbed? What is this social institution of modern America that sometimes cannot easily be told apart from the police (who more and more are said to resemble social workers), that cannot be told apart from the various brands of “shrinks” (who fear to resemble social workers), that cannot be readily told apart from friends, neighbors – and talk show hosts and their guest experts who are pitchers for therapeutics? (Epstein in Chambon et al: 1999, p. 7).
Seeing this current situation of social work she then looks back at the development of social work over time and the ideas that have impacted on the course that social work has taken. I came to Epstein’s chapter at a time that I was realizing that I had perhaps taken for granted what I “do” in therapy, and would need to think about how to describe my practice. There are many different approaches to therapy, so stating that I am a clinical social worker providing therapy would not be enough of a description. It would not even be obvious to my colleagues and fellow social workers what it is any of us “do” in therapy since there is such confusion about what distinguishes social work from any of the other therapeutic or helping professions.

Epstein discusses the role of Charlotte Towle (1896 – 1996) in shaping how clinical social work treatment began to be taught in universities. She was hired as the first clinician on the faculty of social work at the University of Chicago in 1932. Her major work, The Learner in Education for the Professions was published in 1954, and was greatly influenced by the Golden Age in the post World War II prosperity. She was influenced by John Dewey, writing about social psychology and the notion of problem solving for goal driven action, person-in-situation, role performance and social systems. Ralph Tyler, a scholar and academic in the University of Chicago’s Department of Education at the same time also influenced Towle’s approach to social work education and Epstein points out that Tyler wrote the forward to the book. Epstein describes Thomas French as another important collaborator. Epstein says, “He was a psychoanalyst at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis and a colleague of Franz Alexander, a leading psychoanalytic theorist of the time. Alexander, in collaboration with French, gave us the idea of the ‘corrective emotional experience’ as a major therapeutic modality” (p. 20). She goes on to say that French psychoanalysed many elite social workers and was considered a mentor to the social work community, putting forward a “no-nonsense type of psychoanalysis that valued what he called ‘problem-solving insight’ and other rather straightforward types of practical ideas attached to the psychoanalytic core” (Epstein in Chambon et al: 1999, p. 20).

In Epstein’s concluding remarks she states clinical social work became psychotherapy with a difference, since clinical social work took into consideration the treatment of the particular condition, while also considering equally the role of social responsibility and protection issues. Epstein points out however that Towle was not aware of how the feminization of social work was
going to impact its development. She describes Towle as being one of those women in the pre-60's generation who were silent on the role of gender, while not shying away from becoming leaders in a “profession started by male philanthropists, doctors, and politicians and operated by women. These women tried to carry on in a nongendered atmosphere, but that could not be. They had no choice because society in general was keeping gender issues a secret. Secret or no, the hidden dynamic of gender distorted social work” (Epstein in Chambon et al: 1999, p. 23).

**Making the Familiar Visible**

Chambon’s chapter takes Foucault’s approach into the realm of current social work practices suggesting that it is time to make the “familiar visible” (Chambon in Chambon et al: 1999, p. 51). I have realized that part of why I have been struggling with how to describe my conceptual framework for this thesis has to do with confusion as to my conceptual framework as a social worker generally. As Epstein’s chapter indicates, social work has had a variety of influences and as a social worker I tend to pick and choose from a variety of psychotherapeutic approaches attempting to adjust my style depending on the client’s presenting problems and natural style of interacting. I cannot help but be influenced to a certain degree by psychoanalytic theory, but often prefer the empowering and encouraging qualities in an Adlerian approach to psychotherapy. I have also been influenced by working with a clinical supervisor who has introduced me to Yalom’s Existential Psychotherapy (Yalom: 1980).

I shared the Chambon et al (1999) book with my clinical supervisor and colleagues at work, and my supervisor encouraged me to facilitate a series of discussions in our team meetings about bringing Foucault to social work. It became clear that it would be difficult for all of us to grapple with how to make the familiar visible. However, this is very much what I have been attempting to do in both my clinical and research practice and within the writing of this thesis. My practice and research have been closely intertwined and, as I have previously remarked, in many ways my thesis could be described as a piece of action research, since I have been interrogating my practice and assumptions, and using this interrogation as the basis of contributing to the development of new knowledge to improve practice.

Chambon says, “epistemologically, Michel Foucault set out to critically examine the practices and knowledges that place the person at centre stage . . . (1) the fields of knowledge
centred on human action – the social or human sciences, and (2) the practices and institutional arrangements that sustain human conduct” (Chambon in Chambon et al: 1999, p. 52). She goes on to suggest Foucault’s purpose was critical and transformative, problematizing the taken-for-grantedness and assumptions that sustain our everyday professional interactions. She talks about this type of critical reflection on our practices as work that unsettles, “ruffles the smoothness of our habits, rattles our uncertainties, disorganizes and reorganizes our understanding, shakes our complacency, unhinges us from secure moorings” (p. 53). This is perhaps the closest I can come to articulating my conceptual framework for this thesis, and yet it is not a conceptual framework in many ways. It perhaps is more of an attitude. However, I need to make clear that Foucault has influenced me most directly in the area of my clinical practice and not my research approaches. His approach has shifted my “taken-for-grantedness” in clinical work, but I have not directly used his approach to discourse analysis when reading the women’s texts. My reading of their favourite texts was in order to glimpse their imaginary worlds and potential learning sites in order to begin to think about how to bring reading into the therapeutic setting. The motivation for this study has always been the improvement of clinical practice with abused women, and not merely a more complete deconstruction of the romance text.

**Emergent Design**

I have utilized an emergent design for this thesis and so have attempted to limit conceptual frameworks at the beginning. I did not want to do as Celani (1994) did. He approached the problem of why battered women return to their abusers from a particular framework and fit them into an object relations and psychodynamic conceptual framework. Although when I am asked to describe what types of approaches I use within my clinical practice I generally describe myself as using narrative therapy, Adlerian and feminist approaches to therapy. I wanted as best I could to approach the women in my thesis study with as clear a head as possible in order to listen to their stories with as much of an openness as possible, waiting to see what it might be that I would need to make sense of. Just as Lather implies she did not know she would use the angel metaphor in understanding the experiences of women living with HIV/AIDS, I did not know at the start of this
project, what would require further conceptual work and understanding. It was only after meeting with the women and writing about their favourite texts that I came to realize this further conceptual work and understanding was required in relation to issues of hope.

**Ethical Stance: Attempting to Leave Behind the Known**

Godzich (1986) quotes Geerts as having said,

> To see ourselves as others see us can be eye-opening. To see others as sharing a nature with ourselves is the merest decency. But it is from the far more difficult achievement of seeing ourselves amongst others, as a local example of the forms of human life has locally taken, a case among cases, a world among worlds, that the largeness of mind, without which objectivity is self-congratulation and tolerance a sham, comes. If interpretive anthropology has any general office in the world it is to keep reteaching this fugitive truth (p. xiv).

He then goes on to say that this fugitive truth requires a shift from rationalism and gnosticism. According to Godzich, Levinas has been “the most consistent denouncer of the Gnostic position” (p. xv). He says,

> Levinas argues that there is a form of truth that is totally alien to me, that I do not discover within myself, but that calls on me from beyond me, and it requires me to leave the realms of the known and the same in order to settle in a land that is under its rule. Here the knower sets out on an adventure of uncertain outcome and the instruments that he or she brings may well be inappropriate to the tasks that will arise. Reason will play a role, but it will be a secondary role; it can only come into play once the primary fact of the irruption of the other has been experienced. And this other is not a threat to be reduced or an object that I give myself to know in my capacity as a knowing subject, but that which constitutes me as an ethical being (p. xvi.)

This has been what I have attempted to do through my interactions with the women in my study and through the majority of the writing of this thesis. To use Chambon’s and Foucault’s word, this has been an “unsettling” process, difficult to sustain at times because I have worried about the obligations of witnessing and re-telling, but I do not believe it would have been worth doing any other way.
Research Design and the Putting Together of the Research Project

I have continued to be employed, part time, as a generic Social Worker, by the same family counselling agency with which I was involved as a member of the Domestic Violence Team when this research interest developed. Although I do not currently work with women who initially identify themselves as having experienced spousal violence, many of the women I counsel have experienced wife assault, incest or sexual abuse. I work closely with colleagues who remain involved with the Violence Against Women Team, providing group, family and individual counselling to women who have experienced spousal violence, and with other colleagues who work with a variety of different clients, but who also work with abused women. It was through these contacts with other social workers that I was able to put together a small group of women with past experience of abuse, who were interested in co-constructing their narratives with me.

Due to ethical and safety considerations, I decided it would be best to only involve in this research abused women who were no longer in any danger from a violent partner. If a couple is still together and the woman becomes empowered to expect more from her relationship than ongoing violence, without the abusive partner also receiving counselling at the same time, a crisis in the relationship can be brought about that can result in an escalation of the severity and frequency of violent acts. Since it was not a goal of this research to examine other social workers’ practice, I decided it would also be best to only include women in this study who were no longer receiving counselling. Initially the social workers who were asking their previous clients if they were interested in being part of my study made the decision as to whether or not the women were living in a safe environment, but I also assessed for their safety in the initial individual meetings with the women. My experience with abused women has shown me that the women tend to be good judges of their safety, even prior to counselling, because this is where their energy has been focussed for so long: monitoring their partners’ moods and violent tendencies. (This practice experience has since been contradicted in regards to those women with a sustained history of severe physical abuse, by research findings that suggest they may be less able to judge their safety. In particular, the study suggests that an abused woman who has been told she is crazy has difficulty trusting her judgment and finds it difficult to imagine her husband
might ever kill her (Weisz: 2000).) My practice experience supports their suggestion that there is a minimization of the extent of possible violence, but I have seen many women in practice who have become so hypervigilant of their husbands' behaviours that they can sense upcoming violence.) What I realized I would not be able to control was whether or not the women would become involved with another abusive partner during the time in which they were involved in my study, but this did not occur.

I was interested in co-constructing narratives with only three or four abused women, due to wanting to present very detailed descriptions within their stories of their negotiation of the discourses of desire, romance and the heterosexual relationship. It did not seem realistic to attempt to undertake this with more than four women. Unlike Haug's (1987) collective memory work in which snippets of the women's writing and themes were presented, but not the women's complete stories, I was inclined to give each woman the opportunity to co-narrate with me her own story to be included in my thesis. By this I mean that I had expected to discuss their stories with the women and that the women and I would have shared the writing of the stories. The research I conducted was designed to be an emergent study, and as such I could not specify each of the techniques I would use to engage the women in their narration, prior to meeting with them. In this way, the research shared similarities with individual and group therapy in that I could not make exact plans ahead of time, but rather could only have a general approach in mind and then develop the specific methods through negotiation with the women involved in the study and in response to the strengths and needs of the specific women. The only thing I could be sure of was that I would initially meet with each of the women individually, just as I would prior to beginning a therapeutic group, in order to assess for safety, to ensure that each woman was comfortable with me, understood my research interest and had a support network in place. I had decided that we would then meet in a group format, since the interactions between us could generate further memories and we could assist one another in the process of reflecting upon the discourses with which we engaged. Therapy groups I have facilitated in the past have met for twenty weeks, meeting once each week and for two hours each time. This is the minimum length of time for a group to be effective, using a social group work model that focuses on the process of the group and the needs of the group members. Usually the women request additional group sessions and
find it difficult to stop meeting with a group that has become emotionally supportive and often indicate that there are further topics they would like to cover together. This practice appears to be changing in agencies currently, as there is more of an economic need to attempt to be more efficient with staff time and resources. These groups share information, but I am unsure of how much they would be able to assist the women in examining and altering their patterns of interaction. Since there were only two women involved in this study, versus the six to ten women usually involved in a therapy group, I decided that we would not necessarily need twenty weeks to explore the women’s engagement with the discourses that had been important to them. The six group sessions were plenty for examining where they believed they had learned about heterosexual romantic relationships, since we did not need to deal with issues of safety planning as therapy groups would. Although these group meetings opened up therapeutic possibilities, it was primarily a time-limited research group, which reduced the possibility of ongoing therapy focussing on process and changing interpersonal relationship patterns. It was only after completing chapters five and six, in which I discuss the women’s favourite texts and issues of hope, that I wished that I had previously negotiated a follow up session in which we could have discussed these texts in more detail.

Although the two women in this study were both white, I have not discussed the possible differences in attitudes towards abuse that white women and women of colour may hold. Research that I have already discussed (Chambliss et al: 1992) suggests that women do not stay with their abusers because of love. Clinical experience, supported by Burstow’s (1992) observations, suggests white women are just as likely to stay with abusers because it is what they have come to expect, for the children’s sake, or not to upset extended family. These are reasons that are similar to reasons found for women of African-American and Hispanic groups (Levy: 1995).

I had realized prior to meeting with the women in this study that it would depend upon the women as to whether or not I would suggest prompts prior to beginning to discuss and write memories. My colleagues and I have often suggested women begin keeping a journal through the process of therapy and I assumed that the women who became part of my study would probably already have been very comfortable with the process of writing about their memories. I had
thought that I would explain to them that I was interested in understanding how women learn about romantic relationships and how they negotiate the subject positions offered to them within the discourses of romance and the heterosexual relationship, as they are presented to them at home, at school, through religion and through popular cultural texts. I had anticipated that this would generate memories and written material. After meeting and discussing the initial written responses further memories would have been generated. It was only if further prompts were required that I had thought I would suggest looking at photographs of themselves as children, as adolescents and as adults. They could have found it useful to look at any keepsakes they had, poetry they had written, or perhaps drawings. Drawing plans of homes in which they lived, or developing time-lines of meaningful events can also trigger memories of stories that were read or things that were said to them that have remained significant. Parry and Doan (1994) suggest encouraging an exercise of looking for clues as to where dominant and problematic storylines ("victim") were reinforced, while looking for those alternate meanings that were previously overlooked ("did what had to be done in order to survive"). I did not intend to present romance texts to the women in order to have them respond to the texts, because I did not want to lead the research to that extent, but decided to wait and see what the women raised as having been texts that had been important to them. I suggested that the women bring in texts, which they had previously enjoyed so that we could look at the texts critically together, and then write about our engagement with those texts. I had thought we could each write in our journals in between group sessions and then discuss our writing as a group, although the women would not have been expected to share copies of their writing with one another at this stage. The journalling would have been done as part of the process of reflection. The narratives that the women were to write to be included in my final thesis, which were to be final products rather than part of a process, were to have been written and shared in the final meetings of the group or in follow up meetings.

There are definite stages of formation, intimacy, working and ending through which groups progress and through which this working/research group of abused women could be described as having moved. Although I did not want to suggest prompts for memories unless necessary, I did recognize, on the other hand, that as a facilitator of this group I would have perhaps needed to have been more active in the earlier formative meetings and stages in order to
ensure that the focus of my research was understood and that an appropriate and comfortable group atmosphere was established.

I have described how I thought the group would proceed, but since this was an emergent study, I cannot be surprised that it did not follow my expectations exactly. In chapter four I will discuss in detail, how the individual interviews and group meetings proceeded. The primary difference between what I expected and what actually occurred was that the women, despite being extremely forth-coming with details, stories and reflection, were not overly interested in writing their stories, but preferred that I write their stories based on the details they provided. One of the women wrote a short statement for inclusion in a poster presentation I made at a Social Work Research conference in January of 1998, but as the other woman explained, being working single mothers did not leave them a great deal of time for writing. I have found it difficult to find time to write myself, working part-time and as a mother and wife. I take the women’s statements about not having the time to write at face value. Even if they had been extremely motivated to write their own stories, they might have had trouble finding the time to do so. I am unsure of whether they were highly motivated. They seemed to have a preference that I write their stories and they then comment on them, which may have had to do with an insecurity in their own writing abilities and perhaps a deferral to/assumption of my writing skills. I met with the women November 15, 1999 after they had read chapter four, which contains their stories. One of the women had several comments and questions, but was generally content with the representation of herself. She suggested that the representation of her story, with my comments, had triggered insights and further learning about her engagement with popular cultural texts. The other woman said that everything was fine and she did not have any specific questions or comments. She did say, however, that at one point, but she could not remember where, she had the impression that despite representing their thoughts, I still held my own thoughts, which were different. She said that this did not offend her, and she thought of it more as a difference of opinion. I feel fairly comfortable with these comments. The truth is that the two women in the study and I do hold different positions on various topics represented in their narratives, and I have not attempted to suggest agreement where there was none. After not having seen the two women for over a year, I was sad to hear of their on-going difficulties. The first woman reported that her
teenaged daughter had been hospitalised due to a suicide attempt. She is obviously very worried about her. She did report that she had met a nice man, through her involvement with the Internet, and she laughed about the fact that they were developing a long distance relationship, something she said she had always dreaded in the past. She appeared to feel more hopeful than she had been in the past. The second woman, on the other hand, was continuing to experience a myriad of legal difficulties where her ex-husband was concerned. She was having difficulty receiving child support payments and she said her ex-husband had reported her to a child welfare agency, apparently as a reaction to her allegations of abuse by him. Their son has been diagnosed with emotional and behavioural problems and is receiving treatment in a children’s mental health setting. I believe it was difficult for her to put much energy into reflecting upon her engagement with texts at this difficult time in her life. She made good use of the support and began the process of reflecting upon her learning sites, but I believe she would have benefited from further support in order to assist her in coping with the stresses in her life.

Writing Style and Format: Laying Bare the Research Process

Witherell and Noddings (1991) suggest, “narrative involves not only a sequence of events, but also a storyteller and an intended audience. Narrative structure contributes to our understanding of everyday life . . . we acknowledge the central role that narrative structure plays in the formation of the self and in the construction, transmission, and transformations of cultures” (p. 3). They state that adults and children, alike, are natural storytellers, although the theory of knowledge being objective and generalizable often censors adults’ stories. They quote from Bruner, saying that he has characterized two ways of knowing: the narrative mode and the paradigmatic, or logico-scientific, mode. They say,

Bruner contrasts the paradigmatic mode, which leads “to good theory, tight analysis, logical proof, and empirical analysis”, with the narrative mode, which “leads instead to good stories, gripping drama, believable historical accounts. It deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course” (p. 3).

Cooper, in chapter six of Witherell and Noddings (1991), “Telling Our Own Stories: The
Reading and Writing of Journals or Diaries”, says,

In the field of social work both professionals and their clients benefit from the use of personal logs as a form of research on the self and as a tool for personal growth . . . Social workers, as researchers, can examine who they are in the context of their own professional lives. Clients are able to examine their lives within their own contexts, to become their own researchers, to move from disempowered and mute to empowered and “voiced” (p. 111).

Narayan, in the following chapter, “According to Their Feelings: Teaching and Healing with Stories”, presents her narrative inquiry regarding the use of folk narrative as a vehicle of religious teaching in Western India, focussing primarily on the use of story by a holy man. She then goes on to suggest that the usual distinction between listening therapist and orating traditional healer is not so clear cut. She says,

An excursion into the growing literature on narrative generated by psychoanalysts and psychotherapists of various persuasions also reveals that the supposed rift between Western and traditional healing is not altogether unbridged . . . By offering interpretations, they argue, an analyst retells a patient’s scattered stories, until there emerges a new jointly authored story featuring a more coherent and aware self. What is at stake is less plodding historical truth than narrative truth that can artfully arrange and encompass the facts of a patient’s history (p 128).

Prior to meeting with the women involved in this study, I began the process of telling my own narrative using a series of school photographs as triggers for memories, which I then wrote and critically analysed. Although I was partly interested in this exercise because I thought it important to gain an impression of what the process would be like that I was suggesting to the women in my study, I found it an interesting and enjoyable process. This was despite the memories of witnessing violence and the upheaval involved in my parents’ separation and moving with my mother from Canada to England as a child. I have continued to be actively involved in the process of personal self-reflection throughout the course of this study. I have been involved in both clinical and academic supervision, and therapeutic consultation.

In chapter three, I present my own narrative in order to present a description of my subjectivity as professional social worker and researcher. I have not made the impact of my experiences and subjectivities on the research explicit. I have left the details visible so that readers may make their own observations regarding the manners in which my constantly shifting
subjectivity has influenced my interests and approaches within this study.

I audiotaped individual and group sessions with the women. I also kept a journal in which I made observations and recorded thoughts regarding the group process, commenting upon the specific activities and approaches used for encouraging the women in critically reflecting upon their "domestication" and "domination" (Freire in Shor: 1993, p. 25). I also had a scrapbook present at group meetings in which I was able to make notes and draw the women’s family trees and genograms. “A genogram is simply a family tree that includes more social data” (Compton and Galaway: 1984, p. 382). It was during the MSW programme that I was first taught the technique of using a genogram in social work practice. It is a useful tool for broadening the discussion regarding the life of the person who has requested counselling, contextualizing the specific problem that precipitated the request for counselling.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, regarding the development of my research question and methodology, Lather and Smithies (1997) and Chambon et al (1999) have had a significant influence on my reflections about practice with women who have been abused and the telling of the stories. They have also influenced my style of writing and the structure of this thesis. Chambon asks whether writing can unsettle a reader and be an invitation to change, whether writing can be a subversive and transformative practice. She points out that Foucault was able to incorporate some of the potentialities of poetic language into his writing, removing the comfort we take from rational analyses of reality (Chambon et al: 1999, p. 71). This adds to my commitment to attempt to write of the women and of this project in a way that does not attempt to fit them as round pegs into the square holes of thesis writing, but rather attempt to have the thesis writing serve the women.

I have taken seriously Chambon’s (1999) suggestion that the familiar be made visible, particularly when reflecting upon my clinical practice but also, to some degree, in my practice as researcher. Lather and Smithies (1997) suggest their writing style and format demonstrated that they were not only reflecting upon the stories of the women living with HIV/AIDS, but that they were also reflecting upon writing about others as a form of scientific inquiry. In much the same way, I have made attempts to make the familiar visible in this research process as well as in the women’s stories. This has resulted in some differences in writing style from chapter to chapter.
Chapter one, as a preamble, giving a glimpse of work done in preparation for the research process, was published previously as a separate article and can stand alone, unlike the majority of the other chapters in this thesis.

This second chapter, as an introduction to the study, has some of its roots in the thesis proposal, and as such, was partly written prior to beginning to meet with the women, but then was also added to, as my interests in Foucault and the writing process expanded. It tells the story of the development of my research interest, but is also somewhat structured by the necessity to cover the areas of research design, methodology and literature review.

In chapter three I present my own narrative and I structure the telling of this by a series of photographs that triggered memories.

In chapter four I present the women’s narratives as they unfolded as I listened to the tapes and reviewed the transcripts of the tapes of our group meetings. I present their stories as they presented them rather than attempting to chronologically order occurrences in their lives. There are no headings other than to indicate a movement from focussing primarily on one woman’s story to the other. This is due to my concern that any headings would only be added as an afterthought and I am fearful that they would act as signposts for themes for which I would have searched, rather than allowing the reader to find his/her own meanings in the stories.

Chapter five, in which the women’s favourite popular cultural texts are described, also has minimal use of headings. Again this reflects the research process. Chapter five represents a process in which I believe there is some resistance to engage. I did not enjoy reading the women’s favourite texts, but I believed that by reading them I would be provided with a glimpse into their meaning-making worlds. Chapter five was tedious to write, and may be tedious to read.

It was hard enough having to read the texts once, but I was then more resistant to having to describe them. This was when it was the most difficult to maintain motivation in the writing process. It was only through the process of immersing myself in this chapter, however, that I was able to come out the other side with an awareness of what needed further thought. I have wondered about trying to structure chapter five with more headings to make it simpler to read. I have attempted to cut it drastically, and considered moving it to an appendix, but I have decided there is no quick and easy way around trying to immerse ourselves, as clinicians or researchers, in
our clients' meaning-making lives.

Chapters six and seven are then much more structured again, with headings, because I knew as I began writing them what I needed and wanted to say.

Berndorff (2001) has recently suggested that despite "a common set of beliefs underlying the discourse surrounding research practice that supports a pre-ordinate approach to the development of goals and procedures," (p. iii) and despite a certain "narrative smoothing" (p. iii) that occurs in the writing-up of research studies, in order to imply more linearity and success between planning, process and outcome, that "research may also be an emergent social and educational process punctuated by many pedagogical moments, shaped by indeterminacy and influenced by the backgrounds and experiences of individual researchers" (p. iii). I think this can also be said of the counselling process and this description of research as at time an emergent social and educational (perhaps therapeutic also) process, fits well with my research experience with the women in this study.

I have consciously chosen to avoid "narrative smoothing," in the writing of this thesis, because I want to leave the emergent nature of this study clear. Wishing to make the familiar and invisible details of clinical practice with abused women, visible, I want to also ensure the research process is as visible as possible in the structure and writing.

**Timeframe**

As every other Ph.D. candidate before me, I have discovered that a research study, despite planning, will generally take longer than expected. The course work took two years, another academic year went by writing the proposal and completing comprehensive exams. My proposal was "accepted" by my thesis committee early in 1997. By the time I had received permission from the Executive Director of the agency in which I work to have a colleague contact her former clients about my study, and also had received permission to use my agency office space to meet with the women, on my own time, it was already late in 1997. I met with the women from November 1997 until February 1998. During the same period that I was conducting this study and working part time as a social worker, I also held a position as a graduate assistant on another,
unrelated project. This was a wonderful learning opportunity, but did certainly cut into any time I would otherwise have had available to write. So, it took almost a year from the time I first met with the women in this study until I began to feel that I was truly beginning to find the appropriate voice in which to write their stories. There have been times when I have wished I had decided upon a more rigidly structured quantitative style of study, in which I could have feigned objectivity and reason and not worried about my narrative style and the risk inherent with self-disclosure. I have at times worried about each word I write about the women, because I have been concerned about the possibility of inadvertently inflicting violence upon the women again. I have taken seriously the concern to acknowledge and respect the alterity of the women and the distance across which I have been writing.

Forecasting the Conclusion

I have at times experienced a sense of annoyance when innocent bystanders to this study have asked me what my findings have been. I have the impression at those times that they are asking from a particular frame of knowledge and wonder how my findings will fit into their frame, or fill in a blank, as if looking for a lost puzzle-piece. I have only recently begun to realize that what I hope for this study is that it will unsettle those frames of reference/knowledge. The study has been interdisciplinary in nature, crossing the areas of social work, critical and feminist pedagogy, cultural studies and women’s studies. It was an empowering and enjoyable experience for those of us involved in the study, but it also has the potential for being of interest to a broad audience of academics, researchers and practitioners within social work, education and women’s studies. I believe it may also be of interest to a non-academic community of women, offering an example of reflecting upon the “domestication” and “domination” (Freire in Shor: 1993, p.25) of abused women. As this study makes its way out to a broader audience I will have a sense of having done something worthwhile if the “findings” unsettle enough to encourage further questions regarding the development of subject positions, relations in the world and the process of conducting practice and research.
Chapter Three

My Narrative

I hold this to be the highest task of a bond between two people: that each should stand guard over the solitude of the other. For, if it lies in the nature of indifference and of the crowd to recognize no solitude, then love and friendship are there for the purpose of continually providing the opportunity for solitude. And only those are the true sharings which rhythmically interrupt periods of deep isolation. . . . But, once the realization is accepted that even between the closest human beings infinite distances continue to exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to see the other whole and against a wide sky! . . . (All companionship can consist only in the strengthening of two neighbouring solitudes, . . . for when a person abandons himself, he is no longer anything, and when two people abandon themselves up in order to come close to each other, there is no longer any ground beneath them and their being together is a continual falling down) (Rilke: 1975, pp. 27-28).

When my husband and I were considering marriage, we spoke to Michael Creal, a friend of ours, who had taught Humanities and Religious Studies at York University for many years. He is also an Anglican Priest. He offered us the suggestion of having a reading from Rilke’s Letters on Love in our wedding ceremony, which significantly contributed to my maturing notions on love. The above quote from Rilke, minus what I have added from Rilke in the brackets, was what was read at the ceremony. I think it is important to present here, at the beginning of my story, what I am striving for in my love relationship, which I worry is quite different from many mainstream notions of romantic love. I have heard of some couples conducting wedding ceremonies in which they carry two lit candles, light a third candle and then blow out their original candles, symbolizing their becoming one. This would no doubt worry Rilke, who has described how two people can inadvertently do great damage to themselves and each other as they lose sight of their otherness, their separateness, their uniqueness. This abandoning of self for other can lead to a situation where abuse can flourish and where the well being of each individual is sacrificed.

What I asked of the women of this study was to reflect upon what and where they had learned about romantic heterosexual relationships. It seemed only proper that I attempt to
answer that same question myself, not only to have a sense of what I was asking them to do but also as an attempt to make as explicit as possible my own subject position where romance, and this study more generally, are concerned.

In fact, I wrote a fairly detailed narrative for inclusion in this thesis, and it was only after handing it over to my thesis committee that I began to worry about the ethics involved in placing my narrative in a public setting, as occurs once the thesis is bound and placed in a university library. Although the women, whose stories I present in the next chapter, were able to choose names by which to be known and were provided with the opportunity to review their narratives, not only ensuring their own anonymity and privacy, but also ensuring privacy for others in their lives, I obviously do not have the chance to maintain anonymity. I am not so much worried about making myself vulnerable, but am worried that in telling my narrative in the manner in which I first wrote it that I would be telling bits and pieces of other people's lives. I have begun to think of this as an ethical issue. I am bound by ethics in my professional practice and within my research with women, but it was only late in the process that I began to think of the rights to privacy of others in my life: particularly my parents, whose impressions of their marriage could be quite different from my memories/impressions. It is not so much a matter of trying to find the truth, since our memories are situated in the present and might tell more of our current subjectivities than of what historically occurred, but I feel uncomfortable with the thought that by publishing my memories my account would be privileged and I would not be respecting their right to control what is known about them publicly.

Early in 1999 I pursued psychotherapy with an Adlerian psychotherapist for a few months. The academic process of being constantly judged and assessed, surrounded by educated and powerful men, primarily, combined with co-leading a therapy group with a new supervisor who is also a highly educated and powerful man, led to my wishing to further explore the stresses in my past, which were triggered by being surrounded by such men. This obviously so closely shadows my interest in this thesis, where I study the romanticization of abuse and attempt to discover where abused women have learned about the heterosexual romantic relationship, that it surely must impact on my interests in some way. Although intellectually I knew that part of the early developmental process involves realizing that parents are not perfect, and that it is perhaps a later realization that they were not all bad
either, it has only recently filtered down into an emotional level, aided by the therapeutic process, that it is more peaceful to accept that parents have both negative and positive traits and that I share both the negative and positive traits, as well as developing some of my own. I tend towards impatience and anger, which I share with my father, but I have also learned from him to value education and critical thought. I attempt to be kind to people, as my mother is, and try to work hard and independently, as she always has. I may prefer peace as she also does, but I attempt to ensure peace by problem solving and open communication of thoughts and feelings, something that is not always safe to do in all situations, especially those that are potentially controlling or abusive.

I was told that a mutual friend introduced my mother and father to one another when they were both separated from their first spouses. Stories my parents have told me about their first marriages and about the beginning stages of their own marriage together suggest to me that in some ways my parents have been free spirits and have not always lived life according to how they have been expected to live life. On the other hand it often felt as though my father has had particular expectations of how I should conduct my life. My mother treats me from a position at the other extreme, where it sometimes felt as though she should have expected more of me.

Although my previous Adlerian psychotherapist would suggest that my life style or self-concept was fairly completely formed by my earliest memories with my parents, I believe that there is more to who I am, and more to what abused women are, besides these earliest memories. I believe that the therapeutic discourse too heavily emphasizes early childhood learning, looking for direct cause and effect relationships between parental relationships and grown children's romantic relationships. I am attempting, through this research, to bring discourse analysis into the therapeutic setting, assisting clients in reflecting upon the numerous learning site in which they have been engaged, in addition to the family learning site. I have, after all, counseled abused women who report having had very happy childhoods and not understanding where they developed their expectations of relationships nor how to change these expectations and desires. Therefore, I believe it is more important that I attempt to examine in my own narrative other sites of learning in addition to my childhood experiences with my parents.
I have been interested in whether or not any of my educational experiences could have offered alternate discourses to those presented to me by my parents. I wondered how my constantly evolving subject position would have negotiated these discourses. Particularly, I wondered what it was about the development of my subject position that put me in a position of resistance to, or at least negotiation with, the portrayal of the controlling and abusive romantic hero, when many of the abused women with whom I have worked appeared to be in a position of persuasion (Mercer: 1986).

Snapshots

When I first began working as a clinical social worker, one of the first techniques my supervisor at the time suggested to me for assisting clients in discussing their childhood experiences was to have them bring photographs of themselves as children into the therapy sessions. This has often been a useful technique, triggering rich descriptions and also encouraging clients to have empathy for themselves. Without the pictures it seems as though people often remember incidents as though they were adults in the situations they are describing. Looking at pictures of themselves as children reminds them that they were little. Therefore, I searched out some school photographs of myself, and I will limit myself to the memories triggered by the six school related pictures I have found.

Six and a Half Years Old

In the first photograph I am six and a half years old and in Grade One in a Public School, in Ontario. It must have been during the 1969-70 school year, since I was born July 1963. I have a class picture and an individual photograph of myself. The most pronounced memory I have of this time, that I think of often, without even looking at the photograph, was of my father telling me he did not like my smile in the individual photograph, and that I should have kept my lips together so that my teeth would not have shown. My teeth look fine, and I often feel sad that I was trying my best to please someone whom it seemed impossible to please. (I was often told that he had not wanted a daughter but rather wanted a son who would have grown up to be a lawyer.) I also realize that the dress I am wearing in the photographs was my favourite dress at the time. It was primarily navy blue with a white
bodice with little flowers embroidered over the right shoulder. I remember wearing that dress at home, balancing on some beams and thinking that if I had an accident and was taken to the hospital, at least I would be wearing my favourite dress. These memories, at this point, seem to highlight the way in which my female body was already being marked as female. Lesko (1988) discusses the way in which “becoming feminine involves learning sets of attitudes and actions conceived and completed upon and through the body” (p. 123). I was already conscious of what it was to want to look feminine and how much it could hurt to be judged based on something as inconsequential as showing my teeth in a smile.

What is surprising to me as I look at the picture is that I look quite serene in the class photograph. I have long blonde hair, kept off my face with a hair band, although I do also have bangs, and I have an almost prim, lips-together and Mona-Lisa type, smile. I look older than my years. It is only in the individual photograph that I am trying to smile and that makes me sad. There are three other little girls in the picture who look familiar to me, and, due to the names that my mother wrote on the back of the photographs, I know that they were my friends at the time. However, there is also a very handsome little boy in the back row, whom I remember as being somewhat of the class heartthrob. It seems almost impossible that the good-looking little boys would have already begun to be important to some of the little girls in Grade One. On the other hand, I realize my nine-year-old son and his friends admire some girls more than others in their class. The favourite girl at the moment is not only cute, but is also bright, articulate and a little bit of a “tom-boy,” comfortable with boys as equals, having older brothers herself. The quiet prim and proper girls are not as interesting to my son, even if he realizes they are “nice” children.

I remember adoring my teacher, but I do not really remember anything specific about her or the day-to-day operation of the class. I have far more memories of playing with the children during recess than I do of classroom activity.

Seven and a Half Years Old

The next picture I have was taken when I was in Grade Two, at the same school. I look head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the same row, but I look relatively happy in the class picture. My hair has been cut to shoulder length and my bangs are growing out. I’m wearing a very strange outfit. I remember liking the dress, which was peach in colour,
with a huge collar, and a psychedelic tie. However, it must have been a little too short and not warm enough, because I am also wearing pale blue pants. In the individual picture, I have my lips glued together tightly, giving a slightly worried smile.

The Public School I attended during this time was very small. I now live relatively close to the school and have driven past it a few times in the last few years. It looks tiny and I think only accommodated Kindergarten through Grade Two, with Grades One and Two housed in the same room. It is difficult to know whether the classroom memories I do have of that time are from when I was technically in Grade One or Two, since the two years have moulded into one experience in my mind. I remember sitting on the floor with the rest of the class, being taught “Puff the Magic Dragon”, and crying because I thought it was so sad that Puff was dying. I remember feeling rather embarrassed and trying not to let anyone else see me cry. Many years later I was just as embarrassed to realize that it was all a metaphor for the child growing up, but I was still sad for poor Puff. I also remember that for a while we were all required to stand with the teacher near a board on the wall and we would be “checked” to see if we had brushed our hair and teeth and if our nails were clean and trim. I remember being too embarrassed to show my fingers one morning and asking her to merely mark them as not clean, without showing her. Again, the memories I have are primarily in regards to signifying gender through the body. Lesko (1988) points out that “dirt is linked with disorder, and cleanliness or wholesomeness with compliance with accepted dictates for orderliness” (p. 124). She then goes on to draw the connection between the way in which high school girls were either perceived as lower status and ‘loose,’ ‘wild’ or ‘hard,’ or higher status and following more traditionally feminine dictates of modesty and niceness. Ensuring my fingernails were trimmed and clean seems to me now to have been one method of encouraging me to be a clean and wholesome little girl. (A teacher, when I was in the equivalent of high school in England, once commented on the fact that she was disgusted by how nice our hands were, because it proved that we must not be helping our mothers with housework or gardening!)

I did briefly attend another school in the area, for Grade Three. It was a large “open-space” modern school with “pods” that contained three classes each, with a communal centre area. I remember being frightened having to go into the older class to use their pencil sharpener, but other than that I have few memories, because it was not long into the school
year before my mother and I moved to England, and lived with my maternal grandfather in his house. We kept in touch with my father, and I remember the frustration of having to write him letters and having to go to a pay phone when we were expected to phone him. It was unusual at that time in England for everyone to have phones in their homes. He later started coming for holidays to England and we would stay with him in a trailer, because he and my grandfather were not able to live under the same roof civilly. In looking back on this transition I also can see that we went from Canadian country-poor-folk to English town-poor-folk.

If I try to remember what I read and what sorts of influences I might have had from popular culture during these years in Canada before moving back to England, I remember enjoying a cartoon book I had of Cinderella. I was less interested in the Prince finding her at the end, but was more interested in her animal friends that kept her company. As an only child living in the country I think I must have been somewhat preoccupied with wanting ready made and available friends in the form of animals. I remember sitting for the longest time on a swing, hoping that if I just could sit still enough, perhaps some birds would come and perch near by.

