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THE SELF-IMAGE OF ABUSED WOMEN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
BETWEEN WOMEN LIVING WITH ABUSE AND THOSE WHO HAVE  
ESCAPED ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS.

BY

R.N. LOKOTWAYO

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SUPERVISOR: MS S.W. NIEMAND

CO-SUPERVISOR: MR Q.M. TEMANE



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## **ABSTRACT**

This study was an investigation of the level of self-image of women living with their abusive partners in comparison to the level of self-image of women who have escaped abusive relationships.

A convenient sample of 30 women (15 from each group), of ages ranging from 30 to 50 years, attending counselling at social work agencies (Kagiso location - Krugersdorp) was tested.

The self-image of respondents was measured by means of a psychometric test which was administered by the researcher. Data from this test was descriptively and statistically analysed using the Chi-squared test. The main finding of this study was that a large proportion of subjects sampled in both groups had an average self-image.

Both groups had the same proportion of women with low self-image. The implications of the research findings were discussed.

DECLARATION

I, ... *ROSEBELLA NIOMBOXOLO LOKOTWAYO* ....., hereby declare that the work on which this dissertation is based is original. It is being sub-mitted to the University of the North West for the Degree of Master of Social Science (Clinical psychology) in the Department of Pyschology in the School of Health and Social Science. Neither the work, nor any part of it has been, is being or is to be submitted for another degree at this or any other University.

Signature of candidate

..... *Rosebella Niomboxolo Lokotwayo* .....

..... *28<sup>th</sup>* day of *JULY* 1998.

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## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 Introduction

Violence against women by men has a long history. It is a common act that affects women across the spectrum. It frequently takes place within the home and is frequently not reported to the police. According to the Human Science Research Council (1995), out of 100 women, 65 of them would be physically abused in their life in South Africa. Many women do not even realise that they are in an abusive relationship.

Women who have been abused as children or as adults see the world differently than those who have not been abused. They often express feelings of being alienated and out of step with others (Walker, 1990).

Violence especially from people who are to be trusted is a deep assault on the self (Walker, 1990). The act of violence is not compared to individual acts nor a modern syndrome but it can also be an approved societal act. The extent of permissible violence depends mostly upon whose side you are on and the question of whether the means justify the end assumes paramount importance (Walker, 1990).

Several researchers have tried to come up with certain characteristics that are found in battered women. The problem with this kind of research is that it is nearly impossible to decide which characteristics are causes and which ones are the effects of battering. Some researchers might argue, for example that a woman who has a low self-image is likely to be abused whilst others could argue that a woman who has been abused is likely to have low self-image (Matlin, 1993).

There are several characteristics of abused women that have been identified such as the following:

Women who have been abused are more likely to have low self-image (Okun, 1986; Sigler, 1989; Walker, 1981 in Matlin, 1993). Their feelings of inadequacy come about as a result of their perception that they have not lived up to society's expectations for how wives should perform. After all, their husbands through battering are showing them that their failure deserves strong punishment.

Battered women are more likely to use denial as a defense mechanism, as they are forced to deny the violence to the rest of the world. They do not display their wounds in public (Matlin, 1993).

Abused women see themselves as being inadequate and inferior in their everyday interactions. These women develop a sense of dependency. Their self-esteem lowers and they view themselves as being less worthy. They tend to believe that people and events outside themselves determine their worth. They need the approval of others for their survival (Matlin, 1993). They tend to devalue themselves (Kelly, 1986.)

They (abused women) may reflect a certain kind of passivity which is associated with the way they have been brought up. They usually come from homes where passivity and controlled emotions were emphasised (Frieze 1979, in Matlin 1993).

They are likely to blame themselves for the battering, but Freize (1979) in Matlin (1993) however, reported that women blamed themselves more often for promoting a beating than they blamed a wife in a hypothetical description of a battering episode. In other words, they are more likely to think that the husband is at fault when they read about another woman in the same situation as what they are in.

Finally these women tend to change their own behaviour in order to minimize the violence but unfortunately this is usually ineffective because the man will simply find another reason to be abusive (Matlin, 1993).

### 1.2 The purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate and compare the level of self-image of abused women who are still in the abusive relationship with women who have been abused but have gone in and out of the abusive relationship.

### 1.3 Statement of the problem

The first sub-problem is to determine whether women who are in the abusive relationship have a low level of self-image. The second sub-problem is to determine whether women who have been abused but are out of the abusive relationship have a higher self-image as compared to those that are still in the abusive relationship.

### 1.4 Rationale for the study

Although spouse abuse is a relatively well researched area, to the present investigator's knowledge, there has been no definite study which has specifically attempted to determine the level of self-image of South African black women in relation to abuse (as confirmed by the HSRC). Most research on self-image is concentrated on the relationship between self-image and academic achievement.

The majority of the work in this field has also focused on explanations of abuse or the frequency with which abuse occurs rather than on the consequences thereof.

Research on stigmatized American women, although not closely related to the present study has shown what Allport (in Schur, 1984:39) called "traits due to victimization".

These can include various patterns of withdrawal and defensiveness, passivity, hostility, identification with the oppressor, as well as seriously impaired self-esteem. Daly, (in Schur, 1984:39) has noted that

"as contradictory, divided beings, the oppressed do not fully grasp the paralyzing fact that the oppressor, having invaded the victim's psyche, now exists within themselves. They are caught in a web of self-defeating behaviour".

Gornick and Moran (in Schur, 1984) similarly charge sexism with having produced in women

"an image of the self that paralyses the will and short-circuits the brain, that makes them deny the evidence of their senses and internalize self-doubt to a fearful degree", p.40.

Other studies invariably conclude that as a general proposition and notwithstanding some individual differences, constant devaluation implies a strong likelihood of impaired self-esteem. According to Goffman (in Schur, 1984) women have been socialized to accept the beliefs and values on which this devaluation is grounded.

By comparing the self-image of abused women the investigator and other people will be able to be more focused during psychotherapy. This research is worth attempting because of the implications associated with low self-image. For example, according to Schurink, Snyman, Kruger and Slabbert (1992), low self-image leads to overly dependence upon husbands and lack of confidence in the woman's own ability. The present research will also provide information which can be used by other researchers to build on.

