

**A DISCURSIVE STUDY OF
MALE ADOLESCENT SEXUAL
OFFENDERS IN A TREATMENT
PROGRAMME AT CHILDLINE,
KZN.**

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ABSTRACT

This discursive study, investigates the role of discourse in the creation of denial and the unconscious in adolescent sexual offenders. It also attempts to illustrate that the denial expressed by the adolescent sexual offenders towards their abuse event, in fact reflects a collective societal dialogic unconscious, as evidenced in legal, social and psychological discourses, towards sexual abuse. The scarcity of local literature in this field and the increasing number of young offenders, provides the motivation for the research.

A conversational analysis, as extended by Michael Billig, revealed that the seven adolescent sexual offenders interviewed for this study all oscillated between discourses of denial and acknowledgement. The ideological consequences of an acknowledgement position bear the potential for shame and ostracism from family, peers and the community. The adolescents therefore drew on different and often inconsistent and varying rhetorical resources, in order that they could construct their accounts of the abuse event as morally appropriate, in order to remain on the moral high-ground within the conversational setting of the study. A complex code of absences were also noted in the discourses. These silences frequently contained the abusive event, and created a context in which the discourses of contradiction and disclaiming accounts could function and enabled the adolescents to construct themselves as morally polite.

Finally, I illustrated that the ambiguity and ambivalence expressed by the adolescents, is reflected in a collective denial within society. The accounts presented by the adolescents were a construct of our culture's ambiguous and ambivalent attitude towards violence and sexually abusive events against children and women.

DECLARATION

This thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary, is my own original work.

L. Pettigrew.

LEIGH PETTIGREW

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS:

This discursive study constitutes firstly, an investigation of the possible role of dialogue in the creation of denial and the unconscious, in adolescent sexual offenders. It is proposed that the repression of their abusive event may not reflect a characteriological pathology, as suggested by the dominant discourse held by traditional psychopathology¹, but is possibly constituted through discursive interaction, and therefore may function to (1) justify the abusive act/s and (2) conceal the abuse. Secondly, this study attempts to illustrate that this ambiguity and ambivalence experienced by the adolescent sexual offenders towards violence and sexual abuse, in fact may reflect the ideological dilemmas held in Western legal and social discourses. Finally, the study explores throughout, the discursive methodological issues of subject position and reflexivity as they reveal themselves in the reading process. An analysis of interviews conducted with seven adolescent sexual offenders currently in treatment at Childline KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), constitutes the basis for this investigation.

1.2. RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY:

Dominant Western discourse has constructed sexual abuse as a social act, punishable by prevailing institutionalized legal outcomes. Furthermore, it is often defined through relational opposites: disparate from the ubiquitous 'normal childhood'; or disparate from the even more ubiquitous 'normal sex'. The paedophile

¹ I will argue that some of the elements contributing to the contemporary status of adolescent sexual offenders are enmeshed within the language and discursive forms based on a traditional medical model. This medical model operates within the realm of empiricism and locates these offenders according to a fairly extensive set of pathological and characteriological (often reported as stable) properties.

is portrayed in this dominant discourse as a social pariah against which society needs to be protected.

If the majority of South Africans could have it their way, the seven men I'm about to meet would be dead. They are a hated, despised and feared breed of man... It is men like these who have whittled away our personal freedom and drawn a circle around our lives, closing it in and smothering it. They are the spectres who haunt our nightmares and have shattered many women's lives...

(Marianne Thamm, *Fair Lady* : February 1998)

This however represents a remarkably contemporary discourse, for it appears that society has had great difficulty acknowledging the existence of sexual abuse against children. In fact it was not until the 1950s (Vizard, Monck and Misch, 1995) that its existence was acknowledged and it was only in the late 1970s that mental health professionals recognized the seriousness of the sexual behaviour of adolescents against children in the United States of America (U.S.A) (Kempe & Kempe, 1984) and in the United Kingdom (U.K.) (Mrazek, Lynch & Bentovim, 1981).