Eight, Nine and Ten

We moved to a town in the south of England, and I began attending the local Primary School. I attended part of Form Two, and Forms Three and Four. I have one individual school picture of myself, which I believe was taken at that school, and I also have a large black and white photograph of a school assembly, which was taken and published in the local newspaper. I do not like the individual photograph, and I remember not liking it when it was first sent home. My hair is long again, but looks straggly, and the front pieces of it are pulled severely back from my forehead to show a large forehead, with a small pimple near the hairline. I am wearing strange colours again, and look rather awkward with myself. I am overweight. I usually think of myself as having been an overweight child, but looking over these pictures highlights for me that I was probably just taller than average in Grades One and Two and did not begin gaining weight until I was in England, and I was probably overweight only between the ages of nine and thirteen. The larger picture looks very “English”. My husband has commented that it looks like something out of the “Seven-Up”
television series about English school children. I can recognize the handful of girls with whom I played and remember that some of them lived in the council houses that were nearby. There was a development of council houses near the school and it seems to me now that the majority of the students were from that area. The school was on the “wrong side of the tracks”. Again, I do not have many specific classroom memories, but do remember my first teacher reading The Hobbit to us and explaining what the chapter title “Out of the Frying Pan and Into the Fire” meant. In Form Three a Canadian exchange teacher taught me, so I felt as though I had a special relationship with him since I was also Canadian. It was in that year that I remember we were taught how to sew samplers. The sewing teacher reprimanded me for the way in which I fastened the needle to the material at the end of the lesson, saying that if I sewed in the same way I would pull the material and it would look messy. I am not sure if the boys were also required to sew, but it certainly feels, in retrospect, like a gender-biased expectation that we girls should be proficient at sewing.

Only three girls, including myself, and one boy from this Primary School passed the Eleven-Plus exam, which meant that we were able to attend Grammar Schools the following year. In retrospect, I believe that so few children passed because the school was in a poor area of town where we were not expected to pass and where we were not tutored in how to write an exam. Some of the girls I met when I began attending the Grammar School indicated that at their primary schools they were given practice in writing the eleven plus, and a greater percentage of the children in the primary schools in the good parts of town and from private primary schools passed the exam.

It was during the time that I was a student in this Primary School that I began enjoying reading more. I especially enjoyed the Anne of Green Gables and Laura Ingels Wilder books. Although I was happy when Anne married Gilbert and Laura married Almonzo, I continued to be very interested in the friendships between the girls. I could empathize with Anne Shirley’s wish to have a bosom friend in Diana.

I also remember very much enjoying an English comic strip called “The Perishers,” and would receive their books for Christmas presents. In this particular comic strip world a group of child friends viewed and commented on the world. Wellington was a young boy who was very bright and lived alone with his Old English Sheepdog, Boot. Boot thought himself smarter than Wellington. Marlon was a handsome, but not very bright little boy, who
liked eating thick ketchup sandwiches, from which the others would have to protect themselves as he bit into them. Maisie was a very forward young girl who had a crush on Marlon and would often run after him yelling, “Give a girl a grapple.” I can’t help but wonder how I managed to negotiate my way through the discourses within “The Perishers.” If I identified with any of the characters it would have been Wellington I identified with most, wanting to emulate his independence and creativity. I did not want to be anything like the simple minded Marlon or the ridiculously brash Maisie.

Eleven

When I first considered writing my memories regarding the discourses to which I had access through my education and the possible impact of gender on my education, I thought primarily of my experiences at the Girls’ Grammar School I began attending when I was eleven years old. It was only through looking at photographs that I realized that when I think of my school years I tend to ignore those years before I turned eleven. It is possible that this is due to the number of changes that occurred during the earlier years and the fact that there was not a great deal of consistency in my school or home life. I attended a French school for Kindergarten in Canada, because my father was Hungarian and spoke six languages and felt it was important that I begin learning French as soon as possible. However, for one reason or another he removed me from the school after only a few months. Even before that, I ran away from a nursery school I was sent to briefly, because I did not like the fact that I was with babies; evidenced, I felt at the time, by the fact there were spare pairs of underwear in the front cupboard, that we were served porridge for lunch and required to have a nap in the afternoon. After running away I was not sent back again, but was allowed to stay with my father as he worked independently at the time. Even during Grades One and Two I felt as though my mother and I visited England frequently and I often missed school and felt like a stranger when I returned. At the Primary School I was thought of as a Canadian and therefore still not quite one of them. However, commencing the Grammar School with all the other new eleven year olds gave me a sense of being on an equal footing with them where it came to making friends, and I remained at that school from the First Form through to the end of the Lower Sixth, when I was seventeen years old.
My mother took a photograph of me with the other two girls who passed the eleven-plus from our neighbourhood, on our way to the first day of school. We were required to wear a uniform, which did not bother me for very much of the time. Due to economics, and now attending a school where there were some girls from quite wealthy homes, I was relieved that I did not need to compete where clothes were concerned.

The photograph shows me with Sara and Jane, who had been quite good friends up until this time. (I have changed the names of my friends, for the purposes of inclusion in this thesis.) It was taken outside of Jane's house before we all climbed into my mother's car to be driven to school. We all have on the short grey uniform skirt, which was required to be four inches above the knee. We are all also wearing the green and white uniform blouse and the dark green blazer, with a white symbol on the chest pocket. The symbol was oval, with seven wavy lines through it representing the seven rivers in the city in which we lived, and underneath it was the word "Onwards". (In a newsletter I kept from the school's Golden Jubilee in 1977, the editor of the 1926 school magazine was quoted as saying, "We have acquired a distinctive school badge with an inspiring motto: 'Onwards'.") We are all wearing very sensible brown shoes. The only differences in dress between the three of us in the photograph are that Jane is wearing a green sweater over her blouse, has her blazer open and is wearing grey knee-high socks, Sara is holding her blazer closed slightly and is wearing white knee-high socks, and my blazer is open showing that I am not wearing a sweater and I am also wearing skin-toned pantyhose rather than socks. I have had my haircut to shoulder length again, because I did not want to be required to wear it in ponytails or use barrettes. It looks much nicer shoulder length than it did in the last school picture where it was straggly. Sara and Jane look more like school girls to me, with their knee high socks and their big friendly smiles. Sara is quite a bit taller and heavier than either Jane, or myself, but I remember feeling much fatter than Jane, although in the photograph it does not seem so apparent. I look as though I am attempting to look more grown up, wearing pantyhose, with one knee bent ever so slightly, and a prim little smile (still no teeth showing). I also remember having gone through a stage where I did not want to wear sweaters because I thought they made me look fat.

I was to meet my best friend, Heather, that day also. We consider each other more like sisters now than friends, although she is now living in another country and I am back in
Canada. Heather started calling me “Hattie” the first time she met me, because I reminded her, she said, of Hattie Jacques, an obese actress on the “Carry On” films. “Hattie” became such an accepted nickname for me that most of the other students, and some of the teachers and members of the church we began attending when we were older used it rather than my given name. Heather said that she named me “Hattie”, not because I was fat particularly, but because I had a big jolly smile and laughed just like Hattie Jacques. I know she thought I was fat though! Heather and I have always been roughly the same size, although Heather may be an inch or so taller than me now, and sometimes a dress size larger than me. I think she thought of herself as large and overweight and since I was a similar size she thought of me in the same way. We reinforced in each other a worry about our weight. We always bought ourselves a treat everyday after school though, so we were not that worried about it.

Much of my sense of self and my school identity, which was triggered by being “back in school again” at OISE, comes from my years at the Grammar School. It has only been through the realization of how insecure they made me about my abilities, that I realize that they did me somewhat of a disservice. Since my years at the Grammar School are all muddled up together, rather than clearly related to specific years I will describe the last photograph before discussing the school more fully.

Fifteen

In the Fifth Form, a photographer came to the school to take our pictures. Heather, a few other close friends, and I decided we did not really want our pictures taken, so our minor protest was to be not smiling in the pictures. However, when I sat down to have my picture taken, the photographer said “Smile Princess,” which made me laugh, so I have a natural and happy smile on my face in the picture. I am wearing the school uniform, but the picture is only of head and shoulders. I am wearing a green sweater as well as the blouse and blazer. (I remember, however, that by the Fifth Form we had begun testing the boundaries of our uniform. I usually wore a very long flared grey skirt, woolly grey socks and orange-brown desert boots.) If you look carefully you can see I am wearing a small golden coloured cross on my lapel and a silver cross on a chain around my neck. Heather, two other girls, and myself had all started attending an Anglican Church and Christian youth groups around about
the time that we were fourteen years of age. In retrospect I see that I was surrounded by traditionally conservative and patriarchal institutions and ideology at that time, but I remember being extremely happy too. I had a sense of community finally. I told my father in a letter that I had been baptised into a Christian Church, and he wrote back a letter, which consisted of two sentences only, telling me I was stupid and that he hoped I would grow out of it soon. So in some ways I think I became more conservative and traditional as a backlash against him. I loved feeling part of the big family at the Church. This was not altogether consistent with another part of me however, and Heather and I became friendlier with those people in the congregation who were a little more radical. I became close with Steve, who was a psychiatric nurse, but was returning to university to pursue a career in dance and drama. Years later Steve and I communicated with one another again, and I hear now of his difficulties at the Church when he was accused of being gay. Steve lives a gay life style now and Heather has experienced a bisexual lifestyle and they have both removed themselves from organized religion. Although I am the only one of that close circle of friends that is living a heterosexual traditional suburban-mortgaged-to-the-hilt lifestyle, I have also moved away to some degree from traditional manifestations of religion, feeling most comfortable, when I do go to church, in a church which recognizes the need for social justice, which includes openly gay members in the congregation and which supports liberation theology.

In discussing the Church I have digressed somewhat, but it is important to mention because it was such a big part of my life and my friends’ lives that it coloured what happened in school also. Giroux and Simon (1989) have stated,

By ignoring the cultural and social forms that are authorized by youth and simultaneously empower or disempower them, educators risk complicitly silencing and negating their students. This is unwittingly accomplished by refusing to recognize the importance of those sites and social practices outside of schools that actively shape student experiences and through which students often define and construct their sense of identity, politics, and culture (p. 3).

They make this argument in relation to popular culture specifically, but I believe it is true for other aspects of students’ lives also, which is why the impact of the Anglican Church on my life and my friends’ lives needs to be mentioned. However, the religious discourse was not the only one to be important and powerful in our lives. We were certainly not prim and proper. One friend had a brother two years older, which meant that there was a pool of
eligible boyfriends with whom we could begin having parties. These parties had a sexual overtone to them at a very early age. I remember being quite surprised to hear from friends who also attended church and Christian youth groups that they were engaging in sexual intercourse with boyfriends. It was also very much easier in England to drink underage in pubs than it is to gain access to bars underage in Toronto. Therefore, I was drinking in pubs from the time I was twelve, and was regularly drinking in pubs as part of my social life from the time I was fifteen. By the time I was fifteen, I was also involved with my first serious boyfriend, who attended the boy’s Grammar School, and who was from a fairly well to do military family. In looking back on this time of my life from this vantage point I can see that I was being provided with a strange mix of discourses from school, the church and from friends about what it was to be a female and what it was to be an adolescent.

Hudson (1984) has presented an interesting description of the contradictions between the discourses of femininity and adolescence, and the contributions to those discourses made by different professions. “Social workers are generally trying to help girls accept their femininity; teachers are more concerned with ‘managing’ femininity; whereas girls themselves are concerned to be accorded the status ‘feminine’, a judgement which they cannot bestow themselves, but must have confirmed by adults and, of course, by boys” (p. 39). The trouble is that what is being asked of adolescents, which is that they become more independent and begin thinking of a career, when it is asked of girls, does not fit so easily with the contradictory expectations which are to care for others and be gentle and unassertive (p. 42). The discourse of adolescence has been much more traditionally male than female, which can cause confusion for girls. I am unsure if this could still be said to be the case generally. I say this with the backdrop of a seventeen year old girl in British Columbia having been recently found guilty of second-degree murder of a fourteen year old girl. Seven teenaged girls and one teenaged boy beat another teenaged girl. The boy and the one girl have both been found guilty of second-degree murder, because they followed her after the beating as she was trying to escape and they killed her to stop her from “ratting” on them. The newspaper accounts of the beating, killing and trial comment from time to time about how this has shown that not all girls are made of “sugar, and spice and all things nice” (Globe & Mail: April 1, 2000). McRobbie (1999) also reports that currently some feminist journalists “suggest that girls have simply become ‘loutish and ladish,’ . . . where does the
encouragement to act in this way come from and what kind of confidence and enjoyment does it give to girls to have won the freedom to act like boys?” (p. 51).

Looking back at this adolescent stage of schooling at the Grammar School, I see that I was entering into the discourse of femininity without too much trouble, which perhaps would suggest that I was having more trouble with adolescence. I have suggested to friends in the past that I did not go through a rebellious adolescent stage, but rather, due to my particular history with my parents and grandfather, was concerned not to “rock the boat” too much.

The Grammar School, on the other hand, did everything it could to encourage its young ladies to be independent career women. Desjardins (1989) has described the way in which early in the women’s movement the assimilation of male, societally defined attitudes, values, and behaviours was considered to be necessary for equality, while those attitudes, values and behaviours which had been traditionally assigned as female were denied or rejected, even if not consciously (p. 139). She goes on to say that the result of this approach in education was to encourage women to take more math and science courses, to become more involved in competitive athletics and to generally think of themselves as “honorary males” (p. 140). She has quoted from Shakeshaft, indicating, “the interactions between teachers and students reinforce the societal message that females are inferior” and suggesting that “the use of competition as a learning style is a teaching technique that may be less effective for many women” (p. 141). Her arguments ring true for me as I look back to my years in the Grammar School. The school was very much a hierarchical institution, with a Head Mistress who oversaw the operations with an iron fist. She intimidated parents and teachers just as much as the students I think. Some of the teachers were friendlier than others, but we were required to stand and say “Good morning,” whenever a teacher entered the room. Although there were no boys in the school and so we could not have been made to feel inferior in relation to boys in our classes, I believe that the hierarchical structure of the school made the students feel inferior to the teachers. I also believe that the class regime in the school, the fact that those girls who were rewarded for academic achievements were usually of higher class status also, and that those students who wanted to pursue more traditionally female pursuits were considered lower status all contributed to the insecurities of those girls of lower status and of those girls who were interested in the more traditionally feminine pursuits. Languages were stressed, but those girls, like myself, who were not
particularly talented with languages, were expected to take geography or history instead. If a
girl was not achieving good grades in those subjects she was expected to take cooking or
sewing. It is almost as if the more “stupid” we were the more traditionally feminine and
homemaker-prepared we were expected to become. All of us were to take nine ‘O’ Levels in
the Fifth Form, however. Some of the girls left South Wilts at that stage, but most continued
in the Lower and Upper Sixth Forms to study towards three ‘A’ Levels.

Every year a Speech Day was held, when those three students who received the
highest grades in each class were provided with a prize, and there were also additional prizes
for exceptional achievement for ‘O’ Level and ‘A’ Level work. My two closest friends
always received prizes and I never did. Of course, I still had not been taught how to study, or
in fact told that I should study for exams. I do not feel that I actually began studying
properly for assignments, or exams, until I was back in Canada for Grade Thirteen. Mary
Fuller (1995), in a class presentation, discussed the attitude in England which rewards natural
brilliance and talks disparagingly of those students who “just work hard” for their grades. I
think it may have been this attitude that resulted in study habits not being discussed in the
Grammar School. On the other hand, I am sure that my friends who received prizes each
year did study, so it is possible that their primary schools taught them this skill or that their
parents were more involved in encouraging their studying. My friends, however, hated
receiving prizes and were often teased by those “less fortunate” students. I think that this
practice may have been designed to foster competition, but it was not healthy for the sense of
goodwill in the classes, and I wonder now if more of a group approach to learning would
have benefited all of us much more.

Of the ninety-four students who received their ‘A’ Levels in 1979, the Speech Day
programme indicates that only eleven were moving directly into employment rather than
pursuing further education at college or university. I think that the school would consider
itself as having prepared its girls well for independence and a career, rather than “just a job”.
However, in looking over the list of names and where each specific girl was going, it seems
to me now that it was those girls who were considered as lower status who were moving into
employment or to secretarial or art colleges. I am surprised to see how many were planning
to pursue nursing at either college or university, and that some had indicated that they would
be studying speech therapy or physiotherapy. I had not considered any of these professions
when I was at school and I had not even heard of social work as a profession until I had completed my BA and was employed in Toronto. This seems rather strange since I had grown up in England where a great deal of radical social work takes place. I think that social work would not have been presented as an option to me at the Grammar School, because of social work's focus on the poor in that country. The school would not have wanted to change the structure of society fundamentally, but rather would have only wanted girls to be more like boys. Being at this school, combined with having friends I thought of as brilliant contributed to my avoidance of considering the health professions, which is why I am now surprised to see how many girls actually did go into nursing. I thought I should go to university, and looked for something that could have combined my interests in art, math and physics, which suggested architecture as a possibility. However, my grades were such that I would have had trouble being accepted into an English university at that time. I was sick much of the Lower Sixth year and I still was not studying properly. My parents attempted to live together again when I was seventeen and my mother and I returned to Canada. They had attempted to live together in England for a short while. My grandfather had died in his nineties, and my father had moved in with my mother and myself into the house that had been left to my mother. They soon began to argue and I went to stay with Heather and her mother for a while. My father came to see me and accused me of being the cause of the trouble between he and my mother, saying that I should come back home in order for them to be able to stay together. I told him that I was not responsible for their relationship and they could not rely on me keeping them together because I would be leaving them soon for university or college anyway. I have since then always been extremely angered by the thought that anyone is not taking responsibility for their own behaviours and is attempting to manipulate me. They decided to stay together, selling the house that was left to my mother and using the money to buy a townhouse north of Toronto. It went through my mind that I would have liked to have stayed by myself in England, which my mother would not have considered. She looked into the possibility of staying with me in England, but felt we would have a better lifestyle in Canada. Part of me was fairly excited about the possibility of living in or near Toronto, and then was horrified to be welcomed to the "heart of Canada's vegetable market," as the town describes itself on its road sign. It has been suggested that my reaction to this road sign shows the manner in which I was taken in by the class discourse
presented to me in the Grammar School, but although I believe I was taken in by the class
discourse to a certain degree, I do not believe it was behind my reaction to being in the heart
of a vegetable market. I had merely looked forward to greater access to a large city, with
movies, theatres and clubs. As it turns out, I did in fact have greater access to Toronto than I
had to London while living in England, but I was not to know this initially. Having moved
back to Canada, missing Heather and Steve horribly in that first year, I attended the local
High School for Grade Thirteen. Despite adjusting to a new environment again and having
to make new friends, I graduated as an Ontario Scholar from Grade Thirteen, because I could
see, I think, that working hard would be rewarded at this school. My fellow grade thirteen
students were friendly and welcoming, but I did not become especially close to anyone that
year and have not kept in touch with any of them. They had all known one another for so
long, and I was not interested in drug-use as many of them were, so it was actually very kind
of them to be as welcoming as they were. I loved to dance and enjoyed all the “cool” music
so it seemed that I was cool enough to be accepted without having to be a drug user.

Although I graduated with my BA, on the Dean’s list and as a member of the Vanier
Vingt-Deux (one of the top twenty-two from that college), and although I received an open
fellowship and an Ontario Graduate Scholarship when studying for my MSW, and although I
was accepted into a PhD programme for which I had minimal background experience, and
none-the-less have received primarily A grades throughout the programme, received a
Graduate Assistantship position and then another Ontario Graduate Scholarship, I still often
feel stupid and insecure and as if I am “merely working hard.”

Desjardins (1989) says,

Women have been successful - at least they have made high grades - in
higher education perhaps because ‘nice girls’ fulfil other people’s
expectations, especially authority figures, such as teachers and parents.
Energy that could perhaps be spent on learning is often transformed into
efforts to please others. Even when they do make good grades, however,
female students often experience a loss of personal and career confidence
during their college years. Evidently, achievement in our educational
system neither guarantees self-esteem nor generates self-confidence in
women (p. 143).

This certainly appears true for me, and I believe was exacerbated by the attitudes of the
Grammar School, which reinforced attitudes that my father held. I remember when he
looked at one of my report cards, which contained quite a range of grades, he immediately started reprimanding me for a ‘C’ rather than commenting upon a ‘A’. However, even when I do receive good grades, the confidence does not build because the sense of achievement is so transitory and not fundamental to my sense of self. My mother, on the other hand, took a completely different approach, which was to suggest that she just wanted me to be happy, and if that meant I did not study and did not receive high grades that would be fine with her. Although I felt stupid in comparison to my smart friends, they gave me a great deal of reinforcement for my femininity, and often suggested that I was prettier or more graceful. This, at the very least, meant that I felt equal to them in social and leisure activities. Yet I felt that Heather’s mother disapproved of me, since I was not as bright as Heather and because I introduced Heather to the sins of make-up and the shaving of legs!

When I try to think of the popular culture texts with which I engaged during my time at the Grammar School, I remember Heather and I becoming fairly regular consumers of romance books at the local Library. I remember the two of us being driven somewhere by her mother and each of us quietly reading a romance novel. At some point Heather laughed and said it was silly that everything in the book she was reading was being compared to a double bed, with the heroine at that moment reflecting on the disco dance floor being the same size as a double bed, which was causing her heart to flutter no doubt. I think Heather’s ability to critique these books while reading them, was a good model for me, even if it had not previously occurred to me to do so myself. Popular music was important, and the first two albums I bought were David Bowie’s Changes and Mike Oldfield’s Tubular Bells. One friend became a punk rocker, and I would go to the occasional local concert with her, but I don’t think I felt all that comfortable with that. I was more comfortable with the watered down punk that became new wave, and seemed to have more of a focus on fashion: a discourse in itself.

I remember enjoying “Charlie’s Angels” on the television and “The Six Million Dollar Man,” and we were all in awe of the marriage between Farrah Fawcett and the Bionic Man! “Charlie’s Angels” really gave a mixture of discourses and role models to me, as I think of how beautiful each of the women were, how powerful, but yet how controlled by Charlie also. It was miraculous that they could run on those high heels.
Grade Thirteen and University

My experience at the Canadian High School was completely different from that of English Grammar School. It was co-educational and we were not required to wear uniforms, first of all, but, also, there was a much different relationship between students and teachers. We were not required to stand up for teachers, and students seemed to have a much friendlier approach with teachers. They certainly were not frightened of them. I was shocked when I was in university and students felt comfortable with professors, as if they were their equals, and even had the nerve to ask for extensions on the due dates for assignments! I never would have dared, because the bulk of my educational experience contributed to my fear of those people in positions of power over me, and I certainly thought of professors as having a great deal of power. Even as a PhD student when I should have felt more comfortable with professors, I continued to struggle with feeling at ease with them due to their position of power. I often felt as though I was an imposter and they were always on the brink of discovering that I did not belong in the programme.

Acker (1994) describes research findings in which she found that female graduate students were much more likely than male graduate students to blame themselves if work was not going well and were much more prone to considering themselves as lucky rather than truly deserving of success. This is certainly consistent with my insecurities as a graduate student, which appeared to be non-existent in fellow male students. However, having said this, I am also aware of how much more confident I feel in the Canadian educational system, and as a result of the Canadian system, than if I had remained in the English educational system.

Examining my access to various discourses would suggest in some ways I had been set up to be an abused woman. I witnessed violence as a child, I felt intimidated by a powerful father, and I felt insecure of my abilities. I attended a patriarchal and fairly traditional Anglican Church as well as Christian youth groups, which would have suggested that the husband was master of the home. As McRobbie (1981) has described it, at least my "neurotic search for a fella" required nothing more than to "smile at the local heart-throb," and if he had been abusive, my self-esteem could have continued to plummet. Is it nothing but luck that when I began dating more seriously in a Canadian university that I did not pair up with an abuser, or was it that my developing confidence, which was in part due to the
experience in a Canadian Grade Thirteen, protected me? Or was there something in the contradictory discourses with which I engaged and the support of friends which assisted me in staying on guard?

**Relationships**

The women in the study, when asked about where they learned about romance spoke a great deal about their relationships, which I have not done as yet. I think this is because I think the details of my relationships are less important. The point is that I have not been involved in abusive relationships. However, on the other hand, I don’t want it to seem that I am keeping something back that the other women have been willing to discuss.

As I have already mentioned, my first fairly serious relationship occurred when I was fifteen and sixteen. Peter was from a military family and attended the boy’s grammar school. He was 6’ 3” and I loved how tall he was. I felt feminine and almost petite in comparison, which does not happen often since I’m 5’ 7” – a fairly average height for a woman, which does not leave me feeling petite very often. He lived alone in town, in his own flat even though he was only seventeen at the time, due to his family being on a military base near London somewhere. He was a nice person. If anything though I did not think he had quite as handsome a face as I would have liked and I had a feeling that he was not quite as intelligent as I thought a boyfriend should be. He probably struggled with his grades and studying as much as I did, in other words. I met him for lunch on one of my trips back to England when I was twenty-one. He hadn’t gone to university, but had become a police officer in Hong Kong. I had a hard time understanding his very upper class accent. (After moving to Canada, my father commented that my mother had thought I would marry Peter. Although we did enjoy each other’s company, and my moral decision not to engage in sexual intercourse at such an early age was challenged significantly, I was surprised to imagine my mother thinking that I would marry anyone I was dating at such a young age.) When I was seventeen, however, I saw another boy from the same group of friends at the grammar school, whom I had not met before. He had the most handsome face I could possibly imagine at the time, and so I told Peter that I did not want to see him anymore, and instead I dated Mark. I was soon to discover this was a big mistake since Mark bored me to tears despite his handsome face and his interest in studying hard. He was actually more obsessed
with trying to get good grades and go to a good university than I would ever have been or would ever have wanted a boyfriend to be. (My mother did not like Mark, thinking him rather pompous in comparison to Peter's easygoing manner.) So I fairly quickly learned that I would have been happier with Peter but it was too late to do anything about it at that point, and I then started to have a crush on Steve, which was also doomed, since I later found out he was gay. He seemed awfully handsome too though, and was also interested in religious matters, as I was. He was maybe four or five years older than me, rather than the two years older that previous boyfriends had been. He seemed older and sophisticated. It is as if I am also attracted to a certain type of power, but I attempt to ensure it is a safe, non-abusive, non-controlling type of power. Being older is one of those safer types of power in my mind, I guess.

In my first year of university in Canada, I again was initially attracted to Robert because of his looks. We were to become fairly inseparable for those first two years. After my year in grade thirteen, I suppose I was relieved to be with people with similar interests and similar tastes in music and fashion. I ensured that I lived in the college residence that had the reputation of having fine arts and arts students living there and so Robert also fit these expectations – he was a fine arts student, but interested in philosophy. He was bilingual which had always been important for my father, despite my having let him down in that area. He was six feet tall and I felt physically safe with him, but he was not older than me. His birth date was in the same month and year as mine. His family was sophisticated and educated. I was enamoured of his family despite being somewhat intimidated by them. If anything, I think I was probably controlling of Robert and demanding of his time. He ended the relationship saying, of all things, that he was too happy with me and too content and that this got in the way of his creativity. He thought he needed to be a sad lonely struggling artist in order to do real art. After I licked my wounds and my heart seemed to mend we were able to be friends for a while and once, while I was waiting to play squash with him, I was chatting with a young woman who was also complaining about not being understood and I suggested that she and Robert meet. They began dating, and many years later I bumped into them and their two children, in a local garden centre. I was also there with my husband and son, and it was all very suburban and not very struggling-artist. Robert
and I chatted briefly and his wife called for him to hurry, which amused me. My husband, on the other hand didn’t seem concerned, or if he was, was wise enough not to show it!

I met my husband at roughly the same time as meeting Robert. David was residence tutor of the residence in which we lived, and he was also a contract faculty member of the university. He is nine and a half years older than me, and so seemed powerful and worldly wise, which terrified me initially. He took me out to dinner, and I was too scared to have anything to do with him when I was only eighteen and he was twenty-seven, articling for the bar at the time. A lawyer; how impressed my father would be. As it was I felt safe with Robert, and I guess more in control myself. It was only after the end of the relationship with Robert that I felt more comfortable risking a relationship with David. I dated a few different people at the same time I was getting to know David again. David seemed to have a reputation with women, that again worried me, but eventually all these worries about not being able to trust him, seemed rather silly and we began dating. We dated for a couple of years, lived together for a couple of years and only then were brave enough to try marriage. We have now been married for eleven years and have a nine-year-old son. I look at some of the romance novel storylines and can’t help feeling that I have inadvertently fallen into one of their scripts. My romantic hero was older, more educated and worldly wise, and I the sweet and innocent, in comparison, heroine left behind the safer types of romantic interests for the hero. We have lived happily ever after so far. Thankfully, despite what initially might have appeared as a power difference, his interest in academics and his own interest, studying and teaching, legal philosophy on the one hand and film studies on the other, has resulted in him being able to critique social relationships and he has been more than supportive of my academic pursuits. On the surface we may appear like a fairly traditional suburban couple and family, but there is equality in the relationship and a great deal of reflection.

I have previously discussed my own enjoyment of the romance text, and my own attraction to the controlling romantic figure. Perhaps it is the experience of working with abused women, attempting to assist them in deconstructing their own beliefs and attractions, and realizing how easily I also could have been abused in a relationship, which has combined in such a way as to create this interest in the romanticization of abuse.
Although I have discussed how my current subject position sees gender as having made a difference to my educational experience, I have not been able to give an exhaustive overview. It has also been easier said than done to attempt to discover where my position of resistance to the romantic controlling figure developed. Perhaps it was the last remains of a structuralist, and/or developmental stages perspective that would have suggested that I would even have been able to discover a cause. The experience of looking for a cause, however, has further added to my commitment to the poststructuralist suggestion that subjectivity changes with its changing access to various discourses. I am who I am right now, due to the wide range of discourses to which I now have access, and, as I have attempted to indicate, my access to discourses growing up was, although varied, at times contradictory and confusing. And perhaps it is also less important when counselling women to actually determine with them the “cause” of being attracted to controlling men particularly. Perhaps it is rather the process of engaging them in looking at their sites of learning and the competing discourses they have been involved in over time, and are currently involved in, that will ultimately assist them in realizing they have choices. They may then be better able to also effect change in the area of their relationships, and make safer choices. Perhaps this is what empowering them truly means. It is in giving them the tools to critique their desires that they can make their own choices.

Following years of schooling in which I was made to feel incompetent, I continue to strive to first of all ensure I completely understand an academic text, before I feel comfortable enough with the concepts to see any weaknesses or inconsistencies to critique. I am much more likely, if I do not understand the flow of someone’s argument, to assume there are weaknesses in myself rather than in the text. I wish that my educational experiences as a child and adolescent could have encouraged critical thinking. However, as I have alluded, all of the schooling that I have described was hegemonic in nature, since it initially appeared to win my consent to the discourses of femininity and to the power structure inherent within the patriarchy, and thus would not have wanted to encourage a critical stance. It may be this developing ability over time to critique that protects me from being hailed into the discourse of romance and abuse.
Current Popular Cultural Practices

Finally I want to briefly comment upon what I have been reading recently, in addition to academic texts. Having asked the women in the study to reflect upon what they enjoyed reading and watching as children, and how they learned about romantic relationships, they also spent some time talking about what one woman currently enjoys reading and why the other woman is not reading very much. In order to continue to attempt to reflect upon those same questions I presented to the women in my study, and discuss similar issues as those brought up by the women, I will briefly comment on my current reading and viewing practices. These seem to change from time to time as other interests in my life also change. Early on in the thesis writing what I was enjoying reading the most were mystery novels, written by Patricia Cornwell, Elizabeth George and Minnette Walters. In the past I was not at all interested in mysteries and could not understand my mother’s enjoyment of Agatha Christie. What first attracted me to Patricia Cornwell novels was her main character, Kay, around whom she writes a series. Kay is a highly educated single woman, having received both a medical and law degree. She is a medical examiner and forensic pathologist, who, despite gory death scenes and having to conduct detailed autopsies, still loves to cook good food. I think it is the feature of the plot of trying to understand and get to the bottom of something and bring the criminals to justice that was appealing to me at that time. It seemed to parallel my own attempts to understand and get to the bottom of my research problem through this PhD journey. I am also attracted to her independence. Over the course of the last year, Julia Cameron’s The Artist’s Way, was suggested to me many times. It looked initially like a self-help book, so I was resistant to reading it. Then I suddenly had a handful of clients at work, all incest survivors, who told me how much The Artist’s Way, had helped them change their lives and become more creative. One woman told me she had suddenly taken up ballet again after years of being told she couldn’t. This coincided with me having a conversation with a professor on my thesis committee about how to try and get past a writer’s block. He said he had gotten down to writing his thesis by realizing that those students around him who weren’t writing were either having mental break downs or else going through divorces. He said that he had also heard of a woman who overcame her writer’s block by studying writer’s block. So The Artist’s Way, which leads its readers through a twelve-week journey of reconnecting to their creativity, is what held my interest at that point.
Cameron suggests that all children have a natural sense of creativity which generally gets stifled along the way somewhere, so it is necessary to discover what is stifling the creativity currently if it is to be allowed to come out again. She suggests that reading too much is one possible creativity stifler. Certainly when I do become engaged in reading a novel I find it hard to be balanced about it – it can become all-consuming and I don’t want to do anything else until the story is resolved. So for a while I was not allowing myself to read any novels until I was further along with the writing of the thesis.

Radway’s (1991) study of romance readers also points to the manner in which women may use the act of reading as an escape from other obligations. She reports that the women view their romance reading as a “declaration of independence and a way to say to others, ‘This is my time, my space. Now leave me alone’” (p. 213). She examines not only what the women say about their act of reading as escape and independence, but also how their engagement with romance texts may reinforce their positions within heterosexual monogamy and the patriarchy more generally, rather than encouraging any repositioning. However, no matter what type of popular cultural text I read, I do generally experience the act as a move away from caring for others and a chance to be alone, that television, video and film do not provide me. After focusing on my clients’ needs, as well as my husband’s and son’s, I imagine myself maintaining my sanity by withdrawing into the silence of the written imaginary world.

As I move closer to being almost done, I find it difficult to keep going without looking at a novel unrelated to academic study. I have been laughing with Bill Bryson, as he Walk(s) in the Woods, and going back to old favourites, perhaps for the comfort they provide – like chatting with an old friend. More recently I went through a period of enjoying reading Maeve Binchy, enjoying her descriptions, not particularly of love interest, but more of the development of friendships, in Tara Road and Circle of Friends. After reading more of her novels I now become frustrated by the similarities between them. For example, someone usually becomes pregnant out of wedlock, someone wants to move away to Dublin, and there is usually a very handsome dark haired man who cannot be trusted.

My husband and I had been uninterested in seeing the movie Notting Hill, thinking it would merely be a piece of romantic fluff, but finally gave in out of curiosiity, and very much enjoyed it, again not because of the romance between the Julia Roberts and Hugh
Grant characters particularly, but more because of the humourous characters and the strong friendships represented. However, the most romantic scene for me in the movie was when the two main characters find a bench in a park, which has a plaque from a husband commemorating his wife and the place where they had spent so much time together. At my developmental stage in life I suppose I am more encouraged by and interested in the representations of couples aging and remaining happy together, and of circles of good friends rather than of the representation of beginning stages of romantic relationships. It surely cannot be explained away as merely a matter of getting older, however, since my husband’s eighty-year old mother continued to enjoy reading Harlequins, which focus solely on those beginning stages of relationships.

Recently, I have enjoyed the television series, “The Sopranos,” which reminds me of how much I enjoyed “The Godfather” trilogy. There appears to be a romanticization of abuse in these representations, but I think what hooks me is the manner in which these abusive men are not physically abusive to their wives and have been loving and protective of their children and the safety of the home environment. There are, most certainly, contradictory discourses present and I have enjoyed the range of discourses and subject positions offered, particularly enjoying the spunky strength of the main character’s wife.

As soon as this thesis is complete I plan to take a month off to read as many novels as possible, and who knows what will appeal to me then.
Chapter Four

The Telling of Their Stories

If blood will flow when flesh and steel are one
Drying in the colour of the evening sun,
Tomorrow’s rain will wash the stains away
But something in our minds will always stay

Perhaps the final act was meant
To clinch a lifetime’s argument
That nothing comes from violence
And nothing ever could
For all those born beneath an angry star
Lest we forget how fragile we are

On and on the rain will fall
Like tears from a star like tears from a star
On and on the rain will say
How fragile we are how fragile we are


Sting wrote of this song: “In the current climate it’s becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish ‘Democratic Freedom Fighters’ from drug dealing apolitical gangsters or Peace Corp workers from Marxist revolutionaries. Ben Linder, an American engineer was killed in 1987 by the ‘Contras’ as a result of this confusion” (Insert to Nothing Like the Sun). This is not why I quote it, however. I quote it because it makes me cry. It didn’t used to. I’ve always enjoyed the whole album, but this track began to move me to tears when I saw The Living Sea, in which it was used as the major sound track. At that point, it seemed as though the fragility of the oceans was being pointed out. I thought, “in my next life I want to be a marine biologist!” Jesse Cook recently re-recorded this same song, with Holly Cole singing, and their rendition was used in an exercise class I attended. It was a little embarrassing to be moved to tears in an exercise class because of the words of a song. It seemed to sadden me, reminding me of how fragile we are, and how fragile the women whom I counsel, and will be writing about, are, lest we forget.
There is another reason why I quote this song. I put here, at the beginning of my retelling of other women’s stories, a quote from a popular cultural text, to gesture again towards my interest in such texts. This song by Sting has not made me who I am, but rather what interests me is that my negotiation of it has altered over the thirteen years since it was first released. Thirteen years! Thirteen years ago I was working as a counselor in a group home for developmentally delayed adults. I clearly remember driving to work, for a midnight shift, listening to the newly released Sting album. I think I especially liked “Englishman in New York,” at that time, having grown up in England myself. It was simply nice to hear, “I take tea my dear, I like my toast done on one side.” When I lived in England as a child, it seemed to me that people often grilled toast, one side after the other, and many people seemed to only like it done on one side. It felt soggy to me if it was only done on one side. There is sometimes a simple joy in “getting it,” and it was nice to have further memories jostled into consciousness through the words of the song. When I hear of toast being done on one side I can almost re-experience standing in my best friend’s kitchen as a young teen, grilling toast on one side, putting cheese on the other and grilling that. Since the release of this particular album, however, I have returned to Graduate school, graduated with an MSW, begun a career in clinical social work, married, and given birth to a child. I have returned to Graduate School again, begun doctoral research into narrating abused women’s lives, have commented upon the problematics of Sting’s 1983 released “Every Breath You Take,” (Béres: 1999) and have begun to cry when I listen to “Fragile.” When I write about abused women and their engagement with popular cultural texts, I feel the need to clarify again and again that I do not believe that texts have made these women who they are, but I am interested in their meaning-making behaviours, and their negotiation of such texts. I was fifteen years old when The Police released “Roxanne,” and I loved it, but it did not make me consider, one way or the other, putting on the red light. I do not mean by this to undermine the power of popular music, however.