## 1.5 Operational definition of terms

### 1.5.1 Self Image

According to Hjelle & Ziegler 1986, self-image refers to "the diversity of roles one plays in order to gain the approval of others and to manage impressions of who and what one is p.31".

English and English (1974) on the other hand define self-image in the same way as the self-concept.

### 1.5.2 Self-esteem

Most approaches define self-esteem in terms of being a particular kind of attitude or as an attitude about a particular object. According to Plug, Meyer, Louw and Gouws (1991), self-esteem "refers to the evaluative aspect of the self-concept, in other words an individual's acceptance and appraisal of his characteristics", (p.317). The most widely used and accepted definition of self-esteem as an attitude, is that of Coopersmith (1967) "by self-esteem we refer to the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude for approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds towards himself. It is a subjective experience which the individual conveys to others by verbal reports and other overt expressive behaviour" (p.4-5). In the above conceptualisation, high self-esteem does not signify arrogance or conceit but simply acceptance of oneself as a person of worth; low

self-esteem means a view of oneself as unworthy (Hones and Yardley, 1987).

According to Rogers (in Hjelle & Ziegler, 1986), self-esteem does not only include one's evaluation and perceptions of himself/herself, but self-esteem also includes what one thinks one ought to be and would like to be. This is known as the ideal self-esteem.

### 1.5.3 Self-concept

According to the dictionary of psychological terms of English and English 1974, self-concept or self-image is defined as:

“ .... a person's view of himself: the fullest description of himself of which a person is capable at any given time. Emphasis is upon the person as object of his own self-knowledge, but his feelings about what he concerns himself to be is usually included p.486.”

According to Gerdes, Ochse, Stander and Van Ede (1986), self-image or self-concept in simpler terms refers to the person's view of his/her own attributes which include the following:

- social attributes such as ways of interacting with others
- physical attributes such as appearance and
- psychological attributes such as abilities, motives and goals.

Rogers on the other hand (in Hjelle & Ziegler, 1986) defines self-concept as "the organized, consistent conceptual gestalt composed of perceptions of the characteristics of the "I" or "me" and the perceptions of the relationship of the "I" or "me" to others and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to those perceptions. It is a gestalt which is available to awareness though not necessarily in awareness" p.408.

According to Plug et. al. (1991), the self-concept refers to "a person's view and evaluation of himself. It includes cognitive, emotional and evaluative elements" p. 318.

#### 1.5.4 Self-concept and self-image versus self-esteem

According to Mussen, Conger, Kagan and Huston (1984) self-esteem is not identical to self-concept. Self-concept refers to the set of ideas about oneself that is descriptive rather than judgemental. Some part of the self-concept may be regarded as good or bad but some may be

neutral. Self-esteem on the other hand refers to one's evaluation of one's own qualities.

Coopersmith (1967), also regards self-esteem as having a judgemental aspect, that is the person judges himself or herself as worthy or unworthy and is dependent on the approval and disapproval by others.

Allport in Meyer, Moore and Viljoen (1989), on the other hand differentiate between self-image and self-esteem. He postulates that self-esteem has to do with the individual's evaluation of himself or herself as good. As the individual's self-esteem develops, this leads to further differentiation of an image of one's attributes as well as the evaluation of them. According to Allport in Meyer et al. (1989), self-image not only involves the individual but its formation is based on other people's evaluation of oneself. It also involves the image of the person as he or she is, how he or she would be and as he or she would like to be.

Rogers in Hjelle and Ziegler (1986) on the other hand concentrate on self-concept which he sees as the evaluation and the judgement the person places on himself or herself in terms of his or her abilities, talents, motives, goals, ideals and social interactions.

Looking at the above definitions of self-concept, self-esteem and self-image, it seems as if there are different views with regard to the definitions of these concepts.

#### 1.5.5 The concept spouse abuse

According to the policy document No.4 (1994), women abuse refers to any act of abuse perpetrated against women, intended or unintended, of verbal, emotional/psychological, sexual or physical form, which threatens to undermine the health and well-being of the person. This definition is broad enough to include acts that range from obscene phone calls through to forced removals and the denial of land, housing and water.

For practical purposes spouse abuse will refer to violence occurring within a heterosexual, intimate relationship in which the woman is being beaten by a man. Battered women do not necessarily have to be wives of the men who batter them (Marsh, 1989). The battered woman in this research is the one who is abused, or battered, by a man with whom she is involved in an intimate relationship.

"Beat", "abuse" and "batter" include any deliberate severe or repeated physical injury, or any damage caused by being exposed to fear, guilt or any psychological abuse of a life-threatening nature (Moore, 1979). For practical

purposes abuser may at times be referred to as the aggressor or batterer while the abused woman may also be called the victim or battered woman.

## CHAPTER 2

Literature Review2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with the historical development of the self. The specific aim will be to review different developmental perspectives and psychodynamic theories with regard to self-concept, self-esteem and self-image.

2.2 Historical development

Man's thinking about his nonphysical self can be dated back to the written records of the philosophers of the Middle Ages. During the seventeenth century Descartes and Leibnits used the terms "self", "psyche", "mind" and "soul" interchangeably when considering man's psychological self. The concept of the self entered the realm of psychology only during the late nineteenth century (Cook, 1993).

William James' writings in Cooley (1902) reflect a considerable interest in the self as the same as the I-me dichotomy. James in Cooley (1902) considered the self to be "the object of what is known" as compared to philosophers who regarded the self as "the knower with an

executive function". The self as viewed by James consisted of those elements which the individual viewed as belonging to himself and encompassed in the self were material, social and spiritual elements. How the others view the individual constituted the social self, whilst the emotions and desires of the individual constituted the spiritual self. According to James aspirations and values that are held by the individual were important in determining self regard, and the larger the discrepancy between aspirations and actual achievements, the lower the individual's self regard (Cook, 1993).

Cooley (1902) succeeded James in advancing the theory of self. He defined the self in terms of referents of the first person singular pronoun "I", "me", "myself". Those facets of the individual's life which he labelled as "self" were considered to be capable of evoking stronger emotions than those considered to be beyond the realm of the self. Cooley and Mead (in Cook, 1993) argued that the way others react to the child is vitally important to the child's development.