This neglect appears to emerge from the dominant and somewhat ambivalent discourse held by psychological, social, and even legal institutions, that for example, the incidence figures for an adolescent offending population are low; that crimes committed by adolescents are less serious than those committed by adults, and that adolescent sexual behaviour is 'exploratory' in nature or due to the normal aggressiveness of sexually maturing adolescents (Becker, 1990). Even traditional psychopathology has classified adolescent sexual offending as 'adolescent adjustment reaction' or as 'normal sexual experimentation' (Vizard, *et al.*, 1995).

However adolescent sexual offending appears to be more prevalent than is indicated. Victim surveys in the U.S.A indicate that approximately 50 per cent of child molestations were perpetrated by adolescents (Campbell, 1994). Correspondingly, high statistics have also been reported in Britain. Vizard, *et al.* (1995) report that in 1994 a total of 29 500 sexual offences were recorded by the police in England and Wales and 8 400 sex offenders were cautioned or found guilty. Of these 8 400 sexual offenders, 30% were under 21 years; 14% were aged 17 - 20 years; 12% were aged 14 - 16 years; and 4% were aged 10 - 13 years. An attempt was made to obtain

statistics for adolescent sexual offenders in South Africa. However, none of the organisations (South African Police (SAP), Regional Courts in Durban and Pietermaritzburg (PMB), Westville Prison etc.) approached maintain a separate set of statistics for adolescents. The Child Protection Unit (C.P.U.) in Pietermaritzburg was, however, able to report that for the PMB area during 1997: 268 rapes, 10 statutory rapes, 1 incest, 9 attempted rapes, 21 cases of indecent assault, and 5 cases of sodomy were allegedly perpetrated by adolescents in the age group 14 - 17 years of age. How many of these were actually convicted remains difficult to assess. Childline KZN currently have 13 adolescent offenders in their Durban treatment programme, many of whom have not encountered the police or judiciary systems. It is difficult therefore to assess the extent of the problem in South Africa. The few statistics we do have (although we acknowledge that these are often a gross under-reporting) would suggest that the problem is perhaps more serious than the dominant discourse would have us believe.

An extensive literature review reveals that much of the research conducted thus far on adolescent sexual offenders, was conducted in the realm of empiricism and focuses fairly extensively on the pathological, characteriological set of (often reported as stable) properties that the individual offender is reported to possess (this will be explored more extensively in Chapter two). Based on this assessment, an alternative conceptualisation of adolescent sexual offenders is postulated in Chapter two. This theoretical alternative is reflected in the title of this thesis: that is, 'discursive'. Briefly, this discursive study focus is firmly established in the understanding that language does not simply represent a pre-existing reality; or that language is not a transparent medium through which unchanging 'facts' or 'accurate' definitions are conveyed. Rather the claim that lies at the basis of this discursive study, is that through language we actively construct our experiences (Kitzinger and Thomas, 1995:35).

Harre` (1983) argues, that qualitative researchers are afforded access to the gateway of understanding the social world, through talk and conversation, which are 'the primary human reality' (in Shotter, 1993:1). Social psychologists are therefore able to study 'not the person behaving in an 'environment' or language merely as the medium used to represent processes inside human subjects but the language

practices and discourses prevalent in different contexts' (Shotter, 1984). Language, therefore, is the arena through which identity is continuously being re-negotiated, as the goals and contexts of interaction shift (Sherrard, 1991:171). Language has become the medium for, 'self- construction and thus for research on the self' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:106).