I will write about women who have experienced wife assault. Women who may be considered, by some, as weak: “why don’t they just leave if they are being abused? They must be weak-willed.” When I met with two women who had experienced wife assault, I asked them what they had learned about relationships from their childhood experiences. One answered that she had learned that relationships are “screwed up” (tape of meeting
November 10, 1997). The other said she had learned “abandonment, but also that women are strong and powerful and keep things together and are caretakers” (tape of meeting November 17, 1997).

My plan is not to necessarily present a linear chronological ordering of events in these women’s lives. My plan is to attempt to present a far messier representation of women’s experience, wanting to highlight my belief that the memories, and the retelling of memories, are situated in the present. Clinical social work practice is situated in the present, and in engaging women in retelling their stories, the women are either reinforced in positions of victimhood or are empowered. The 1997-98 academic year saw me involved in a History and Memory project, writing with other academics about the process of attempting to “bind memory, hope and learning,” through the process of writing about Holocaust remembrance, and the Jewish ghetto in Vilna, in particular (Simon, Eppert, Clamen and Béres: upcoming publication). Why remember, or retell, unless there is some specific articulated hope bound to the process? My clinical social work experience was brought to that academic experience and that academic experience has informed my practice. If I do not have hope that remembering and retelling can involve learning and empowerment, I cannot engage women in counselling or in this research process. I begin near the end of the series of taped sessions with the women:

Laura: If I were to speak to other women, who had just recently separated, (from abusive partners) what would you have me say to them so that they could begin to disentangle themselves and stand on guard against going back?

Scarlet: Don’t look back.

Gypsy: I was talking to a friend and it’s really, and she was trying, this stuff about trying to get out and listening to her she said, “Ya, but he wouldn’t have hit me if I hadn’t have yelled back at him,” and I, talk about bells going off in my head, and I said, “What do you mean? You think he has the right to yell at you? Do you think it’s proper that he yells at you?” And she says, “No,” and I said, “Well, why the hell, if he’s yelling at you, do you not have the right to yell back at him?” She was like, “Wow, I guess you’re right,” but I think, I don’t know. You know what?

Laura: Does that ring bells for you guys? Did you, at some point, sort of blame yourself?
Scarlet and Gypsy: Ya, hmm, hmm.

Gypsy: I blame myself all the time.

Laura: But then you realize that if you hadn’t have done one thing to get him into a bad mood, then it would have been something – you know, you over-cooked the potatoes, or there was this or that...

Gypsy: I used to bust my ass for dinners not knowing if he would come home or not and one night I made chicken nuggets with fries was alright and another night it was like, God forbid you put that in front of me. You know what I mean? And then another night I could go all out and make roast beef and potatoes and a vegetable and it was like why didn’t I make chicken nuggets with fries? I could never win, never. And if it wasn’t that it was the kitchen floor – a spot on the kitchen floor. Or the bed wasn’t made properly or something was hanging up wrong.

Laura: And when you realize that you’re not responsible for their temper and their lack of control, that’s the first step of disentangling.

Gypsy: Ya. You have to learn it’s their problem. That’s what I said, “It’s his problem,” but it’s really hard for you to get yourself and step out and look in at them being the one in there – it’s really hard. All the time that I was in there I thought I was doing right. Thought it was normal.

Laura: Once you got out, how did you stand on guard so that you wouldn’t go back?

Gypsy: My meetings, and my self-esteem.

Laura: A support group?

Gypsy: Ya, did me a lot of good.

Scarlet: Oh, ya.

Gypsy: It normalized what we were feeling and that we were normal. You don’t keep blaming yourself. I had my ACOA, (Adult Children of Alcoholics) but something was missing, and it wasn’t strong enough, but it wasn’t covering what I needed. So, definitely, I would recommend the abuse group. I have a lady at work, she’s in the one downtown. Like, I said to the lady, “It’s over. (The group for abused women.) Where do I go now? But luckily, see that’s where I think some people who could really benefit, after twelve weeks, you’re not cured in twelve weeks. It’s a constant battle. There needs to be something like ACOA, but an abuse group where women can go on a weekly basis and whenever, and run
forever, cause that twelve weeks was good. It was great. It was the best thing ever, but I
luckily I have the Internet and I keep going through that and keep reaching out and doing
something, but I could see where others might fall back.

Laura: If you become isolated again, it would be easy to slip back into it.
Gypsy: Ya, we saw two group members slip right back.
Scarlet: One completely disappearing. Cutting off all ties from anyone in the group.
Gypsy: And the second one doing the same thing.
Scarlet: Ya, and that was so bad. I'm expecting to read the papers one day and read
that something happened to her.

Gypsy: I know. Self-esteem is really crucial. Some women just don't have the ...
Scarlet: They just don't have the strength.
Gypsy: And it's a shame. It really is. Sometimes I know I can talk really strong. At
times I was really high on that. Hey, I walked into that place (the group for abused women)
and one week I could walk in in tears and the next week be really high. But, I wish I could
take part of my strength and give to the next woman and say, "You know you can do it." All
I kept on hearing was, "I can't do it. I don't have a job." I thought, "Fuck! I did it with a
part time job."

Scarlet: You know there were a lot of women in the group, who if they could have
read my mind they wouldn't have liked what I had to say. I mean, they really pissed me off.
Gypsy: Ya, actually.
Scarlet: One that dropped out - it was like she came in there and just wanted to talk
her face off, but didn't care about what anybody else had to say to her - take anybody's
advise. And she tried to take up so many sessions on pity on herself. Without a chance for
anybody else. And she's the one that if I could have grabbed something and knocked some
sense into her -literally - hit her in the head and knocked some sense into it, I would have,
'cause I used to sit in my chair sometimes and think, "I'm going to punch you in the head,
you know, and make you see." What the hell?

Gypsy: It's hard.
Laura: And then you end up being just as abusive as the men.
Scarlet: It's just these women, they, they... I know, I don't know, it's almost like what
they're getting they're just asking for.
Gypsy: Ya (tentatively.)
Scarlet: Do you know? It’s bad to feel that way, but if they want to wallow in their pity, and not do anything to get out of the situation then they’re just asking for what they’re getting, because they’re not doing anything to get out of it.
Gypsy: I know it sounds mean what we’re saying.
Scarlet: It sounds mean, but you have to meet with these women . . . You’d feel the way we do.
Laura: No, no, I used to, and I think I sometimes, . . . but it is hard to know how to encourage those women who are stuck and wallowing in self-pity, to move out of that.
Gypsy: Do you want to know something? I’ll tell you something. It doesn’t matter how much you do, how much anyone else does, they have to want to do it themselves.
Scarlet: And I don’t think they wanted to do that.
Laura: Those women, but I’ve counselled women in the past who have wanted to change. They’re working really hard, but then say they are so scared. They say, “I’m so scared I’m going to get attracted to abusers again,” or say, “I’m really trying hard not to go back to him.” Those women, who are really trying hard and not wallowing in self-pity...
Scarlet: Like us (laughing.)
Laura: So you’re advise to them is, “Don’t look back, form a support group.” Would you say, “Get over blaming yourself”?
Gypsy: Oh, God, ya. “Take the blame off yourself. Know that you’re number one.”
Scarlet: And forget about a couple of words: “but” and “what if”. . . You know what it is almost like? Getting off an addiction. It is. It’s like getting off drugs or alcohol. You’ve got to take it one day at a time. It’s an addiction.
Laura: The abusive men too. It’s like they’re bad for you, but you’re hooked on them. It’s a good analogy.
Scarlet: Ya, ’cause when I had the problem with drugs it was like getting off was like one day at a time and getting away from this relationship and stuff is also one day at a time. It’s funny, I never thought to compare it that way before, but . . .
Laura: It’s like a conscious effort has to be made to develop a healthier life style, right? Stop doing drugs and start nurturing yourself. Same could be true for giving up these
abusive relationships. You kind of have to change you’re expectations of what is healthy for you to have in a relationship.

_Gypsy:_ Oh, God, ya. My paper says it all. That pattern – it’s comfortable for me – it’s what I thought was normal.

_Laura:_ It’s familiar.

_Gypsy:_ Ya. That’s where I said the old Gypsy tries to surface, because like it’s comfortable for her. And change scares her, but she knows change is good and she’s always seeing the positive in change, so . . .

(From transcripts of the fifth group meeting between Scarlet, Gypsy and myself, January 19, 1998.)

Scarlet and Gypsy had both recently finished a twelve-week group for women who had experienced wife assault, when they were contacted by their previous group facilitator and asked if they would be interested in forming a small research group with me. I had explained to them that I was using a narrative research and narrative therapy approach to engage them in talking about their life stories with me, so that I could gain a greater understanding of all the possible sites that contribute to abused women’s learning about what to expect in relationships. Gypsy, in the same fifth session quoted from above, described the meetings together this way:

_Gypsy:_ You know, even this is helping. Talking, hashing things out. I even find that a big help.

_Laura:_ I hoped it would be. In some ways it’s like a Phase Two group, just going into things in more detail.

_Scarlet:_ It’s like a continuation for us.

_Gypsy:_ It was really nice that we knew each other already – it would have been okay anyway, but we were all the more comfortable, because we already knew each other, her and I.

_Laura:_ You know what I like about this too is that we’ve talked about things that you wouldn’t ordinarily talk about in therapy sessions – you know, the books that you read and stuff that you would think, “What’s that got to do with overcoming wife assault,” but it does have something to do with it – where you have learned about relationships.
Gypsy: I wouldn’t have been able to write as good thoughts and ideas. Like, I’ve written something for Alanon when I hit my year and it was basically on my past and stuff, but I never come out about the abuse and stuff what went on. None of that came out. I just basically talked about my past and present sort of thing. Well, with this, I finally looked at it and went, ya, I did go through it and admit to it, whereas before, no, he didn’t do that, that was normal. It’s a road that’s been traveled and it’s been good.

Laura: When you get to the point where you think, “I was normalizing that. I was thinking that was normal and now I realize it was abuse,” it helps you stand on guard to not take it next time. “I know to label that abuse. That is not normal.” It helps you to break the pattern.

The paper to which Gypsy makes reference in the transcript of our session together is something that she wrote for inclusion in a poster presentation I took to a Social Work Research for Practice conference in North Miami in January 1998. She wrote:

I would like to thank you for listening and a special thank you to Laura for allowing this opportunity to be heard.

My name is Gypsy and I would like you to know that I have finally put myself into a healthier state of mind. I have now been on my own with my two girls for eight months and it was the best thing I have ever done! It has been a long and hard road, and the rewards have been plenty. Physically, mentally and spiritually.

For sixteen years I was married to a verbally, mentally and sometimes physically abusive man. Did I think what he did to me was wrong? HELL NO!! HE LOVED ME!! It was always MY fault, I made him angry!! WRONG!! It took a long time for me to realize it was not my fault!

I am speaking for the abused Gypsy, who from an early age learned that abuse equals love. (A sick way of thinking, but the only way, as no other was seen throughout her life.) An alcoholic father walking out of her life at an early age of 8, compounds the fear of abandonment. As well as an alcoholic stepfather leaving also. I did something wrong to make these men leave me. I believed I had to try really hard to keep a man. This means that whatever he does is acceptable, and if he gets angry, it is my fault. If he yells at me he cares about me; if he gives me the silent treatment is because I pissed him off. The excuses are endless. And the excuses made to the outside world for his behaviour are ordinary and was part of my everyday routine. I was taught to deal with my alcoholic father, stepfather, and the rest of the world in this manner. Over the years this became so comfortable for me. I fit in perfectly.

I saw so many personality conflicts that he had with friends, and family still it did not sink in that it was HIS problem and not mine.
I was always trying to make things right, but most of all hiding from the truth from the outside world. I mean I did it as a child so just carry on the tradition. WOW, listen to me, I really was unhealthy.

I am thankful that is through ACOA, Woman’s Abuse Group and living, I have learned a healthy way of thinking. I continue to learn every day. My self-esteem has escalated, and I am a somebody, not just someone’s doormat. Some days are harder than others. The old Gypsy tries to surface because it is so comfortable to me. But with my new found knowledge, the inspiration from family and friends the new GYPSY will live on.

Please feel free to visit my home page at:

http://members.wbs.net/homepages/m/y/s/mysticalgypsy/mysticalgypsy.html

Looking at Gypsy’s website recently, I discovered that Gypsy had used this statement that she wrote for inclusion in my poster presentation as her story for those visitors to her website who want to know more about her. It was interesting to see such a tangible result of Gypsy’s involvement in this study.

I have described the setting in which Scarlet, Gypsy and I met in order to represent the position from which we were looking back on their lives in order to construct their narratives. It is clear that their feelings towards other abused women are not altogether simple either. Perhaps women who have already struggled with the separation from an abusive partner may find it harder to be patient with other women in similar situations. I spoke to the facilitator of the group that Gypsy and Scarlet had attended, interested in hearing her impressions of any women in the group who could have been experienced as wallowing in self-pity, as Gypsy and Scarlet described them. The facilitator was able to corroborate that there was a woman in the group who seemed extremely self-pitying who had been very difficult to work with. She said that she had, in fact, needed to be involved in several series of groups before being able to begin to take care of her safety concerns. The self-reflection and learning process takes different lengths of time for different people. As I pointed out to Gypsy and Scarlet in the fifth session, when any of us become frustrated with an abused woman, and feel like “knocking some sense into” an other person, we risk becoming abusive ourselves. If we were to become controlling of the abused woman who is attempting to make sense of her situation, we would inadvertently reinforce what she has already learned about her relationships with people, which is that others control or abuse her, and that she is a
victim. If we can be patient and give the opportunity for ongoing self-reflection, in order to assist with the deconstructing and reconstructing of her life story, she will be supported to challenge the expectations of relationships that she had previously understood as “normal.” I can understand Scarlet’s frustration, however. Sometimes in the past when I worked exclusively with women in abusive relationships I would need to struggle against reacting to particular women who triggered reactions in me of frustration. Since I had witnessed violence first hand myself it was important for me to be aware of any emotions that arose in me that could have been in reaction to my personal memories versus those emotions that could assist in the therapeutic situation. Perhaps Scarlet was being triggered in someway by the woman who appeared to her and the facilitator to be “wallowing.”

I originally planned to present Scarlet and Gypsy’s stories separately. Their stories, however, are somewhat intertwined at this point, due to having narrated their stories in a group setting together. So the telling of their stories will intertwine at times. The presentation of their stories, whether separate or together, is an attempt to provide an example of how each of these two women have negotiated a vast array of representations of romantic relationships, and gender, in their search for happiness and safety.

I have commented in Chapter two about Lather and Smithies (1997) study and their style of writing, which impacted on my writing style. However, I comment about it here again, because it was at this point in the writing of Scarlet and Gypsy’s stories that I began to realize I would need to consider how to write in such a manner as to make the process visible.

Lather and Smithies (Lather: 1994, Lather and Smithies: 1997) have experimented with the use of a split text when writing of their research with women living with HIV/AIDS. This provided them the opportunity to disclose their own reactions to the women and to the research process at the same time, and on the same page, as they wrote more specifically about the women. Lather suggests that this method of writing attempted to deal with issues of validity after poststructuralism, as well as indicated that she and her co-researcher,
Smithies, were situated more as witnesses than as experts "saying what things mean" (p. 3). I prefer not to use a split text, but do not want to edit out my thoughts either, because I believe the ever-moving position from which I attempt to write for/about/with the women should be presented. I am struggling with similar concerns as those described by Lather and Smithies, not wanting to position myself as expert, telling it how it is. By making clear the process of writing, I am attempting to respond to some of those same issues to which Lather responds. I will experiment with the use of a different font style when I wish to represent some of my own thoughts or memories, which are jostled forward in my mind as I write of Scarlet and Gypsy. (I'm going to use the "Comic Sans MS" style when I write my own thoughts, because that strikes me as being comical. "Times New Roman" seems that much more serious for the serious task of attempting to write ethically of the Other.) The reason I am attempting to embed these thoughts into the body of the text and immerse them within Scarlet and Gypsy's stories is due to wanting to make as clear as possible my subjectivity and the position from which I am writing as witness. If I added in these thoughts as footnotes, or as later chapters, they could be positioned in such a way as to imply they are my thoughts as expert reflecting later on what the women said. I am not as worried about the possibility of reviewing theories in later chapters, because my purpose then will be to review the theories with an attitude that looks for how they might assist me in understanding these women's complex lives and whether these theories offer any practice advice. I acknowledge, despite this attempt to highlight my own reactions with a different font, that I have already written at great length of my own memories and thoughts without a change of font. I also, just as
obviously, make choices and interpretations and, therefore, am present within the rest of the telling also.

Names

Scarlet and Gypsy chose the names by which they wished to be known in these stories. As you can see by Gypsy’s home page address, she goes by the name of “Mystical Gypsy” in that location and, therefore, felt that “Gypsy” would be a meaningful name for her in her story. Scarlet, on the other hand, was not sure of the name she would like used, and it was through group discussion about her favorite book, whose heroine was named “Scarlet Rose,” that she agreed to be known as “Scarlet.”

Scarlet (and Gypsy)

Although I begin by focusing on Scarlet’s story, I have placed Gypsy’s name in brackets, because it is difficult, after meeting them together, to cleanly separate the two stories. Gypsy and Scarlet also asked questions of one another and gave one another feedback, thereby influencing what each spoke about.

I met Scarlet for the first time November 3, 1997. She had sounded enthusiastic about being involved in the research project, when I first spoke to her on the phone. This was partly due to being supportive of my motivation behind the study, of wanting to assist abused women, and to improve social work practice with abused women. However, she was also thrilled by the idea of being in another group for abused women, especially one that was free of charge. She cancelled the first appointment that we had set to meet and discuss the research project, because she was trying to sell her condominium privately and had been required to set an appointment to show the condominium to someone. I was worried, therefore, that perhaps she was not as keen to participate as I had thought, and I was unsure if she would keep the second appointment that we had arranged. I need not have worried. She attended all the following meetings punctually and with enthusiasm. I liked her very much, as I did Gypsy, also. I sometimes reflect on how much I like so many of the clients who request counselling from me. It should not be necessary for social
workers to like their clients, in order to be able to provide appropriate counselling services to them. It certainly makes the job that much more enjoyable, and I wonder if social workers are not that much more effective, also, when we are able to see likeable qualities in our clients.

I was at a research presentation where a case study was being provided, with age and physical description, and a fellow student muttered at me that she hated those types of case study descriptions. Even at work, in preparing written records, the social work staff is less likely to include any description of physical appearance, unless it is relevant to the problem that brought the client in for counselling. However, I find it hard not to mention anything about Scarlet’s appearance. She seemed younger than I had expected. She later told me she was thirty-one, but felt like twenty-five. She commented in our first individual meeting that she had not been raised to be a prim and proper little girl, but rather to wear work boots and a leather jacket, which is what she was doing when I met her. In the first meeting, her hair was very long and was a bleached blonde.

Haug et al (1987) provide some interesting discussion of the contributors’ memories of the manipulation and regulation of their femininity. One series of memories they presented was in regards to their mothers attempting to control their hair in certain ways: coping with frizzy hair, the timing of the move from pigtails to a bob or a chignon. Scarlet, also, had vivid memories of the impact of her hair experience on her self-perception and her feelings of desirability. She talked about how much she had always thought that long hair was synonymous with female beauty and desirability. As proof of this thought, she recounted a time when she was a young child when there had been a problem with head lice in her school, and due to a lack of alternatives, as far as she remembered, she and her sister had both had to have their long hair cut extremely short. She remembered being taunted, the day after her hair had been cut, by her “little boyfriend,” who thought she now looked like a boy. By the time I met with Scarlet and Gypsy on March 26, 1998, Scarlet had had her hair cut to a chin length bob, and it was a mahogany/auburn colour. She was still wearing work boots and a leather jacket, but was, otherwise, looking more sophisticated, at the risk of using such a blatantly subjective judgment. She had previously complained about prejudicial treatment in job interviews, especially in relation to her being a single mother. This change in
appearance coincided with Scarlet beginning a full time office job, which may have influenced her appearance, or she may have changed her appearance to increase her chances of being offered the job in the first place. By chance, I happened to see Scarlet February 4, 1999, and I did not recognize her immediately. She smiled and said hello to me, and I gazed at her in a puzzled way, thinking how familiar her face was, and she had to tell me her name. Her hair was shorter still and blonde again, swept behind her ears. She looked quite glamorous to my way of thinking and I told her I had been writing her story, and wondering if her looks had changed again, and she joked about my needing to do some editing then.

When I first met Scarlet she had only been separated from her husband for a year. She was living with her parents, with her eighteen-month old son. Her husband had visitation with their son on Saturdays, and the only way that Scarlet and he were to communicate was via a book that was sent back and forth with their son, and through their lawyers. There were two charges laid against him: one for assault and one for uttering threats, both of which were heard in January 1998.

Is it not possible that we sometimes see what we look for? Heaton (1988) says that the "Freudian finds Oedipal themes, the Kleinian the presence or absence of the depressive position, the Jungian various stages of individuation, and so on. Psychotherapy, wherever it looks, only finds itself: a form of violence to the Other" (p. 6). Since I have not wanted to only look for, and tell of myself, in the narration of the lives of women who have experienced wife assault, I have worried, because even in not wanting to do violence again, I know that I cannot leave behind everything I know in approaching a relation with Scarlet and Gypsy, and in introducing their lives to readers. I hope that by sufficient amount of self-disclosure I will be able to represent something of the distance between myself and Scarlet and Gypsy, because, if I did not, I might unintentionally reduce them to my sameness. On the other hand, I worry that I am telling too much of myself and that I am overshadowing the women's
stories, when it was my concern for practice with abused women that brought me to this research in the first place.

There is a political and ethical stand that I am taking when I choose to attempt to write a messy representation of Scarlet and Gypsy’s lives. I hope to incorporate some of the distance across which there has been a "saying" as well as a "said." Simon and Eppert (1997) take up Levinas’ distinctions between the "saying" and the "said". They say,

The "saying" of testimony signifies expressly in an ethical transaction in which one is seized by the "face" of the other in a performative moment of testimony and compelled to a responsibility for that other. It requires an attentiveness that can only be accomplished by greeting the embodied call to witness with a binding allegiance: "here I am." Here I am to learn and attempt to exceed the limits of my knowledge. In my approach as apprentice, I submit myself to learn the limits of myself and in doing so bare myself to a wounding; a trauma inflicted by the other’s story. To learn the limits of what I am able and need to say as a witness and try and respond to what lies beyond what is thematized by what I already know, my task is to acknowledge and remember you, while not always speaking about your testimony but to your testimony. I must accomplish this task while being open to the way my structures of knowing cause me to stumble and fall short of what needs to be said but cannot (p. 181).

However, I admit that there is so often a tendency to look for themes, which can then do injustice and violence to the Other. Themes that are found may tell you more about my preoccupations than about the Other. I have found recently, in the project with which I was involved regarding Holocaust Remembrance, that it is often in the holding together of uneasily held together details that we have a greater chance of truly honouring the alterity of the Other’s experience, while at the same time learning about our own, not
unproblematic, process of engaging with the Other (Simon, Eppert, Clamen and Beres: upcoming publication).

It is possible to look at the details of Scarlet’s life and find a pattern, or theme, of how she developed into the type of young woman who would be attracted to controlling, domineering and potentially abusive men. It is also possible to look at the details and see how she developed into an assertive woman who was able to disentangle herself from an abusive relationship and begin to deconstruct, and reconstruct, her understandings of romantic relationships. It is possible to provide a variety of details: glimpses into her memory of her life. These may be uneasily held together, because they at times may seem contradictory. However uncomfortable I am with themes, I also find a pattern in Scarlet’s memories and stories of her preoccupation with appearance and a belief in certain characteristics coinciding with appearance. There also seems to be a similar theme within the stories with which she engaged regarding romantic love being able to overcome problems.

Scarlet said that one of the earliest stories she remembers is that of how her parents met and fell in love, and she felt that was one of the first contributions to her notion of romantic love. Having told me the story, she then double checked the story with her mother, and found that she had not remembered a few of the details correctly, and her mother put her “right.” However, for the purposes of understanding the development of Scarlet’s belief in the power of heterosexual romantic love, what Scarlet remembered of the story, that she had kept with her over time, is actually of more interest, than what “truly” happened as recounted by Scarlet’s mother. (In fact, there were only minor differences.) Scarlet described how she had understood that her parents had been introduced to one another by her father’s sister, and that her mum and dad had fallen in love immediately. This was despite her mother being “no beauty at the time,” because she had recently been scarred in an explosion. Her dad had loved her mum for the person she was, and had overlooked the scar, as far as Scarlet understood. Her mother had then been required to return to Europe and her dad thought she was never coming back, so he found someone else to marry. She said she thought that her dad’s sister had invited her mum to his wedding to the other woman. When he saw Scarlet’s mum at the wedding, he realized that he could not love another woman, and he left his wife after a week of marriage in order to be with Scartlet’s mother. Despite it taking seven years
for her dad’s divorce to be finalized, Scarlet’s parents lived together and Scarlet and her sister were both born before their parents were married. She said she had grown up with this story, which she found extremely romantic. The fact that they never thought they would see each other ever again, but that their love conquered all, was wonderful in her eyes. At the same time, however, Scarlet says that her mum has to put up with “crap.” She says that her dad always starts to drink as soon as he comes into the house, and that her mum gets fed up with the “shit.” However, she says that since her mum is fifty-one; eight years younger than Scarlet’s dad, and they have been together since she was eighteen, she won’t ever leave. Scarlet says that when she has asked her mum about it, her mum says that she has just learned how to let things go in one ear and out the other, and not let them bother her.

Scarlet reported that she read a romance novel everyday of the summer she was sixteen. She said this was because her parents had forbidden her to see her boyfriend that summer and so she lost herself in the romance of the books, imagining she was the heroine, and he the hero. She said that she and her boyfriend had dated for about three years and he had been her first true love. She reported that she found it funny, because her two abusive partners had been blonde, that this first true love had had dark hair, and wasn’t much taller than she had been, but he had been wonderful to her. As evidence of how wonderful he had been to her she explained an incident when the father of a child she had been babysitting attempted to sexually assault her. She said the father had encouraged her to drink beer with him and then, while driving her home, had parked the car, and attempted the assault. She reported having felt humiliated and ashamed by this experience, but able to disclose it to her boyfriend, who then encouraged her to tell her parents. From her position in the present, looking back at this memory, the fact that he had supported her seemed so out of ordinary in comparison with later experiences with abusive partners.

The reason her parents forbade Scarlet to see her boyfriend the summer that she was sixteen, was, she understood now, due to their plans to move the following year to another province. Despite the limitation set by her parents, she reported that they had managed to sneak another year together anyway. She said that her parents later had explained to her that they did not want Scarlet to become overly close to her boyfriend, prior to the move, because they had thought it would make the move that much more difficult for her. She has regrets about their decision about this, believing that things might have been different for her other
wise. She says that, at the time, they tried to convince her that he was bad for her, and this has been very confusing for her, because, in fact, the relationship she had with him, in retrospect, has been the only positive relationship she has ever experienced. She seemingly implied that her parents confused her as to what was healthy and what was not healthy in a relationship, through their labeling of this good relationship as bad. She said that the last time she had seen him, she had become involved with drugs and had become very tough, and although she had been excited that he had grown taller than her, and that he had their names written all over the inside of his car at the time, he had been disgusted by her drug-related violent behaviour. Although she realizes that she is a different person again now, having given up her drug habit, and although she has heard through mutual acquaintances that he still remembers her and speaks of her fondly, she is very shy about ever contacting him again.

As well as reading a romance novel every day of the summer she was sixteen she said she also loved the movies *Grease* and *Saturday Night Fever*. The possible meaning she could take from these popular cultural texts is similar to the meaning she reported having taken from her parents' love story. She said that what she loved about the romance novels, which is true of the story line within these two movies she mentioned also, was that despite something coming between the heroine and hero, they were always able to overcome the obstacles on their path towards true love. She said, though, that in some ways the music from the movies had more of an impact on her than the movies themselves. She and her friends would receive the soundtracks as gifts, and they would go to dances too, and whenever they listened to the music they would be reminded of the romance of the movies. Slow songs would remind her of being with her boyfriend also, she said.

When Scarlet spoke of having read a Harlequin romance every day of the summer holidays, I asked if she ever read any of the Teen Harlequins, and if she had read any of these romances in school. As discussed in Chapter Two, Michael Apple, in an introduction to *Becoming a Woman through Romance* (Christian-Smith: 1990) has said teen romances have recently become more frequently included as part of the high school curriculum, especially for those girls who are not overly interested in reading. He says, "Generally seen as high interest/low ability books, they are often used as reading material for those girls . . . who need to be 'kept interested' in the reading process" (p. xi). Scarlet reported that she had not
been given any to read at school, but rather had been expected to read things like *A Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, *Clash of the Titans*, and *Shane*. She said now she’s been able to see *Shane* as a movie. She said she hadn’t enjoyed reading the books provided at school, feeling she hadn’t been able to “get into” them, but once she had seen the movie of *Shane* she had a change of heart about the book and felt she should have given the book more of a chance. She expressed feeling it is hard, when reading a book before you see a movie, to really imagine what things are like, if you don’t understand. It was interesting for me to hear this particular thought, since I am more accustomed to hearing friends and colleagues complaining about movies not having met their expectations, following enjoyment of the book. I suppose that the difference here is that Scarlet had had difficulty understanding and enjoying the book, so she had no expectations of the movie. Having seen the movie she was then able to have more of an open mind regarding the possibility that it had been a good book.

I asked Scarlet if she saw any pattern in her relationships, which mirrored those in her parents’ story and within the Harlequins, *Grease*, and *Saturday Night Fever*. She had agreed that there was a similarity in all of those stories, since they all involved different types of people falling in love and overcoming obstacles. The obstacles, which had been thrown in her way with her first boyfriend, she hadn’t been able to be overcome, since she had been still young enough that she was required to move with her parents. She said though, that the first love experience had heightened her expectations for any future boyfriends. She said she had wanted someone like him, even resembling the way he looked. This led to a discussion regarding how badly her visit back had been when she had been twenty-one, and involved in drugs and her first boyfriend had been so disillusioned by her. Without having discussed the relationships with the two abusers, we talked about the contradictions inherent within the details of her having been so involved in cadets at one time, being a “good girl,” following rules, and then addicted to cocaine, at a later period in her life. She agreed that her cocaine use and addiction did not fit into the expected behaviours of a “good girl.” Perhaps from an Adlerian point of view this should not be too much of a surprise. Adler would suggest that those “perfect” young children need to rebel in some way or another at some point. Later on, Scarlet told me that her favourite books
currently are vampire romances in which she says the hero turns the heroine into a vampire, with the message being, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em," which perhaps is another example of a "good girl" needing to rebel.

Scarlet said that she had never had that many girl friends when she was a child, but rather thought of her sister as her best friend and the two of them "hung out" with the guys. Despite the fact that school hadn't been very important to her and her sister, she said they were the first two in their whole family to ever graduate from high school, and so their parents had been very proud of them. Their father had been a boxer, and he wanted his girls to be able to take care of themselves. Scarlet had taken karate for a little while, receiving her yellow belt. What she had most enjoyed was being involved in Air Cadets and Flags. She had been involved in Air Cadets from the time she was fourteen until eighteen, and was a corporal at one time. She was the only female in Air Cadets to be trained to give rifle demonstrations. She was the best, she remembered. She was disciplined in Cadets and in Flags, winning third place in a Flags competition, but she "goofed off" in school, she said. One of her female friends joined cadets also for a short while, but Scarlet remembered her not being able to manage the discipline of it and she dropped out. If we could stop the memories and take a snap shot of Scarlet at sixteen, some interesting and contradictory details would be provided; reading a romance everyday in the summer, disciplined in Cadets and Flags, not caring about school. She, in fact, did bring in a photo of herself in her Air Cadets uniform, saying how embarrassing it was because she thought she looked like a boy with her short hair.

Scarlet's explanation of how she moved from rule-follower to addict had to do with the effects of her first abusive relationship. Her family had moved to another province and she said she had started dating someone, who over the course of the relationship had become abusive. She said he had not been physically abusive. She then said, however, that he had been mentally abusive, had fractured her nose and that charges had been laid against him for threatening her. Despite saying he had not been physically abusive, the fact that he fractured her nose would indicate he had been physically abusive. Both Scarlet and Gypsy understood emotional and verbal abuse to be as serious as physical abuse. A previous client of mine once said that bruises went away but the scars from
emotional and verbal abuse stayed much longer. I think Scarlet and Gypsy would have agreed. Scarlet went on to say the court case dragged on for over a year and, meanwhile, her former boyfriend stalked her and harassed her. She said that garbage she would put out would often be moved onto the front lawn and set on fire. She would receive crank calls and lots of hang-ups. At the same time, during this year, she had made a friend with a girl whose boyfriend was a drug dealer. She and the friend worked together at the same warehouse store and anytime they wanted they would take a washroom break and use coke and that would take her mind off the troubles with court. She said that she felt as though she had been in hell with all the difficulties with the abusive boyfriend and the court process and the coke put an invisible shield around her. She said it was great at the time, using it everyday for six months. She said she hadn’t eaten though, because she had no appetite, and her weight dropped from 140lbs to 105lbs, which is common for addicts. Despite living at home with her parents, they had not suspected drug use and Scarlet thinks they just thought she wanted to lose weight. She said she never has admitted to any doctors that she was ever addicted to cocaine. It started to become frightening when she began to spit up blood and she knew things had gone too far. She had no strength because she hadn’t been eating and she described being in bed for three weeks, although her mother took her to the hospital now and again during that time. She thinks she had a stroke during that period, but she never told anyone in the hospital, nor her family doctor, about the cocaine use, so they did not have access to all the information when diagnosing the possibility of Scarlet having experienced a stroke. She remembers being adamant about not wanting any counselling to kick the habit. She felt that she was a strong enough person, and that if she had gotten herself into it she was just going to have to get herself out of it too. (This seems to be what she thought of her abusive relationships too.) She has been clean from drugs for ten years now, and her only addiction now is to cigarettes she says. After she had kicked the habit she figured her first, kind, boyfriend would have moved on with his life and she then met her abusive ex-husband on the re-bound from the abusive dating relationship.

When recounting the beginning stages of her relationship with her ex-husband she explained it in such a way as to highlight a similarity with her parents’ love story again. She said that she had just had surgery on her hand when she and her ex-husband first met, but despite the scar, he was still willing to pick her up, take her out, introduce her to his friends,
pay for drinks and the meal and even buy her a rose. She pointed out that this had been the only time he had ever bought her flowers. She said this first date had indicated to her that he was completely different from her previous abusive boyfriend. It was like her parent’s love story, in that he overlooked the scar and seemed to love her for herself. She said there was no violence until after they were married. At first she was so pleased to be with someone with whom everything appeared to be going smoothly, but it slowly dawned on her that he was always just doing what he wanted to do. She said that what had attracted her to him had been the fact that he had looked identical to the previous abusive man she had been with. She had just hoped that he would be completely different personality-wise. She couldn’t remember anything she had initially liked about his personality. However, she said she had been nervous about introducing him to her family, because she figured they would all point out the similarity in appearance to her first ex-partner, and she thought they would give her a difficult time about that. Despite recounting, at this point, the dream she had had of marrying someone with blonde hair and blue eyes, she then said she now won’t look at anyone who looks like that and figures she needs someone with dark hair. At another point, she did say that she would look for character traits and it would be important if she ever dates again that the person she dates gets along well with her son. At a later meeting, I pointed out to Scarlet that this seemed to me to be a focus on appearance, but she argued that it was appropriate for her to want to be attracted to a partner’s appearance. I agreed that attraction to one another was an important part of a love relationship, but my concerns had more to do with the emphasis on appearance in place of a concern about character traits and/or the assumption that a certain appearance would guarantee a certain type of personality. I am not altogether sure that she fully understood my point.

What came out at the end of the first group meeting was that Scarlet now loves to read Ann Rice novels, which she says thrill her, and Vampire Romances, which are her special babies, she says. She is fascinated by the supernatural: ghost stories, angels and vampires. She watched Interview with a Vampire five or six times, but thinks that these books make her feel more than the film versions could. She enjoyed Bram Stoker’s Dracula, although she did not really think of it as a romance since Dracula died at the end. When asked what sort of message she took from these books she said that despite the heroes being beasts and being controlling, they are still loving and give what they can. (This could be
seen as being true of the Beauty and the Beast storyline also, which I discussed in Chapter One.) She said that on her videotape version of Interview with a Vampire, there is an introduction by Ann Rice, who says that her books are not merely based on vampires, but are based on real life today. Scarlet believes that the message in these books is that if you get a man who is a beast, the only way to understand him is to play his game too; “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.”

Did this attitude help her escape the abusive marriage? Having been encouraged by her father to look after herself, and having spent time in the Air Cadets, as foils to the typical romantic heroine in the romance text, was she able to access that “tougher” side of herself and learn how to play the same game as her husband? She described him as having started going out with his friends more and more, gambling and letting debts build up. They had bought a condominium, only with the help of her mother as co-owner and guarantor of the mortgage. When Scarlet realized that not only was he abusive, but he was also not pulling his weight financially, she decided to allow debts to build up, so that they would be forced to rent out the condo and move in with her parents. Then, one day while he was at work, she packed up all his belongings, put them on the front lawn and had the police come so that they would be there when he arrived home and was told to take his things and leave. She said she hadn’t been able to leave the abusive relationship over night, but, with planning, she had been able to arrange it so that she was safely in her parents’ home when she asked him to leave. Especially after her first experience of attempting to leave an abusive relationship over night, but, with planning, she had been able to ensure her safety and her son’s safety. She explained that following the sale of the condo, her mother would receive the money owing her, Scarlet would be able to pay off some of her debts, and even if there was not very much left, she would, at least, be able to start again.