Cooley (1902) coined the phrase 'looking-glass self', and said we always imagine and in the imagining share the judgements of the other mind. Mead (in Cook, 1993) developed this theme further and argued that a person

always takes the role of the other when deciding what to do and so comes to judge self and actions as others such as parents, teachers, friends, people in general - have judged him or her.

The child chooses one of several courses of action by anticipating how others will react to it. According to Mead (in Cook, 1993), no sense of self could develop in a person who never mixed with others because such a person could never learn to react to his or her own behaviour as others do.

During the early twentieth century the work of psychoanalytic theorists with regard to the self emerged beginning with Sigmund Freud. Freud emphasized the ego and its development rather than giving an explicit formulation of a self construct. Self concept and ego are easily confused. The "ego" refers to an aspect of the individual's personality structure from which impersonal generalisations can be made. The ego includes such non-self mechanisms of self preservation as defense that is, the ego includes aspects of the individual's psychic life of which the self is unaware. As opposed to "ego" "the **"self" refers to the subject as the individual experiences himself** (Mead, 1934).

During the 1920's an aura of mysticism surrounded the self concept as far as the behaviourists were concerned. The behaviourists could neither see nor touch a self concept and for this reason the self could not be experimentally verified by the behaviourists.

Although the behaviourists dismissed the concept of self, other theorists such as Mead (1934) stressed the importance of social interaction in the development of self-awareness. Mead believed that the individual internalizes the attitudes and ideas that are expressed by key figures in his life and expressed them as his own. The reflected appraisal of others is thus important in the determination of self-regard, and the individual anticipates the reactions of others by perceiving the world as they (generalised others) perceive the world (Mead, 1934).

Sullivan (1953) stressed the importance of significant others, especially the mother figure in the social interaction of the child. He postulated that the way in which an individual is treated or judged by others will influence to a certain extent the individual's view of himself.

The theories of Maslow and Rogers expanded the view that man's behaviour is always meaningful and understandable in terms of his phenomenal perception of the world.

### 2.3 Development of self-image, self-esteem and self-concept

Different theorists such as the following view the development of self-concept, self-image and self-esteem from different viewpoints:

#### 2.4.1 Rogers's view of self-concept

According to Rogers (In Hjelle & Ziegler 1986), the concept of self is the most important construct in his theory. According to Rogers (in Meyer et al. 1989), self-concept refers to:

"the organized consistent conceptual gestalt composed of perceptions of the characteristics of the "I" or "me" and the perceptions of the relationships of the "I" or me to others and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to these perceptions. It is a gestalt which is available to awareness though not necessarily in awareness. It is a fluid and changing gestalt, a process, but at any given moment it is a specific entity, p.378-379".

It is the differentiated part of phenomenal field concerning the person himself. According to Rogers in Meyer et al. (1989), although the self-concept has a

relatively stable pattern of integrated perceptions, it is flexible and changeable. If there is a change in one part of the self-concept, there will be a change in the whole of the self-image because self-perceptions are organised into a whole.

Rogers views self-concept as representing an organized, integrated pattern of self-related perceptions.

People retain a firm internal sense of being the same person at any moment in time no matter how much they have changed.

Self-concept does not only include one's perceptions of what one is like but also includes what one thinks one ought to be and would like to be. This is referred to as the ideal self (Hall & Lindzey, 1978).

Rogers does not pay much attention to personality development as such nor has he got specific stages through which the self concept as part of the personality develops, rather he is concerned with the ways in which evaluations of an individual by significant others tend to promote the development of a positive or negative self-image or concept. Rogers (in Cook 1993) sees the self as starting with a beautiful potential and being progressively distorted by the demands of society and parents. In many individuals, this distortion eventually gets so bad that the person needs Rogerian therapy. Maladjustment occurs

because the self is distorted by the imposition of the conditions of worth.

The most critical years are during infancy and early childhood.

A child is born without a self-concept, but the child differentiates which is a part of the actualizing process. He or she gradually begins to distinguish himself or herself from the rest of the world (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1986). The child begins to actively differentiate between experiences that are part of his or her own personal being and those that belong to others.

According to Rogers (in Prochaska 1984), when the self is first formed, it is governed by the organismic valuing process alone. This means that the infant values positively experiences perceived as maintaining actualizing tendencies and values negatively those experiences that would negate his or her growth.

In order to understand how the self-concept develops, one should consider the two concepts of the actualizing tendency. There are the need for positive regard and the need for positive self-regard (Maddi, 1989). These are both learned needs. The need for positive regard develops as one's consciousness of self emerges. It is concerned

with the human being's need for approval, appreciation, love and respect. The individual may go to an extent of adopting the wishes and values of others in order to fulfil this need. People who are closely connected to the individual play a major role in the individual's development and as well as in the development of the individual's self-concept. According to Rogers (1951), one does not need positive regard from others only, but also needs it from oneself. This is known as positive self-regard.

The need for positive self-regard is closely related to the need for positive regard from others because the individual requires that esteem from others in order to feel positive about himself or herself. The need for positive regard is a very strong motive and can hinder the actualization process.

According to the researcher's point of view if a woman is repeatedly devalued by significant others such as the spouse through abuse, it would mean that the woman would not feel positive about herself. In an ideal situation on the other hand, there would be no difference between the person's way of experiencing the world and his view of himself. This is known as the state of congruence.

If the self-concept is congruent with the experiences of the organism, psychological adjustment exists. The person

who is congruent sees himself or herself as he or she really is and has a self-concept that corresponds with his actual potential.

On the other hand a state of incongruence occurs if experiences that are contrary to the self-concept form part of the individual's phenomenal field. The individual may deal with this state by either denying or distorting the experiences in order to make them fit the self-concept (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1989). The other key factors in development of the self-concept are conditional and unconditional positive regard (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1989).

Unconditional positive regard involves accepting a person for what he or she is. It is not necessary for the person to fulfil certain requirements in order to be accepted. The person's self-concept is free to include all his or her experiences and he or she is in a state of congruence. The existence of unconditional positive regard enables the individual according to Rogers (In Hjelle & Ziegler, 1986) to become a fully functioning person, which according to the researcher is not the case in abused women, because they have to live their lives according to what their abusers want them to be.