Discursive psychology has set itself the task of investigating how psychological states are constituted through discursive activity and is firmly rooted, therefore, in the study of the utterance and the particular, occasioned use of language (Billig, 1997: 140). Accordingly, it is argued that psychology should be based on the study of this outward activity rather than upon hypothetical, and essentially unobservable, inner states that predominate much of the literature on adolescent sexual offenders. This thesis is influenced therefore by the traditions of Wittgenstein, ethnomethodology and conversational analysis and concentrates on the social and discursive constitution of psychological phenomena, rather than on supposed inner motivation. This conceptual framework is strongly related to the work of Michael Billig (1987, 1991, 1997, 1998). Conversational analysis has provided us with an in-depth investigation into how everyday morality is accomplished in conversation. Billig (1997, 1998) extends the notion that conversational interaction is not only a mode of expression, but also a mode of repression. If for example, we say that the unconscious as well as the conscious, is constituted in interaction, 'then everyday interaction is not only reproducing moral norms, but also reproduces immoral temptations, which are routinely resisted and repressed' (Billig, 1997: 140). This study will therefore focus not only on the presences, but also the absences in the dialogue of the adolescent sexual offenders. Billig's concept of the dialogic unconscious will be introduced here in order to suggest how processes of repression can be studied discursively.

1.3. THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEMPORARY IDEAS:

A number of contemporary ideas, ideologies and social movements have influenced the nature of this research. The reflexive process within a discursive study begins at

the commencement of the research and it is to these alternative frames, that will ultimately influence the picture in the viewfinder, that I now turn to.

1.3.1. Postmodernism:

The cultural and intellectual 'backcloth' against which social constructionism and indirectly this study, has taken shape, is what is usually referred to as 'postmodernism'. Essentially, postmodernists believe that, that which is accepted by society as 'truth' or fact 'depends as much as anything else on the social and cultural context of the historian' (Hutcheon, 1988:78). There is therefore, for those who are able to recognise it, no immutable past, present or future and the world as we see it is the result of hidden structures. Human values, especially in terms of what was intended, are seen to be an important element in understanding what was done and what was found (Bernstein, 1983 in Newborough, 1992:13). The Foucauldian view of the subject laid the intellectual foundations for many of the postmodernist views on the self and is an important addition to any definition of postmodernism. According to Foucault, the subject has no 'internal being'; there is no inner and outer self, only those practices and knowledge that constitute the self in language. Postmodernism also postulates the notion that we need to abandon our expectations of closure and resolution of issues, since problems are often redefined and superseded rather than solved. A potential solution to this, according to Heller (1992:157), is that we 'become oriented towards a process of problem definition and solution rather than toward advocacy of particular solutions that are expected to be final answers to what are ever-changing problems.'

1.3.2. 'New Paradigm' Psychology and Social Constructionism:

'New paradigm' research, according to Reason and Rowan (1981), maintains the need to take heed of what individuals communicate about themselves more seriously, that is, the need to move beyond analyses of behaviour to a focus on accounts. This work is associated with, *inter alia*, the 'ethnogenics' of Harre` (1979) and the social constructionist theoretical framework (Burman, 1991:6). Within these frameworks

research is conceived of as a collaborative enterprise between the interviewee and researcher and also induces responsibility on the part of the researcher to be accountable and non-exploitative. The social constructionist movement has been particularly influential in this work. The main object of the social constructionist movement has been to:

...displace attention from self-as-entity and focus it on the methods of constructing the self. That is, the question becomes not what is the true nature of self but how is the self talked about, how is it theorized in discourse? ...There is not 'one' self waiting to be discovered or uncovered but a multitude of selves found in the different kinds of linguistic practices now, in the past, historically and cross- culturally.
(Potter and Wetherall, 1987:102)

1.3.3. Feminism:

As a woman and being particularly interested in the abuse of children by male adolescents, it is apt that the lenses through which this study are focused, will be feminist in orientation. I regard this study therefore as feminist. This is partly because a major part of its political and theoretical purpose is feminist, that is, I intend to explore how the discourses of male adolescent sexual offenders - the framework within which explanations are sought - have the effect of systematically distorting (though not necessarily intentionally) the abusive event and reproducing a view of the world which masks sexual abuse against women and children.