Gypsy (and Scarlet)

Gypsy seemed very enthusiastic about being involved in this project. She telephoned me the day after her previous social worker had spoken to her about the research. She wanted to start as soon as possible, and I felt badly about the delay in meeting, while I negotiated for a space in which to meet with them and tried to find a time that would
accommodate as many women as possible. I had initially planned to have three or four women involved in this research project. I spoke to two other women on the phone, in addition to Scarlet and Gypsy, but one of the women lived the other side of the city and we could not find a location that was convenient for her. The other woman I spoke to, and met with in an individual session, decided she had too much stress in her life, working as a supply teacher, crossing picket lines during a strike and worrying about the safety of another abused woman who was a friend in crisis. A fifth woman was contacted and she was interested and supportive of the project, but was too busy with her own consulting business and unable to commit the time to meet with us. Scarlet and Gypsy were so forth coming with the details of their lives that it seems fortuitous that I met with only the two of them. I might not have had the time to write more than two stories, and present more than the texts that they indicated as having been significant.

The first time I met with Gypsy, individually, she warned me that she was feeling somewhat distracted because she had found out on the weekend that her father-in-law had just died, and she was still feeling sad about it. She said she had been separated for six months, although she had almost separated four years ago, but had begged him to stay at the last minute. She and her thirteen and fifteen year old daughters had left and moved into an apartment, and she had supported the three of them on part-time employment as a medical secretary. She said that a court case had just finished which had been dealing with her ex-husband’s physical abuse of the daughters. He had only just been granted visitation rights and he had had them visit him for the first time on the weekend that had just passed. She had received a phone call from him at 3 a.m. Sunday morning asking her to come and pick up the girls, because he had just found out his father had died. She had been upset too. When she arrived at his place at 6 a.m. he yelled at her about how long it had taken her to get there. She said it just felt so typical. She wasn’t scared of him, and is sure that she won’t go back to him.
Gypsy presented herself as a “go-getter.” She has her own home page and chat room for abused women on the Internet. She noticed books on my bookcase regarding survivors of sexual abuse and she commented on how difficult she found reading such books, so I asked her if she was a sexual abuse survivor. She said she was. She had not received counselling in regard to the sexual abuse she experienced as a child, but felt that her involvement in Al-Anon and ACOA (Adult Children of Alcoholics) helped her considerably and prompted her to confront the perpetrator of the abuse. When she spoke to him, she said he had asked her if it was a private conversation or if he should contact his lawyer, which she found validating and made her think she wasn’t going crazy after all. She thought that perhaps her experience of childhood sexual abuse had contributed to the tendency she had had to normalize the abuse in the marriage. She said that her husband’s mother had also told her to “let things go” in the marriage, which had also normalized the abuse. What had slowly opened her eyes to the fact that she was living in an abusive relationship had been her friends’ surprise regarding the treatment with which she was “putting up.” That helped her realize that his treatment of her wasn’t “normal” as far as the rest of the world was possibly concerned, even if it was all too normal and to be expected for her. When I met her, she was working in two part-time jobs, supporting herself and her daughters, and taking Al-Anon and ACOA leadership training courses.

The first scheduled group meeting was to involve three women, as well as myself. It was to have included Scarlet, Gypsy and the woman who decided at the last moment that she had too much stress in her life to be able to commit to attending the meetings. Although Scarlet and Gypsy saw their involvement as being potentially of benefit to others since it was to involve the writing of their stories for my thesis, they also saw the potential benefit for themselves of being involved in a further group. The other woman had indicated a certain hesitation about being in the group and wanted to try to get on in life without having to think about past abuse anymore so had not seen any benefit for herself from being involved in the group. Gypsy did not phone to say she would not be attending the first session, so I was worried when she did not attend. Since she had seemed so enthusiastic, I phoned her the
following day to make sure she was okay and to find out why she hadn't made it to the meeting. She said she was very grateful for my having reached out, and implied that due to some problems that had arisen she had been unable to attend, or they had made her forget about the meeting. Despite having missed the first session, she attended all the following meetings and actively participated.

When asked to speak about what she had learned about relationships from her family, Gypsy said she had learned that they are "all screwed up," because her family is all screwed up. She said, with some trepidation it seemed, that her mother was pregnant with her when her parents married. Scarlet laughed, attempting to reassure Gypsy by saying that she had beaten her, because Scarlet's parents hadn't gotten married until she was at least seven years old. Gypsy said she had a younger brother and sister, but that her parents separated when she was eight years old. She said that her mother and siblings and she all lived with her mother's parents for what felt like the longest time, and her grandmother seemed to keep Gypsy's mother "in-line." However, her mother then moved in with a younger man, who was only seven years older than Gypsy. He and her mother had two more sons, the first of whom was born when Gypsy was thirteen. She said she was the live-in babysitter, and was always expected to come straight home from school to keep an eye on her siblings. It was this stepfather whom Gypsy described as having sexually abused her. She said that he expected them all to sleep together and would not permit her to wear nightclothes, and would fondle her as they all lay in bed together. She also said that he had them have showers together. Although she remembered being uncomfortable with these experiences at the time, she said it had only been very recently that she had begun to realize that they were sexual abuse. She said it was when she was a member of the group for abused women that she received feedback from the other group members and group facilitators that just because the abuse had not included intercourse did not mean it was not sexual abuse. She had seemed to believe that sexual intercourse initiated by a father upon his daughter was the only activity that would be considered incest or childhood sexual abuse. Since her father had not sexually abused her, and since there had not been intercourse involved in her abuse, she had not thought of herself as having been sexually abused as a child.

Both Gypsy's father and stepfather were alcoholics, and she said that her mother entered two more relationships with alcoholics following the break-up of the relationship
with Gypsy’s first stepfather. She said her father remarried and had three more children, so in total she has two siblings and five half-siblings. She did not meet her father’s second family until very recently.

Gypsy felt strongly that what she had learned from watching these relationships was “abandonment.” She said she had felt abandoned by both her own father and then her stepfather, but also she made a conscious decision that she would not fall into the same pattern her mother had fallen into of having relationships with alcoholics. In fact, Gypsy’s ex-husband was not an alcoholic. Her mother’s partners had all been controlling and abusive alcoholics, whose moods controlled the household, and she decided that as long as she made sure she did not marry an alcoholic she would be safe. Abused women who are with partners who are alcoholic, as well as abusive, seem, as Gypsy did as a child, to blame the alcohol for the abuse and believe that if only the man would stop drinking then the abuse would also stop. Gypsy said that she had also learned that women are strong and powerful and keep things together; are caretakers. She watched her mother and saw her mother running the household, but despite being able to cope on her own, her mother seemed to also want to have a man around. Although Gypsy’s violent husband had not been alcoholic she said she only recently recognized that he had the same controlling traits as the alcoholics she had known. Because he had not been alcoholic, she had thought she would be safe with him. She had learned that men’s attitudes towards women are naturally controlling and that she should expect that. She said she had always thought, “they loved you more, the more they yelled at you.” She said that the only kind of love she had experienced as a child was an abusive kind of love so she had figured “he loves me, so that’s okay – he can do that.” She added, “it’s strange how you think” (tape of group session November 17, 1998). Scarlet said she understood what Gypsy was talking about because she had felt a similar way. Gypsy went on to explain that she felt more uncomfortable when there was no abuse or control and wondered, at those times, what she had done wrong. Scarlet and Gypsy both indicated that abuse, in some ways, was understood as being proof that their partners were concerned about them. We discussed jealousy in these terms also. I pointed out that I have heard women in counselling sometimes convince themselves that jealousy is okay and proves that the jealous person loves them. However, the
abuser can use jealousy as another tactic of control, controlling how the woman dresses, where she goes, to whom she speaks. Gypsy also said that she might start wondering why someone wasn’t jealous, and try and make him jealous.

Asking Gypsy about how much of an impact friends and boyfriends had had on the development of her notion of romantic love, she pointed out that her best-friend’s father was also an alcoholic. She said they moved “so many damn times,” staring a new school almost every six months, that it was hard to make friends and she said this continued to add to her fears of abandonment. When Gypsy heard of Scarlet’s feelings about being ugly due to her hair being cut, Gypsy said she had also felt very self-conscious about her appearance, but primarily due to the early development of her breasts. She said she had been teased about the fact that she must have been stuffing her bra. Mind you, she said, she had never been popular and felt more of a loner, going at her own pace. She remembered always being good at academic school work, getting A’s most of the time, but having to go straight home after school in order to help look after her siblings and other things around the house. So she wouldn’t have been able to just hang out with friends anyway.

Gypsy said she had heard that her parents had met on a double date to a drive-in movie, and that they had been forced to marry due to her mother being pregnant. She said she understood that her grandmother’s husband had been in the army. She did not think either story was very romantic and all she had learned was that men control women and it’s not so great.

Gypsy said she still loves her first boyfriend, just as Scarlet still loves her first boyfriend. She knows he’s married, but wishes that she could just bump into him one day. She said they had been together from the time she was 16 until 19. She said he had been completely different from anyone else, because he was like a “rescuer.” He treated her well, said he loved her and they did things together. She said she just knew she loved him, and she didn’t have to think about it the way she had had to think about whether or not she loved her husband. She said she had convinced herself that love would grow between her and her husband. This reminds me of the study (Chambliss et al: 1992) that investigated abused women’s attitudes toward love and marriage, and found that the
majority of the women seemed not to feel "in love" with their partners, but rather felt for various reasons that they just had to stay in the relationship.

Gypsy then went on to talk about her second boyfriend, whom she said she had also loved. She said they had both treated her as their equal, and they and her husband had all been good providers. She told Scarlet and me of how she had written a poem for her second boyfriend, and she had told him that if they ever stopped seeing each other then she wanted the poem back. Everything had been going very well, she said, until he joined the army. She said she couldn't cope with not seeing him enough. One weekend, she remembered, she was a "real bitch" to him, as if she were purposefully working on getting that poem back, she said. Then, "sure enough," he brought the poem back to her, but she said it had been okay, because she had not wanted to be with someone who was going to be away a lot. Ironically, she reported her husband had been out of town a great deal, and she ended up so much more like her mother than she had ever wanted, raising her kids alone the bulk of the time. She had trusted her husband and then four years prior to our meeting he had broken that trust she believed, because she believed he had had an affair. Despite the verbal and emotional abuse having always been present in their marriage, she begged him to stay in the marriage four years ago. She said her friends would ask her how she could put up with the things he would say to her, but she would argue that he hadn't actually meant anything bad by it. During the period in which she felt she had been trying to hang on to something in the marriage that she had begun to realize was not really there anymore, they both began to start "raging against each other," and the first assault charges were laid against him. She said they had tried to stay together and sort out their problems and she had begun attending Al-Anon groups, and began to observe healthier people and healthier relationships. She started to realize that none of her friends ever wanted to come and visit her if her husband was going to be present. She slowly began to realize there was something wrong with the way in which she was being treated. This was somewhat different from Scarlet's experience, Scarlet pointed out, because Scarlet said her friends were all in bad relationships too. Perhaps the only good relationship Scarlet ever witnessed was the one between her sister and her husband.

Scarlet said she read a great many romance novels during the time she was in her abusive marriage, just in order to try and escape, which is consistent with Radway's (1991) study of romance readers. Gypsy, at this point, said she did not really like romances and
preferred mysteries, which may also provide escape and an expected outcome. However, she said, the books she had enjoyed most had been V.C. Andrews' *Flowers in the Attic* and *Petals in the Wind*. Scarlet asked her how she could possibly read those books when they were so obviously about sexual abuse and incest. Gypsy said she had never really thought about that. The more Scarlet pointed out that that was all those books were about, the more surprised Gypsy seemed to become. In the following group session Gypsy reported that she had talked to friends of hers during the week and had asked if they had realized that that was what V.C. Andrews’ books were about, and they all seemed to imply to her that of course they had known that. She said that she had not read those particular books in a long time—since way before she had realized that she had been sexually abused herself, and she reiterated again that she did not like Harlequins. She said that at the time of having to sleep with her mother and stepfather and having to have showers with him, she had felt ashamed and uncomfortable with his behaviours towards her. She said she had asked her mother about it, and her mother had told her that it was normal. She said she still carries around shame because of those experiences and can’t figure out why her mother let it happen. Gypsy realized, having had the incest in the V.C Andrews’ books pointed out to her, that she might have been reading them at that time because she could relate to them. She realized that the abuse portrayed in the books was similar to what she had been experiencing at home at the time and was being told was normal. The incestuous behaviour in the book then would have seemed normal, but also contributed to normalizing this uncomfortable shame producing behaviour she was experiencing at home with her step-father, of which she was attempting to make meaning. Gypsy said she still has anger towards her mother for not having protected her from her stepfather. She said that she hates being hugged by either her mother or grandmother and hates it when her mum tells her that she loves her. She says she wants to say, “Fuck off,” whenever her mother says anything about loving her, since her love hadn’t been enough to protect her. The ambivalence towards the mother in this book would also have mirrored Gypsy’s confused feelings towards her own mother.

As Gypsy talked again about not having liked Harlequins, Scarlet said that she had boxes and boxes of hard cover Double Day type romances, by “actual authors.” Gypsy said she liked Stephen King, “The Bobsy Twins,” “Nancy Drew” and “The Hardy Boys.” They both reported enjoying *The Hardy Boys* on television. As Gypsy talked of the sexual abuse,
Scarlet described a male cousin of hers always trying to make her have sex with him, when she was much younger. She said she had also had a female cousin who had always wanted to play house with Scarlet, when Scarlet was eleven or twelve. Her cousin would want to be the male of the house and try and have sex with Scarlet, lying on top of her. Scarlet said that had made her feel “really weird,” because that wasn’t what “playing house” meant to her.

Scarlet talked about dreams she had had in the past. They seemed to underscore her interest in the supernatural. She said there is exactly twenty years between her great-grandmother and her grandmother, twenty years between her grandmother and her mother and then between her mother and herself. She said that in one of her dreams, she, her mum and her grandmother were all in a yellow van, going over a cliff into the water and drowning in the water. She said that she had first had this dream about five years ago and when she told her mother about it, her mother told her she had been having exactly the same dream. After that she stopped having the dream, but she had just told her father about the dream, and he reminded her that they had driven a yellow van the summer that they went on holiday to Prince Edward Island. He reminded her that he had been trying to teach Scarlet’s mother how to drive the van that summer, but it had a standard transmission and she had difficulty managing. He reminded Scarlet of how at one point the van had started rolling back towards a cliff, while Scarlet stood outside watching this all happen. At this point Scarlet also told her dad about a man she continues to dream about – “a big burly guy with blonde hair, though he seemed to be ‘good thing’ in the dreams, with a beautiful face.” She said that she always dreams about him at a certain house, and a fairground. She said that her father’s response to this was to tell her that the man she is dreaming about is her Aunt’s husband. Scarlet and the Aunt look identical to one another, according to accounts reported to Scarlet, and the husband thought that Scarlet was his wife reincarnated. Her dad felt that the man must have had a powerful influence on Scarlet if she was still remembering someone she had met when she was younger than two years of age. She said that she had pointed out to her parents that she could only remember bad times from her childhood and so her parents had been trying to help her remember happier times. They reminded her of going on holiday and eating shrimp, but then she could remember at the same time there was an “idiot” at the same campground, who had been out shooting. She said that for every good situation they came up with she could remember something bad that had happened within the same situation.
They reminded her of taking her to Centre Island and on the pony rides and train there, but she said she had not wanted to go on the pony and she had cried on the train. She said it made her feel negative and she wondered why.

I asked both Scarlet and Gypsy whether they felt therapy influenced this negativity possibly. I pointed out that people tend to seek counselling in order to feel better, but when therapists start digging away at the “bad/sad stuff,” there is a danger of inadvertently developing a focus on the negative. Scarlet felt she had been this way before therapy though. Scarlet said she can remember details of all kinds of bad things, which made Gypsy wonder whether or not Scarlet’s parents had not always been so positive themselves in the past, and might have been more negative, giving little praise to Scarlet when she was a child.

This moved the conversation on to self-help books, which Gypsy said she loves to read. She said she likes books on zodiacs and dreams too. She said she used to order books about sex through the mail. She bought a book about women’s pleasure at one time, which, when her husband found it, made him think she thought he was doing something wrong, and she said that made her feel all kinds of shame again.

Gypsy then started talking about the movies she had enjoyed. She said she had very much liked Rocky Horror Picture Show, and had loved the soundtrack, but now said she felt it was really stupid.

As I catch myself reporting that Gypsy now thinks that Rocky Horror Picture Show is stupid, I can’t help but think of Turnbull’s discussion of the “discourse of disapproval.” As she has said, “it is all very well for academics and intellectuals to talk about pleasure and resistance, but are these terms available for people, especially women . . .?” (Turnbull: 1994, p. 6). She would suggest that a discourse of disapproval is much more readily available to Gypsy to describe her reaction to enjoying a popular cultural text, than a discourse of pleasure and resistance. When I re-watch Grease now, as I have done recently, since Scarlet and Gypsy both mentioned enjoying it as teens, I can thoroughly enjoy it. I can experience pleasure from the ‘fun’ of the songs and dancing, even as I resist the gender stereotyping. As a non-academic, without access to
such discourses, without having reflected on "complicit pleasure" (Bennet: 1986), it would have been more difficult to enjoy Grease, or at least, to have admitted to enjoying it.

Gypsy then went on to say that she very much enjoyed war movies. She said she especially had enjoyed Bridge over the River Kwai. She said she thought she liked the type of war movie in which the men come back at the end of them, since she felt she was struggling with abandonment issues, and she thought she must find the men’s return very hopeful. She also liked Good Morning Vietnam. She said she hadn’t liked romance movies, much, but it seems to me that the gender expectations that can be learned from, or negotiated within, war movies are fairly rigid and consistent with those within romances; the men are pretty macho. She said she hated Monty Python movies. She likes religious movies like The Ten Commandments, and loves watching Rudolph and Children’s Christmas shows. Now she likes Pretty Woman, saying she could watch that over and over again. Scarlet and Gypsy both agreed that Pretty Woman was a good old Cinderella story, but as I write this I realize that the Richard Gere character comes back for Julia Roberts at the end. Perhaps that “coming back/home” was what appealed to Gypsy so much again. It is also interesting that although she said she did not like romance movies, Pretty Woman is fairly romantic. She also very much liked Bridges Over Madison County, saying again how she liked the man coming home at the end, but again it was a real tear-jerking romance. She liked Dying Young, and hated Forrest Gump, with a passion. She said Forrest Gump really irked her; she thought, “it was shit.” The portrayal of sexual abuse of a neighbourhood girl was fairly clearly referred to in Forrest Gump: could that have made her uncomfortable and made her reaction to it so vehement?

I asked both Gypsy and Scarlet about what they thought of movies that portrayed abused women. They had liked Sleeping with the Enemy, in which Julia Roberts plays an abused woman who escapes from her abusive husband, who then comes to find her in her new life/persona, but he is killed. They both said they had found it difficult watching The Burning Bed, with Farrah Fawcet. Gypsy said she would flinch and jump when watching it, not only having experienced wife assault but having witnessed it as a child also. She said she felt the pain again. Scarlet said she didn’t like watching these movies because they make her angry. She wants the women to get up and hit back. They had both watched It’s Not Always
Happy in My House, in the Abused Women's group. It's Not Always Happy in My House is a half-hour film that depicts wife assault and the process of going to a shelter. It has been used often within therapeutic groups for women who have experienced wife assault. Gypsy and Scarlet both agreed that it seemed to represent their experiences more accurately than the Hollywood movies. Again they said that they switched back and forth, while watching it, from relating to the children in the film, and being worried for the children, and then relating to the women.

Since my last research/group meeting with Scarlet and Gypsy I have seen Gary Oldman's Nil by Mouth. It represents a family in which there is quite horrific wife abuse. It is an English production, set in England and representing a very particular type of poverty and violence. In a team meeting at work recently, a colleague was discussing a client, who, when he moved to a Metropolitan Housing Project from the North Of England, thought he had arrived in a very lovely place. The social worker was flabbergasted and realized that she had a limited impression of what life in England must be like. Nil by Mouth is set in one of those not so nice areas, and there is a significant amount of drug and alcohol abuse represented. The depiction of the wife, following a severe beating, is graphic: not at all Hollywood-like. The daughter is shown witnessing the beating. The woman was pregnant at the time of the beating and she loses the pregnancy and she leaves her husband. There are several scenes of stalking and harassment, and near the end of the film he finds her, but she tells him that she deserves better treatment, and she deserves a better life. What a relief. She goes out with her mother, her grandmother, her daughter and her aunt and the aunt's husband that night to celebrate her birthday. They encourage the grandmother to get up on stage in the bar and sing, which she does. She sings a song about having to love your man. The next scene shows the couple reunited. The extended family is with them in the kitchen as they
talk about going to visit another family member who is in jail. The cycle continues and I was left with a heaviness of heart for weeks following viewing the film. It represented my counselling experiences that had urged me to begin this whole research project in the first place. Abused women leave, but they go back. How can they be empowered to reflect upon the construction of their desire, so as to stay firm in their expectations for a better life and better treatment from their partners? Having witnessed wife assault as a child, I was perhaps most emotionally moved by the scene where the little girl sat on the steps listening to the beating of her mother, and watched as her father paced back and forth, telling her to get on back to bed. It seemed to trigger in me feelings of vulnerability, as I remembered a similar incident, which were then difficult to put aside. I found myself reacting with a greater degree of emotion to various situations at work than I would normally have done. I would be interested in how Gypsy and Scarlet would react to the film, but I do not want to suggest that they watch it. I showed a clip of the film to social work staff at work, in a presentation that I was asked to make regarding my research. I only showed the singing in the bar at the end of the movie, followed by her return to the matrimonial home. A fellow social worker asked about watching the whole movie, and having warned her about how graphic it was, and how long the effects of having watched it stayed with me, she decided not to watch it just yet.

I have also recently completed reading Black and Blue (Qindlen: 1998). It represents an abused woman’s attempt to relocate with her son, in order to protect herself from on-going abuse, but particularly in order to ensure that her son does not begin to believe that his father’s treatment of her is “normal and permissible.” The book represents the narrative of an abused woman in an
understanding manner, showing some of the confusion women experience as the person they love begins to abuse them.

Gypsy mentioned that in between group meetings one week, she went to the bookstore and looked at books that she had read in the past. She had read all the books by V.C. Andrews, and she said she liked John Grisham, but she said that even though she still enjoys them, she hasn’t actually read anything in a long time, “because once you get on the Net . . .” (tape of meeting November 24, 1998). She said she had become addicted to the Internet. She says that whenever her children are given a school project, she goes onto the Internet for them right away to find information for them. Scarlet talked about having gone onto the Internet quite a bit in the past too. She said she used to have an American Online Microsoft network and she gradually realized that her husband had an addiction to the Net. She said she had been able to follow his tracks on the Net and find out which X-rated sites he had visited. She found that he had been e-mailing women and teens, who were e-mailing nude photos of themselves back to him. She said she had known so much more about computers than him, and on Windows 95 he had not realized that he had not completely deleted certain things, which she was then able to discover. Gypsy said she had found that her ex-husband had also been visiting certain sites on the Net: “Big This” and “Big That,” as she described them. She said she went in to have a look too, out of curiosity. Both Gypsy and Scarlet described their experiences in chat rooms also, finding that the world is quite a small place. Scarlet had discovered that she had been chatting on-line with her next door neighbour, and Gypsy discovered that a cross-dresser that she had been interested in questioning on-line, attended the same bowling alley to which she took her daughter. When they realized that they would probably see one another at the bowling alley he had to ask her to please not expose his cross-dressing to his wife. Scarlet and Gypsy both found this extremely amusing.

When I asked Gypsy and Scarlet if they thought I had missed anything in regards to my attempt to broaden our understanding of where they had learned about relationships, besides family, friends and boyfriends, Gypsy mentioned general societal trends. She explained that by “general societal trends” she meant certain pressures she had experienced at school and from the Church. She said she had been brought up Catholic and she felt that she had learned from the Catholic Church that she should not get divorced.
Recently, when facilitating a Separation and Divorce group, my supervisor provided me with a quote from the canon law of the Catholic Church,

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament. (Codex luris Canonici, can. 1055.)

He explained that this formalized a change in the Catholic Church's expectation of marriage, moving it away from being merely a contract between two people, but raising the standard, whereby it would not be considered a marriage in the Church's eyes unless it was good for each spouse and unless it was considered by the spouses to be as a covenant. He explained that a contract specified rights and obligations between two people, but that a covenant, like the covenant between God and Israel, consisted of more than just rights and responsibilities but also assumed a sealed and loving relationship. This canon law also is a standard against which marriages are considered when spouses request an annulment from the Church. If some Catholics complain about the increase in the number of annulments being given it is because there is a high expectation of marriages within the Catholic Church.

Gypsy said she also felt ashamed, as a child, to come from a split family, since she did not want classmates to know that she was from a split home. She realized that it was far less difficult for children now, but she felt terrible about it. She did not want others to know that her father wasn't around. Her mum had had to work hard and she had rarely been able to attend school functions, and Gypsy had been ashamed that her mum had not seemed to be there for her. She said it had taken her a long time to figure out that it was happiness she needed more than social approval regarding being in an intact family. She suggested that this way of thinking had contributed to her putting up with "a lot of shit," just because she wanted her children to have a dad, because she had not had a father involved in her childhood. She
realized she had been trying to live through her children’s lives, and since she and her husband have separated her children have appeared to be much happier. She said they had visited their father the previous weekend, and had come back home saying, “he was back to his usual shit.”

Although Scarlet said that her father had not been present a great deal, because he had been a “trucker on the road,” she had felt quite differently about it than Gypsy had. She said that as she grew up she saw her mum raising her and her sister without help from Scarlet’s father. She also knew that her grandmother did not have a husband. She believed that women were strong and did not need men in their lives. She said it was only quite recently that she discovered that her grandmother had been a lesbian and that her Grandmother’s female roommate had actually been her partner. She said she had learned that women are strong and can do anything and don’t need men. Gypsy said that thought had been there too in her mind, but it was the social stigma in the classroom that had been so difficult for her. Scarlet said she had not experienced that type of social stigma that Gypsy was talking about, because her first major boyfriend only had a mum too. His mother had had an abusive boyfriend, so Scarlet said she figured that even her boyfriend’s mother would have been better off without a man in her life too. Scarlet said that by the time she was sixteen she had already thought that “if you had a man, fine, but if you didn’t, never mind.” I told Gypsy and Scarlet of a feminist saying that had amused me when I was thirteen or so: A Woman without a Man is like a Fish without a Bicycle. I remember the saying being on buttons/badges that could be pinned to a lapel. The lapels of our school uniform blazers could become quite cluttered with various bits and pieces like that.

Although Gypsy said she could understand what Scarlet was talking about, she felt she had followed in her mother’s footsteps much more closely; having lived as though it did not matter how bad the guy was, you were better off as long as there was a guy in your life. And, as described previously, despite not wanting to marry an alcoholic, she had married a man with all the same behaviours of her mother’s alcoholic partners, despite not having been an alcoholic himself. Scarlet said that despite not having wanted to marry anyone that would be like her father had been early in his marriage, she also had married someone who was
similar to how her mother described her father as having been. Scarlet’s understanding of what her father had been like seemed to have come from what her mother had told her about his gambling and partying, rather than from her own experience of him as a child. She reported that her mother had said that after Scarlet’s father she would never bother with another man – “to hell with them.” She said that contributed to her thought that she does not really need a man. She said she heard this from her mum growing up, as well as more recently.

I pointed out to Scarlet and Gypsy that, despite developing an attitude regarding not needing a man in their life, they would continue to be pressured through songs and movies, to believe that unless they were in a romantic heterosexual relationship they did not really have a life. It’s possible to have as a thought, “Who needs a man?” but yet there is subtle pressure. Even in advertising, Gypsy pointed out, things are couple oriented, and going to a movie or to dinner is easier as a couple. Scarlet said that it wasn’t as bad as it used to be and she goes out dancing at a bar where they don’t play any slow songs, and that way she doesn’t have to worry about having to watch all those couples “bunching up” during slow songs. I wondered, therefore, how Scarlet managed to maneuver her way through romance texts, even vampire romances, given the fact that a couple is highlighted in a romance. She was initially resistant to analyzing her reading behaviour in the present. This seems similar to difficulties Radway (1991) experienced with the women in her study. She reports that each time she attempted to have them engage in a discussion of why they enjoyed romance texts they were much more inclined to discuss either their reading as an act of escape (p. 7), or they would focus on the specifics of which plots/storylines they enjoyed most (p. 77). It was just as difficult in these six meetings with Scarlet and Gypsy to engage them in analysis of aspects of the texts. Scarlet said she convinces herself that the vampire romances are not real, despite having previously pointed out that Ann Rice says that Vampire texts are based on elements of real life. She said she convinces herself that she is not reading a regular romance when she reads a vampire romance, telling herself it’s another world and is not based on anything in real life. This appeared to be a rationalization for Scarlet, enabling
her to differentiate her enjoyment of Vampire romance texts, as if she was
defending her reading of them by pointing out the manner in which they are
different from plain romances that she would not read. There was something
about the manner in which she said this that suggested she was not merely
rationalizing her enjoyment for my benefit, but for herself also. She said she just
thinks that she is reading a good book and it does not have to point to real life at all. At this
point Gypsy asked Scarlet if she was angry. Scarlet said she was. Gypsy pointed out that
when she started the Abused Women's group she would get angry as other women talked
about loneliness, wondering “what the hell they were talking about,” and Scarlet remembered
that that had made her angry too. Gypsy pointed out that she was beginning to feel the
loneliness now, though, and, despite not wanting to go back to her ex-husband, she had
begun to think it would be nice to be in a relationship, especially as the Christmas season
approached. She wondered whether Scarlet’s anger was perhaps necessary at this point,
keeping her going, but that she might change her mind about the possibility of relationships
in the future. Gypsy pointed this out very gently and tentatively, saying she wasn’t sure at all
about this, but just wondered. Scarlet seemed to listen and accept that Gypsy might be right.
Gypsy pointed out, as an example, that despite good support groups and friends, she thought
she could do with a hug from a man now and again. Scarlet told her that she knew what she
was saying, but just did not feel she was at that point yet. Scarlet said that it was, “pretty bad
when the most gorgeous drop-dead guy could walk right past and (she) wouldn’t pay any
attention. If someone noticed (her, she) would say, ‘What are you looking at?’” Having to
focus on the needs of her young child right now means she is holding herself in, she thought.
Whereas, Gypsy felt, having older children, she was in a position of feeling she would have
more time to consider a relationship. Gypsy believed that the state of her self-esteem at any
point impacted on how interested she was in having a romantic relationship. When she’s up
on a cloud, feeling good about herself, she said, a relationship was less important, but when
she starts feeling depressed, she felt that was when she was more likely to fall into her old
habits.

Having mentioned the effect of Christmas upon Gypsy, with her wishing more at that
time, than at other times, to be in a relationship, I asked if there were any other times of the
year that were difficult, wondering about Valentines Day in particular. Surprisingly to me, both Gypsy and Scarlet indicated that New Year’s Eve was always the most difficult holiday to get through, and was the time they would most miss being in a couple. They both felt that Valentine’s day was a “money racket,” although Gypsy mentioned that previously, she had found it difficult to work in an office where others had flowers delivered to them and she did not. Gypsy also mentioned at this point, how disappointing Christmas had always been with her husband. She said he had never been as interested in Christmas as she was and would usually ask her on Christmas Eve what she would like for Christmas, she would answer “Oscar de la Rente” perfume, and that’s what she would get. She would never get a surprise. She said also that out of sixteen Christmases together they had maybe not fought on two. The last Christmas they had still been married he was out of the country visiting his relatives, and she put the house up for sale and she and her children went to Gypsy’s sister’s home for Christmas. She said they had a beautiful day together. She had become accustomed to Christmas being “shitty,” with fights about whose parents’ house to go to for Christmas. She said that she and her children were putting a lot of effort into making their first Christmas following the separation as nice as possible. They had just recently bought their Christmas tree and they were buying new ornaments to make a fresh start. She said the only thing sad about it was that her father-in-law had just died, but they would make it special for themselves.

Scarlet said that the first Christmas she had been separated from her husband had not gone too badly, primarily because her son had only been seven months old at the time, they had not developed a separation agreement, and so, she had kept him with her the whole time. This second Christmas following the separation had been a little more worrisome, now that their son was a little older and her ex-husband had visitation rights. Despite the restraining order, Scarlet had taken her son for his visit with her ex-husband, knowing that he would come down from the apartment with his mother to pick up his son from Scarlet. At that time, she had taken the initiative and said to him that they should save themselves the money required in involving their lawyers and just agree that he could have their son from 10-1 on Boxing Day, and that was it, “take it or leave it.” He had said, “Sure, great, thanks a lot,” so Scarlet had felt relieved. So she knew she would have a great Christmas, but knew that she would be sitting up with her Mum New Year’s Eve, drinking ginger ale to toast the New
Year, and that she would miss being in a couple at that time. Gypsy agreed with Scarlet. They felt that Christmas was great with their kids, but couples spend New Year’s together. They both felt that even your closest friends would not invite you as a single person to a New Year’s Eve party. They only ever have couples there. Scarlet said she didn’t think it was that the friends were worried about the single person going after someone else’s date, but that they might be worried that the single person would feel left out. I asked if she thought that was truly the case, and she said she would rather be given the chance to see how it felt, because maybe there would be other singles there and she wouldn’t feel left out. This reminded me of an occasion when a married friend had indicated how tenuous marriage felt when she became aware of other couples separating and divorcing. I pointed out to Scarlet and Gypsy the possibility that single people sometimes make couples aware of the fact that couples do separate, and that nothing is guaranteed. Scarlet said though that it is difficult to know what to talk about at a party sometimes, because people ask, “Are you married?” “Were you?” She said that they don’t want to hear your sorrows. I pointed out that there is actually more to both Gypsy and Scarlet than whether or not they are in a romantic relationship. They have full lives separate from whether or not they are married.

I asked Gypsy and Scarlet about who they are, separate from what they think about relationships. Gypsy wondered about the effect of birth order, suggesting that because she had been the oldest child in her family, she had developed into more of a caretaker than she might have otherwise. She said she had taken beatings for her younger siblings, lied for them and generally covered up for them to protect them from raging alcoholics in the home. She said she developed the ability to “look you in the eye and say ‘I’m okay,’ but I’m not okay” (tape of meeting, November 24, 1997). It would have been better for her if she had learned how to not put up with such difficulties. When she was younger she remembered her stepfather holding knives to her mother and Gypsy would jump in between the two of them to try and protect her mother. She asked that he kill her if he was going to kill anyone. She said that her ex-husband, when he heard of memories like this, had thought she was from a “lulu farm.” She said that he could not believe that her mother had put up with behaviour like that, which Gypsy found ironic since he did not know everything she had had to put up with, and then he put her through similar abuse himself. She said that her ex-husband had said he would “fucking kill” Gypsy’s brother-in-law if it was true that he was abusing
Gypsy’s sister. Gypsy said that when he said that she just looked at him, because it seemed so strange that he seemed to think it was okay that he treated Gypsy the way he did but no one else should treat anyone that way. She said she was so accustomed to violence, verbal abuse and emotional abuse that if someone was not treating her in those abusive sorts of ways she truly wondered what was wrong. I pointed out that if parents treat children in an abusive manner; these two people who are meant to love you, then a child may begin to expect everyone who loves her to treat her in similar ways. (This is a similar thought to that discussed by Henton (1983), and presented by Chambliss et al (1992).) Then at the same time, if the child/adult reads Harlequins or Vampire Romances, or watches soap operas in which the romantic heroes are quite controlling, then all the ideas that are formed regarding the behaviours associated with love are reinforced, but need to be deconstructed and unlearned. If someone really loves me then perhaps he would respect me, think of my needs, negotiate, but that kind of relationship is not romanticized in popular culture so often. Equality is not romanticized. It is not sexy. Gypsy agreed and said that when you don’t see that, you begin to think that is not normal, and she would be likely to think of someone who treated her in that way as a “geek.” Gypsy pointed out that she did not necessarily agree with all the messages she had subtly been taught over the years, but then ended up in an abusive relationship anyway. She said she tried to avoid it but still ended up doing it. She said, “You go wide around the corners, just take a wide turn, but end up in the same place you were trying to avoid.”

I asked if Scarlet and Gypsy were worried about ending up in abusive relationships again, or whether they could spot the signs now. Gypsy said she feels a little more confident, and was able to realize someone wasn’t being respectful when he telephoned her and started complaining right away about the difficulty he had had getting through on her “damn line,” asking her if her kids were on the phone all the time. “Whoa,” she thought. However, she said she had been seeing someone who seemed to be offering a 50-50 relationship, who didn’t get jealous if she wanted an evening out with her friends, but she admitted to finding the lack of jealousy a bit strange. She said she was also apt to blame herself for any difficulties that arise.

Scarlet said though, to her, too nice just was not normal. As an example of what she meant by “too nice,” she said that if a boyfriend told her it was okay for her to go out with
her friends she would wonder, "Okay, are you screwing around on me, or what?" She said there are too many things in the back of her mind and if he bought her something, she would wonder what he wanted or what he had done. Nice and equal is one thing, she said, but it does not last, and she would be thinking that his true colours would only come out in a matter of time. She said she cannot even see herself in a relationship for a long time, but could hypothetically imagine in ten years, if we were to meet, she might say she was dating now and again. She said she has seen too many bad apples. She said that in the past she has considered a year a long time to be in a relationship with anyone. If she were ever to be with someone for three years with no abuse, she would still think, "Well, it just hasn't happened yet. I've beaten the record, but it will still come eventually." This seemed to imply that Scarlet was continuing, at this point, to feel angry about relationships, as Gypsy had pointed out to her, and to which Scarlet had agreed. Should we be worried about self-fulfilling prophecies?

I have not presented an exhaustive description of Scarlet and Gypsy's lives, but I believe I have given enough varied details to suggest some of their meaning-making behaviours and the subject positions from which they have attempted to make meaning of popular cultural texts that interested them. There is not a very great overlap in the types of texts they enjoyed. Scarlet could not bring herself to re-read a V.C. Andrews' book, and Gypsy could not interest herself in Scarlet's favourite Vampire Romance. However, they both enjoyed *Grease* and *Saturday Night Fever*.