On the other hand, conditional positive regard involves accepting the individual only under certain circumstances (Engler, 1985).

Because of the need for positive regard, an individual becomes sensitive to and influenced by the attitudes and expectations of significant people in his or her life. The individual learns to regard himself or herself in much the same way as he or she experiences regard from others.

The individual also starts viewing himself or herself in the same way significant others have viewed him or her. According to Rogers (In Hjelle & Ziegler 1986), conditions of worth that are imposed on the person are detrimental to the person's becoming a fully functioning person. If the conditions of worth are not applied, the self-concept may be distorted. According to Rogers (in Van Niekerk 1996), a psychologically healthy individual's focus of evaluation is centred within the individual himself, rather than in the opinions of others or in culturally prescribed values. Thus in making choices, the mature individual is not overly influenced by external factors but rather relies on his or her organismic experiences.

#### 2.4.2 Allport's view of self-esteem and self-image

Allport's explanation of self-esteem and self-image is best understood by looking at the level of functioning as far as the individual is concerned. According to Meyer et al. (1989), Allport distinguished between two levels of functioning, namely, the opportunistic functioning and the

propriate functioning. The opportunistic functioning is governed by biological drives and it serves a survival function.

The propriate functioning on the other hand, involves acting and taking decisions according to one's values rather than being dictated by biological factors and the environment.

According to Allport in Meyer et al. (1989), propriate functions develop throughout the person's life. Although he explains the development of different propriate functions, he sees the development of these propriate functions as a process that must be seen as integrated and continuous. Allport put a lot of emphasis on the development of the following propriate functions (Meyer et al., 1989):

**(i) The sense of bodily self**

This refers to the experience of one's existence in terms of one's bodily sense. According to Allport (in Meyer et al. 1989), the child becomes aware of his body as something distinct from the whole world round about age 15 months. The sense of self changes throughout the person's life due to developmental changes that occur physically. These changes are characterized by either negative or positive evaluation of the self (body) but when the person reaches

adulthood the importance of physical appearance disappears as other values take precedence. If however a person is sick or there are changes in the body, awareness of the bodily self re-emerges.

**(ii) Self identity**

This emerges around the age of two years when the child recognizes himself or herself as the same person. This is noticeable when the child learns his or her own name and the words like "I" and "mine".

Although self-identity is first linked with the sense of bodily self, it eventually becomes interlinked with other aspects such as one's values, memories, self-evaluations, feelings and thoughts.

**(iii) Sense of self-esteem or pride**

According to Allport in Hjelle and Ziegler (1986), self-esteem is an individual's evaluation of herself or himself. This is the stage where a 2 year old wants to do everything for himself or herself and take all the credit for that. This sense of pride or self-esteem develops throughout life. According to Allport in Meyer et al. (1989), "the individual evaluates himself and his achievement sometimes as negative and sometimes as positive, depending on what standards he uses" p.246. The degree of evaluation largely depends on how much value the person puts on the issue. If it's valuable to himself/herself, the more affected the

person will be as compared to the issue that is of less value. According to Allport in Meyer et al. (1989), this appropriate function (self-esteem) is closely linked to the individual's self-image.

**(iv) Self-extension**

From the age 4 to 6 years the child becomes aware of things that belong to him or her (for example possessions such as a doll) and those that do not belong to him or her and as a result the child will guard these against any threats. This part of the self-extension later become extended to families, nations and churches (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1986).

**(v) Self-image**

According to Engler (1991), self-image emerges between the ages of 4 and 6 years old. This "refers to a sense of the expectation of others and its comparisons with one's own behaviour" (Engler, 1991:282). Children come to understand parental expectations and to see themselves as fulfilling or not fulfilling those desired goals. This early self-image lays the foundation for the development of conscience and later intentions and goals (Engler, 1991).

Allport in Meyer, et al. (1989), distinguishes three types of self-image: "an image of yourself as you are, as you should be and as you would like to be" p.346. This is similar to Roger's self-concept and the ideal self. The person's self-image is formed on the basis of other

people's standards or opinions as well as the person's direct experience.

As the person develops, the opinions of other people become less important and the person's own experiences become more important. A number of factors are responsible for determining how realistic one's self-image is. These factors vary from cultural to the individual's own convictions. These convictions may include factors such as guilt feelings, moral development as well as conflict between different sets of values. The ideal however is for external standards (influences by other people) to be replaced by internal standards (self-controlled influences) as development is an ongoing process (Meyer et al., 1989).

**(vi) Rational coping**

Between 6 and 12 years, the child begins to realize that he or she has the capacity to find solutions to life's problems and he or she begins to incorporate his rational capabilities into his self-image. His or her rational capabilities grow more appropriate in his or her self-image (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1986).

**(vii) Propriate striving**

The core problem of an adolescent is the selection of an occupation or other life goal. According to Allport (in Meyer et al., 1989), this propriate functioning is closely related to the formation of a value system which in turn influences all the other propriate functions.

Although the development of various aspects of the proprium are described in terms of discrete stages, several or even all of them can function simultaneously (Meyer et. al., 1989).

Allport (in Hjelle and Ziegler, 1992), concentrated more on the healthy individual rather than on the unhealthy individual. He postulated that the healthy person has a positive self-image so that he can be able to tolerate frustrating events. He is able to accept himself as a person and is able to accept his own shortcomings.

#### 2.4.3 Abraham Maslow's view of self-esteem

Maslow's explanation of self-esteem is best understood by looking at the psychodynamics of personality. Maslow partially explained human functioning in terms of needs. He identified different needs which are arranged hierarchically (Meyer et al., 1989). As the more basic needs are satisfied, the needs that are characteristic of a higher level of mental health emerge.

The first needs are physiological in nature and are at the lowest level. When these have been satisfied, the safety needs emerge. According to Louw and Edwards (1993), children tend to have a great need for safety, they function strongly on this level. When one feels secure,

the need for affiliation, that is a need for friendship and love emerges.