The 'turn to language' offered by discursive investigations, was particularly attractive because of the associations between language and oppression, a phenomenon post-structuralist feminists have studied because of the recognition that 'language is not a neutral, descriptive medium but is deeply implicated in the maintenance of power relations' (Gill, 1995:166). Discourses are intimately related to the manner in which society is organized and managed and therefore give shape and substance to our daily lives. They offer us social positions and statuses and it is in the interest of relatively powerful groups that some discourses and not others receive the stamp of 'truth'. If we accept that men, relative to women, for example, are still in a more powerful position in society, then we can say that the prevailing discourses of femininity serve to uphold this power inequality (Burr, 1995).

Feminist methodologies which acknowledge the central issue of power relations in research have also been a significant influence here. The diverse ways that power structures the interactions between researcher and interviewee in research is particularly revealing. Power is not treated as something that can be removed by the researcher at will, but as an ever present dynamic that must be taken into account at all times and in all aspects of research (Burman, 1991:6). I will attempt throughout this study, therefore to edify my own involvement not only in conducting the interviews but also in the interpretation of the research. This research must therefore been seen as a social product rather than a product of some eternal truth (Oakley, 1981).

Within all the influences described above, feminism, postmodernism, 'new paradigm' psychology, and social constructionism, reflexivity is accorded a principal role. Hence, this qualitative study shares with interpretative work in general, 'the assumption of intersubjectivity between researcher and participant and the mutual creation of data' (Olesen, 1994:166).

1.4. THE CONCEPT OF POSITIONING:

Within a traditional scientific paradigm, researchers claim that they are able to step back from their own humanity and reveal the objective nature of the phenomena under study, without bias or contamination, from their own personal prejudice (Burr, 1995:160). However within a social constructionist framework, it would be argued that in fact this alleged 'objectivity-talk' of scientists forms part of the discourse of science through which a particular version of human life is constructed. It could also be argued, that 'such objectivity is impossible' (Burr, 1995: 160) and that in fact, no human can step outside of his or her humanity and view the world from no position at all. 'Each of us, of necessity, encounters the world from some perspective or other and the questions that we come to ask about that world, our theories and hypotheses, must also of necessity arise from the assumptions that are embedded in our perspective' (Burr, 1995:160).

'Positioning' is the concept that will be used throughout this thesis to refer to those dynamic aspects of talk-in-interaction, 'whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines' (Davies and Harre`, 1990:48). The use of the concept 'positioning', contrasts sharply with the notion of 'role'. According to Davies and Harre` (1990:62), role theory is always 'separable from the various roles that they take up' and refers to those 'static, formal and ritualistic' aspects of encounters. Positioning, on the other hand, focuses on:

...the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions. A **subject position** is a possibility in known forms of talk; position is what is created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons.

(Davies and Harre`, 1990:62, emphasis added)

It is necessary to extrapolate further the concept 'subject position'. Broadly, it is a part allocated to a person by the use of a story and is influenced by personal characteristics such as, race, gender, class, ethnicity, age et cetera, which contain and shape what we do. Its significance lies in the fact that:

...the constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in the provision of subject positions. A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for person within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire.....Among the products of discursive practices are the very persons who engage in them.

(Davis & Harre`, 1990:48)

One would be mistaken to assume that positioning is necessarily intentional as 'one lives one's life in terms of one's ongoing produced self, whoever might be responsible for its production' (Davis & Harre`, 1990:48). The process of positioning has therefore, determined and influenced all aspects of this research, in terms of the lenses or frames that were selected by myself.

1.5. AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF POLITICS:

Finally, all research, this thesis notwithstanding, is 'political' to some lesser or greater extent, for it often reflects the dominant ideologies and power relations in society (Griffin, 1986:188). Researchers need to be particularly sensitive to the possible political effects of their research (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995). This is particularly so with research that may, on some level, challenge the status quo and that is interested in how people can challenge the order of things. A discursive investigation of adolescent sexual offenders will hopefully contribute to this process since: 'When we want to understand the function of a particular discourse, the way they position their subjects in relations of contempt and respect, of domination or of subordination or of opposition and resistance, **we pass quickly and ineluctably from conceptual critique to social critique**' (Parker, 1992: 37, emphasis added).