In the next chapter I present a description of Scarlets' favorite Vampire Romance text: *Dark Rapture* and the V.C. Andrews' text, *Flowers in the Attic*, which Gypsy had enjoyed as a teen. I present these discussions in such a way as to point out Scarlet and Gypsy's negotiation of the texts and also to demonstrate the manner in which I chose to further examine issue of hope in the following chapter. I also discuss other texts that they mentioned enjoying, which present similar themes to those within their favourite texts.
Chapter Five

The Texts Scarlet and Gypsy Enjoyed

Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, with the stories that we dream or imagine or would like to tell. All these stories are reworked in that story of our own lives which we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semiconscious, virtually uninterrupted monologue. We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions, anticipating the outcomes of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed. We explain our actions in terms of plots, and often no other form of explanation can produce sensible statements. Narrative competence appears at about the age of three, when we are able to recognize narratives and to judge how well formed they are. We can translate and recognize the same plot as it appears in various media. Narrative appears to be a subset of the general language code that we use to summarize and retransmit stories into other words and other languages (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 160).

Purpose of Chapter

As discussed in chapter two, I contemplated taking this chapter out all together, or moving it into an appendix. However, I have decided to leave the chapter here as an attempt to make each step of the research process as visible as possible. Through describing Scarlet and Gypsy’s favourite texts in detail I will be highlighting an emergent aspect of this study and the manner in which I chose to focus on issues of hope in the following chapter. Through the process of immersing myself in these texts I was able to enter into an aspect of Scarlet and Gypsy’s meaning-making lives. As social workers, we can not move into our clients’ homes and experience their day to day difficulties, but at the very least we might be able to glimpse an aspect of their lives by a willingness to take the time to look at their favourite movies and television programmes and to read a favourite book. This may not always be
necessary if the social worker is already familiar with the particular favourite texts mentioned by clients.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a more detailed description of the narratives present in the texts Scarlet and Gypsy enjoyed. This has been done with particular emphasis being given to attempting to understand their possible negotiation of the plots in these texts, and their meaning-making behaviours, rather than attempting to provide an objective or structural deconstruction of the texts.

Radway (1991) discusses the manner in which the romance readers she interviewed focused on presenting plot summaries whenever she asked them about their favourite romance texts. She describes them as able to articulate three important aspects, however; “the personality of the heroine, the character of the hero, and the particular manner in which the hero pursues and wins the affections of the heroine” (p. 77). She remarks that she was struck by the manner in which the women appeared to remember particular favourite books due to the heroine. When discussing either their favourite books or favourite heroines the women’s descriptions were always linked to the plot. Radway says, “when specific titles were volunteered to illustrate a point, they were always linked with a capsule plot summary beginning with a statement about the heroine and continuing with the principal events of what was, to the speaker, her tale” (p. 77). As an example of this she quotes from “a lengthy and exuberant discussion,” which occurred after she asked the women to describe an “ideal” romantic heroine. “Rather than list a series of abstract traits as others generally did, these women launched into a fifteen-minute communally produced plot summary” (p. 79).

Again, describing the women’s discussion of plot, Radway states, “although the women almost never remembered the names of principal characters, they could recite in surprising detail not only what had happened to them but also how they had ‘managed to cope with troublesome situations’” (p. 201).

Radway’s reported experience with her research reminds me of my experience with women in therapy. When they discuss their engagement with popular cultural texts they are most likely to discuss what they believe they can learn from the plot regarding how to behave or react to others in their life. It is due to these experiences with the women in my practice, further corroborated by Radway’s (1991) research, that I have chosen, when engaging with, and discussing, Scarlet and Gypsy’s favourite texts to attempt to focus on understanding their
engagement with the texts, which is much more concerned with plot than a typical feminist academic reading would be. Since my focus in this study was to improve practice with abused women I focussed more on attempting to understand the experience of the women first in order to then assess what I needed to understand more fully. It was only through the re-telling of the plots in this way that I came to realize I would need to further explore issues of hope for the women. I do not believe that I would have come to this professional practice awareness if I had brought more traditionally academic analysis skills to the task.

I acknowledge that in re-telling the plots I am making decisions that are not merely to do with the women’s engagement, but also point to my particular concerns about their possible negotiation and how eventually I might bring that to bear in professional practice.

One interesting point regarding the stories that Scarlet and Gypsy reported enjoying is the manner in which themes can be seen to repeatedly play themselves out within these narratives. There is a certain consistency of subject matter within the stories that their parents told them, stories that they have told themselves about their families and themselves, stories and films that they enjoyed growing up and in the popular cultural texts with which they engage in the present. The practice problem facing social workers who are attempting to effect change in the women’s self-perceptions and expectations of relationships is enormous, and unlikely to have a positive outcome, unless we recognize the multiple learning sites these women have encountered.

**Scarlet’s Favourite Storylines**

Keeping in mind the story Scarlet reported of how her parents fell in love, which she says has always been meaningful to her, she then described reading a Harlequin romance every day of the summer she was sixteen. Then she said she loved *Grease* and *Saturday Night Fever*, and would listen to the sound tracks and imagine the romance of the films: two people dancing together, falling in love, overcoming obstacles to be together. She then described the beginning stages of her relationship with her ex-husband, saying that he overlooked the fact that she had a scar on her hand at the time that they first began dating. She said that “despite the scar,” he took her out, bought her dinner and drinks, and even bought her a rose.
Scarlet loves to read Vampire Romances now, and enjoys watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on television. She says she likes the message that they portray, which she thinks is “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em!” (The heroes turn the heroines into vampires.) What is important for practice concerns is that I engage with the meanings the women have taken from these texts, even if this is not what an academic reading would suggest about those same texts. Interestingly, Scarlet said of *Dark Rapture*, one of her favourite books, which she leant to me, that there was no sex in it. However, it has many sex scenes in it, and when I read some of them aloud in one of the last group sessions she had to admit that they did sound like sex scenes, and she joked about having to read it again. For example, Scarlet did not remember there having been a sex scene involved with the vampire-hero, Sebastian, turning the heroine, Scarlet Rose, into a vampire, but I re-read this following scene to her.

Her breasts quivered and rose in anticipation of his masterful mouth as he hovered excruciatingly close to them . . . Slowly his tongue journeyed down her stomach until he came upon her moist delicate garden that ached for his attention . . . she felt his tongue venture inside, and swiftly he brought her to a pulsating climax . . . She reached out and caught his hair in her fingers and pulled him up. Their bodies locked together and moved rhythmically to the silent music of their hearts. And then he was within her, moving in and out, feeding upon her soul . . . A cry of satisfaction escaped her lips and Sebastian shuddered over her sweating body as they reached their xanadu together. She had no fear of him now as she gazed into his obsidian eyes, small dots of white hunger sparkling in their centers . . . He whispered urgently, “I need you now, Scarlet.” “Yes,” she gasped. “Please.” And then, without so much as a second thought, Sebastian introduced her to his reality. Scarlet’s eyes flashed open and her body convulsed and went stiff with the first painful intrusion of his vampire teeth (Hauf: 1997, pp.122 – 125).

It is not important one way or another whether or not there are sex scenes in the books that Scarlet enjoys, but it is interesting that she had not remembered there having been any sex in her favourite book, when, in fact, there are numerous examples similar to the one quoted above. I had mentioned to Scarlet, in one of our group meetings, that an academic reading of a vampire text suggests that the bite of the vampire is synonymous with sex between vampire and victim. I mentioned Gelder’s reading of the vampire text over time, (Gelder: 1994), wondering what her thoughts were on his argument that the changes in how the vampire has been represented over time can indicate changes in society’s concerns. Gelder’s argument has been discussed in more detail in Chapter One. Scarlet was not
especially interested in these academic thoughts on the text, and it was within this context that she argued that there was not any sex in the vampire text anyway. This showed the manner in which presenting an academic reading of a text to a woman in therapy is not going to assist her in examining her meaning-making behaviours or change her expectations. This reinforces my belief that I need to first understand my clients' understandings of texts and assist them in finding more empowering learning relevant to their own situations. Whether or not the vampire and the victim have sex, and whether or not the changes in vampire texts over time coincide with changes in society's concerns, Scarlet enjoys vampire romances. She thinks they are good stories, with, as I have previously reported, the message, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em." I also realized, only as I typed out the above quote from Dark Rapture, that the scene in which Scarlet-the heroine is turned into a vampire, describes the heroine as having "no fear of him now as she gazed into his obsidian eyes, ..." (Hauf: 1997, p. 124).

When a woman telephones requesting marital counselling, part of the telephone intake process includes asking whether or not there is any violence in the relationship. Even then, many women who are experiencing quite severe physical abuse may deny the existence of violence in the relationship with such a direct question, but what is often more important is whether or not the woman identifies experiencing any fear of her partner. If either partner is fearful of the other in a marital counselling session the chances of encouraging honest dialogue and meaningful learning are severely limited. There might be very little current physical abuse in a relationship, but a great deal of fear due to a history of previous abuse in the relationship and on-going intimidation, and threat of violence. In a counselling setting, practice knowledge indicates that violence often escalates following a separation from the abusive man, suggesting that even leaving the abuser is not going to reduce fear. As I have also discussed in the first chapter, I have known women involved in victim relocation programmes who continue to be fearful of being found many years after the separation. Is it possible, I wonder, that there is something in the vampire text regarding the overcoming of fear of the vampire-hero that may be appealing to an abused woman, and which may be used as a site of learning? I continue to believe that the vampire text romanticizes the abusive man, but perhaps there is an interest for the abused woman who engages with the text in attempting to learn how to deal with, and overcome, fear. Scarlet has indicated being
fascinated by angels, vampires and the supernatural in general. Her fascination may have something to do with her search to find some peace from fear, or find some way to control the fearful situation.

Following Scarlet’s separation from her first abusive partner, when he harassed her and she began abusing drugs, she clearly decided to take much more control herself in the process of separating from her second husband. She protected herself from potentially fearful situations by ensuring she and her husband needed to move in with her parents prior to asking him to leave. Even then, she packed his clothes, put them outside and had the police present when she told him she wanted him to leave.

As McRobbie (1981) has previously indicated, there are contradictory messages present in texts, and while, on the one hand, Scarlet may be learning how to take control of a situation and protect herself, she may, at the same time, also be negotiating images of desire. Radway (1991) suggests,

It is because the romance’s surrounding universe is always portrayed so convincingly that romance readers might well be persuaded to believe that the romantic action itself is not only plausible but, like the already known ending, also inevitable. Reading in that case would be, as the women have said, a ritual of hope. Repetitive engagement in it would enable a reader to tell herself again and again that a love like the heroine’s might indeed occur in a world such as hers. She thus teaches herself to believe that men are able to satisfy women’s needs fully (p. 207).

What I have suggested regarding the romanticization of abuse in popular cultural texts is that women in abusive relationships may also be learning that abusive men are able to satisfy women’s needs fully. Radway, in fact, suggests that the romance may “express misogynistic attitudes not because women share them but because they increasingly need to know how to deal with them” (p. 72).

Scarlet suggests that the message in vampire romances is that “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em,” and it would appear as though this is what she has learned to do in some ways. She took control over a controlling/abusive husband, when she controlled their living situation in order to feel safe when she asked him to leave. Her resourcefulness and assertiveness is consistent with her image of herself as a work-boots-and-leather-jacket-chick-who-takes-no-shit. However, she also expresses some concerning thoughts about the importance of appearance in predicting behaviour in potential partners in the future.
Scarlet says that looks have always been very important to her, and that as a teen she felt that if “you didn’t have the looks, you didn’t have my time.” She indicates attempting to break this cycle now, and hopes that she will be able to focus more on how some one treats her and her son. As I described in the previous chapter, Scarlet continues to experience some difficulties in breaking her preoccupation with appearance and assumes that how someone looks correlates with that person’s behaviour. For example, because her brother-in-law treats her sister very well, Scarlet has expressed the thought that she should look for a partner who looks like him. It is clearly important in romance texts in general, but is also true of vampire romances also, that the hero and heroine be physically attracted to one another.

In the final group meeting with Scarlet and Gypsy I had asked if they could bring in an example of the type of Valentine’s cards they have enjoyed receiving, or would like to receive. Gypsy forgot to do this, but Scarlet brought in a card that she had picked out as being representative of what she would like to receive from someone in the future. It was a pink card with silvery-pink scroll writing throughout, with a scrolled drawing of a heart in the upper left-hand corner on the outside. On the front it said,

To the Woman I Love  
My Lover and Friend  
If there’s one face I want to see  
each day my whole life through,  
One smile that makes a difference  
in everything I do,  
If there’s one touch I long to feel,  
one voice I long to hear  
Whenever I am happy  
or just needing someone near . . .

and continued on the inside,

If there’s one joy,  
one love from which  
I never want to part . . .  
It’s you—  
that someone special  
in my world,  
my life, my heart.  
Happy  
Valentines Day
The envelope was also pink, with a drawing of deep pink ribbons and hearts on it, to make it representative of a gift. It is a lovely card in some ways, and I imagine that it is a positive sign that Scarlet realizes that a romantic relationship may be more likely to succeed if the couple like one another as friends as well as being attracted to one another. However, I teasingly pointed out to her the mention of "face" within the card as if the focus on appearance was continuing, and she was somewhat annoyed with me, saying that surely two people in a love relationship need to find one another attractive. I attempted to point out again that I agreed that two people in a romantic-love-relationship should be attracted to one another, but my concern was more regarding those comments Scarlet had made regarding her thought that certain appearances should indicate certain behaviours.

Scarlet was probably right to be annoyed with me at this point, since my comment on appearance was less related to the card, but rather an ongoing concern I had. It continues to bother me that Scarlet thought she should only date dark haired men from now on, since both the abusive relationships she had experienced had been with blond men.

**Dark Rapture**

Regardless of the amount of sex in *Dark Rapture*, or Scarlet’s focus on appearance as an indicator of behaviour, perhaps the plot of the narrative may be more telling. As Polkinghorne has suggested, “we explain our actions in terms of plots, and often no other form or explanation can produce sensible statements” (Polkinghorne: 1988).

The heroine of *Dark Rapture* is Scarlet Rose. I will refer to this character as Scarlet Rose to distinguish her from Scarlet, the woman in my study. Scarlet Rose is twenty-two years old, living alone in California, following the death of her parents two years previously. Gary, her brother, is in a rock band named "Wild Child." The lead singer is Vince and there is some initial mutual attraction between Vince and Scarlet Rose.

Gary and Vince convince Scarlet Rose to host a party for their rock ‘n’ roll friends. It is at the party that she meets Sebastian, the vampire hero.

The way he moved, and spoke, that quiet confident voice; he was everything the press made him out to be. A gallant, dashing prince of rock n’ roll.
And then he took her by surprise. In one quick movement, Sebastian was next to her, so close that she could smell his spicy scent. Taking her in his arms, he captured her breath with a hot kiss that seared their lips together in a passionate bond. She could feel his hands begin to roam down her back and she had no control as her body melted beneath his sensuous touch.

Her heart skipped a beat. She couldn’t believe it, she’d just met this guy!

Caught totally by surprise, she let him explore her mouth while the warm softness of his lips controlled hers...

“Wait a minute,” Scarlet said breathlessly, her fingers pushing into the slippery black ruffles. She did not entirely want him to stop, but for a split second she realized that she was kissing a stranger...

His eyes pleaded silently with hers. He was a vision, a dark angel fallen to earth. This was the wild child she’d been dreaming of. Untamed, carnal, and so beautiful (Hauf: 1997, pp. 37 – 38).

She tells him that she doesn’t usually kiss men before she has even been on a date with them, so he invites her to dinner the next night. A parallel between Vince and Sebastian is slowly drawn out, as it becomes clear that they both experience headaches and physical pain due to a thirst for blood. Sebastian realizes what the pain means and takes blood regularly from women. Vince is unaware he is a natural vampire.

Sebastian is described as controlling, dark and dangerous, whereas Vince is shy and much more a golden boy. Sebastian is romanticized as Scarlet Rose becomes more and more attracted to him and less interested in Vince, even after Sebastian becomes physically abusive with her following dinner on their first date. This is explained as being due to his thirst for blood becoming uncontrollable.

Scarlet Rose manages to escape and runs home, and begins to wonder if his severe change in behaviour was her fault, thinking that perhaps she had led him on.

I can’t help but remember the comment made by the woman from the used book list-serve, where I had been able to track down my own copy of the book. She had commented that she had bought the book for the hunk on the cover but the book had left her cold. It seems to me that the style of writing and scenes depicting Sebastian’s abuse of Scarlet Rose combine to leave me cold too. It is interesting that on the one hand Scarlet had told me that when she is watching movies with abused women portrayed she starts to want to shout at the screen, “Get out, leave him,” but, on the other hand, loves this book. I feel like giving up on this book when a scene involves the hero calling the heroine “a bitch,” as she is protecting
herself from his unwanted physical demands. I am also concerned that this scene represents the situation presented in counselling work with abused women, when the women either blame themselves, or some other problem over which the abusive man has no control, rather than hold the man himself accountable for his behaviour.

Sebastian sends Scarlet Rose flowers the day following the dinner date, with a note apologizing and promising to make things better. The cycle of violence begins, as described in the Wife Assault Manual (The Interagency Committee: 1990). The cycle of violence depicts the manner in which tension build up is followed by a violent episode, which is followed by an apology and a honeymoon period, which then leads into tension build up again. The violence, or intimidation, often becomes more severe over time, and the honeymoon periods become shorter.

The plot of the book becomes somewhat convoluted with time travel and various vampires cavorting about. Not only is there Sebastian in the present day, who makes Scarlet a vampire, there is Vince unaware of the fact that he is a vampire. Francesco is also a vampire, who has been following Sebastian through time wanting revenge, for what we are not initially told, and Matthias, Francesco’s slave.

Sebastian tells Scarlet Rose that he was born “a bastard” in 1750, and that a woman that he fell in love with made him into a vampire when he was nineteen years old. He says he never saw her again but that Scarlet Rose looks remarkably like that female vampire he had known in 1769. He says that the only person he ever killed, was his first “donor,” as he calls those people from whom he takes blood. He explains it as being due to not understanding how much blood he needed. He explains that he and Francesco had grown up together in Paris in the 1700s, and had fought over a lover, whom Sebastian had accidentally killed. Sebastian explains that this is the cause of Francesco wanting revenge for two hundred years, and he believes that he may target Scarlet somehow.

In a subplot of the novel, we read of Vince attempting to break into a vault that is in the mansion he has inherited, which he believes may hold treasure. When he, Gary and Scarlet Rose initially manage to open the vault, they discover vintage clothing, and he offers the dresses to Scarlet Rose wondering if she would like to try one on. After trying on one of the dresses she becomes possessed, and accuses Vince of having killed her, thinking that he is Alexander Lyons. He tells her that he is Vince and that Alexander was merely one of his
relatives. She tells Vince that she will take Scarlet Rose from him, so that he will know loss and pain and betrayal too. As Scarlet Rose disappears, Sebastian is described as waking up in pain and realizing that something terrible has happened to her. He goes to the mansion, and demands to know from Vince and Gary what has happened to her. Sebastian finds an old diary in Vince’s family vault, and asks to borrow it to read in case it can shed some light on what has occurred. At the same time, Vince receives a phone call, summoning him to his mother’s deathbed. Francesco follows Vince in order to find a way to befriend him, wanting to make him a vampire companion.

Parallel to the storyline unfolding between Vince and Francesco, we read of Scarlet Rose arriving back in time in France in 1769, waking up on a recently dug grave. Since it is a fresh grave and the dates indicate that she lived from 1750 to 1769, Scarlet Rose deducts that she has somehow travelled back in time. An old man finds Scarlet Rose, saying it’s his lucky day, as he reaches for her, but she swipes at him with her nails, and being stronger now, as a vampire, easily overpowers him, and drinks blood from him. I am attracted to the idea of how powerful and strong Scarlet Rose is as a woman. I think of this as a series of sexual assaults have recently occurred within a particular down town neighbourhood. The attacker has become known as the “bedroom rapist,” breaking into women’s homes at night and assaulting the women in their own beds. There have been varied reactions to this. On the one hand, police are urging women to insure all their windows and doors are locked and that outside lights are kept on. On the other hand, feminist organizers of such activities as the “Take Back the Night” march, are saying that the police advice merely makes women more like victims/captives in their own homes, and that this advice does not solve any problems. If only women could defend themselves the way Scarlet Rose defends herself from this old man in the graveyard. In fact, the Scarlet in my research group implies by her suggestion that she has learned in these books that if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em, that she is probably attracted to this notion of being a powerful, strong woman too. Scarlet Rose makes her way to a mansion she can see in the distance, and tells two sisters that she meets there that she has been in a carriage accident. The sisters are horrified by the trauma Scarlet Rose must have experienced, and bath, feed and clothe her.

The sisters take Scarlet Rose to a party for the Duke’s son’s nineteenth birthday. The son’s name is Sebastian and he has quite a reputation, Scarlet Rose is told. It is on the way to
the party that Scarlet Rose considers the possibilities and remembers that Sebastian had told her that he had fallen in love with a vampire woman at his nineteenth birthday party, and had been transformed into a vampire two days later. Sebastian and Scarlet Rose meet at this party and after some confusion they fall in love and she does turn Sebastian into a vampire. After she has done this in the eighteenth century, she is transported back to the twentieth century, and Sebastian can feel immediately that she has returned and he races to the vault in Vince’s mansion and finds her there. Her return coincides with Vince having returned from his trip to visit his mother, and his blood hunger developing more intensely. Sebastian touches Vince, which confirms his suspicions that Vince is a vampire. He tells Gary to call for an ambulance and take care of Vince while he tends to Scarlet Rose. Francesco takes Vince away and later tells Vince that he is a natural vampire and that the headaches and pain have merely been blood cravings and that if he drinks blood from Francesco that he will complete his transformation and become immortal.

Sebastian has convinced Scarlet Rose, in the meantime, that Francesco is continuing to hurt him and her through Vince and that she is not safe until he has found Vince and Francesco. So, she reluctantly agrees to hide in a stone coffin in a mausoleum in the local graveyard. Meanwhile, Vince has become quite confident in his natural abilities as a vampire and has taken blood from a woman in a bar and has gone with three female bikers to the graveyard. He quickly drinks from and kills two of the three, but merely kills the third, who had attempted to run from him, saying, “You were the ugliest one, bitch . . . Made me lose my appetite” (Hauf: 1997, p. 444). Again at this point I find myself having even more trouble enjoying reading the book. While in the graveyard he finds Scarlet Rose. He revives her with his own blood hoping that this will result in her thinking of him as her master rather than Sebastian. When she wakes up he tells her that Sebastian has deserted her, but she does not believe him. She struggles against Vince, and tells him that Fransesco has been lying to him. She tries to explain how Francesco only wants to kill her in order to have revenge on Sebastian. Vince does not believe her and takes her to Francesco to try and prove to Scarlet Rose that she is wrong. Vince soon finds out that he is wrong and Francesco tells him that it is right for him to kill Scarlet Rose. She reminds Francesco of their meeting in Paris in 1759, which only convinces Francesco that Scarlet Rose must be an evil witch who truly should be killed. He tells Vince that female vampires are not natural and she must die. Scarlet Rose
manages to delay Francesco sufficiently until Sebastian comes to the rescue, brandishing two swords, and challenging Francesco to a dual. Francesco puts one of the swords through Sebastian’s chest, which horrifies Scarlet Rose, but the wound, being narrow is not fatal for a vampire. Gary brings with him a long wooden stake for protection. So after Sebastian has been injured, Scarlet Rose is overcome with anger, and takes the stake and stabs it through Francesco, who dies, his body turning into a pile of ashes.

Vince has begun having bad waking dreams, which he realizes are due to having killed, and also experiences pain as his “master” dies. Sebastian explains that when a vampire creates another vampire, their souls join, so evil from Francesco had joined Vince’s soul, resulting in his severe violence against the women he killed. This triggers a certain frustration in me as even such a far-fetched excuse for violence against women is offered within the plot. The explanation of two souls becoming joined when one vampire makes another vampire also reminds me of the romantic popular notion of two becoming one through a wedding ceremony, which I have pointed out in chapter three is problematic, despite, or perhaps due to its taken-for-grantedness.

The story ends with Vince taking a nap in a stone coffin in the vault in his mansion not altogether sure that he will be able to resist the pleasure of having someone’s heart burst as he kills them. Sebastian asks Scarlet Rose for an answer to the question he posed over two hundred years ago, and she decides that as vampire she feels reborn and there is too much to live for and learn and so she does not really want the marriage certificate. After all, they did create one another and they share a soul, so what’s the point. He begins to say that she is his blood child and he is her . . . but she becomes angry saying she cannot believe he was about to say he was her master. She argues that she in fact was his master first. So it is decided that although they will love each other for all eternity, they will not get married just yet.

Reflections

How does this convoluted plot of this vampire romance intertwine with stories that Scarlet tells herself? “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em,” is the main idea she reported learning from the text. It is possible that it also intertwines, contributes to or reinforces other beliefs that Scarlet holds. Scarlet told of being fascinated in the supernatural, angels and vampires.
She told of her fascination in her dreams and curiosity with stories that her father has told her, that she thought might give insight into her dreams. The way she talked about these ideas suggested she was grappling with the notions of fate, a possible spirit world and potentially reincarnation. Scarlet Rose in the book is also grappling with notions of love, and to whom to be attracted. Her struggle initially about not being as attracted to Vince, the nice golden boy, as she is to the dark dangerous Sebastian seems to parallel some of the issues with which the Scarlet in my study is grappling. In the last group meeting she was talking about her belief that a relationship cannot and never will remain good and non-abusive. She says that the longest she has ever been in a good relationship has been one year, but then something always goes wrong. She says that if she ever finds herself in a relationship where there has been no violence for 18 months she will merely tell herself that this is the longest it’s ever been but the violence will still come eventually. And the story of Dark Rapture corroborates this for her – or adds to her belief in this, because even the boring golden boy-Vince becomes actually more violent than Sebastian. And even at the end when Francesco has died and his soul has left Vince, Vince still worries that he will struggle with craving the feeling of someone’s heart bursting as he drinks enough to kill that person.

It is interesting to note that Scarlet’s lesson of “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em,” which she says she learns from vampire romances is also present to a certain degree in Grease. Scarlet Rose and Sandy, the heroines in each, both lose their innocence, and Sandy consciously decides to change her looks drastically and become more like Danny in order to win his affection. This coincides with Danny also donning a sweater, instead of his leather jacket, to become more like Sandy, but when he sees Sandy’s transformation, he seems happy to toss away the sweater.

In this way, Scarlet’s preoccupation with the meaningfulness of appearance seems to also be reinforced at the same time as her notion of “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” is reinforced.

Clover (1992), in Men, Women and Chain Saws, describes the “final girl” character within horror/slasher movies, who also represents some of the strength and “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” attitude that Scarlet appears to find attractive in the vampire romances. Clover says,
If her friends know they were about to die only seconds before the event, the Final Girl lives with the knowledge for long minutes or hours. She alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B) (p. 35).

She says the "final girl" moves "from passive to active defence" (p. 37), which is perhaps not a bad message for abused women to hear.

Meeting with Scarlet and Gypsy in six group meetings meant there was enough time for them to articulate their narratives and talk about storylines they enjoy, but left me with a certain frustration about the time constraints of this piece of research, because it seems to me it would have taken longer, perhaps the twenty weeks suggested by a social group work model, before Scarlet and Gypsy would have begun to be able to be in a position to deconstruct these plots themselves in more detail and develop an interest in alternative story lines. Gypsy indicated being in a position of greater hope than Scarlet at the time of the last meeting and I suppose I hope that Scarlet will feel more hopeful at some point too. Having said that however, I realize the difficulties inherent in the notion of hope, if it is only a false sense of idealism, not grounded in reality. Relationships are work surely. Perhaps Scarlet could expect that she would constantly need to renegotiate expectations within a relationship and perhaps set limits. Romance novels perhaps may contribute to facile hope, and perhaps social work practice could participate in the inquiry into what could constitute healthy expectations. The six meetings provided me with a snap shot in time showing me how Scarlet and Gypsy felt about themselves and their relationships and their story up until that time, but did not allow for the development of a method of teaching clients to critique their favourite texts.

It has only been following the fieldwork and analysis phases of this research study that the implications have found their way into my professional practice with clients. If I were meeting with Scarlet and Gypsy now I would be much more interested in having them talk about what they thought they learned from each of their favourite texts, as part of their own narrative, rather than thinking it so necessary to reengage with the texts myself. What is more important for practice, I now believe, is that I engage my clients in telling me what they most enjoyed and believe they learned from their favourite texts. My objective reading of it is less important. On the other hand, I am better able to assist my clients in looking for alternate
and more self-empowering readings if I am also aware of the story lines of their favourite texts, alongside their own personal narratives. For example, I am currently counselling a woman who is a single mother, in a dating relationship with a man unwilling to commit. She has been married and divorced twice. She has memories of feeling unwanted in her childhood and often falls back into patterns of feeling desperate to do anything to make a man happy and willing to stay in a relationship with her. She says she listened to lots of love songs as a young teen and that her favourite movie was Love Story. She says she believes she learned from her popular cultural interests that “love is enough,” but this has not been true in her life. We have examined the manner in which the plot of Love Story contributed to her belief that she should give things up for her relationships, just as Jenny gave up her chance of studying music in Paris, to marry Oliver and work as a teacher to put him through law school. We are examining how her favourite texts, combined with childhood learning, contributed to her expectations of heterosexual relationships. Since this study with Scarlet and Gypsy was an emergent study and I was unsure of how to go about meeting this end goal of improving practice, this thesis, as the final product of the study, only represents a step towards improving practice and does not fully represent how to incorporate these observations into practice.

This is similar to Mitchell’s (1995) description of ending his book about psychoanalytic experience and psychoanalytic ideas. He says,

The particular wrinkle for the author of clinical theory is that while the book has stopped, work goes on. He sees his patients the next day, and the inadequacy of the theory to capture new features of the clinical experience soon becomes inescapable . . . Books of psychoanalytic theory are less fixed structures like buildings, and more like action photos, snapshots of a process that, if it remains alive, is continually changing (p. 230).

Gypsy’s Favourite Storylines

Gypsy suggested her themes had more to do with abandonment, learning that “men control women and it’s not so good,” and that “women are strong, powerful, keep things together and are caretakers.” She reported loving war movies. My initial thought regarding this was that war movies present a certain type of stereotypical representation of gender also,
but what she said she thinks she must have enjoyed about them was that the men came home at the end of the movies. She did not enjoy Harlequins, but enjoyed Danielle Steele’s romances, and she said she especially enjoyed V. C. Andrews’ books: Flowers in the Attic and Petals in the Wind. Having decided to focus my interest on those books that Scarlet and Gypsy both identified as loving the most, I spent time contemplating Scarlet’s love of Dark Rapture and chose to focus my interest, in regards to Gypsy’s engagement with popular cultural texts, on her reported fascination with Flowers in the Attic, despite this fascination having waned to a certain degree by the time I met with her. After all, she said that having become so involved with the Internet, she did not spend nearly as much time reading or watching television or movies any more.

The last time that Gypsy, Scarlet and I met prior to my writing of their stories, we were all to have then read Flowers in the Attic and Dark Rapture, so that we could deconstruct the messages presented in those books and discuss what it is that we enjoyed and did not enjoy about reading them. I have to admit that I enjoyed neither book and found it difficult to motivate myself to continue reading them. I had less trouble enjoying the storyline of Dark Rapture than I did putting up with what I considered poor writing. Gypsy also had to admit that she could not develop an interest in the book and so had not read it and could not discuss it.

I found V. C. Andrews’ writing style much more enjoyable, but found myself, as a mother of a young child, so unhappy about the treatment of the children in Flowers in the Attic that I did not think I would be able to finish the book. Having forced myself to continue reading, I found the latter half of the book more enjoyable, as the children grew up and three of the four escaped their mother’s and grandmother’s mistreatment. Scarlet admitted that she had not been able to motivate herself to re-read Flowers in the Attic. Having read the book myself I was able to then agree with Scarlet’s surprise regarding how Gypsy had been able to “love” reading this particular book at an earlier age and how she had not noticed the incest in the story.
Flowers in the Attic

The back cover's description of Flowers in the Attic would not have inspired me to read this book, if it weren't for my interest in discovering what Gypsy had enjoyed reading so much as a teenager. The back cover says,

The Dollanger family had such a perfect life – then Daddy was killed in a car accident, and Momma was forced to bring Chris and Cathy and the twins to live with her millionaire parents. But the promise of a new life is soon shattered: reviled by their grandparents, the children must live in an abandoned wing of the mansion, with only an airless attic to play in. As the weeks stretch into years, they become convinced that their mother no longer cares for them, and can only dream of what the future might hold. Powerless to change their fate, they must cling desperately to their love to give them hope of a better, happier life . . . (Back cover, Flowers in the Attic.)

I have suggested in earlier sections of this thesis that I have grappled with how to write of the women's stories ethically. Although I believe I need to treat their stories carefully and believe somehow that writing of their lives is more important and deserves more care than how I write about the books they enjoyed, I worry a little about how to even write about these stories they enjoyed reading. It is hard to keep my dislike of these books out of the way as I write about them. I worry that I will sound condescending and therefore hurt Scarlet and Gypsy, who reported enjoying these books. I am attempting to merely look at Dark Rapture and Flowers in the Attic, wondering how Scarlet and Gypsy may have negotiated their way through the plots. The fact that I am in a position of resistance to the narratives rather than in positions of reinforcement or negotiation makes it hard to keep a tone of frustration out of my writing about the books. This is not to suggest a judgemental quality, and I am hoping that by making my position as explicit as possible I will make clear the abyss over which I am attempting to reach in order to write about these popular cultural texts. In a way it was easier to write about Scarlet and Gypsy because, as I said in the last chapter, I liked and respected them. I do not like or respect these popular cultural texts or their writers. As I said of Dark Rapture, I found the writing horrible and the plot problematic, although I do not automatically dislike vampire texts; I enjoyed Bram Stoker's Dracula and did not dislike Anne Rice's Interview with a Vampire. I quite respect V.C. Andrew's writing skill, but felt strongly averse to her plot.
As I copied out the description from the back cover though, the phrase “they cling desperately to their love to give them hope of a better, happier life...” seemed so much more significant than it had when I had looked it over previously. After wondering about Scarlet’s possible need for hope in overcoming fear, I wonder if Gypsy also had engaged so enthusiastically in reading this text when living within her chaotic family as a young teen, experiencing sexual abuse by her stepfather, due also to a need to hope for something “better, a happier life.” And then I wonder how I could have failed to notice that little word “hope” when the prologue even begins talking of hope.

It is so appropriate to colour hope yellow, like that sun we seldom saw. And as I begin to copy from the old memorandum journals that I kept for so long, a title comes as if inspired. Open the Window and Stand in the Sunshine. Yet, I hesitate to name our story that. For I think of us more as flowers in the attic. Paper flowers. Born so brightly coloured, and fading duller through all those long grim, dreary, nightmarish days when we were held prisoners of hope, and kept captives by greed. But we were never to colour even one of our paper blossoms yellow.

Charles Dickens would often start his novels with the birth of the protagonist and, being a favourite author of mine and Chris’s, I would duplicate his style – if I could. But he was a genius born to write without difficulty while I find every word I put down, I put down with tears, with bitter blood, with sour gall, well mixed and blended with shame and guilt. I thought I would never feel ashamed or guilty, that these were burdens for others to bear. Years have passed and I am older and wiser now, accepting, too. The tempest of rage that once stormed within me has simmered down so that I can write, I hope, with truth and with less hatred and prejudice than would have been the case a few years ago.

So, like Charles Dickens, in this work of “fiction” I will hide myself behind a false name, and live in fake places, and will pray to God that those who should will hurt when they read what I have to say. Certainly God in his infinite mercy will see that some understanding publisher will put my words in a book, and help grind the knife that I hope to wield (Prologue, Flowers in the Attic, pp. 3–4).

As I read that, I find myself again thinking that V.C. Andrew’s writing style is so much smoother to read than Michelle Hauf’s, but also I think of all the sexual abuse survivors I counsel at work and how the majority of them struggle with how to overcome feelings of guilt and shame also, just like Cathy, the narrator of Flowers in the Attic, suggests she has, although she says she had thought she would never feel ashamed and guilty.
The story begins with Cathy and her older brother living with their beautiful mother and handsome, all-American father. Their father is a public relations man for a computer firm and is often away during the week, but returns home each Friday evening, bearing gifts for everyone. The Friday homecoming is described as being very special. The ritualised homecoming may have been of interest to Gypsy since she says she suffers from fears of abandonment. The family is described as middle class and not wanting for anything. Carrie and Cory, the twins, are born, which initially upsets Cathy because she wanted to always be her father’s little girl and she was scared that she would get overlooked as a middle child. Their father reassures Cathy and Cathy becomes fond of her younger twin brother and sister and becomes mother’s little helper. This was a role that Gypsy reported she was expected to adopt with her stepsiblings, which might have added to her interest and empathetic connection with this book.

One terrible Friday evening, while the family, with friends, waited for the father’s return for his birthday party, he is killed in a car accident. It is interesting to note that both Dark Rapture and Flowers in the Attic begin with the death of a parent. I take up notions of death and existential isolation in the next chapter when I discuss hope. The mother and four children are “abandoned” by the father through his death. The mother becomes distracted and leaves Cathy to fend for the twins more, as she worries about finances and spends more time doing paper work. She finally receives a letter from her own mother and at this point explains to the children that she and their father had spent too much money, always living for the present rather than worrying about the future, how everything they own is about to be repossessed, but how her own parents are in fact millionaires. She says that she had been cut out of her parents’ will when she married the children’s father, but since she is the only child still alive she hopes to win back her father’s favour. She explains how her father did not know of the children and so they would leave immediately with just a couple of suitcases, hide the children in a deserted wing of her parent’s mansion, with her mother’s help, and that as soon as she has won back her father’s love, she will bring the children to meet him. This represents an aspect of Gypsy learning about “men control women, and it’s not so good.”