As soon as the need for affiliation has been satisfied, the need for self-esteem emerges. According to Maslow in Meyer et al. (1989), the need for self-esteem refers to the need to evaluate oneself positively. Maslow in Meyer et al. (1993), classified this need into two sub-categories:

- needs of the person based on his or her achievements. This includes characteristics such as a sense of independence, efficiency, achievement and confidence.
- needs of the person based on the esteem of others. This involves elements such as importance, dignity, social standing and appreciation. In this case the person needs external factors (other people) to recognize and appreciate him in terms of his competence.

When self-esteem needs have been satisfied, the person feels confident and needed in the world. If on the other hand one has not fulfilled self-esteem needs, one will feel inferior, weak and helpless. Maslow in Meyer et al.

(1989), however asserts that the ideal situation is for one to base his self-esteem on actual experiences rather than on the judgement of others. One's self-esteem is to be founded on one's actual worth rather than on external factors.

Once one feels comfortable, recognized and appreciated, one will be motivated to strive for the highest level which is self-actualization. This is the level at which people truly discover themselves and fully realize their potential (Louv & Edwards, 1993).

#### 2.4.4 Other theorist's views on the development of the self-esteem

According to Coopersmith (in Howcroft, 1987), the self concept arises out of social experience. As the child develops he internalizes a view of himself from his parents or the most influential parent. The school may also give the child a view about himself (as intelligent) which is both self-confirming (a child who sees himself as stupid will behave accordingly and confirms the biased views of teachers who then reinforce the child in his feelings and perceptions of stupidity). Having been confirmed by one teacher as stupid, the child will take his feelings/perceptions into other spheres.

According to Rogers (in Hjelle & Ziegler, 1986), the development of positive or negative self-image occurs during infancy and early childhood.

The structure of self, develops through interaction with the environment, and the way others (especially significant

others) evaluate the child to promote the development of the self-concept. As the child's cognitive and perceptual abilities mature, the child's self-conception becomes increasingly differentiated and complex and the elements that are important in the development of self-concept follow.

Bandura (in Howcroft, 1986), emphasized social learning in the development of the self-concept. Bandura attributes the development of self-attitudes to learning experiences which occur in social situations. Bandura in Howcroft (1986) stated that human beings have a capacity for self-direction. Through the process of modelling, behavioural rehearsal and reinforcement, the child learns and forms his own self-attitudes.

#### 2.4 Levels of the self-esteem

Research indicates that intervention used in conjunction with other clinical diagnostic measures are fairly accurate in differentiating individuals who possess low self-esteem from those who possess high self-esteem.

Research findings indicate that individuals who possess high self-esteem differ from individuals who possess low self-esteem.

According to studies that have been done by Coopersmith (1967), there are distinguishing features which characterize individuals who possess high or low self-esteem.

High self-esteem is associated with confidence, independence, creativity, flexibility as well as lower disposition to deviance.

Low self-esteem on the other hand is associated with lack of self-confidence, dependency on others, use of defensive facades, avoidance of self-analysis, less creativity, less flexibility as well as more disposed toward various forms of deviance or criminality.

Coopersmith (1967) also found that individuals who possess low self-esteem tend to experience feelings of distress, self-hatred, psychomotor symptoms and feelings of depression. Battle (in Howcroft, 1986), found that self-esteem amongst adolescents and adults, is significantly related to depression - as self-esteem increases, depression decreases.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Most theorists agree on one thing, that these three concepts (self-image, self-esteem, self-concept) have an evaluative aspect. The person values himself or herself

negatively or positively. These theorists do not however look at what happens after adolescence in terms of the self-esteem, self-image and self-concept. The present study is looking at the self-image of women in early and middle adulthood. It would be valuable and more interesting to know if there are any developmental and psychodynamic changes in terms of the self-image as far as these personality theorists are concerned. According to Allport (in Cook 1993), the self-image becomes more integrated after 12 years of age, but Allport does not give a specific explanation as to whether external factors do have any influence on the self-image after this age.

The present study is going to be based on Allport's theory of self-esteem and self-image. Allport sees self-image as an extension of self-esteem.

The research instrument that has been used in the present study looks at self-image rather than self-esteem, but self-image as defined within the research instrument's manual, seems to be the same as the definition of self-esteem as seen by Allport (in Meyer et. al. 1989). Minnaar (1988), when looking at the research instrument, sees self-image as based on the evaluation of the person in terms of his self-worth. Does this person view himself or herself negatively or positively?

The words self-image and self-concept are loosely applied in the manual for this instrument as meaning one and the same thing. One should bear in mind that there are no validity figures with regard to this instrument.

## CHAPTER 3

## BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ABUSE AND ITS RELATEDNESS TO SELF-IMAGE

3.1 Introduction

Types of abuse, the contribution by society toward the abuse of women as well as how self-image is related to the abuse of women, will be discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Types of abuse3.2.1 Emotional/psychological abuse

According to Padayachee and Pillay (1994), this is the most severe form of abuse as it leaves the woman totally shattered. Compared to physical abuse it is not easy to identify as the wounds of emotional abuse are invisible. According to Padayachee and Pillay (1994), a woman is in an emotional abusive relationship if her partner does any of the following: calls her names, insults her, criticise her constantly, embarrasses her in public, threatens her in any form, isolates her from family and friends. Living with such a person can be terrifying as one will never know when he is going to explode. All this leaves a woman with a

very low self-image, lack of confidence and feelings of helplessness.

### 3.2.2 Physical abuse

Researchers at People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA), found out that one out of six women is beaten by her partner. Slapping, punching, hitting or kicking are forms of physical abuse which often result in hospitalization or death (Walker, 1990). A project of POWA found out that most cases of intimate femicide have been a consequence of silent physical abuse leading to death of a partner. Men feel in control when they subject their women to continuous battering.

### 3.2.3 Financial/economic abuse

According to Matlin (1993), financial abuse refers to any intentional control of financial matters by the spouse leaving the woman with less or no financial control at all. The partner gives the woman a small amount to support the family and spends most of the money on himself. In case of joint financial situation, the partner refuses to give information with regard to the couple's financial situation. All in all the woman is not allowed financial independence.

#### 3.2.4 Sexual abuse

When your partner rapes you, having sex with you against your wish, or forces you to have sex with others, it is regarded as abuse (Matlin, 1993). Sexual abuse is one of the common forms of abuse in South Africa. Women have been driven to hurt or kill their husbands or partners. This is the form of abuse that drove American Lorena Bobbitt to cut off her husband's penis (The Star: 22.09.94).