1.6. IDEOLOGY AS DILEMMATIC:

Billig (1987) maintains the belief that our thought, its content and processes, are provided by wider, socially shared concepts and issues. The concepts, values and beliefs of the society into which we are born not only shape what we think about, but also influence what we hold as the two positions of an argument or issue. According to Billig *et al.*, 'thinking itself is characterised by this 'dilemmatic' nature' (Burr, 1995:84) that is, it takes the form of a dilemma or a two-sided question. This dilemma however, is more complex than a simple choice or even a straightforward technical problem.

... The characteristics of dilemmas are revealed as fundamentally born out of a culture which produces more than one possible ideal world, more than one hierarchical arrangement of power, value and interest. In this sense, social beings are confronted by and deal with dilemmatic situations as a condition of their humanity (Billig, *et al.*, 1988).

The implications are that we do not simply absorb wider social concepts and values uncomplicatedly and live them out in our lives. Firstly, according to Billig (1987), ideologies are not coherent, unified systems, but always have at least two themes and as such do not present a 'story' that can be lived out in this way. Secondly,

human nature is such that our very thinking processes involve us in 'debate, argument, weighing up pros and cons' (Burr, 1995: 85). Individuals are capable therefore of exercising choice and making decisions about the strengths and weaknesses of society's values and ideas, and possess contrary but socially shared linguistic repertoires for talking about their lives (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

If this research re-presents a slice/s of everyday thinking, it can be argued therefore that there will be ideological elements. A discussion about adolescent offenders calls upon ideological themes, for it invites us to talk about the nature of the individual, and the nature of the social group (Billig *et al.*, 1988: 146). The adolescent offenders, in describing their abusive event not only seek to express their own position, but also to negate the counter-position, a process also experienced by the researcher (Billig, 1991). Every process therefore should be understood in terms of a counter-process and it is to these counter-themes that I turn in Chapter 5.

1.7. OVERVIEW OF THIS STUDY:

The literature review contained in Chapter two comprises a critique of the dominant interpretations of adolescent sexual offending and sexual abuse in general, as maintained by: traditional psychopathology, legal and social discourses. Based on this critique, a new discursive site for analysing adolescent sexual offenders will be introduced.

Chapter three, introduces the data and addresses methodological processes involved in conducting a discursive analysis.

Chapter four examines, as a first discursive site, some of the strategies used by the adolescents to maintain their positions of justification and the role that these disclaiming accounts play in concealing and justifying the abuse.

Chapter five attempts to position the adolescents' disclaiming accounts within a larger social context and explores the possibility that their accounts may reflect the

ideological dilemmas prevailing in the dominant discourse on male violence towards women and children. Chapter five provides an extended illustration of a discursive investigation into the reproduction of sexual abuse and violence, as a second discursive site. And finally, we explore a few possible strategies for shifting individual adolescent offenders and society, in general, towards an acknowledgement position of sexual abuse.

Chapter six provides a reflexive look at the research process, in particular, issues of validity and methodology, and gathers together the theoretical thinking about adolescent sexual offenders in society.

CHAPTER TWO: ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The basic limitation of a scientific position which views events as empirically objective and external in their meaning is brought into sharp focus when the subject of exploration is a morally unacceptable, denied or disclaimed act. A scientism which leaves a researcher..... unable to conceptualize the humans studied as subjects, embedded in cultural practices and in conversation with others, prevents him or her from seeing them as subjects who think and construe, who understand and misunderstand, and who have agency and intention in line with cultural, historical and gendered expectations (Hyden & McCarthy, 1994).