As soon as the children are bundled into the mansion and taken up the back staircase, they begin to realize there is more to their mother’s story than they know. Their grandmother asks whether, despite being beautiful, the mother is sure there is nothing wrong with them.
She also says that she will never look at the child who most resembles the father and she makes comments about the mother and her behaviour with her half-uncle. So it slowly comes out in that the reason the grandparents disinherited their daughter was due to her having married her half-uncle. The grandmother believes the children are products of an incestuous marriage and must be deformed in some manner. The grandmother uses God as a threat with the children saying that God can see them even when she cannot watch them and she gives them a long list of do’s and don’ts. She insists that the two girls sleep in one bed and the two boys in the other and that they never use the bathroom together. The twins are four years old, Cathy is twelve and Chris is fourteen. The children are locked into one bedroom with two beds and a table. They are told to never open the curtains and to always remain quiet. However, the room they are to inhabit also includes access to stairs to a huge dusty attic. They are permitted to play in the attic, and are initially told to take all their belongings up there the last Friday morning of every month and wait quietly while the servants clean their room as they also clean that wing of the mansion. The mother initially tells the children she has every hope of winning back her father’s love within a week and that she will then introduce them to him. She also suggests that as he is in his sixties and will die soon since he is unwell. The grandmother warns them that he is a man of steel, with all the medical technology he requires and that he has rarely been bested. The children rationalize that their mother loves them and they should trust her rather than this crazy old woman they have only just met.

Cathy and Chris slowly fall into the roles of mother and father to the twins. Gypsy reports having learned that “women are strong, take care of things, are caretakers,” and we see in this text the manner in which Cathy slowly takes on more of the caretaker role of the younger twins.

There is far less to describe in terms of the story line in Flowers in the Attic than there was in Dark Rapture. The children are merely held captive for many years, continuing to hope year after year that their mother is about to release them from the attic, having won the affection of her father again. Only a few days after they have moved into the attic, the grandmother orders the mother to show her whipped back to the children to prove that they must obey all rules. The whipping was ordered by the grandfather, who demanded one whip for each of her thirty-three years of life and an additional fifteen for each of the years she had
lived “in sin” with her half-uncle. At seeing her mother’s whipped back, Cathy decides that she no longer believes in a just God, but continues to believe in her mother. As the years go by, however, their mother comes to visit less frequently, and when she does come she seems happy with her new rich life style, and it becomes clear that she has started dating and thinking of marrying again.

The first Christmas that they are in the attic, their mother brings them a small Christmas tree and presents, but when they discover that there is to be a huge Christmas party that evening, Cathy and Chris beg her to allow them out of the room in order to watch the party from a distance. She allows this, unlocking their door for them after the twins are asleep so that they will not want to come and watch also, because no one thinks the twins could be trusted to stay quiet in a hiding place to merely watch a party in progress. They would be free to escape at this point, but they trust their mother so much, and would not know where else to go, so they do not attempt any sort of escape. Chris, however, does take the opportunity to explore the rest of the mansion while everyone is so busy with the party. Cathy thinks of him as her knight,

“Take care until you see me again,” he whispered.
“Christopher,” I whispered back, “all you need is a white horse and shield.”

“Farewell,” he whispered. “Have no fear. Soon I’ll be back to care for thee and thine.”
I giggled as I climbed into bed to lie down beside Carrie. Sleep was an elusive stranger that night as I thought about my mother and that man, about Chris, about all boys, about men, about romance – and love (Andrews: 1979, pp. 202–203).

When Cathy wakes up it is to discover that her mother has returned to their room before Chris. She is furious saying that they have misused her trust in them and slaps Chris as he returns, threatening to whip both Chris and Cathy if they ever do anything like that again. She immediately backs down, however, apologizing for the slap and saying she would never whip them. Chris and Cathy both forgive her and continue to trust in her. Her visits to the attic and the children become much more sporadic and Cathy asks after the first year if Chris doesn’t sometimes doubt their mother. He says,

Sometimes I am just as doubting of what she does as you are. But I think back to the time before we came here, and feel I have to trust her, and believe in her, and be like Daddy was. Remember how he used to say, ‘For
everything that seems strange, there is a good reason? And everything always works out for the best.' That's what I make myself believe – she has good reasons for keeping us here, and not sneaking us out to some boarding school. She knows what she is doing, and Cathy, I love her so much. I just can't help it. No matter what she does, I feel I will go right on loving her (Andrews: 1979, p. 230).

This makes Cathy worry that Chris loves their mother more than he loves her. Not only am I concerned by the message presented to Gypsy as a future abused woman about loving and trusting someone despite evidence to suggest that the person should not be trusted, but there is also the relationship between Cathy and Chris being gestured towards as something that is obviously taking on more importance than it would have if they had not been locked up in the attic.

After two years of being in the attic, Chris persuades Cathy to escape one evening for a swim, leaving the twins asleep and returning before they wake. This adds to some of the confusion and frustration I have with this book, which mirrors the frustration sometimes of working with abused women. They can get away from their abusers. They aren't actually trapped. The children show this as they leave their prison and go swimming in a nearby lake. They do this by tying sheets together and climbing from the attic window. They do admit it might be difficult to encourage the twins to climb down the makeshift ladder.

Soon after this scene, Chris is shown standing by the bedroom window looking out, waiting, as Cathy believes, for the train to go by. She asks him if he is considering their escape and also asks him why he thinks their mother has not visited them in over two months. He says he is not thinking of escaping because their father always wanted him to go to medical school and he does not see any way that would be possible without their mother receiving her inheritance and sharing it with her children. At least this gives some further reason, besides their love for their mother, for them not escaping.

It is generally thought within clinical practice that separation causes the least amount of socio-economic change and strain for those couples who, on the one hand, are already struggling financially and with nothing to lose monetarily, or for those couples who are extremely well-off, since they feel less financial strain in having to set up a second home. Those couples who are working hard to maintain a certain standard of living have their socio-economic lifestyles affected the most by separation. I have counselled women who are
fearful of taking their children from homes with their own bedrooms and back gardens, into basement apartments, as they would need to as a result of a separation. This seems to be a thought for Chris and Cathy as they have partly taken up their mother's worries about how they would survive without money, and have developed their own concerns about how they would meet their goals in life, for Chris to be a doctor and for Cathy to be a dancer, if they did not have access to their mother's inheritance.

The grandmother enters the children's room while Chris is still standing by the window, which results in her whipping both Chris and Cathy, because she had previously told them never to look out their window. This has the result of bringing Cathy and Chris even closer together.

After two months absence, with all four children becoming weaker all the time, their mother finally returns in a happy mood, bringing gifts for them all. She says that she has exciting news for them and wonders if they have missed her. This is the first time that Chris stands up to his mother, telling her that of course they missed her but that she was wrong to go away for so long. The argument escalates and she begins to ask if he does not love her anymore.

"I love you," was his reply. "I make myself keep loving you, despite what you do. I've got to love you. We all have to love you, and believe in you, and think you are looking out for our best interests. But look at us, Momma, and really see us. Cathy feels, and I feel, that you close your eyes to what you are doing to us. You come to us smiling, and dangle before our eyes and our ears bright hopes for the future, but nothing materializes. Long ago, when you first told us about this house and your parents, you said we'd only be shut up in this room for one night, and then you changed it to a few days. And then it was another few weeks, and then another few months... and over two years have passed while we wait for an old man to die, who may never die from the skilled way his doctors keep pulling him back from the grave. This room is not improving our health. Can't you see that?" he almost shouted, his boyish face suffused with red as his limit of self-control was reached at last (Andrews: 1979, pp. 292-293).

The argument escalates further and their mother accuses them of being ungrateful for the warm room and the gifts she has given them. She admits that she has had pleasure while they have suffered, but she promises to make it up to them in the future. She begins to cry and then the children feel guilty and try and apologize and tell her to stop crying, but she is angry with them, telling them to open the gifts she had chosen with care and then tell her she
does not care for them. She leaves them telling them that she will not return until they have thought about the pain they have caused her and are ready to begin treating her with love again. They open the gifts from her once she has left, and are frustrated by the fact that despite knowing their interests she has obviously not paid any attention to the fact they are growing, since the clothes she has bought are the wrong sizes.

I think about the anger Gypsy feels towards her mother, and how she wants to tell her to “fuck off,” whenever she tells Gypsy that she loves her. It begins to appear that not only would Gypsy have been reading about incest being normalized, but also about the struggles of whether or not to continue loving a parent when all the evidence points to the fact that the parent is not treating her children with the proper love and care. Gypsy spoke about having asked her own mother about the sexual abuse her stepfather was perpetrating upon her, and said that her mother told her it was normal. Here in the book that was her favourite book at the time she was being given further representation of the confusion over whether to believe a mother or not.

In the following chapter the children’s mother tells them that she had been away for two months because she has married again. She expects them to be happy for her, which they are not, particularly when it becomes clear that she has not told her new husband that she has four children in the attic. Their mother explains that she could not tell her new husband, because he is also her father’s attorney, and she believes it best that she not tell him until she has all the money that is to come to her. Cathy does not think this is right but struggles with continuing to want to try and believe in her mother, but at the same time realizes that the connection between herself and her mother is becoming more tenuous.

It is finally a dream that Cathy has which makes Chris decide that they need to escape. They begin to develop a plan, thinking that they will not be able to take the twins down the rope ladder. They decide to take their mother’s key on one of her visits to them, press the key into a bar of soap, returning the key to her before she leaves, and fashion a key out of hard wood, that will fit into the mould and also open the door without breaking. They decide that they will gradually steal money from their mother’s room, not believing that she and her husband will miss a little money here and there over time. They plan not to escape until they have five hundred dollars. They are able to do this because their mother, or grandmother, usually comments on those evenings when their mother is planning to be out
with her husband. Chris usually is the one to leave the room and steal the money, but Cathy begs to come with him on one of the forays in order to see her mother's room. Cathy is further horrified by what her mother has been doing to them when she sees the opulence in which she has been living.

The children become more run down. Cathy worries that the twins do not seem to be growing as much as they should, and they all seem to experience bouts of vomiting more regularly. One evening when Chris is too ill to go and steal from their mother, Cathy goes. When Cathy arrives in her mother's bedroom, however, she is surprised to find her mother's husband asleep in a chair. She is unsure of what to do, but is interested in getting a better look of him, so tip toes in and is surprised by how young he looks. She kisses him and leaves. She returns to the room she shares with Chris and the twins, unable to tell Chris what has happened and merely telling him that she was unable to find any money.

Chris later guesses that Cathy must have kissed their mother's husband. On one of his subsequent trips to their mother's room, he is startled by the couple's return, hiding in a walk-in closet and able to hear what they are saying to one another. They are bickering because they have returned for his wallet, and he complains that the maids must be stealing from them, since they continually are missing a few dollars here and there and because his wallet never appears to be where he left it. She complains to him about his making them late and he says he would like to fall asleep in the chair again and have that young girl he dreamed of come and kiss him again. This angers Chris and he returns to the children's room and goes up into the attic to find Cathy, who was sitting up on one of the windowsills waiting for him. He yells at her that he knows what she has done and that he believes their mother must know what they are doing.

This wasn't Chris... this was someone I'd never seen before... primitive, savage.
He yelled out something like, "You're mine, Cathy! Mine! You'll always be mine! No matter who comes into your future, you'll always belong to me! I'll make you mine... tonight... now!" (Andrews: 1979, p. 355).
We fell to the floor, both of us. I tried to fight him off. We wrestled, turning over and over, writhing, silent, a frantic struggle of his strength against mine.
It wasn't much of a battle.
I had the strong dancer's legs; he had the biceps, the greater weight and height... and he had much more determination than I to use something hot, swollen and demanding, so much it stole reasoning and sanity from him.
And I loved him. I wanted what he wanted — if he wanted it that much, right or wrong.

Somehow we ended up on that old mattress — that filthy, smelly, stained mattress that must have known lovers long before this night. And that is where he took me, and forced in that swollen, rigid male sex part of him that had to be satisfied. It drove into my tight and resisting flesh which tore and bled (Andrews: 1979, p. 356).

They are described as feeling guilty and sorry and Cathy thinks they will be doomed and damned to hell now. However, thinking of Gypsy reading this section as a young teen, and thinking of the discussions that Gypsy, Scarlet and I had together about the role of jealousy in romantic relationships, I worry about how the discourses, present in this section of Flowers in the Attic, but present in many other popular cultural texts also, could have contributed to those meaning-making behaviours, which suggest that jealousy, and wanting to possess, is proof of love and that a man does not need to be held accountable for his sexual actions. Radway’s (1991) study of romance readers also showed that readers could accept rape and violence if it was due to the hero’s jealousy, which they understood as proof of his uncontrollable love (p. 76). The victim here is described as having wanted the same thing as the abuser anyway. Again I am primarily thinking of how Gypsy may have made sense of a passage like this while living in a situation where her stepfather was sexually abusing her. Survivors of sexual abuse often blame themselves and worry that they had not done enough to stop the abuse, and here Gypsy would have been presented with the image of a rape of a sister by her brother, normalized and romanticized even, by the fact that they have been shown to be developing a romantic love for one another, and by the fact that Cathy is said to have wanted the sexual encounter just as much as Chris, knowing how important it was to him.

The following scene where Cathy and Chris sit out on the attic roof and talk about what has just happened is also problematic, especially as I consider a future victim of wife assault reading it.

"I don’t hate you Chris," I whispered, pressing my head tightly against his chest. "You didn’t rape me. I could have stopped you if I’d really wanted to. All I had to do was bring my knee up hard, where you told me to. It was my fault too." Oh yes, my fault too. I should have known better than to kiss Momma’s handsome young husband. I shouldn’t have worn skimpy little see-through garments around a brother who had all a man’s strong physical needs, and a brother who was always so frustrated by everything, and
everyone. I had played upon his needs, testing my femininity, having my own burning yearnings for fulfilment (Andrews: 1979, p. 357).

This reminds me of the section of the tape that is transcribed in the previous chapter, where Gypsy talks about having blamed herself for so long for the abuse by her husband. She said that he was angry sometimes due to her cooking the wrong meal, sometimes because there was a mark on the floor, sometimes because she hadn’t hung his shirts up properly. Any of us can find a way of blaming ourselves for someone else’s treatment of us if we look hard enough. They do not have to make logical sense to an outsider observer. It also takes more than an outsider/therapist telling the victim that it was not her fault for her to begin believing that the abuser, rather than the victim, was responsible. This is one of the greatest challenges I face in counselling survivors of sexual abuse. They are likely to merely think I am trying to be kind if I suggest it was not their fault they were abused. Looking with them for the discourses with which they have engaged over time that have contributed to their tendency to blame themselves perhaps is one way of assisting them in moving from self-blaming victim story-line to the more empowering survivor story-line.

The day approaches for the children’s escape, but before they can get away Cory becomes much more ill. Not only has he been vomiting, but he is having trouble breathing and swallowing. Chris reads through all the medical books he can find and wonders about food poisoning. Cathy tells the grandmother as she brings their food for them for the day that Corey needs a doctor. The grandmother leaves without looking at the child, but returns with their mother. The two women huddle together whispering about what should be done. Cathy yells at their mother that she cannot merely stand there and worry about herself, and her future money when a son of hers is dying. The mother and grandmother eventually decide to take Cory to a hospital.

Their mother returns to them without Cory, saying that she had taken him to a hospital, where she had said he was her nephew, but that it had been too late and that he had died of pneumonia. Chris asks about going to his funeral, but their mother says that she already has had him buried under a false name.

The death of their brother and the effect it has on Carrie makes Chris and Cathy decide that they need to escape as soon as they can, rather than waiting until they have five hundred dollars. They decide that the very next chance Chris has of stealing from their
mother and her husband, he will take all the money and all the jewellery that he can find and they will leave immediately. They pack their bags and since their mother has told them that she will be going out with her husband that night, Chris goes to steal from them one last time. Cathy lies down next to Carrie to wait for his return, but as dawn begins to break she begins to worry that something must have happened and that Chris must have been found. If he does not come back soon they will not be able to catch the morning train, or the grandmother might even bring them their food before Chris gets back.

Chris eventually returns in the morning, without having found any money or jewels and tells Cathy that they have gone. He says that the room that their mother and her husband shared is empty of all their belongings except for her winter clothes. He says he had become frantic and decided to see if he could find their grandmother’s and grandfather’s rooms to try and find something to steal from them. He describes coming upon their grandmother and how she had been reading a bible, and had gotten out of bed to pray, saying that she had always done what she thought was best and asking to be forgiven for her sins and to be looked on with grace. He says he then went to confront their grandfather in his anger and desperation, but finds the room where he must have slept empty, with a hospital bed folded up and wheel chair in the corner. He realizes by the dust that he must have died some time ago. He goes to the library where he remembers his mother having said there was a safe behind a picture. He tries to listen for the clicks that would alert him to the combination of the safe, but is interrupted by the butler and a maid coming in. The maid has told the butler that she thought she had heard noises, and he impatiently looks around to reassure her there is no one there. Chris is trapped behind the sofa as they lie down on the sofa and he tells Cathy of his surprise of all the noises they make as they have sex. What upsets him more is that he overhears what the butler and the maid say about the children’s mother. It becomes clear that the grandfather had died over a year ago, leaving all his money to their mother, and returning to the grandmother only that money which she had brought into the marriage. He says they also talk about the mice in the attic whom the grandmother has been trying to kill with poisoned food.

Chris tells Cathy that arsenic is white and could be in the powdered sugar on the doughnuts that are brought to them each day. They remember a movie they saw on their television in which a woman married a much older man and slowly started poisoning him
with arsenic. He gradually became more and more sickly, and when he finally died the doctors would have thought he had died of old age or pneumonia since he had gradually become so unwell. They suspect this is what happened to Cory and they decide to test out this theory by giving a sugar doughnut to the mouse they had kept as Cory’s pet. The mouse dies from the poison in the doughnut.

Chris puts the dead mouse and the other poisoned doughnuts into a paper bag and Cathy says that this will be the proof necessary to send their grandmother to jail. Chris does not respond and Cathy accuses him of keeping something back from her. He says he will tell her once they have escaped.

They are worried as they leave early in the morning that they might run into their grandmother on their way out of the house, or that she will send the butler to catch them and bring them back. However, they manage to make it to the local railway station in time for the 5:45 a.m. train that takes them to a bus station. They have two hours to wait until it is time for their bus to leave.

It is during this time that they are waiting for their bus that Chris hands Cathy the bag with the sugared doughnuts and the dead mouse. He says that they have the time now to go to the police and that Cathy and Carrie would probably be sent to a foster home or orphanage and he does not know where he would be sent, but at least justice would be done. Cathy asks him to tell her the rest of what he had discovered but that he would not tell her previously. He says that he overheard the maid and the butler talking about the fact that the grandfather’s will had been read nine months ago and how a codicil had been added by their grandfather stating that if it ever came out that their mother had had children from her first marriage, or if she were ever to have children in her second marriage that she would be required to give back all of her inheritance and everything that she had bought over the years that she had lived in his home again. Chris explains that he has realized that it was their mother who insisted that their grandmother bring those doughnuts for them, since their grandmother had always warned them about not eating sweets, and so it was their mother who had been slowly attempting to kill them. He says that he realizes that their grandmother is cruel, but after hearing her prayers he does not believe that she would have intentionally tried to kill them. The grandmother is wealthy in her own right, whereas he reasons that their mother is the only one to gain from their death.
Chris asks Cathy to make the decision about what to do with the evidence they have. She wants her mother and grandmother to rot in jail, but realizes that if they were to go to the police she and Chris and Carrie might all be separated from one another and she cannot risk that. She thinks that her mother will suffer in the future for her choices, and for the script that she has written for herself.

Momma would grow old; her husband was years younger. She’d have time to feel lonely and wish she’d done it all differently. If her arms never ached to hold me again, they’d ache for Chris, and maybe Carrie... and, most certainly, she’d want those babies that would be ours one day.

From this city we’d flee southward on a bus to make of ourselves somebodies. When we saw Momma again – and to be certain fate would arrange it that way – we’d look her straight in the eyes, and turn our backs.

Into the nearest green trashcan I dropped the bag, saying good-bye to Mickey (the mouse), and asking him to please forgive us for what we did.

"C’mon, Cathy," called Chris, stretching forth his hand. "What’s done is done. Say good-bye to the past, and hello to the future. And we’re wasting time, when already we’ve wasted enough. We’ve got everything ahead waiting for us" (Andrews: 1979, pp. 410-411).

Reflections

So the book ends on a hopeful note, but a type of hope that I find worrisome. It appears to feed into individualism within liberal and therapeutic discourses, much as Peck (1994) describes being present in Oprah Winfrey television programmes, which are yet another form of popular culture that I often hear quoted within counselling sessions. Peck says,

A therapeutic “mode of thinking about self and society” has become widely dispersed in contemporary American culture, shaping the way we think about ourselves, relationships, institutions, and politics. Also organized around the individual, therapeutic discourse tends to translate everything into individual and interpersonal terms; to expect that any problem can be ameliorated through communication; to emphasize feeling over other modes of experience; to privilege individual experience as the primary source of truth; and to encourage “taking responsibility” for one’s own feelings and behaviour based on the belief that we are powerless to change anything beyond our own lives (Peck: 1994, p. 91).

I think of this as I read the final pages of Flowers in the Attic, thinking of Gypsy’s engagement with the text many years ago. Gypsy, as described in the previous chapter, is
now very involved in self-help groups, such as Al-Anon, and in directing others through her website to self-help resources. She suggests that anytime she does read these days she is most inclined to read self-help books, but otherwise spends most of her time on the Internet. Cathy’s decides, at the end of Flowers in the Attic to not rely on social structures, and to not attempt to hold her mother and grandmother accountable for their abuse of the children, because she does not want to risk being separated from her brother. Cathy and Chris decide that they will cope on their own, and will rise above their past, representing the therapeutic discourse in action.

Penwill (1994), in a master’s thesis, talks about maternal abuse and the lack of supports for poor single mothers, making them all the more isolated and vulnerable, and increasing the risks of their becoming abusive. Penwill, rather than falling into a therapeutic discourse that suggests each single mother should take responsibility for her behaviour, which at one level I have trouble not falling into myself, is able to point out that the social structuring of mothering, which does not value stay at home mothering, and which does not provide necessary supports for stay-at-home and single mothering needs to be addressed. So within Flowers in the Attic, a fuller critique of the structures represented might question the liberal, capitalist, patriarchal structure which privileges the grandfather’s position of power, with his wealth and control, as the back drop to the control and abuse perpetrated by the grandmother and mother upon the children. However, this is not discussed within the book, and was not something that Gypsy appeared to consider. Gypsy’s discussions and approach to her life appeared much more influenced by the individualism and therapeutic discourse represented within the book.

Peck (1994) draws on Foucault as she discusses the power of discourses and their naturalizing effects, creating “taken-for granted”’s. She says, “as Protestantism envisioned an individual who stood alone before God, capitalism posited an individual who stood alone in the marketplace, and science discovered an individual who stood alone as an object in nature. The product of this historical convergence is a pervasive cultural ethos of ‘self-contained individualism’ . . . that is taken to be a fact of nature – the foundational cause of the existing social order rather than the consequence of sociohistorical forces” (p 95). She goes on to say that the blurring of the boundaries between these discourses appears to have each drawing on the other as further validation of their truth. She says,
The boundary between religious and therapeutic discourse has become particularly blurred in contemporary society, owing to the dramatic growth of the 'recovery movement' that draws heavily on evangelical Protestantism, and the 'New Age' religion that has incorporated ideas from the human potential movement in popular psychology... This fluidity enhances the persuasive power of these discourses where each can be called upon to reinforce the others (Peck: 1994, p. 96).

I come back again to Mercer’s (in Bennet et al: 1986) image of complicit pleasure and imagine Scarlet and Gypsy in constantly shifting positions to the power and pleasure in the texts with which they engaged.

Clover’s (1992) description of horror movies and the audience’s engagement with such movies states, “we are both Red Riding Hood and the Wolf; the force of the experience of horror, comes from ‘knowing’ both sides of the story” (p. 12). Although Radway (1991) suggests the readers identify with the heroine, I also accept Clover’s suggestion that as we engage with particular texts we are able to experiment with varying subject positions by identifying with different characters. This may be one aspect that assists with the shifting of a position from reinforcement to resistance to the underlying discourses within a text. Radway also points out that the women in her study have suggested that far from encouraging passiveness in readers, those romance texts that do represent weak heroines are more apt to show readers how not to behave and have encouraged some readers to become more assertive.

The discourses present in the texts Gypsy and Scarlet enjoyed only became clear to me as I was writing about them, and so I did not have the opportunity to discuss them fully with Gypsy and Scarlet as part of the research. However, I am not convinced that the therapist being aware of the discourses present in the texts their clients read will be sufficient to improve practice with abused women. Pointing out the discourses present may very well lead to resistance, much as Scarlet was resistant to the academic reading of the vampire text. Her point was that she enjoyed vampire texts, and she did not remember any sex in the books even if academics talked about the vampire bite as being sexual. What may be more effective in professional practice is engaging with clients at the level of story/plot discussion, since this appears to be their natural style of engagement.

In the next chapter I will discuss hope as an area that needs to be explored in academic research and in practice. If we can understand what keeps an abused woman
hopeful within an abusive relationship and what keeps her fascinated by certain books that represent discourses that may reinforce disempowered positions, perhaps this will add to practice knowledge. This would need to be a practice knowledge that is respectful of the women’s hopes while at the same time offering a challenge to the therapeutic discourse that inadvertently situates women as pathologized with individual problems.
Chapter Six

Hope, Loss and Separateness

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.
(Yeats in Finneran (Ed.): 1983)

The Structure of this Chapter

This chapter does not follow a linear argument, building one step upon another, but rather ambles in a circular motion around the concept of hope. This represents the manner in which I have come upon the study of hope.

I had already read Benjamin's (1997) Present Hope: Philosophy, Architecture, Judaism, prior to coming to the stage in this thesis of realizing the need to conceptualize issues of hope in Scarlet's and Gypsy's engagement with popular cultural texts, and for counselling practices generally. In fact, it is possible that having been involved in the process of considering hope and learning in Holocaust remembrance with Simon et al (upcoming publication), my sensitivity to hope was heightened, making me more likely to think of hope within this research study. Although Benjamin does not discuss hope in a therapeutic setting, it was due to having been involved in the History and Memory project that I thought to re-engage with his work in order to examine whether his unique understanding of hope would offer anything relevant to this study. His views on hope will be described. His discussion also takes up issues regarding loss, stemming from Freud's Mourning and Melancholia (in Freud: 1991 (1915)), which led me also to Freud's text and then to alternate views of death and loss.
Having completed a literature search for texts regarding hope, I found that hope seemed to be taken up in differing manners from discipline to discipline, leaving me to pick and choose those that might offer insights for my practice. The majority of texts regarding hope within Philosophy appeared removed from practice, and relied upon rational and mathematical equations for describing the manner in which people might hope. Religion appeared to focus on hope for salvation and Social Sciences focused on hope in the new Millennium. What I did find useful, in addition to Benjamin’s description of “Present Hope,” were descriptions of hope from the point of view of a Jungian analyst, from a Psychoanalyst and from a few Christian writers, all of whom will be discussed in detail. Finally Yalom’s (1980, 1989) existential psychotherapeutic approach is discussed in terms of death anxiety, existential isolation and Buber’s use of “I-It” and “I-Thou” relationships in order to situate what it is the women might be hoping for and how their hope, if situated in the present, might allow an entrance into considering the lack in their present abusive situations.

Although my feminist roots would argue the possibility of pathologizing women through a therapeutic discourse and, in particular, through a psychodynamic approach, I believe that taking up notions of hope, especially when situating hope in the present, acts against pathologizing women. It provides a means to assisting the women in examining the development of their beliefs in heterosexual relationships. It also moves against elitism by engaging with them in their favourite popular cultural texts, developing tools with them to examine their hopes and imaginations.

I had not imagined writing about hope. When I began this thesis journey I was intent on wanting to understand how and where abused women had learned about heterosexual romantic relationships. I wanted to understand what contributed to the maintenance of abusive relationships. The research has been exploratory in nature, despite an initial concern regarding what I had perceived as the romanticization of abuse in popular culture. As has been described in the preceding two chapters, Scarlet and Gypsy have been engaged over time with a series of popular cultural texts that present not unproblematic representations of heterosexual romantic relationships. Rather than challenging, or providing alternative options, to those presented to them from their families and friends, these representations may have reinforced and contributed to their on-going attempts to make meaning of life.
experiences. Just as Hyden's research (In Riessman: 1994) suggests couples with experience of violence alter the meaning of the violent act in order to maintain hope in their relationship, it appears as though Scarlet and Gypsy have been engaged in meaning-making behaviour when engaged with popular cultural texts, that contributed to maintaining hope. This could be seen in how Gypsy was normalizing, and finding hope in, her experience of childhood sexual abuse through her engagement with Flowers in the Attic, and how she may have begun to learn through the therapeutic discourse and focus on individual responsibility in the final chapters of the book, to think of herself, rather than the social settings in which she found herself, as requiring change. (As discussed in the previous chapter, I find these liberal and therapeutic discourses problematic.) It also appears as though Scarlet may have been learning (or reinforcing the belief) from vampire romances that true love is possible with an abusive man, even if it requires an attitude of “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.” Her learning could be described as not completely negative, since it provided her with the necessary attitude to fight back against an abusive husband. The messages are contradictory and her thoughts are confused at times. Scarlet and Gypsy’s life experiences inform their engagement with the texts and the texts contribute to meaning-making behaviours in their day-to-day lives. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, it was only through looking more carefully at the details of their favourite texts that I became more aware of the fact that Gypsy and Scarlet were potentially maintaining hope through their textual choices. This has led me to an interest in examining hope.

**Beginning Thoughts on Hope**

Is the opposite of hope despair? Since so many people who request counselling do so because of depression or despair, I wonder if maintenance of hope would otherwise keep a person out of therapy. Abused women commence counselling not because they want to necessarily, but because they often feel it is the last chance at saving a relationship and stopping the abuse. (In extremely severe cases, women may request assistance because they hope to receive help in planning a safe escape.) However, many of the women with whom I have come in contact over the past ten years as a clinical social worker, have often minimized the abuse, and were resistant to social workers pointing out and labeling abusive
behaviour as such. I wonder if a woman’s resistance comes from a realization that if she were to give up hope, she would despair. I do not think social workers want to make their clients despair and if we do not want them to despair then we will need to reflect upon how to assist our clients in developing a healthy and realistic hope, versus a naïve type of hope, or a naïve optimism perhaps, in the powers of romantic love to make all things well again.

This would almost suggest a development of typologies of hope, but I am unwilling to participate in the development of such a structure. In my clinical practice setting recently, the Branch Manager/Clinical Supervisor suggested that we discuss marital affairs and methods of practice with couples where an affair had occurred, in a series of team meetings. One social worker helpfully photocopied and circulated a chart that lists types of affairs and characteristics. This chart suggests that one type of affair occurs due to intimacy avoidance in the marriage, another due to conflict, another due to sex addiction, and so on. There was resistance to this chart from the supervisor and some other social workers, because of the dangers of pigeonholing clients when using such a tool. Typologies may, indeed, cluster themes and give a description of types, which can be useful for an academic understanding, but sometimes hinders a true commitment to listening to our clients own descriptions and understandings of their situations.

Yalom (1989), in Love’s Executioner, presents ten accounts of therapy with ten different patients. The book is titled after one of these clinical stories, in which Yalom sees himself as having to be “love’s executioner.” This touches on the potential hope/despair of the therapist. Yalom begins by saying,

I do not like to work with patients who are in love. Perhaps it is because of envy – I, too, crave enchantment. Perhaps it is because love and psychotherapy are fundamentally incompatible. The good therapist fights darkness and seeks illumination, while romantic love is sustained by mystery and crumbles upon inspection. I hate to be love’s executioner (p. 15).

In this clinical account he describes a seventy-year old woman who has been obsessed for many years with a previous therapist. They had become sexually involved but no longer have any contact. Yalom agrees to treat her, saying that he was certain that she was “suffering, not from love, but from some rare variant which she mistook for love” (p. 15). There is a commonality between Yalom’s description of Thelma, as his patient is known in
the story, and work with women who are in abusive relationships. As therapists we may not agree with the women that they are in healthy love relationships, because the behaviour in the relationships does not appear good for the women. If we also consider the women as "suffering from some rare variant which they mistake for love," then we also are in the uncomfortable position of being love's executioner. Mitchell (1993) discusses "hope and dread in psychoanalysis" in a similar manner. He begins his introduction by describing Sophie, a thirty-year old patient, who has fallen in love with a new man while he, as her analyst, has been on vacation. He says, "the problem, as she saw it, was returning to her analysis, where my analytic scrutiny was likely to find fault with what appeared to be an idyllic relationship, to dash her hopes, to rain on her parade," (p. 2). He appears to find himself put into Yalom's position of "love's executioner." There could arise out of this the question of how therapists maintain hope, and do not begin to despair in this line of work. Although this is not the focus of this chapter, I will briefly comment on this question.

When I first began providing counselling to survivors of childhood sexual abuse I would at times find myself driving home after a day at work, feeling as though I was carrying the heaviness of their painful stories. I asked my supervisor of the time how she managed not to become overwhelmed by hearing others' pain. She said she coped by focusing on the fact that they had survived, focusing on their strength. This is what I continue to do, and what I tell my clients I do when they ask me how I cope. I tell them that I would not be able to continue to listen to their painful memories if I did not have hope that they would begin to feel more powerful and more sure of their survival through the process of counselling. It is as if my hope in the process assists the clients in maintaining hope. It is not a naïve optimism that maintains my commitment to providing counselling, but rather a belief in the ability to move from one story-line to another, from one set of meaning-making behaviours to another, from the position of victim to that of survivor for example. However, having said this, it becomes more important to move on to a more thorough examination of conceptions of hope.

Stotland (1969) says, "the importance of hope for man has long been known to laymen and professionals. It is widely accepted that with hope, man acts, moves, achieves. Without hope, he is often dull, listless, moribund. Faced with a situation that threatens a loss of hope, he may desperately try to cling to it, to restore it, to protect it" (p. 1). He goes on to
admit how subjective the term “hope” is and how difficult to measure. His definition of hope is closely tied to motivation for a particular, and usually desirable, goal.

Motivation

Returning to one of my first basic social work texts (Compton and Galaway: 1984) from my time in the MSW programme I looked to see if there was any mention of hope there. Hope is raised in relation to motivation in the therapeutic process and increasing effectiveness of therapeutic intervention. Prior to their discussion of motivation Compton and Galaway briefly describe Eric Erikson’s ego psychology. They then move on to discuss competence and mastery and finally motivation. Their overall approach to social work within this text is to teach the systems theory to students of social work, to encourage a focus on the individual within society, with all the boundaries, tensions and possible imbalances that this approach can describe. They briefly mention Freud and his psychoanalytic constructs, and his conception of “the human being as a dynamic energy system consisting of basic drives and instincts which in interaction with the environment serve to organize and develop the personality through a series of developmental stages” (p. 133). However, they rely more on an ego psychology construct, saying that the ego psychologists moved their focus away from merely early childhood experiences, and rather believed that throughout life human beings have the opportunity for further growth and development through new life tasks and biopsychological demands (p. 134). They suggest we are driven, not just by hunger, thirst or sex, but by a general need to explore and master the world, which provides us with a sense of competence. They call upon research by Robert White, saying,

White holds that as a result of experiences of competency, individuals grow to feel a sense of mastery – a belief that one can change one’s environment by obtaining knowledge of how to change it and by the use of effective skills that one has developed. The article dealing with learned helplessness supports this notion by discussing what happens when persons are deprived of ways of controlling their environment. These concepts have tremendous significance for social workers in that they support the notion that, given a relatively benign environment, individuals actively seek control of their lives and welcome new experiences. Resistance toward change and apathy are seen as states resulting from environmental lacks and hurtful interactions and transactions over time. Thus the forces of growth and change are seen as stronger than the
resistance to change provided the individual’s transactions with the
environment and other systems have provided experiences of effectance and
mastery leading to a sense of competence (pp. 134 – 135).

This description of competence and mastery, and the opposite state of learned-
helplessness reminds me that abused women, once they have requested counselling, are often
experiencing more of a sense of learned-helplessness. This is consistent with descriptions of
the effects of the cycle of violence over time for those women who remain in abusive
relationships (Wife Assault Resource Manual (1990)). The women who remain in abusive
relationships are more prone to “learned-helplessness” rather than an experience of
competence and mastery.

It is in relation to these thoughts on competence and mastery that Compton and
Galaway discuss motivation, saying that control over internal reactions and significant
external events impacts on motivating human behaviour. They suggest that people are
generally motivated to gain a sense of mastery, linking performance and self-esteem in this
way. They move on to describe work done by the University of Chicago (social work)
faculty, based on ego psychology and work done by Helen Perlman and Charlotte Towle,
saying “that the individual’s use of social work services rests on some combination of
motivation, capacity and opportunity” (p. 136). They say that the University of Chicago
faculty integrated Thomas French’s work and they summarize their work in the following
way,

First, motivation is defined as what one wants and how much it is
wanted. In other words, people will not move towards change unless that
change is in line with their goals and purposes and there is significant desire
for the goal. Second, the two basic and necessary forces of motivation are
the push of discomfort and the pull of hope. People do not have the courage
and purposiveness necessary in goal-directed activities without a balance
between these factors (p. 136).

Although this provides a general description that appears to make sense it does not
provide a framework for understanding the women in my study and the abused women who
request counselling but who wish to remain in relationships with abusive men rather than
leave and hope for a better relationship with someone who would not be abusive. It does not
explain why some women experience being attracted to a series of abusive men over time,
despite leaving abusive situations when they become too unbearable. It describes the
opposite of hope as being learned-helplessness and apathy, and although I would agree these can be the results of prolonged involvement in an abusive relationship, this description does not provide useful frameworks for understanding the women in my study or women with experience of abuse more generally. It is as if these abused women, despite having both a push of discomfort and a pull of hope, are, none-the-less, stuck and having difficulty with goal directed behaviour.

Reflecting upon my clinical practice with hope and despair in mind, since I had thought of despair as potentially the opposite of hope, rather than apathy, I think of those times when clients can be extremely close to, if not actually, despairing. They do lack motivation in life generally, even if they exhibit some motivation to be in counselling. I think of a depressed woman in her forties. Married and with a young daughter, she had been made redundant, leaving behind her identity as “a suit,” as she and her husband described her prior to her depression. She decided not to look for work right away, wanting to focus on mothering, but when her child entered full time school and the severance pay was gone, she became more and more depressed and unable to motivate herself to find meaningful paid employment. Staying at home, or working from home, writing children’s stories as she had once dreamed of doing, was not an option because of the pressure her husband and friends were putting on her to start making money again so that they could live that life style to which they had previously become accustomed. I attempted to assist her in developing those dreams of writing again, but she could not find motivation for that either.