#### 3.3 Society's contribution towards abuse

According to Padayachee and Pillay (1993), our patriarchal society is the major cause of abuse. Men consider themselves bosses in the relationship. We have been brought up in a society where the father's word is the law and the mother takes the backseat in most decisions. Pressure from the family and the community are some of the reasons many women endure the assault in silence.

Community status is the issue, not the welfare of the abused. A domineering father and the passive mother are still considered the norm or ideal by many.

According to Horsfall (1991), the patriarchal society has given men in some cultures the right to dominate and control women, and has made men and women to believe that women are by nature subservient to men. As a result such

beliefs have resulted in disregard and denial of the man's abuse of his economic, political and physical power. Society in South Africa has many divisions in terms of race, status and economic well-being of women. Although there are differences in terms of these divisions there is one common factor; women in any group are less than equal to men. Although in recent times some laws have been amended to allow women more equality with men, the reality lags far behind (Rissik, 1993).

According to Rissik (1993), in the African society, which is by far the largest in the country; there is a lack of concern, especially by men, about women's desires and needs. There is also a lack of appreciation of the role women play in holding together the family unit. Women are seen as the property of their husbands and as a result abuse is seen as "normal".

In Israel, with its emphasis on the importance of the family and the belief that violence has no place in Jewish society, wives are still beaten by husbands (Dobash & Dobash, 1996).

#### 3.4 Abuse and its effect on the self-image

According to Peterson (1990) victims of abuse view themselves as being reduced to the status of objects. To

acknowledge their human strength and qualities would disrupt the stereotype of female weakness and vulnerability on which the victim's image is built.

According to Harvey (1991), abused women perceive themselves as dirty, unloved, rejected and abandoned. As a result, they shy away from the public, feel insecure, guilty and lose self-confidence. According to Kelley (1986), psychologically abused women see themselves as being inadequate and inferior in their everyday interactions. They tend to devalue themselves. These women view themselves as being less worthy. They tend to believe that people and events outside themselves determine their worth. They need approval of others for their survival.

According to Chaplin (in Peterson 1990), these (abused) women see themselves as failures, they are unable to cope without a man to manage their lives. In a study that was conducted by McGrath in 1990 (in Culbertson, 1997) on depression, he found that some of the symptoms of depression were helplessness, eating disturbances, feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness, lack of energy and tension.

These symptoms amongst other things were as a result of some risk factors such as sexual, physical and psychological abuse. These symptoms were found to be universally similar cross-culturally.

In a study that was conducted by Ortlepp and Nkosi in 1993, it was found that spouse abuse does not only lead to lowered self-esteem but also other areas are affected. The results of the study showed a strong inverse relationship between the incidence of both physical and emotional abuse and the subjective experiences of job satisfaction and job involvement. The incidence of spouse abuse is strongly related to subjective employment experiences such as job satisfaction and job involvement.

According to Pagelow (1984), psychological abuse instills fear, increases dependency and/or damages the self-image. If a woman is repeatedly told that she is ugly, worthless, and stupid by the man she married, she begins to give these demeaning words credibility. This becomes worse if she is isolated from others whose care might counterbalance this negative portrait, and she comes to accept it as her self-image.

The way these unrealistic and negative self-images develop and become accepted is best understood by looking at the socialpsychological principles and sociological principles, such as the looking-glass self that was proposed by Cooley (in Pagelow, 1984). According to Cooley (in Pagelow, 1984), the looking-glass is our society, which acts as a mirror in which a person observes the reactions of others to him/her and to his/her behaviour. People form their

beliefs about themselves by the images they see reflected. The attitudes of others show a person whether he/she is intelligent or stupid, attractive or repulsive. If a person receives positive impressions, or at least would believe they are positive, the person forms positive self-images and continue to act in ways that brings approval. According to the researcher's point of view, women who have escaped the abusive relationship will be able to form positive self-images as the spouses who have been instilling feelings of fear are no longer with them. According to Cooley (in Pagelow, 1984), if on the other hand a person receives negative impressions (as is the case with women who are still in the abusive relationship), self-image diminishes.

Subsequently a person is likely to try to change, but if he/she fails to see an improved image, his/her self-image drops even more.

Cooley (in Pagelow, 1984), believes that self-images developed in childhood are more stable and long-lasting and therefore are crucial to behaviour and personality development, although self-images and self-evaluation change throughout life as people and their environment change.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Although it became clear from the discussion on the development of self-image, self-esteem and self-concept and the discussion on abuse, that most theorists agreed that the early years of life were the most important with regard to the level of self-esteem and self-image, it also became clear that life experiences were very prominent in shaping the person's self-esteem and self-image. They (life experiences including abuse) can either have a negative or a positive impact on the person's self-esteem and self-image. The way the individual views oneself determines how one responds to the demands of the environment.

### 3.6 Research Hypotheses

Hypotheses underlying this study are the following:

- 3.6.1 Women who are in the abusive relationship have a low level of self-image as compared to those that are out of the abusive relationship.
- 3.6.2 Women who have been in the abusive relationship but got out of it have a high level of self-image as compared to those that are still in the abusive relationship.

## CHAPTER 4

Methodology4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

A survey-type of research design was used. The research was non-experimental in nature.

4.2 Participants

The researcher interviewed black, married and unmarried women, who were in and out of the abusive relationship that were seeing social workers at Kagiso Location. Women who were known by the researcher to be in the abusive relationship, also residing in Kagiso were interviewed.

A convenient sample of 30 women (15 from each group) were interviewed. The ages ranged from 30 to 50 years.

The level of education on both groups ranged from Standard 9 to tertiary education.

4.3 Selection of research subjects/participants

Subjects were selected by using the stratified random sampling technique. According to Cosby (1989) stratified random sampling involves dividing the population into subgroups or strata, then a random sampling technique is used to select sample members from each group.

In this study a list of abused women who are still in the abusive relationship and those who have gone out of the abusive relationship was obtained from the social workers and was also drawn by the researcher. From the list subjects for the study were chosen randomly to form the sample.