2.1. INTRODUCTION:

This chapter explores discursive site two, which refers to the dominant Western interpretations of male adolescent sexual offending, within legal, social and psychological discourses. The decision to include these broader contexts was one I debated often and the methodological dilemma it created is examined in more detail in the latter part of Chapter two and in Chapter three. If I focused only on the research and interviews, I felt that I would risk framing the presented discourse as a-contextual, a-political and a-historical, and I would, therefore present an 'as if' universalist approach, ignoring the particularities of our culture and times. The manner in which the adolescent sexual offenders are managed and conceptualised both by psychology, the legal fraternity, and other social systems, informs this critique and creates a more inclusive discursive site, two. Since it is possible that these factors and facets of adolescent sexual offending will affect their experience, it is deemed necessary and appropriate to outline them here. This critique then creates the space for a discussion about a new discursive site for analysis which comprises the focus of the second half of this chapter.

For the purpose of this study, discursive site two has been highlighted in Chapter two and drawn into the foreground. The reader is reminded though that this is a rather artificial elevation and that the other two discursive sites, particularly the interviews with the adolescents and the researcher within the study, are equally part of this second discursive site.

2.2. IDEOLOGICAL DILEMMAS WITHIN THE SOCIAL AND LEGAL DISCOURSES ON ADOLESCENT SEXUAL OFFENDING:

Our media abounds with reports of child abuse: we are reminded often, for example, that child abuse is on the increase and that the police and social systems are unable to stem the increasing tide of reports and the urgency for stronger legal action.

The South African Police Service conceded this week that its child protection units (CPU's) only scratch the surface of the problem of child abuse in the country. Police were confronted with nearly 36 000 cases of child abuse last year, more than double the number in 1993, and it is widely acknowledged that the number of reported cases represents only a fraction of the actual abuse.
(*Mail and Guardian*, 20th - 26th March, 1997).

Reports of crimes against children under the age of 18 years increased by more than 25 percent in 1996 claims the National Council for the Child and Family Welfare... And more than 75 percent of rape victims were female... She [Tia Wessels, Council's Executive Director] claimed that not enough is being done to curb the violent act against children...Child Welfare is overburdened, handling an average of 767 new cases of sexual abuse... 'If stronger measures are not taken, we can expect that figures will continue to rise. The future of the next generation of adults in our country will be severely impaired', said Wessels.
(*Brakpan Herald*, April 18, 1997).

'The rate of child abuse cases being reported has increased tremendously. People are coming forward to report cases...' said Gauteng MEC for Welfare, Ignatius Jacobs... 'Child Abuse cases involving young girls have risen by 45% in three years.'
(*The Star*, April 6th, 1998).

There can be little doubt that we are witnessing a dramatic increase in the number of reported cases of sexual abuse in South Africa. This rising statistic, according to the Superintendent of the PMB Child Protection Unit (CPU), is due largely to the

simultaneous increase in reporting and the increased sexual abuse against children. Research (Campbell, 1994; Bagley, 1992) has indicated that approximately half of the adult sexual offender population began their deviancy in adolescence and that the average sexual offender would during a lifetime commit 380 sexual crimes. In Chapter one, a number of statistics were presented to the reader, as part of the rationale for researching this particular group of individuals and also in an attempt to illustrate the fact that adolescent sexual offending is more serious than initially reported (Vizard, *et al.*, 1995). There are, however, a number of indications that would suggest that even these epidemiological studies represent a gross underestimate of the numbers of young people involved in sexual offending. Why then is the problem so widely neglected and disclaimed by South African society? A closer examination of the conceptualization and management of adolescent sexual offenders, reveals that a number of tensions and dilemmas exists in our society towards this group of individuals, in particular.