I have also provided counselling to a man who has been HIV positive for the past ten years. He lives close to despair each day, finding it difficult to motivate himself to keep going when he feels as though he is living with a death sentence. He describes himself as heterosexual, despite a couple of homosexual relationships in his past. He believes he would now only be able to have an intimate and sexual relationship with a HIV positive woman, although he does not have much hope in finding such a person with whom he would be compatible. He has difficulty finding support groups, because most services are provided to gay men, with whom, he says, he has little else in common now except his diagnosis. Here is a situation where I also have difficulty not slipping into feelings of despair, since the therapeutic process appears to offer him so little.
The majority of people do not live together, or marry, without some hope that their relationship will continue and be happy. When people separate, whether due to abuse or not, there often is a sense of sadness associated with the loss of hope in that relationship. I am beginning to wonder if I run the risk of inadvertently contributing to despair and depression in my clients who are in abusive situations when I empower them to look after their safety, if I do not assist them concurrently in examining their perhaps misplaced hopes and developing more empowering and safer expectations and hopes.

Mitchell (1993) describes two different approaches to hope within psychoanalytic theorizing. He quotes Boris as supporting the approach that hope is essentially regressive and interferes with maturity. He says, “to Boris, the analytic process represents the relinquishment of hope and the precipitation of a crisis of despair” (p. 205). This describes my worry of causing despair in my clients. Boris suggests,

Desire is plastic, peremptory, and polymorphous. Hope entails a commitment to preconceptions a priori, ideal images. Desire is insistent and extremely undiscriminatory. Hope is choosy and demanding. When the ideal object and the actual object are closely related, hope and desire work well together. When there is too great a gap between the ideal object and actual, possible objects, a crucial and “fundamental antagonism” develops between hope and desire (p. 205).

Mitchell then moves on to say that the second, and contrasting, approach emphasizes developmental arrests, represented in the work of Eric Erikson. He describes Erikson as regarding hope as originating in infancy through the first task of developing a basic trust versus mistrust (p. 206). Although originating in infancy, Erikson “does not see hope as limited by infantile wishes and longings, something to be renounced as development and maturation proceed” (p. 206).

Mitchell also draws upon Winnicott and Kohut as also viewing hope as progressive. He says that Winnicott suggests, “infantile hopes and longings do not need to be renounced, but rather reanimated,” (p. 207) although he does suggest that effort is required “to disentangle the patient’s wishes and hopes that represent a longing for a more genuine, more personally authentic experience from those that are a shallow adaptation to what seems to be required from the outside” (p. 207).

The Yeats poem I placed at the beginning of this chapter is a poem that my clinical supervisor has mounted on his wall in his office. When I commented on it, he explained that
he often uses it with clients in initial appointments, promising to tread softly on their dreams that they discuss in counselling with him. Thinking of the poem from the other standpoint, from the point of view of the poet, and possibly the client, I imagine the hope and fear entwined within the request to tread softly on his dreams. How much do the abused women experience both fear and hope? How much do fear and hope go hand in hand? We are trained to be sensitive to the fear abused women have of their abusers, but I worry we have been less than sensitive to their need for hope and their fear that we might not understand, and be sensitive to, their hope.

Mitchell (1993) says, “like Winnicott, Kohut feels the patient knows what he needs, regardless of what the analyst may think he knows. Kohut also stresses the importance of hope in maturity and throughout development. There is an enduring need for ideals and idealization that utilizes self-experience. Rather than smothering desire, Kohut regards hope as perpetually flaming its embers” (p. 207).

Mitchell later suggests that he finds neither of these two different approaches to hope as helpful in isolation, since he does not find it useful to think of patients’ hopes as purely regressive nor purely progressive. He says,

The patient’s initial hopes lend themselves to being understood and used in different ways. Like most else in human experience, they are fundamentally ambiguous and provide the potential for many different forms of organization. What is most therapeutic is the analyst’s ability to find opportunities for new growth embedded in old hopes, to see in the patient’s hope a dialectical relationship between the static and familiar and the longing for something fuller and more rewarding (p. 221).

**Present Hope**

As discussed earlier in chapter three, and earlier in this chapter, the process of being involved in the Holocaust remembrance project brought me in closer proximity with the need to grapple philosophically with concepts of time and the positioning of hope and memory within time (Simon et al: upcoming publication). This perhaps is an area of obvious concern when dealing with how to maintain hope when involved in acts of remembrance of collective trauma. Benjamin (1997) informed our thoughts and has continued to influence how I think of hope in relation to those people who request counselling. Having been immersed in Holocaust literature prior to my involvement in the History and Memory project, as well as
during the project, has had a very great impact on my approach to both counselling and research. After watching the eight hours of Claude Lanzman's Shoah a few years ago, I have found the impact quite long lasting. Lanzman did not rely on any documentary archival footage but interviewed survivors, bystanders and Germans in the present, discussing their memories. He did not rely on dubbing or concurrent translation, but had translators present whenever needed, keeping the process long and cumbersome to highlight the difficulties of remembering and speaking across languages and cultural differences as well as across time. It was not possible for me to witness Claude Lanzman's Shoah, despite some of the criticism of his approach, without being affected in such a way as to question some of my basic assumptions about interviewing, witnessing and retelling. I want to make it clear that I am not suggesting that the individual trauma that propels people to commence counselling can be considered comparable to that of individual and collective trauma throughout the Holocaust. However, my understanding of the alterity of the Other and the limits of empathy have increased throughout my involvement with Holocaust literature and archival documents. I have also become more aware of the need to conceptualize time, hope and memory in order to inform practice and research in counselling as well as in Holocaust remembrance.

Benjamin raises the notion of where hope resides in time. He says,

After all, is there not an inherently paradoxical element in any attempt to insist upon a relationship between hope and the present? Is it not the case that hope is already implicated in a future which it intends? The project of hope, and with it the possibility of hope's realization, would seem to be necessarily futural and therefore to cast doubt on the validity of any attempt to bring hope into conjunction with the present. How could there be any real connection between the present and hope? It is the self-evident force of this question that reveals the problem. If, as a question, it harboured an inner truth, the consequences stemming from it would efface the present. In other words, if it were accepted that hope is opened up by gesturing towards a future, then the question that immediately arises concerns the present. What happens to the present — the site in which hoping takes place — if hope is unequivocally futural? Not only would the present remain unthought, but its considerations and concerns would be effaced in relation to the future. In this instance, rather than allowing the present to remain unthought, there is the possibility of another form of questioning. It arises precisely because of the failure to address the present which occurs when hope is taken as only ever futural. The question is: What happens to hope once the present rather than the future is taken as central? (Benjamin: 1997, pp. 9-10).
He goes on to say that hope will participate in naming the present situation, drawing attention to incompleteness within the present. His discussion moves on to an examination of Freud’s concepts of mourning and melancholia and how they might inform a practice in relation to the Shoah. As stated earlier, Benjamin initially came to mind in thinking about the abused women and their need for hope, remembering that he had a unique way of taking up the notion of hope. Keeping hope grounded in the present, informing us of the present, rather than imagining it as only being to do with the future was an approach I wanted to take up in thinking about abused women’s negotiation of popular cultural texts.

I have suggested in chapter one that what has been different about my approach to working with abused women, and therefore researching with them also, is that when I see frustration and difficulty in practice – when I see them struggling with trying not to return to abusive relationships, I may get frustrated, but I actively resist pathologizing the women. My first inclination is to examine my own practice and consider whether I have not done something I should have done to assist them. My clinical supervisor has agreed with me that it is mere decency and humility to examine one’s own behaviour in an interaction, rather than immediately blame the other. I agree with this. I attempt to bring as much humility, and respect for the other, as possible to my interactions with abused women and to my thinking about their position in the world. I am not inclined to pathologize the women or suggest that they are naively hoping for something, or that they have their heads in the sand when engaged with popular cultural texts. It is a fear of mine that in attempting to bring to the table issues about the construction of desire and abused women’s reading of popular cultural texts, that a stereotypical notion of an abused woman reading a romance novel will be assumed. When I raise issues of hope, I am worried that it will be assumed that I merely mean an abused woman reads examples of romantic relationships and hopes for such relationships, keeping her from examining her abusive situation and keeping her immobilized and a prisoner of the relationship. That would be pathologizing and counter to my respect of the other.

My research with the women was situated in a moment in time – in the present. Therapy and research take place in time – in the present. Memories reside in the present despite being about the past. Hope resides in the present even if directed to the future. The
women's memories do not tell us only of the past but tell us about their present situation. Their memories give insight to their present meaning-making behaviours, showing how they make interpretations and telling us something of their current subject positions. As Parry and Doan (1994) have been quoted as saying in chapter one, therapy could be considered clinical hermeneutics. The type of social work I provide does not necessitate proving that some sort of historical event took place, but rather assisting people from overcoming the effects of memories.

Simon and Eppert (1997) first introduced me to Felman and Laub's work with survivors and testimonies. Simon and Eppert recounted Felman and Laub's story of how a survivor of Auschwitz was taped while being interviewed about her experience in the camp. She spoke in a monotone voice devoid of emotion until she came to describe an uprising that had occurred which had resulted in four chimneys having been blown up. The tape was later played to both historians and psychologists/psychiatrists. The story goes that the historians discounted her because in reality only one chimney had blown up. The psychologists were more interested in her abreaction and could see that she was expressing emotion in her recounting of her memory. What was more important, they believed, was the fact that the woman remembered a break, a difference in the day-to-day routine of being in the camp. She was remembering a disruption and an attempt to revolt. It did not matter if one or four chimneys had exploded. The disciplines of history and psychology contain differing discourses, with different standards of judgment, different interests.

Social Work is perhaps slowly becoming more aware of its own unique discourse and series of power relations. (This is a project that Chambon et al (1999) encourage us to take up.) Even with the very broad area in which social work can take place, different social workers in different agencies will have different standards of judgment. A social worker in the position of sexual abuse investigator with a Children's Aid Society will need to investigate allegations of sexual abuse to discover if there is sufficient evidence to support allegations, whether the child is in need of care, and whether charges should be laid. Within domestic violence situations a Children's Aid Worker would need to assess the facts, rather than memories, in order to assess the safety of children. In my position within an agency where clients self-refer and they are voluntary rather than mandated clients, it is not my job to judge the veracity of their statements. This therapeutic/social work discourse rubs up
against the legal discourse from time to time when letters are requested in support of our clients’ reports, for court cases and hearings in front of the Victims Compensation Board. The Ontario College of Certified Social Workers recently published guidelines for working with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, which stipulate that it is not our job to assess the veracity of a client’s memories, but rather to assist the client in healing from the effects of memories. This may be partly motivated by a certain political stance, but I believe, it has also improved practice with survivors.

This has been a round about way of reiterating that memories and effects of memories are in the present, contextualizing the manner in which hope also resides in the present. If memories can tell us just as much or maybe more about the person who is the holder of the memories than it can about what actually happened in the past, then perhaps it is useful to think of hope in the same way. Benjamin (1997) suggests that hope tells us something of what is missing in the present and informs what it is that is to be hoped for. In regards to Holocaust remembrance, hope will need to consistently hold a space open for the loss of the millions of Jews. Hope for a more just world and that no such genocide will ever occur again may be unrealistic and naïve if hope is not grounded in the present loss.

If the abused women are engaged in the process of hope, we need to ask about their present situations, and what loss it is they are experiencing. Can we examine what it is they are hoping for in order to understand more fully the lack they are experiencing? How do we assist them then to experience hope in a constructive and empowering way rather than naively? This perhaps fits with Compton and Galaway’s (1984) discussion of motivation in counselling involving both a pull towards that which is hoped for as well as a push of discomfort, although Benjamin (1997) suggests a slightly different approach to taking up hope.

So many of the abused women with whom I have worked have requested counselling wanting to know what they can do to change themselves so that they would no longer be beaten, and have protected their partners from their social workers, saying that they are not really abusive. This is a different group of abused women than those who have experienced life-threatening assaults and who access shelters directly from the home situation. Even those women in shelters often return to their abusers, and could perhaps benefit from reflection on what it is they hope for and what it is that is missing in their present situations,
however, for the most part, my comments about hope are in relation to those abused women who despite requesting counselling have difficulty admitting any push of discomfort, because they are so busy denying any significant abuse. Even Scarlet suggested that she had not been physically abused, although her husband broke her nose and she had a restraining order against him. Since these women have difficulty admitting and expressing the discomfort and, as social workers, it is possible to become frustrated as the women appear “stuck” and naively optimistic or hopeful about their relationships, we need to work with what is given to us in the therapeutic setting and begin exploration through the women’s images of hope.

The project I was involved in with Simon, Eppert and Clamen (Simon et al: upcoming publication) involved attempting a praxis that would bind together issues of memory, learning and hope. I believe these are the building blocks of therapy also. We are not usually talking about collective trauma within the therapy setting, but we are dealing with people’s memories, learning and hope.

**Mourning and Melancholia**

When Benjamin (1997) raises issues of mourning and melancholy, despite my usual resistance to Freud when it comes to understanding women with memories of sexual abuse or violence, I reluctantly realize that I need to consider the place of mourning and melancholy in the lives of my clients. Benjamin quotes Freud as having said that in “mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (Benjamin: 1997, p. 16). He goes on to say that resolution comes about, on the one hand, in the case of mourning, by overcoming the loss of the object. He again quotes Freud in regards the more complicated situation of melancholia,

Just as mourning impels the ego to give up the object by declaring the object to be dead and offering the ego the inducement to continue to live, so does each single struggle of ambivalence [in melancholia] loosen the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating and even as it were killing it. It is possible for the process in the [unconscious] to come to an end, either after the fury has spent itself or after the object has been abandoned as valueless (Freud in Benjamin: 1999, p. 16).

Foote and Frank (In Chambon et al: 1999) suggest that Freud made a stand against pathologizing the process of mourning, in their description of the disciplining of grief in
therapy. They say, "Freud hardly averts his eyes from the derangement of bereavement, but he regards this as a part of life, not a cause for therapeutic intervention" (p. 158). However, when they focus their attention on these statements of Freud, they present only one side of his discussion of mourning and melancholia. Returning to Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* (In Freud: 1984 (1917)) I tend to agree with Benjamin's take on Freud's statements, versus Foote and Frank's. Although Freud suggests that mourning is a normal part of life, not requiring therapeutic intervention, he does discuss melancholia as "pathological mourning" (p. 260) and it is in regards melancholia that he says that the ambivalence felt loosens "the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating it and even as it were killing it" (p. 267). He suggests this process only ends when fury has been spent or the lost "object has been abandoned as valueless" (p. 267). I wonder if these notions of "disparaging," "denigrating" and "abandoning as valueless" those whom have been lost, may have contributed to Benjamin's conviction that Freud has nothing to offer to the area of Holocaust remembrance.

The manner in which meaning of the loss is adjusted does remind me, however, of the description of the situation in which abused women alter the meaning of the violent act, or disconnect from themselves to protect the relationship, as described by Hyden (in Riesman: 1994), and suggests a need for a change in meaning-making behaviour in order to move on from the abusive relationship. The person experiencing melancholia appears to be despairing in herself, rather than risking an acknowledgment of the loss of an object. Freud suggests one possible resolution comes about when the object has been abandoned as valueless. I see men and women in counselling not only grieving the loss through death of someone they loved, but also the loss of relationships, health, life style, jobs. I see those who mourn and move on and those who become melancholic.

**Disciplining of Grief**

I have been counselling for over two years now a man who was so identified with his mother, that when she died as a result of what should have been a simple operation, he began to blame himself for not having advised her properly. In some ways he appears stuck in melancholy, having been writing a letter of complaint to the College of Physicians and
Surgeons for almost two years. He cannot give up his connection to his mother by reconsidering her as valueless, so his movement is very slow and ambivalent. He attended a grief group briefly, but was outraged by the religious overture that suggested he should accept God’s will when he does not even believe in the existence of God. He has little hope, and even his motivation to write his letter ebbs and flows. Foote and Frank’s chapter (in Chambon et al: 1999) is useful in regards this client, as they point out from Foucauldian terms, the therapeutic attempts at disciplining grief, rather than allowing each individual to grieve in their own ways and in their own time. They discuss grief as a “site of disciplinary power” (p. 163). It is as they discuss normalization, medicalization, totalization and individualization as the complementary processes that position the bereaved as objects of knowledge and minds and bodies to be disciplined by that knowledge, that they do admit Freud’s contribution to the medicalization of grief when he differentiated “normal and pathological responses to grief” (p. 167). They go on to discuss complicated mourning as resistance, and so this encourages a greater respect for my client as he resists the social and therapeutic expectations that he should no longer be mourning the death of his mother after two and a half years.

Foote and Franke point out the stages of grief, as particularly put forward by Kubler-Ross. The stages of grief, although an alternative to mourning and melancholia, present a model against which clients can be judged to be healthy and progressing “normally” through their grief, or “pathological” in terms of not progressing normally. They go on to suggest that White’s narrative approach to therapy is a useful model to use in remaking therapy into a site of resistance to power. Their therapeutic stance is consistent with that which I use in therapy and which I have attempted to use in this research project. They say,

Thus the therapist becomes a partner in resistance, providing precisely the “consensual validation” that earlier functionalist students of the therapeutic, such as Talcott Parsons (1957), maintain that therapist are to avoid providing. Parsons understands therapy as the normalizing effort to bring deviation back within the dominant discourse; White understands therapy as nurturing resistance to the dominant discourse.

Therapy becomes a space within which suppressed meanings of experience can be performed. Such performances are deviant, and therapy is political – White claims no neutrality for his work. Unmasking power and giving voice to marginalized experience must go beyond resistance to transformation (pp. 178 – 179).
Benjamin (1997) suggests that knowledge plays a significant role in overcoming both mourning and melancholy. He says that Freud suggests that it is through knowledge of details that memories of the lost object and awareness of the fact that the ego is not sharing the same fate as the lost object develop, allowing for both a letting go of, and a remembering of, the lost object.

With melancholia there will be a different state of affairs, or at least initially, since melancholia misconstrues the object. It misidentifies it and for that reason is marked by a type of epistemological failure. It is, however, a failure that can be overcome. It is neither the failure nor the limit of epistemology. The absence of knowledge is an absence given within the structure of epistemology insofar as it is an absence that can be replaced. Absence will yield to presence through a form of knowledge. Overcoming melancholia will mean that the correct identification of the object has taken place. It will arise because of having moved from a misidentification to the correct identification (Benjamin: 1997, p. 21).

In terms related to the Shoah, Benjamin suggests that mourning and melancholy turn out not to be useful, since we will never be able to fully know. He quotes Blanchot as saying, “One reads books on Auschwitz. The wish of everyone there, the last wish: know what has happened, do not forget, and at the same time know that you will never know” (Blanchot in Benjamin: 1997, p. 21).

However, in considering the abused women, perhaps it is useful to consider their “stuckness” as similar to melancholia as they experience too great an enmeshment with the other. If they leave the abusive relationship and mourn the loss of what they had hoped for in the relationship, they can move on, despite the potential risk of being involved in future abusive relationships if they do not deconstruct the formation of their desire. However, those who are resistant to acknowledging that their relationships are abusive, or who are minimizing the abuse, are not allowing themselves to see that there is any loss to mourn. They are more inclined to disparage and lose themselves before letting go of an abusive relationship and abusive partner. Looking at the details, gaining knowledge, disconnecting from the abusive partner will allow them to mourn the loss of their relationship, while retaining their ego, within these Freudian terms. This is not necessarily in opposition to the type of therapy White (1985, 1995, 1995) and Foote and Franke (in Chambon et al.: 1999) suggest, since looking at the details and acquiring knowledge are consistent with altering meaning-making behaviours and taking up a position of resistance to dominant discourses.
As I have stated in chapter one, when I first began to be interested in the romance discourse and the romanticization of abuse within the romance discourse I was surprised by a group of first year undergraduate students who implied that romantic was by definition unproblematic. There is a certain “taken-for-granted”ness about romance being lovely and not needing to be examined. It is partly due to this taken for granted aspect of the romance discourse that it needs to be made more visible, and made more visible especially to those who are most hindered and endangered by it. This would be one way in which looking at details and gaining knowledge might assist with moving on from melancholia/despair/apathy/“stuckness.”

This highlights the tension I experience as I engage in practice and research with abused women. On the one hand I worry about their positioning within the romance discourse, but this alone would potentially have me responding to the women as victims and as duped by romance. Freud’s views on melancholia provide another possible view of the abused women’s position, but this is certainly not all that can be said. Perhaps melancholy is similar to hopelessness or despair. It also sounds pathologizing, individualizing and isolating. Then, on the other hand, I can see that there are varying and contradicting messages present in popular cultural texts in general and in romance texts more specifically. The readers of romance (Radway: 1991) stress the act of reading as just as important, if not more important, than academics’ reading of the texts, and I also wonder about attempting to examine the women’s engagement in terms of their wish to maintain hope. This could be a move away from a pathologizing account of their position within abusive relationships and with popular cultural texts. This leads me, as I initially suggested, in a circular approach to attempting to understand the women and their engagement with texts, as I move around them attempting to understand various aspects of their situation, rather than building any sequential and linear argument. Perhaps this tension mirrors the tension the women experience as they also attempt to make meaning of their situations. However, I still need to look in more detail at hope versus despair.
Hope

Kast (1991), as a Jungian analyst, talks about the manner in which therapists so often focus on patients’ despair and anxiety – the negative emotions. She suggests we think of writing biographies of joy with our patients/clients, thinking more about the emotions of elation – joy, inspiration and hope. Her suggestions are quite consistent with the approach of narrative therapy, since they both suggest attempting to move away from too heavy a focus on the negative story-lines that bring people into counselling, to looking for alternatives – alternative memories, more empowering story-lines, alternative meanings, exceptions to the rule. She says that it is important to know our strengths, “to see the oases of happiness where they appear in the landscape of our life stories,” because otherwise she feels there is the danger of having a one-sided image, that positions us as “victims of our parents and of life. But we are not simply victims; life has its successes and joys for us too” (p. 157).

In regards to hope, Kast says,

We can sort out what has been written about hope by distinguishing between these two basic perspectives. The first maintains that without hope one cannot live, since hope represents the human being’s basic source of Geborgenheit (safety, security, protectedness) upon which all higher feelings – and the energy for action – nourish themselves. The other perspective argues that hope is the easy way out, and that living in constant hope of something better jeopardizes and devalues the here and now of our actual lives. When we are busy hoping for something else, the joy of everyday life slips away from us (Kast: 1991, p. 138).

She goes on to argue that it is possible to learn to hope, and that hope does not necessarily involve ignoring the present through escapism, although it can. She quotes Bloch as saying, “the lives of all people are filled with daydreams, many of which are merely vapid, an enervating escape, booty for swindlers. But within these daydreams there is also something that opens our eyes, prevents us from being satisfied with mere leftovers, and outlaws abdication” (Bloch in Kast: 1991, p. 139). In a similar vein to that of Benjamin (1997), she uses Bloch’s thoughts on hope, saying that he “saw hope in daydreaming, fantasy and imagination. Through fantasy and imagination, we draw the future into the present. He concedes that this can be mere escapism, but he insists that it can also move us to improve our lot” (p. 139). How I see this approach as sharing similarities with Benjamin’s, despite
the difference in subject matter, is in the manner in which hope is again brought back to the present, informing the present.

Although Kast indicates that Bloch suggests we cannot know with any particular act of imagination or hope whether we are escaping or allowing an opening for change, she believes we can easily discern which is occurring within ourselves. "If a fantasy does not engage the will but only calms us, then I would suspect it of being an escape" (p. 139). It may be less simple to discern which is occurring within others, and within clients.

Mitchell (1993) also discusses the use of imagination within hope and within the therapeutic setting. He says,

Psychopathology might well be considered a failure of imagination, a life that is stuck between old constraints foreclose the possibility of new experiences, new states of mind. The analyst can sometimes envision other ways of being and being-with, other forms through which the patient’s experience, both past and present, might be organized and developed. And that imaginative reshaping opens up new possibilities for the patient, both in thought and action (p. 223).

Popular cultural texts are part of clients’ imaginative lives and I would suggest again that by discussing favourite texts with our clients, we will be provided a glimpse into their imaginative lives. This will assist in reshaping their hopes and in the development of new possibilities in their lives.

Kast goes on to describe the manner in which French existentialism particularly thought of hope as an escape. She says this thought was especially expressed by Camus in The Myth of Sisyphus (1942). She suggests that French existentialism, and Camus in particular, responded as a product of its time. She describes it as if reacting against Christian faith and hope in something greater than every day life. She quotes Camus as saying “Hope of another life one must ‘deserve’ is a fatal evasion or deception of those who live not for life itself but for some great idea that will transcend it, refine it, give it meaning, and betray it” (p. 139). She suggests Camus’ stance was that we should live life in the here and now and be happy with the absurdity of our lot. She explains Camus’ use of the myth of Sisyphus. The part of the Greek myth that Camus used to support his position involved the gods punishing Sisyphus by giving him the impossible task of pushing a huge stone up a hill. There is no chance of success, and whenever the stone is nearly to the top of the hill, its own weight pulls it back down the hill again. Sisyphus continues to go after the stone time after time,
continuing to attempt to push it to the top. She says that Camus concludes by saying “the struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a human heart; we imagine Sisyphus a happy man” (p. 141). Kast suggests that Camus’ basic message is that “when we actively affirm our fate in simple obedience to whatever presents itself at the moment, life has meaning after all” (p. 140). This thought is not particularly useful for women living in abusive situations, although I would agree that a form of hope that was merely escapism would not be overly useful either.

Kast goes on to describe how Sartre’s position is somewhat different from Camus’, in that he would not suggest that the human condition would inspire happiness, despite both of them arguing against hope and for the need for absolute engagement with the present condition. I suppose what Benjamin and Kast, building on Bloch’s statements, suggest is that hope can be brought to the service of engagement with the present, as long as it is the type of hope that brings about action versus escapism. Perhaps, if hope can be taught, as Bloch contends, even the type of hope involving escapism can be shaped in such a way as also to look at the present.

Kast says,

Hope can be learned first by our being knowingly dissatisfied and rejecting deficiency, and then by our pursuing the daydreams and imaginary world that point the way to change . . . Hope for Bloch was akin to inspiration and creativity. Disappointment results from not understanding that utopias must not be made wholly real. Utopias are lamps hidden in the darkness, as Bloch pointed out. This definition can lead to an understanding of hope as a form of revolt. We can learn to hope by revolting against bad experiences . . . Hope can also be a matter of decision. But hope has no power of resistance if it is a simple denial of hopelessness in which we tell ourselves that ‘things generally turn out as well as they can.’ The revolt begins when we say, ‘Yes, things often turn out badly, and yet I am foolish enough to think they may improve. How could things get better?’ (p. 152).

She suggests that asking about how things could be better is the first step towards qualified dissatisfaction. She argues that Bloch’s conception of hope in no way avoids the darker side of life. However, she suggests that trust plays a part in hope, needing to trust in ourselves, others and life generally, when change is contemplated. Thinking of clients with a history of trauma makes me think that this need of basic trust may be a tall order for some. Kast suggests that sometimes when a person’s hopes shatter, leaving that person devoid of specific
expectations, that an absolute imageless type of hope, and absolute hope, can sustain her. She suggests that this absolute type of hope assists in developing Geborgenheit, safety and security. Perhaps that is what assists even the most traumatized clients in continuing day in and day out, despite a lack of specific hopes and dreams – a general and absolute hope.

In her final discussion about hope, Kast calls upon the mother archetype. She says, 

I spoke of joy as a meaningful coincidence of the ego and the Self in the anticipation of something unexpected. The archetypal image of this emotion would be the motif of waiting for the arrival of the divine child . . . I referred to Dionysus as an archetypal image of inspiration. The archetype of the divine child can take many forms; Dionysus is a form that emphasizes the aspects of unanticipated newness and indestructibility. Joy is not indestructible; it can be killed. Dionysus suggests eternal transformation through vitality. It is clear that a mother belongs here, too – mother goddesses, feminine goddesses. There is no divine child without a mother (p. 154).

Kast suggests that this mother archetype allows us to consider hope as occurring within a connection with others, or in an “oneness with other persons and with the cosmos” (p. 154). She describes the mother archetype as the foundation of life and vitality, which can lead to feelings of Geborgenheit, safety, security, fullness and an assurance that what is needed will be provided. She says that transformation that is built upon a mother archetype, versus a father archetype, will provide an experience of being carried and sustained as “we experience self-existence by forgetting ourselves rather than by fighting for ourselves” (p. 155). She suggests that the mother archetype can lead to feelings of strength and autonomy, whereas the father archetype, in which we reflect on difficulties in order to become conscious of them, can lead to a type of individuation that has much more to do with separation. Her comments sound similar to those of feminists and native groups who would suggest that the white male version of health and development does not explain the growth in connection women, and other groups, experience. (Manicom (1992) suggests, particularly in regards to pedagogy, that it is not only women who prefer collaboration, but also Afro-American/Afro-Canadian communities.) Kast, in fact, says that Sisyphus is incomplete. She describes him as “solitary, proud, perhaps even autistic . . . He is completely by himself. And he is a hero who acts as if consciousness were primary: ‘I can do what I want. No one has to help me’ . . . . The principle of relationship is completely absent in this existentialist strand of thought” (p. 142).
This leads me to some observations made by Lynch (1965) regarding hope. He says, first of all I incline to equate the life of hope with the life of imagination, that is to say, with the realistic imagination, with an imagination that, in the language of Martin Buber, imagines the real . . . Let us only say now that hope imagines, and that it refuses to stop imagining, or hypothesizing, and that it is always imagining what is not yet seen, or a way out of a difficulty, or a wider perspective for life or thought . . . The second and related part of my version of what hope is carries this act of the imagination one step further and insists that it be or become an act of collaboration or mutuality. Hope not only imagines; it imagines with (Lynch: 1965, p. 23).

Lynch is also speaking particularly about hope within therapeutic relationships, despite not being a psychotherapist himself. Farber, in the Foreword to Images of Hope describes Fr. Lynch as “the outsider who can speak as a friend,” not attempting to proselytize nor be proselytized himself (p. 11).

Lynch makes some similar comments to those of Kast wondering why hope has not been discussed more fully in either psychiatry or religion. What I wish to highlight of his discussion, however, is what he says about hope necessarily occurring in connection, which adds nicely to Kast’s final observations about hope in the realm of the mother archetype. This is also consistent with Mitchell’s (1993) suggestion that “to become more serviceable as a basis for generating personal meaning, old hopes require transformation with the interaction between analysand and analyst” (p. 221). Lynch says,

Hope cannot be achieved alone. It must in someway or other be an act of a community, whether the community be a church or a nation or just two people struggling together to produce liberation each other. People develop hope in each other, hope that they will receive help from each other. As with the imagination, we tend always to think of hope as that final act which is my own, in isolation and in self-assertion. But it is not this at all; this interpretation is, in fact, one source of its dubious and sentimentalized reputation (Lynch: 1965, p. 24).

The thought of hope occurring within some form of connection is not altogether simple or unproblematic. As I have quoted from Rilke in the beginning of chapter three, solitude and the recognition of difference and separateness need to be protected within any relationship.
Separateness and Connectedness

Nouwen (In Durback (Ed.) (1989)) suggests loneliness is one of the greatest problems of our day. He says that psychiatrists and psychologists suggest that loneliness is one of the most frequently expressed problems and an underlying root of many other problems, such as suicide, addictions and psychosomatic problems. He says however, “the roots of loneliness are very deep and cannot be touched by optimistic advertisement, substitute love images, or social togetherness” (p. 12). Nouwen’s background is in both theology and philosophy and his approach is very much influenced by his Christian faith as a Jesuit. He goes on to say,

Sometimes illusions are more livable than realities, and why not follow our desire to cry out in loneliness and search for someone whom we can embrace and in whose arms our tense body and mind can find a moment of deep rest and enjoy the momentary experience of being understood and accepted? . . . Instead of running away from our loneliness and trying to forget or deny it, we have to protect it and turn into a fruitful solitude. To live a spiritual life we must first find the courage to enter into the desert of our loneliness and to change it by gentle and persistent efforts into a garden of solitude (p. 13).

At this point it might be worth pointing out that I have been writing the bulk of this chapter on hope in a convent, where I have come for a long weekend for the express purpose of writing. I imagine many Ph.D. students need to remove themselves from their usual day-to-day lives in order to focus on writing, and this convent has been the perfect retreat from the pressures and expectations of work and family life. It is providing me also with an example of how a community can protect solitude. These Anglican nuns (Sisters of St. John the Divine) have provided me with a place to rest, read and write, looking after my physical, emotional and spiritual needs while protecting my solitude so that I can get on with resting, reading and writing. Julia Cameron (1992) would call it synchronicity that after adding the above thoughts on the need for solitude, despite previous quotes about the need for togetherness, that I wandered over to the Sunday morning Eucharist service, where the Priest preached about the Christian community providing the space for individuality and difference, which he suggested was what made the difference between a Christian community and a cult. He said a cult would not allow for individuality and difference and would not welcome people into their midst who thought differently. These nuns do not cross-examine people
who ask to come and stay in their guest wing. They merely give space and time. They do not expect guests to attend services with them, but they are welcome to, whatever their faith background. It seems a lovely example.

Existential Psychotherapy:

Death Anxiety, Existential Isolation and the “I-Thou” Relationship

At this point I want to circle back again to another brief examination of death, not from Freud’s perspective on mourning and melancholia this time, but from Yalom’s (1980) examination of existential psychotherapy generally and his reflections on death anxiety more specifically. Yalom says,

Obviously the role of death in human behaviour either as a source of anxiety or as a determinant of motivation had little appeal to Freud. It met none of his personal dynamic requirements: it was not an instinct (though Freud in 1920 was to postulate that it was) and did not fit into a mechanistic Helmholtzian model. Nor was it novel: it was old hat, Old Testament, in fact, and it was not Freud’s aim to join a long procession of thinkers stretching back to the beginning of time. “Eternal fame,” as he was wont to put it, did not lie there. Eternal fame would be his from discovering a hereto unknown source of human motivation: the libido . . . his fierce investment in the primacy of the libido was overdetermined; he elevated one aspect of human motivation to a position of absolute primacy and exclusivity . . . Counter theories soon appeared. Freud’s most creative students took issue with libido theory; and by 1910, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, and Otto Rank had all chosen to leave the good graces of the master rather than accept his mechanistic, dual-instinct view of human nature (pp. 73 – 74).

Yalom goes on to briefly describe the focus each of these former students took, as they attempted to propose alternate sites of motivation. He suggests that Jung “posited a spiritual life-force monism,” Adler “emphasized the child’s concern with survival” and Rank “stressed the importance of death anxiety,” suggesting the human condition involves a movement between two fears; the fear of life and the isolation that goes along with life, and the fear of death (p. 74).

Yalom is of greatest relevance to my project in terms of his contributions regarding existential isolation, death anxiety and meaninglessness. He says, “the process of deepest inquiry – a process that Heidegger refers to as ‘unconcealment,’ – leads us to recognize that
we are finite, that we must die, that we are free, and that we cannot escape our freedom. We also learn that the individual is inexorably alone” (p. 353). He discusses the manner in which awareness of death can lead to greater appreciation of life, whereas ignoring the general fear of death can lead to particular anxieties, since it is easier to be frightened of a specific thing rather than to be afraid of a larger unknown. He says in Loves Executioner (1989), “I have come to believe that the fear of death is always greatest in those who feel that they have not lived their life fully. A good working formula is: the more unlived life, or unrealized potential, the greater one's death anxiety” (p. 111). He also discusses (Yalom: 1980) the manner in which many of his patients, and even himself, have experienced a greater willingness to live life to its fullest after a close brush with death.

Yalom (1980) differentiates interpersonal isolation, which is closer to what we would think of as loneliness, referring to being isolated from other people, from existential isolation. “Existential isolation refers to an unbridgeable gulf between oneself and any other being. It refers, too, to an isolation even more fundamental – a separation between the individual and the world” (Yalom: 1980, p. 355). Yalom goes on to suggest that many relationships have behind them existential isolation as the driving force bringing the two people together, but that it is only through accepting the fact that each of us comes into the world alone and will die alone that we are able to engage in any meaningful exchange with another.

Imagining what could be considered a meaningful exchange, Yalom goes on to discuss Martin Buber’s descriptions of relationships as falling into one of two categories. He suggests that relationships are either “I-Thou” or “I-It” relationships. The “I-It” relationship, as the name implies, is a relationship “between a person and a piece of equipment, a ‘functional’ relationship, a relationship between a subject and object wholly lacking mutuality” (p. 364). He goes on to say,

The I-Thou relationship is a wholly mutual relationship involving a full experiencing of the other. It differs from empathy . . . because it is more than an “I” attempting to relate to an “other.” “There is no ‘I’ as such, but only the basic word I-Thou.” “Relation is reciprocity.” Not only is the “Thou” of the I-Thou relationship different from the “It” in the I-It relationship, and not only are the natures of the I-Thou and the I-It relationships vastly different, but there is even a more fundamental difference. The very “I” is different in the two situations . . . The “I” appears and is shaped in the context of some relationship. Thus the “I” is profoundly influenced by the relationship with the “Thou” . . . When
relating to "It"... one holds back something of oneself: one inspects it from many possible perspectives; one categorizes it, analyzes it, judges it, and decides upon its position in the grand scheme of things. But when one relates to a "Thou," one's whole being is involved; nothing can be withheld (p. 365).

In some ways these distinctions remind me again of Rilke's statements on loving the other whole and complete and against the wide sky, as quoted at the beginning of chapter three, as I attempted to explain the position from which I imagine a healthy relationship. However, Yalom's use of Buber's "I-Thou" relationship in terms of a losing of oneself in the relationship can appear part of the romantic discourse, which I find concerning. At another point he describes this as relating in a needless fashion, which involves losing or "transcending" oneself. This is not without problems and, I believe Yalom would suggest, is not common, perhaps operating as more of a utopia. However, it provides some additional framework for considering what it is that the abused women may be hoping for through their engagement with popular cultural texts and the romance discourse. If their experiences with abusive partners could be described as "I-It" relationships, which they probably could in terms of how their abusers have treated them, then they may be suffering from both interpersonal and existential isolation and ultimately wishing to be involved in an "I-Thou" relationship. Focusing on their hopes, particularly as they may be manifested through their choices of popular cultural texts, may provide the opportunity to engage the women in examining with more care what is lacking in their present situations and help them protect themselves from involvement in further I-It relationships.

Can Hope be Taught?