#### 4.4 Selection instrument

##### 4.4.1 Centre for Social Research (CSR) Abusive Index

The participants were further selected by using the CSR Abuse Index to check the presence as well as the degree of abuse. This scale has 26 items which range from mild to severe form of abuse. The subject has to indicate the extent to which she has experienced each of 26 behaviours (e.g. does your spouse account for every minute; does he ever strike you with an object?) on a four-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 3 (frequently) (i.e. items 1-14) and 0 (never) to 6 (frequently) (items 15-26). (Worell and Remer, 1987). There are no available validity and reliability figures for this scale.

Scores for the scale are obtained by summing up the points for each question. The sum refers to the person's Abuse Index Score.

The CSR Abuse Index Scale categorizes abuse according to the following:

- 120 - 92 - dangerously abusive
- 91 - 35 - seriously abusive
- 34 - 13 - moderately abusive
- 12 - 0 - non-abusive

Subjects who obtained an Abuse Index Score of 12-0 were excluded from the study. All subjects obtaining a score from 13-120 were included (moderate to dangerous abuse).

#### 4.4.2 Biographical information

The following information was requested from the subjects:

- Age
- Home language
- Marital status
- Level of education
- Occupational status
- Income
- Religion

#### 4.5 Psychometrical test

##### 4.5.1 Intra and Interpersonal Relations Scale (IIPS).

Of the many available methods for assessing self-esteem, the Intra and Interpersonal Relations Scale was used as it

is standardized for Blacks. The reliability coefficient for this scale appears to be adequate (0.85).

The IIPS gives an indication of the person's attitude towards himself (Intrapersonal relationship). Secondly it gives an indication of the person's relationship with people around him, specifically parental figures.

Depending on the nature of the relationships i.e. intrapersonal and interpersonal, conclusions can be drawn in respect of the person's personal adjustment or maladjustment (Minnaar, 1988).

This test consists of four fields with each field comprising 30 opposite word pairs (e.g. depressed-cheerful), in terms of which the person has to describe himself.

Due to the selective interests of the researcher, the fields assessing the subjects' relationships with her parents were excluded. The two fields that were used are as follows:

#### 4.5.1.1. Self-image (Field I)

This field measures the person's self-image. From what the person describes himself/herself on the strength of the 30 given characteristics, one can determine what the person thinks of himself/herself, whether the person has a positive or negative view of himself/herself; whether his/her sense of personal worth is high or low and also

whether his/her view of himself/herself is realistic or unrealistic (Minnaar, 1988).

According to Minnaar (1988), the words self-image, self-concept and self-esteem have the same meaning.

#### 4.5.1.2 Ideal self (Field (IV))

This field measures the subject's ideal self. From the description the subject gives of himself/herself, one can determine the type of a person he/she would like to be. It provides an indication of the person's cognitive aspect in the subject's personality. Are the ideals that are set by the person exceptionally high, and also are they realistic? (Minnaar, 1988).

When comparing the two fields, one can determine whether a person is satisfied with what he/she is or whether he/she would like to change himself/herself.

The IIPS is scored by means of a specially designed transparent plastic scoring key. The positive characteristic is allocated the highest figure. The scores for all the individual items have to be added together. The total score (raw scores) is then converted into standard score (stanines) by using the norm tables.

#### 4.5.2 Interpretation of scores

According to Minnaar (1988), a stanine of 4, 5 or 6 is regarded as average and normal. On the other hand a stanine of 3 is viewed as indicating a borderline case and a stanine of 1 and 2 would indicate a poor relationship.

A stanine of 7 would point to a realistic view of the self (ideal situation). A high stanine (8 and 9) will have a negative significance since in such a case there will be a strong possibility that the person has deliberately attempted to create a positive image or has an unrealistic view of himself.

#### 4.5.3 Metrical qualities of the IIPS

##### 4.5.3.1 Reliability

According to Owen and Taljaard (1989), reliability of a test refers to how consistent is the test from one occasion to the next. It is usually expressed in the form of a coefficient whose value can vary between zero (complete unreliability) and one (complete reliability).

The four field's reliability was calculated by using an adaptation of the Kuder-Richardson formulas according to a method suggested by Ferguson (Minnaar, 1988).

TABLE 4.1                      RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS OF THE FOUR FIELDS  
OF THE IIPS

	FIELD 1		FIELD 2		FIELD 3		FIELD 4	
	SELF CONCEPT		MOTHER		FATHER		IDEAL SELF	
	R	E	R	E	R	E	R	E
Standard 9	0,84	0,78	0,87	0,71	0,78	0,92	0,90	0,62
Standard 10	0,85	0,76	0,86	0,73	0,79	0,90	0,89	0,65
Population	0,85	0,76	0,86	0,73	0,79	0,90	0,89	0,65

R = Reliability

E = Error of measurement (stanines)

From the above table the reliability coefficient for Fields 1 and 4 appear to be adequate.

#### 4.5.3.2 Validity

No validity figures are available for the IIPS.

#### 4.6 Statistical analysis

The Chi-squared test was used to test whether significant differences exist between the two groups i.e. the self-image and the ideal image between women who are still in the abusive relationship and those that are out of the abusive relationship.

All tests were based on a 5% level of significance. The degrees of freedom [(r-1) (c-1)] were 3 for all the tests.

The following chapter comprises the tabulated results and findings.

## CHAPTER 5

RESULTS5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the results of the study will be reported. The descriptive statistics and the results of various chi-square analysis will be presented.

5.2 Self-image of women living with abuse and those who have escaped the abusive relationship

Table 4.1 indicates that a larger percentage of women on both groups have an average self-image i.e. 26,7% for group 1 and 30% for group 2. Both groups had the same percentage of women with low self-image i.e. 10%.

TABLE 5.1 SELF-IMAGE FOR GROUP 1 AND GROUP 2

S E L F E S T I M E	STANINES								TOTAL
	1 - 3		4 - 5		7		8 - 9		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
GROUP1	3	(10)	8	(26,7)	2	(6,7)	2	(6,7)	15
GROUP2	3	(10)	9	(30)	0	(0)	3	(10)	15
TOTAL	6		17		2		5		30

Group 1 = women who are in the abusive relationship.

Group 2 = women who have escaped the abusive relationship.