As I move towards completion of this thesis, it is worth commenting on how significant it is that I am contemplating the positive aspects of abused women's engagement with popular cultural texts. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, I had not imagined writing about hope. I was concerned about the romanticization of abuse in popular cultural texts. I was concerned about the possible negative impacts of engagement with popular cultural texts. I continue to believe that many of these texts romanticize abusive behaviour, and that the women's engagement with these representations of men's control of women is
not unproblematic, but I cannot turn away from this challenge to look more closely at how these texts may be part of my clients’ imaginary lives and may contribute to hope and the challenge to find ways to honour my clients’ hopes. The challenge is how to do this in such a way as to keep hope grounded in the present: “dissatisfied and rejecting of deficiencies.”

It is both frustrating and exciting to have these thoughts now after completing the research with Gypsy and Scarlet, but I imagine frustration is a common side effect of emergent studies, especially within the time constraints of a Ph.D. programme. In a future study, I would want to pursue with abused women, not only some sort of open-ended exploration, balancing an interest in both the possible negative and positive implications of their engagement with their favourite popular cultural texts, as I did in this study. I would want to explore in more detail, with the women, how their imaginations might be engaging with certain sites, maintaining or encouraging hope, looking for methods to improve practice, keeping hope grounded in the present and informing their present situations. In other words, I would attempt to put into practice some of these thoughts regarding hope.

Kast has suggested that hope can be taught, and perhaps this could be done through an exploration of a person’s daydreams and imaginary world, which could include an exploration of those imaginary worlds entered into via popular cultural texts. I have discussed Mercer’s concept of complicit pleasure, in previous chapters, discussing how I, and the women, might have taken up differing positions vis-à-vis pleasure and power represented in texts. I wonder, if hope can be taught, whether hope could also facilitate some movement between those positions of resistance, negotiation or reinforcement that are taken up in relation to the power represented in texts.

Due to the emergent nature of this study, these theorizations regarding hope came following my meetings with women and following the writing of their stories. This means that I did not have the opportunity to take up notions of hope with Scarlet and Gypsy. However, these are ideas that have begun to inform my practice and which could be taken up in future studies.
Chapter Seven

Reflections as a Basis for Future Research

Reflections versus Conclusions

Although this final chapter could have been entitled “Conclusions,” and although I believe I have learned a great deal throughout the process of conducting this piece of research, it does not feel appropriate to think of having come to conclusions. As I pointed out in the introduction, what I have hoped for this research is that it might unsettle, rather than act as a lost puzzle piece, filling in a gap. “Concluding,” sounds final and sure, whereas I believe this research has opened up new areas of questioning. This has been partly why it has been difficult to begin the process of bringing this research process to an end. There is a fairly great desire at this point to complete the doctoral process, but that implies concluding, finishing and moving on, which I do not feel so ready to do. So, I have begun to think of this as much more of a transition, versus a conclusion, and so I am more comfortable with the idea of reflecting upon what I have done so far, and pointing towards where I plan to continue going.

The thesis process has been described as a journey (Cole & Hunt (Eds.): 1994), which could imply that it ends when the researcher/traveler reaches the intended destination. I have begun to think of life-long learning more in terms of the journey, with the thesis process only one leg of the journey. I think of this life-long learning journey in terms of Griffiths and Tann’s (1992) fifth level of reflective practice, which they label “retheorizing and reformulating.” As discussed in the introduction, they describe this level of reflective practice as being made up of “act-observe-sytematically-analyse-rigorously-evaluate-retheorize-plan-act,” implying an ongoing cycle of acting, reflecting and retheorizing in the journey of reflective practice. This takes the pressure off a little in terms of not having to complete my “life-work” in this one research project. Finishing the thesis can be a stop-off, and I can re-fuel and keep going in the same direction, or change the mode of transportation
altogether. I would feel more secure in knowing exactly where I was heading next, but this is fine for the moment, since it is part of the cycle of reflecting between acts.

The purpose of this final chapter is to review my position vis-à-vis clinical practice with abused women, and clinical practice with a broader population, following this piece of narrative, critical and action research. I will also discuss in this chapter what I wish to pursue in terms of further reflection and research, and areas in this research project that I view as having been missed opportunities for other directions of study. Finally, I will comment on the process of self-disclosure and self-regulation within this thesis.

When I co-facilitated an Interpersonal Relationship group with my clinical supervisor, as training to facilitate these types of groups myself, he commented that in every group meeting, any number of interactions would occur between group members that could be taken up in detail for examination and learning. His suggestion was that he and I would probably notice and comment upon different interactions, and view them differently when we did notice the same interaction. There would also only be time within a two-hour group meeting to process one or two interactions each evening. I am currently holding similar thoughts about this thesis project, since there was probably any number of themes I could have pursued. I was already interested in the romanticization of abuse in popular culture prior to beginning the research and I became interested in hope, through reviewing the women's favourite texts, but as I look back on the process now I can see other themes I could have pursued, which I did not, and I assume that readers of this thesis may notice others I could have pursued.

**Further Work Regarding Hope in Practice**

The fact that I began this thesis process worried about women's negative learning from the romanticization of abuse in popular cultural texts, but have come to a position where I am wondering about how these texts may be assisting the women in maintaining hope, I believe points out a shifting to a less pathologizing stance. The abused women who are struggling with not being attracted to abusers are not masochistic, (see Caplan's (1985) The Myth of Women's Masochism for a full description of this), and not pathological, but are hoping. They are actively hoping and making-meaning of their experiences. Counselling can provide a scaffold, as Michael White (1995) describes "collaborative conversations," to
assist in the process of deconstructing and reconstructing hopes, memories and meaning-making processes through collaborative exploration of the present. However, this is done with the understanding that memories, hopes, meaning-making behaviours and imagination are all situated in the present.

I find it interesting and challenging to have made this change in my thinking of the women’s engagement with texts, thinking of their engagement now as more of an avenue for exploring their imaginary lives and their hopes, rather than as a site of only negative learning. Previously, I could have intellectually agreed that these sites offered contradictory learning, but this has broadened to a greater acceptance of the truly varying manners in which a reader might be taking up texts.

I have completed and presented a beginning exploration of how to conceptualize and pursue issues of hope through counselling. I am interested in immersing myself in further study regarding hope, wanting to take it up particularly in regards to practice. Just as I became interested in popular cultural texts as sites of learning initially for women who had experienced abuse, but then became more aware of the possibilities of deconstructing learning from popular cultural texts for my other clients also, I see the possibilities of exploring hope with a variety of counselling clients with varying “presenting problems.”

One of my current clients was referred to me from a hospital setting, where he had been diagnosed as having a “courtship disorder.” He is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, reporting having been sexually abused by his father and his father’s lover, and exposed to a great deal of pornography at a very young age. When he was first referred to me he had been charged with indecent exposure, for the third time, and this last time while on probation so he was charged with breach of probation also. He had previously been charged with voyeurism also. The testing he had received in the hospital setting had concluded that this was a courtship disorder in his case, because he always exhibited himself to adult women to whom he was sexually attracted as though he expected a positive relationship to come of the encounter. He has found it extremely useful to not only look at the learning that took place as a child being sexually abused but also as an ongoing consumer of pornography. He has come to realize that the messages present in the type of pornographic movies he has enjoyed suggested to him that women would be appreciative of his exhibitionism, leading to sexual fulfillment and possibly ongoing sexual relationships. The medical model within the hospital
setting had described him as having a courtship disorder, because they believed he was attempting to speed up the “normal” course of a courtship by exhibiting himself. This did not necessarily pressure him to take responsibility for his behaviour and did not assist him in changing the behaviour, but rather had him pathologized with a “disorder.” As the narrative therapy approach would suggest, externalizing the problem and looking for external learning sites has had the result of assisting this client from moving from a position of shame that suggested to him that there was something wrong with him internally that made him do such things, to a position in which he realizes he learned to behave like this and can learn alternate behaviours.

What I have realized recently, however, after a crisis in this client’s marriage was brought about by the police charging him again for indecent exposure, is that it is also important to explore issues of hope with him. He reports that he has never engaged in illegal sexual activity when single and engaging in brief affairs. He has only ever indecently exposed himself while in relationships that have held promise of intimacy. We have begun to realize that he has difficulties in feeling comfortable with appropriate self/emotional exposure in intimate relationships and through his withdrawal from relationships he appears to put himself in a position in which he is more prone to sexually act out. We will continue to explore this in terms of hope; what it is he is hoping for, and what that tells us about his present situation, at the same time as asking how things might be better. This client’s problems have begun to make me realize that I will need to explore the area of “compulsions.” Compulsions may occur in extreme situations and may be more difficult to alter than the desires that abused women have learned, but further research in this area may also inform practice with abused women. This is an example of how my research has informed my practice and my practice continues to fine tune further areas of research.

Being an emergent study, and coming to this interest in hope from the process of the study, meant that by the time I would have wanted to discuss issues of hope with the women in the study they had fulfilled their obligations to the study. We had already met to discuss their reactions to what I had written of their lives and there had not been an expectation previously of meeting regarding what I would write about the stories they had read. Following this final meeting I had wanted to ask Gypsy for some further clarification about her interest in the Internet. I left a few phone messages and e-mail messages, and she e-
mailed me, telling me she was going through a difficult patch, I assumed with on-going difficulties with her daughter who had attempted suicide, so I have felt it best to not bother either women at this point with further questions, which might actually be better pursued in further studies. (They are both aware of how to access further counselling if they require additional support.) I will be able to continue to reflect upon hope and the role of maintaining hope through popular cultural texts through my clinical practice and may pursue this in further research in the future. As I have indicated in the previous chapter, many of my clients are struggling with despair versus hope, and I believe this area is of importance to a broad spectrum of counselling clients.

Space: Space as Power in the Counselling Setting, Imaginary Space and Virtual Space

My greatest regret regarding a missed theme, which I would have liked of have pursued with the women in the study, rather than merely theoretically, has to do with space.

I believe that many clients mention to their therapists books that they have been reading and films that they have enjoyed, but I do not believe it is common practice for therapists to take up with their clients the possible impacts of their enjoyment of particular popular cultural texts. The discussions are more probably left as joining chit-chat on the walk to or from the waiting area or to initially break the ice in an otherwise “therapeutic hour.” As Parry and Doan (1994) have suggested, however, if therapy could be considered clinical hermeneutics, where a great deal of the focus will necessarily be in regards to meaning-making behaviour then it does not make sense to skip over anything the clients offer that provide access to their meaning-making lives. Being interested, in this research project, in exploring the learning from popular cultural texts resulted in my inadvertently recreating a blind spot in my research-therapy with the women. There is the danger at any stage of the social work career, either as a beginning or experienced worker, of thinking we know what to ask about rather than listening carefully to what the clients want to tell us. Wanting to learn more about an area that is so often ignored in the counselling setting, I questioned the women in this study about where they had learned about heterosexual romantic relationships, wanting especially to see how learning from popular cultural texts fit into their overall learning experiences. Just as other social workers might have a blind spot where popular
cultural texts are concerned with their clients, I have to admit that I had a blind spot when Gypsy talked about her engagement with the Internet. She could not have stated it much more clearly, having said that she really did not have time to read anymore since the Internet, when I asked about what she enjoyed reading. However, I was interested in pursuing their engagement with popular cultural texts over time and their potential learning from such texts, so I focused on *Flowers in the Attic* in terms of Gypsy’s engagement with popular culture since she had said it had been her favourite book in the past. This has been useful, leading me, following the review of *Dark Rapture*, to issues of hope, which I believe are important. In an on-going counselling setting, versus this research setting, I could go back to a missed theme and give Gypsy the opportunity to now talk about her engagement with the Internet, but, as I have stated, although I attempted to do this with Gypsy, it was not possible within the time constraints and obligations of this research project. Although I have been unable to discuss my thoughts regarding space with Gypsy, I have begun to consider space in relation to her engagement with *Flowers in the Attic* and the Internet, which could point towards “space for hope.” Thinking about space then leads on to considering space as an indicator of power in the counselling setting and a site of potential unsettling. This may point towards further areas of research also.

The *Wife Assault Resource Manual* (1990) points out that one of the methods by which an abuser controls his spouse is by isolating her. This has the result of minimizing her chances of contextualizing his behaviour and comparing it to the experiences of other couples, as well as contributing to her reliance on him, and limiting her chances of escape. In these terms, a woman’s access to the Internet may provide additional access to supports and information, and act against potential isolation. (It is not quite as simple as this, since use of the Internet can also be experienced as a lonely, solitary endeavour.) In Gypsy’s situation and experience it has also provided her with the opportunity to turn the power tables, becoming the provider of support and information in her website, suggesting links and websites for other women who have experienced sexual abuse and spousal violence. During the time that I was meeting with Gypsy and Scarlet, Gypsy was in the process of completing training to become a facilitator of ACOA groups (self-help groups for adult children of alcoholics, modeled on the same principles behind the Alcoholic Anonymous groups) and was able to put some of this training and experience into practice immediately in her website.
She said she would usually update her website every morning, adding new inspirational thoughts for the day. Here is a place where academic qualifications and expert status is unnecessary and she can pursue her role as self-help advocate.

Gypsy and Scarlet talked about their former husbands’ use of the Internet in terms of visiting sites for “big this and that,” which led to a discussion of how Gypsy and Scarlet had each “talked” in “chat rooms” to men, whom they had discovered they knew as a neighbour, in one instance, and as a parent of a child’s friend, in the other. The parent of the child’s friend talked in the chat room of being a cross-dresser, but then when they realized they knew each other, had to ask Gypsy not to mention his cross-dressing to his wife. Scarlet and Gypsy each appeared to be suggesting that although their experience with the Internet and websites suggested that the men they knew appeared to risk more and experiment with self-exposure, they were aware that it was still a small world and that you could still be found out if trying on new personas on the Internet. Gypsy’s website portrays herself in a manner consistent with how she presented herself in this research project, and gives details of her life, which surprises me in some ways. However, if I consider the manner in which people expose details of their lives on prime-time television, it becomes less of a surprise that websites and homepages contain such detailed information about people’s lives. Although the Internet provides the opportunity to experiment with new personas, it would appear as though Gypsy has not been interested in so much creating a new persona but in allowing more of what she considers her authentic self to express itself after the stifling and isolating experiences of abuse.

It is interesting to consider Gypsy’s engagement with *Flowers in the Attic*, within this context of considering her access to space and within the context of space and power. *Flowers in the Attic* represents children isolated in an attic for several years, contained in a small space and only escaping after several years to the outside world. In the final chapter they are waiting for a train to take them to a warmer and more open climate. Gypsy talked of having loved this book at the time that she was being sexually abused by her step-father, and she realized that the incest portrayed in the book may have contributed to normalizing her experiences with her step-father and vise versa. However, an argument could be made that there was also a parallel between her isolation and struggle to maintain hope and these themes within the storyline. Gypsy talked of moving “so many damn times” that she never
had the opportunity to make and maintain school friends, and of having to rush home after school everyday to help baby-sit her younger half-siblings, so that she felt like a prisoner in her own home. Moving from a position in which she felt isolated and controlled as a child, fascinated by the isolated and controlled children in *Flowers in the Attic*, to a position in which the world is at her fingertips through the Internet is a dramatic shift.

Having access to the Internet is not necessarily the end of her problems, however, but does indicate a shifting of space and power. When I met with Gypsy and Scarlet in the follow-up session, Gypsy indicated that she had met a man through the Internet and that she was about to travel to New York to visit him. She had spoken about her fears of being in a relationship where her partner would be absent a great deal and she admitted her fears about this long distance relationship. At the time of meeting with Gypsy she had no fears about this new relationship being abusive in anyway and I hope that the amount of work she has done in attempting to break relationship patterns and understand the construction of her desire will stand her in good stead where it comes to making relationship choices. Empowering experiences through access to space and information are positive but still do not guarantee safe choices from this larger pool of potential partners. The other area of potential difficulty lies within the potential differences in interaction on the Internet versus in person. Will two people who are interested in meeting one another due to their personalities on the Internet find that they interact in a similar manner when they meet one another? (The movie *You've Got Mail* plays with this concept, ending happily, Hollywood style.)

**Electronic Self-expression versus In-person Self-expression**

I currently am counselling a female survivor of childhood sexual abuse who discovered information about our agency on the Archdiocese website. Her behaviours highlight the manner in which a person may behave dramatically differently in person versus electronically. She identified wishing to heal from the effects of childhood sexual abuse, but particularly those effects of shame and self-blame which have made her painfully shy and uncomfortable with people. This had caused great difficulties for her in her job in a bank, where she had a significant amount of interaction with customers. Her extreme shyness has made traditional "talking therapy" a difficult process for her. We have sat through silences and she has struggled through attempting to answer my questions. Her answers are often "I
don’t know,” or very brief one-liners. These sessions became more information sharing as I provided my understanding of the effects of sexual abuse and attempted to provide information to begin to shift her self-blame and shame. I attempted to focus on more empowering and joyous memories, but these were few and far between. She had attempted suicide at ten and again at fifteen years of age. I was beginning to think that I was not able to help her in this particular counselling setting since she was so uncomfortable with talking, but she did not want to discontinue counselling. So, I suggested she come alternate weeks, rather than weekly, and that she e-mail me during the weeks that she did not have an appointment because she would occasionally speak of only being comfortable communicating in chat rooms on the Internet. She is most actively involved in a Catholic chat-room, where she says she uses another name, but she is more closely herself in this chat-room than in any other context. She has told one or two others who are active in the chat-room about her history of abuse, but has not disclosed this to everyone. She recently met one of the priests from the chat-room while she and her husband were on holiday, but she said she would not have been able to do this if he had been one of the people she had told about her history. This suggestion that she write to me in e-mail on those weeks she does not come to counselling has provided a vast amount of expression of both thoughts and emotions, which facilitate greater interaction when she attends an appointment. She is articulate about her memories, and her meaning-making behaviours regarding these memories though her writing. She can describe in vivid detail interactions she has had with people during the week and her fears and reactions. These provide me with a much clearer view of her experiences and her interpretations of her experiences than she was able to provide by talking. When she comes into a session now I can open her e-mail message and give her voice by reading it aloud for her. I then give her my reactions, validating and normalizing her pain and reinforcing all her attempts to change patterns of interactions with family and friends. She is beginning to write now and again of beginning to think that maybe it was not her fault that she was sexually abused. She even chose to disclose her experience to one of her brothers as an attempt to explain her reluctance to speak to the other brother and as an attempt to break the silence surrounding the abuse. I very much doubt that these changes would have come about for her without our use of e-mail in the therapeutic process.
This research experience with Gypsy, hearing of her use of the Internet raised my awareness of the possibilities inherent with the Internet for expanding access to information and supports, minimizing the isolating effects of wife assault. This, no doubt, raised my consciousness regarding the possibilities inherent in the use of the Internet and e-mail with my clients. This experience with my client using the Internet to give herself an opportunity to be herself and “speak-up” in chat-rooms and using e-mail as a tool to facilitate further therapeutic experience within the counselling setting has added further awareness of the possibilities offered by the space and boundaries within the Internet to increase feelings of safety for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. This is an area of research to pursue.

“I-It” versus “I-Thou” Relationships in Electronic Communication

One particular area to consider in terms of the use of e-mail with clients, for a tool for therapeutic intervention, rather than merely a method of booking and rescheduling appointments, has to do with how space and boundaries will be taken up in terms of Yalom’s (1980) use of “I-Thou” and “I-It” relationships. The therapeutic relationship offers the potential of an experience with an “I-Thou” relationship and when my client forwarded journal writing to me this possibility was increased, but necessitated I respond to her message, rather than merely waiting for the following appointment to take up her writing. The reason she finds it easier to express herself electronically, I believe, is because she cannot see the person or people with whom she is communicating. She could convince herself while writing that she is merely speaking to herself. Although this can, on the one hand make her feel safer, and give her a space to express herself, which is important, it is also vital therapeutically to assist her in developing safety skills and the ability to maintain appropriate boundaries. When she is physically with people she has impermeable boundaries, when she communicates on the Internet there is the risk of not maintaining a sufficient boundary and then regretting what she has disclosed. I experienced the level of detail and intense emotion she expressed in the first couple of journal entries she forwarded as quite overwhelming. This indicated to me that the boundaries in this space were different than in the space the counselling room offers.

I cry easily when watching films or reading books, as though I am part of the narrative and the boundaries are not present to protect me. I can hear of experiences in the
counselling setting that are just as painful as those in popular cultural texts, yet I rarely cry with my clients. I have often thought of this in terms of putting on a professional hat and being required to maintain a certain degree of professional “objectivity” in order to not become overwhelmed and unable to help. However, I am also constantly monitoring my feelings and reactions to my clients, while maintaining this “distance,” since these reactions can provide further useful insights for assessment and treatment. The reaction to reading my client’s e-mail, was much more similar to that of reading a book or watching a film. I asked her at one point if she had any thought of how I might have reacted to one of her messages. She said she imagined I would have stayed objective and professional. “No, I didn’t,” I said. I believe it is helpful for her to hear a “human,” rather than merely professional reaction in order to begin to assist her in contextualizing her experiences. This would not be as necessary for those clients who have friends who provide support and the human reaction.

When a child is sexually abused she/he is treated as an “It,” and there is the danger of recreating further “I-It” relationships following these early experiences. When I first received the first e-mail message from my client I had the obligation of attempting to bring about an “I-Thou” exchange. I replied about the power of her writing, attempting to validate the emotions she was experiencing as a result of her memories and assuring her that we would discuss her writing in detail in her next session. Thinking about how to bring about “I-Thou” versus “I-It” interactions through electronic communication is an important area to continue reflecting upon, especially as the Internet and e-mail are such common avenues of communication now, and are beginning to be used more within therapeutic relationships.

Space and Access to Power

These interests in space, although initially triggered by an interest in the space provided by Gypsy’s access to the Internet, have led me to a beginning exploration of space as an indicator of power. Moffatt (in Chambon et al: 1999) discusses the use of surveillance and government of the welfare recipient, taking up Foucault’s approach to looking for the techniques by which people’s bodies are disciplined and coerced. With this in mind he discusses the process by which Social Assistance Workers meet with and examine those people applying for, and receiving, social assistance. He says that Foucault elaborates how this examination could be described: “It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it
possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them” (Moffatt in Chambon et al. 1999, p. 222).

Moffatt goes on to describe in detail the office space in which these examinations take place, using the concept of “panopticon.” He says,

The panopticon has two main features: the central tower and a peripheral building that surrounds the tower. The tower is constructed so that windows face the inner ring of the peripheral building. The peripheral building is divided into cells that extend the width of the building. At either end of the cell is a window; the interior window is situated so that it is in line with the windows in the tower.

A supervisor is placed within the central tower, and those who are to be supervised are placed individually in each cell. The people to be supervised might be criminals, patients, workers, or paupers. The window on the outside of the cell allows for light to cross the cell. The cell is backlit by light from outside the building. With the aid of the backlighting, the supervisor can observe the movement of the inmate to the smallest detail and with the greatest precision.

Each person who is under supervision within a panoptic structure is constantly visible to the supervisor. Furthermore, by virtue of being located in their individual cells, the inmates are thoroughly individualized. The surveillance of the supervisor is both constant and immediate. The people are not only trapped by virtue of isolation, but they are also trapped by virtue of their visibility. The panopticon is a mechanism that ensures the efficient expression of power relations (Moffatt in Chambon et al.: 1999, p. 224).

He then goes on to describe the design of the office in which people applying for welfare are examined, highlighting the manner in which the setup reinforces the worker’s role as interrogator. He suggests that the manner in which the interview is forms-driven also reinforces the power of the worker, constantly reinforcing the manner in which the worker sees, and the client is seen. He then moves on to a few examples that workers gave of their attempts to be subversive. One worker described “not listening” as an act of subversion, so that a worker might suggest to a person applying for welfare that the less told the better—and if a welfare recipient told of work done and money received, the worker might not listen. Another worker told of an act of subversion by suggesting to a “real bad, like a tough man” that they both leave the interview booth and meet out front for coffee in order to talk. This changed the nature of the exchange and the man became more comfortable and the worker
was able to see the human side of him. This sounds as though an “I-Thou” rather than an “I-It” exchange was allowed to occur due to the worker’s act of subversion.

Moffatt’s descriptions and discussion further heightened my sensitivity to the panoptic set-up within the counselling office in which I work. Our clients are controlled through being contained in the waiting room, with a glass partition separating them from the receptionist, forcing them to speak through a small opening and slipping payment under another small opening, limiting their ability and comfort to speak with the receptionist. Social workers then go and invite their clients in to the inner sanctum, walking with them down a long hallway to the social worker’s individual office, or to the appropriate group room if the client has come for a group session. One of male clients has talked about his discomfort with female social workers opening doors for him and holding doors for him to enter and exit rooms first. He is accustomed to doing this “gentlemanly” thing. I have talked with him about this in terms of men generally having access to more power than women, and opening doors for them, and the therapist having power within a therapeutic setting and thereby setting up the situation in which the social worker would open the door for a client. If a male social worker opened a door for a female client, the gender power relations would not be called into question, but because a female social worker was opening a door for him, this appeared to be an unsettling change of power relations for him. Within this exploration of the physical set-up of our office space, it is also interesting to note that the Branch Director’s (also my clinical supervisor) office is at the end of the main long hallway, off which the bulk of the social workers’ offices come, giving him a clear view of who is early, late, busy or not so busy. The social workers each have a private office, whereas the two secretaries, who take turns at reception, have desks in an alcove of the hallway, reducing their private space, and indicating a difference in power, however much they are respected and liked.

In a team meeting in which I was facilitating a discussion about Chambon et al’s (1999) Reading Foucault for Social Workers, my colleagues raised issues related to the size and corresponding power of chairs within their offices. Each of us has control over how we wish to set-up the furniture in our own offices, but we seem to have all positioned our desks with large desk chairs against one wall, and positioned two or three other office chairs in such a way so that we sit in the same type of chair as our clients when we are in a counselling
appointment. One worker talked of having moved her furniture around in such a way so that now she sits in her desk chair when she is interviewing and she was finding herself uncomfortable with the power this appeared to be providing her. I admitted that a client of mine had asked to sit in my desk chair at one point in a counselling appointment. I can't remember why, but I said that was fine, but the longer she sat in my "big" chair the more I began to feel she had been sitting in it too long and I felt the power differences were being altered. I can have as a goal that I create as egalitarian a setting as possible for my clients and that I empower my clients, but I need to be aware of the possibility of not being completely comfortable when they take some power, in order to ensure that I do not sabotage their changes.

**Surveillance and Power in the Supervisor-Supervisee Relationship**

An area of research that I have already begun pursuing has come out of this interest in space/power and the panopticon. My clinical supervisor has become just as interested as I am in Chambon et al's (1999) *Reading Foucault for Social Work*. Following a meeting with Chambon, in May 2000, we have begun writing about our supervisor-supervisee relationship, particularly focusing upon the power within that relationship and the possibility of that same power dynamic being played out within my relationships with my clients. A further interest we may reflect upon is the new Lotus Notes recording system in the office, which increases his power of surveillance. We have reflected upon the impacts of this system on social workers, the way we record, and how we feel about our work, and have also experimented with involving our clients in the process of recording. We have been taking these issues up in supervision, but keeping fifteen minutes at then end of each bi-monthly supervision hour to write about the supervision process. Each of us tends to arrive in the office fairly early and this gives another opportunity to reflect and write upon any interactions we have had and any thoughts we have about the playing out of power within this relationship. It is unnecessary to go into details about this ongoing research at this point, but suffice to say this new research has come out of this research project with the women, which has sensitized me to issues of space and power within the counselling setting. This was partly due to further exploration of Foucault's ideas as they relate to social work practice and research, but also as
a result of thinking about Gypsy's access to the Internet as an empowering move through greater access to space.

Structure of Thesis

I believe it is necessary to comment one last time about this research as having been designed to be an emergent study. In the introductory chapters I pointed out my resistance to those studies about abused women that were driven by a particular theory rather than driven by praxis. Celani's (1994) study about why abused women return to their abusers was particularly worrisome in its use of object relations, pathologizing the women, by suggesting they have borderline personalities while at the same time mother-blaming. It was, therefore, important to me that I attempt to meet and interact with the women without a firm notion regarding what theory I would need to use in order to "analyze" them. In fact, I was not so interested even in analyzing the women, but rather in interacting with them and then deciding what it was I needed to know more about in order to better be able to assist them and empower them. Obviously, it has been impossible to leave behind everything I know as I have met with the women and as I have written about the women. However, I hope that my writing style has indicated the manner in which I may have slipped back into past knowledge to make sense of my interactions with the women, and also how I have attempted to listen in such a way as to know when I needed to make sense of something which required new information. This is why the women's stories, including my self-disclosures about what their stories triggered in me as I was writing, and the outlines of the stories they enjoyed reading have been presented in such detail in this thesis prior to any new theoretical analysis.

The issues of hope, and space/power to a certain degree, have come near the end of the thesis, having come out of the reflection upon the research and process.

I have attempted to not position myself as an expert telling it how it is, unveiling the truth about abused women and the construction of their desire. This is why I chose to position the chapters in this thesis in the manner in which they are presented. I first of all wanted to present a background of study already completed about texts, showing my beginning preoccupations with the possible learning about heterosexual relationships in popular cultural texts. I moved on to a description of what I wanted to pursue within this
study and how I wanted to maintain an element of practice and action research within this emergent study, making use of narrative research and narrative research approaches. I have presented my own narrative in order to present as much detail as possible regarding the position from which I was to meet with and write about the women in his study. I continued to make as explicit as possible the position from which I wrote about the women, through the use of self-disclosure and the use of different fonts, in the chapter that presents the women’s stories.

The chapter which describes the stories that the women identified as either currently being, or having previously been, their favourite texts was the chapter that I found the most frustrating and difficult to write. The writing of the chapter regarding these popular cultural texts held the least amount of interest for me as I wrote it, because at the time it felt as though I was merely regurgitating the storylines, but it was only through the plodding writing of it, that I came to think about issues about attempting to overcome fear and maintain hope.

As previously explained, what I have found frustrating in other texts about popular cultural texts is the manner in which only very short snippets are presented from the texts, and only brief, already re-worked through theory, versions of the story-lines are presented. I consciously chose to present as complete as possible a retelling of the women’s favourite texts, wanting to provide the reader of this thesis with as full a description as possible of those texts. This was necessary given the approach I was using with this thesis, of allowing ideas and theory-needs to unfold from the interactions with the women, the retelling of their stories and the retelling of the storylines within their favourite popular cultural texts. If the thesis had been driven by a theory and by the wish to prove a particular hypothesis, I would have been able to only re-tell those parts of the stories that upheld my position. This was not my goal and therefore the thesis is necessarily a little more cumbersome, particularly through the chapter regarding the popular cultural texts they enjoyed. Obviously, I have still made choices, but they were made as I wrote the chapter and not made due to a preset notion that I would be taking up concepts of hope.

**Self-disclosure and Self-regulation**

There has obviously been a great deal of self-disclosure in this thesis. I do not naïvely believe that this solves all the potential difficulties and concerns regarding scientific
inquiry. I have consciously chosen to not attempt to take up a position of scientific-rational-objectivity, but rather have acknowledged the impact of my own complicity, and my own position in this research study. Rather than attempting to remove myself from the process of inquiry, I have attempted to indicate how dramatically my own subjectivity has affected my research interest, method of questioning, interaction with the women and writing process. I have also attempted to examine my own engagement with popular cultural texts and discourses, showing what I had hoped to achieve with the women in the study.

Just as obviously, however, I have also self-regulated my self-disclosure. I have indicated earlier, in chapter three, that I became interested in Julia Cameron’s (1992) *The Artist’s Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*, as I began to consider how to motivate myself to continue with the writing process. One suggestion that she makes is to write three pages every morning. She describes these “morning pages” as being free-flowing, unregulated spewing forth of clutter, that might otherwise get in the way of more organized and purposeful writing/creativity later in the day. This was a very useful exercise and allowed me to loosen some of my self-control and anxiety about beginning to write those chapters of this thesis that either involved self-disclosure or writing of others. The next step was to allow myself a little more freedom when writing on the computer, when actually attempting to generate writing for the thesis. I have been asked once by my thesis supervisor and once by another thesis committee member about how I decided in any given chapter what to write about. Answering that I write in a fairly free flowing manner and then edit and re-arrange afterwards, resulted on the one hand in a comment about “lots of people doing that” and on the other in a suggestion that I write a list of my overall purposes to keep next to my computer as a guide. In this way, as I wrote I could glance at this list and remind myself of my goals and ask myself if something I happened to be writing about at that time fit in with my goals and was necessary for inclusion or was extraneous. This was a useful suggestion, but the one problem that both these comments perhaps did not take into account, was my high level of writing anxiety and worries about writing ethically of the other which could so easily have gotten in the way of me ever writing, if I had not just attempted to go to the other extreme and write, from time to time, in more of a free-flowing stream of consciousness. I was then able to re-read what I had written, editing and making decisions at
that editing stage about whether or not what I had written was actually relevant to the thesis or not.

I am aware also that I have given very few details about my relationship with my husband. After writing the first draft of my own story, it was brought to my attention that I had not included any descriptions of dating relationships or of my marriage. This was quite an oversight, when discussing how and where I had learned about romantic heterosexual relationships, especially since the women whose stories I present had focused a great deal upon past relationships. They primarily provided details in terms of the first and only good relationship in which they had been involved followed by a description of the abusive relationships. Since I have not been involved in abusive relationships, I did not need to deconstruct and make sense of relationships in those same terms. I have attempted to present a description of what I hold as an ideal in a relationship, through my comments on Rilkes' (1975) presentation of “Love and Other Difficulties.” However, I have also begun to think in terms of the boundaries around relationships that protect privacy. These boundaries are not in and of themselves a sign of a healthy or unhealthy relationship, but each person and each relationship (from a Systems Theory approach) has a set of boundaries with varying degrees of permeability. An abuser may attempt to keep rigid boundaries around the relationship and isolate the woman in order to control her, but lack of boundaries may be problematic in other ways, leading to a lack of commitment to the relationship and an increase in the likelihood of affairs.

I have felt conscious of the boundaries around my marriage and, although I have presented some reflections about this relationship, I have self-regulated to the degree I felt I needed to in order to maintain a comfortable level of privacy.

**Audience**

Although I have pointed out a significant amount of free-flowing writing and self-disclosure in this thesis, I want to also point out that this has not been one long journal-writing exercise. I have considered my audience and the purpose of my research and thesis. The purpose has come back time and again to wanting to promote and explore reflective practice and wanting to understand the meaning-making behaviours of abused women who are struggling to break patterns of being attracted to abusive men. These goals have
necessitated more than journal-writing. However, I have had difficulty maintaining a clear image of an audience for whom I am writing.

I could have conducted this piece of research as merely reflective practice, increasing my awareness of the women’s meaning-making behaviours, the role of popular cultural texts within these meaning-making behaviours, adjusting my practice accordingly, without writing about the process. If this had been the case I would not have needed to consider my audience, since I would have only been conducting the research to improve my practice. However, I believe that I have taken up important issues for the profession of social work. I believe social workers should examine their practices, the power moves that silence our clients, the power structures that constrain our practice and that we should reflect more upon how to empower our clients to examine their meaning-making behaviours. I believe this is important for counselling work with women who have experienced wife assault, but also with sexual abuse survivors, and a wide variety of other clients with varying “presenting problems.” I have indicated how this approach has been useful with a man who was charged with indecent exposure and it has been useful in assisting a woman charged with fraud examine the construction of her monetary expectations. This is an approach also useful when counselling couples, especially when it becomes clear that value differences are causing difficulties. Within this study I have demonstrated the need to deconstruct the meaning-making behaviours in terms of expectations and beliefs regarding heterosexual romantic relationships, but with different clients the focus for need of understanding will be different.

It is due to believing that this has been a significant study that I have had to grapple with imagining an audience. I have at times attempted to imagine writing for my thesis supervisor and thesis committee, but have rarely managed to maintain such an audience in my imagination. More often I have thought of other books I have read as both clinical social worker and academic and thought of what I have found useful and approachable. I have in some ways, then, written for an audience that I imagine as being similar to myself in terms of interests and concerns. I see this audience as being interested in both clinical practice and theoretical exploration. After writing any particular section of this thesis with such an audience in mind, I would then have editing anxiety as I imagined passing on chapters to my thesis supervisor or committee.
Passion in the Thesis Process

When I was pursuing my own counselling earlier on in the writing stages of this thesis, my therapist told me of how, when he was beginning his thesis, his thesis supervisor directed him to give up his planned study, in which he had much invested emotional energy, and rather suggested he choose a topic for study in which he would not be so involved. He told me this to point out the fact that he believed I had chosen a topic for my thesis, which was too important to me. I was quite adamant, and reluctantly rebellious with him, about how I would not have pursued an area of research that had not been important to me. I did not begin this PhD process with my primary goal being the attainment of a PhD, looking for an area to study to complete the degree requirements, as he suggested he had done. I began the PhD process because I was experiencing a practice problem that I wanted to understand through in depth academic study. Being the type of person who is frustrated by loose ends and untidiness, I would not now stop without completing all the degree requirements, and have come to the point that I believe I would want to teach social work practice, and therefore need the qualification, but this was not what drove the study in the first place.

I began the pursuit of this study as a special student taking one course, in order to insure that OISE was the correct place for me to pursue ongoing study. The following year I was granted a conditional acceptance into the PhD programme, having to complete a Qualifying Research Paper (QRP) prior to registration. My son was one and a half years old that summer I was working full-time and writing a Q.R.P. He turned two during the first term that I was registered in the PhD programme. He is currently nine years old and is waiting patiently for me to complete my thesis. [I promised to consider buying a dog for the family once the stress of juggling responsibilities and writing the thesis was over, but he talked me into buying one once the first draft had been handed in.] The majority of his childhood he has known his mother to be both social worker and student. I hope I have been a good role model of learning as a life-long process rather than dissuading him from ever beginning anything quite so time and resource consuming.

I have joked with friends that my PhD is my second baby, but even someone as resistant to Freudian analysis as I am, can see the degree of truth present in such a joke. Our family life and my personal choices have been greatly influenced by the six years I have
spent in the degree programme and the additional year or so added to the beginning and end of the programme. I truly believe that I am a better social worker for this experience. I have pursued academic study and I have allowed this process to influence how I think of myself in the world and act in the world. Coming full circle, and using Freire's (1970) terminology again, I have reflected upon my own "domestication," the "domination" of those women I counsel and I have begun to change my practice in order to empower my clients to also conduct this type of reflection. The next stage in my journey will be to develop skills in encouraging and teaching these forms of reflective practice.
Bibliography