TABLE 5.2 IDEAL SELF-IMAGE FOR GROUP 1 AND GROUP 2

I D E A L S E L F E S T I M E	STANINES								TOTAL
	1 - 3		4 - 5		7		8 - 9		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
GROUP1	4	(13,3)	8	(13,3)	3	(10)	4	(13,3)	15
GROUP2	4	(13,3)	10	(33,3)	0	(0)	1	(3,3)	15
TOTAL	8		14		3		5		30

Group 1 = women who are still in the abusive relationship.

Group 2 = women who have escaped the abusive relationship.

TABLE 5.3 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SELF-IMAGE AND IDEAL SELF-IMAGE OF GROUPS 1 AND 2

D I F F E R E N C E	STANINES						TOTAL		
	1 - 3		4 - 5		7			8 - 9	
	n	%	n	%	n	%		n	%
GROUP1	3	(10)	4	(13,3)	7	(23,3)	1	(3,3)	15
GROUP2	3	(10)	6	(20)	4	(13,3)	2	(6,7)	15
TOTAL	6		10		11		3		30

Group 1 = women in the abusive relationship.  
Group 2 = women who have escaped abuse.

5.3 Ideal self-image of women living with abuse and those who have escaped abuse

Table 4.2 indicates that both groups had the same percentage (13,3) of women with low ideal self-image. Group 2 however had a high percentage (33,3) of women with average ideal self as compared to Group 1. Group 1 on the other hand had the same percentage (13,3) of women with high ideal self as those with low ideal self, as compared to Group 2 who had a low percentage (3,3) of women with high ideal self and a high percentage (13,3) of women with low ideal self.

#### 5.4 Difference between self-image and ideal self-image for Groups 1 and 2

Table 4.3 indicates that Group 1 had a high percentage (23,3) of women with an above average difference between the self-image and ideal self-image as compared to Group 2 (13,3). Both groups had the same percentage (10) of women with low difference between self-image and ideal self-image.

#### 5.5 Hypotheses testing

$H_0$ : There is a significant difference between the two groups.

$H_A$  There is no significant difference between the two groups.

The above hypothesis was tested using the chi-squared test to test whether significant differences exist in each of the groups. All tests were based on a 5% level of significance. The degrees of freedom  $[(r-1) (c-1)]$  were 3 for all the tests.

### 5.5.1 Self-image for both groups

The chi-squared value,  $X^2 = 2,591$

The theoretical value;  $X^2(3;0,5) = 9,348$

### 5.5.2 Ideal self-image

The chi-squared value,  $X^2 = 59,306$

The theoretical value,  $X^2(3;0,5) = 9,348$

### 5.5.3 Difference between self-image and ideal self-image

The chi-squared value,  $X^2 = 1,552$

The theoretical value,  $X^2(3;0,5) = 9,348$

## 5.6 Interpretation of the above results

In cases 4.5.1 and 4.5.3 we will reject the null hypothesis since  $X^2 = 2,591 < X^2(3;0,5) = 9,348$  and  $X^2 = 1,1552 < X^2(3;0,5) = 9,348$

It can therefore be concluded that no statistically significant difference exists between the two groups. The self-image as well as the difference between the self and the ideal are the same for both groups.

In case 4.5.2 we will not reject the null hypothesis since  $X^2 = 59,306 > X^2(3;0,5) = 9,348$ .

It can therefore be concluded that a statistically significant difference does exist between the two groups. The ideal self-image for the two groups is different.

## CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION OF THE STUDY

One of the main findings in this study was that a large proportion of subjects sampled in both groups had an average self-image. Both groups had the same proportion of women with low self-image.

In relation to the above findings, the first hypothesis that women who are in the abusive relationship have a low level of self-image was not supported. Although many studies (Walker, 1990; Kelly, 1986 and Matlin, 1990) have found that women who are in the abusive relationship have low self-image, according to this study this seems not necessarily to be the case. The above studies have however been done on white women not black women. Cultural differences in terms of how women perceive the situation (abuse) may play a role. The way black women perceive the abuse by their partners might be different from how white women perceive abuse.

With regard to the second hypothesis of this study which stated that women who have been abused but are out of the abusive relationship have a higher self-image as compared

to those that are still in the abusive relationship, no differences existed. This hypothesis was also not supported.

Although ideal self-image was not included in the hypothesis it is however noted that there was a significant difference in terms of the ideal self-image of the two groups. A large proportion of women who were in the abusive relationship were unhappy and frustrated, they would like to change their self-image.

On the basis of these findings it can be speculated that other factors (cultural, economic) might have had an effect on the above results. For example in some black cultures being abused by a man is seen as the norm, maybe that is why the abuse has had no significant effect on the self-image of these women.

Also on the other hand the majority of women who were tested were abused moderately. The degree of abuse might also have had an effect on the self-image.

A limitation of the present study was that the data was not analysed to establish the influence of the degree of abuse.. The study included those that were moderately abused to those that were severely abused.

There are no available reliability and validity figures with regard to the scale that was used to check the presence of abuse. One can then assume that this scale based on the items that are on it does measure the presence or absence of abuse.

Secondly, all participants selected for inclusion in the study generally had a moderate to high level of socioeconomic status.

Thus the findings cannot be generalized to lower level occupations.

Thirdly a small sample from only one location was used.

Fourthly only one tool was used to measure self-image.

There appears to be some disagreement with regard to the concepts self-image, self-esteem and self-concepts. Some theorists view it as meaning one and the same thing whilst other view it differently.

In light of these features of the present study, the findings should be interpreted carefully and further replications are required before they can be generalized.

## CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is recommended that:

- (i) Further studies among black women with regard to abuse and self-image need to be undertaken in the near future, as to the researcher's knowledge there is still a lack of research done in these areas.
  
- (ii) A large sample will have to be used as this study concentrated on a small sample only and variables such as the ethnic group and religion need to be taken into account as they may also play a part with regard to the women's self-image.

A non-probability sampling technique in this study was used and this also restricts the generalizability of the study. In future a probability sampling technique should be used so as to increase the external validity of the study.

(iii) Psychological services, especially those that give support: to abused women seem to be lacking in black communities. The few that are available are not easily available to most people. The ideal situation would be to have psychological services in each and every community.

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