2.2.1. The Dilemmatic Nature of Defining 'Normal' Adolescent Sexual Behaviour:

Curiosity is a universal pathway to learning. Experimental non-coercive, non-coital child-child occasional sex-play at different growth stages is quite normal, not harmful, and is experienced by 90 per cent of boys and girls. They play doctor or kiss-and-touch games. Some accidentally or intentionally overhear or peep at an individual or couple at home having sexual exchange in a bathroom, bedroom, a car or in a public place.
(Renshaw, 1994)

The problems of defining abusive behaviour are more frequently reported in the literature on adolescent abusers than on adult offenders, and no doubt spring from the continued lack of information about 'normal' psychosexual development in children and adolescents (Vizard, *et al.*, 1995). Large scale studies of sexual behaviour appear to be rare and most of the literature consulted for this study, rarely contextualized adolescent sexual offending within adolescent sexual behaviour or within adolescent sexual development. Those authors that do, agree that it is 'confusing' and often fraught with difficulties (Vizard, *et al.*, 1995:732). These authors consider a wide variety of sexual behaviours as 'normal' within this adolescent age group (Friedrich *et al.*, 1991:463) and place these behaviours along a diverse

continuum extending from touching and kissing through sexual petting to full intercourse (Elliott & Morse, 1989).

Much confusion exists therefore about what expectations society should have of adolescent sexual behaviour. Becker (1988) attempts to tackle this issue and describes nondeviant sexual behaviour in adolescence as “noncoercive sexual interaction with a peer”. Antithetically, deviant sexual behaviour may be defined as being comprised of three elements: the use of coercion or force, sexualised interactions which are age-inappropriate for the partner, and partners who are not peers. The presence of any of these elements therefore, would define the behaviour of the individual as abusive. But we would acknowledge that even these guidelines expose the question of what constitutes “coercion” and “age-appropriate sexual interactions” and even (albeit at the extreme) who are peers, and who are not?

The matter is further exacerbated by professional interpretations of the meaning of sexualised interactions between children within cultures, and a notable failure to maintain a critical awareness of broader societal conditions. In fact, much of the literature on adolescent sexual offending is characterised by its focus on the individual and his ‘abnormal’ behaviour in isolation from family, peers, environment and culture and economic and political considerations. A thorough understanding of adolescence is an essential basis for work within this realm and is endorsed by Bailey in her paper on ‘Adolescents who Murder’ in which she states that “we need to know what is and how to define normal functioning and development before we can safely intervene with those who have been designated ‘abnormal’” (in Lyon, 1996 : 1). Even with more uniform practices of eliciting information, cultural, religious and individual attitudes and practices would mean that a degree of variation in what is considered acceptable adolescent sexual behaviour, would continue.

2.2.2. Dilemmas in Defining Male Adolescent Sexual Offending:

Although defining adolescent sexual development and behaviour is dilemmatic, there is some support for the view that the sexual behaviours of adolescent sexual offenders is qualitatively different from the exploratory teenage behaviour (Longo &

Groth, 1983; Becker *et al.*, 1986). However defining precisely what behaviour constitutes this 'grey zone', is also fraught with tensions and characterised as dilemmatic. Behaviour that does exist in this grey area is often minimized by parents, police and professionals as 'experimental' ; '[it is]normal at that age for a boy to be curious and experiment' ; 'normal childhood exploration' (Johnson, 1988), 'he'll grow out of it' (Renshaw, 1994); 'some degree of law-breaking is often regarded as part of normal adolescence gradually reducing with the onset of maturity' (Lyon, 1996:1); and adolescent offenders are even described as 'naïve offenders' (Vizard *et al.*, 1995:736). Feminist post-structuralists, Wendy Hollway (1981, 1984) and Wilkinson & Kitzinger (1995), refer to this discourse as the 'male-sexual-drive discourse'. In this discourse 'common sense' is reflected in the 'knowledge' that women and girls are legitimate sex objects in male arousal and that young adolescents' aggressive sexuality is directly produced by a biological drive and hence considered natural.

Modern psychiatrists have amply studied the behaviour of errant young girls and women coming before the courts in all sorts of cases. Their psychic complexes are multifarious, distorted partly by inherited defects, partly by diseased derangements or abnormal instincts, partly by bad social environments, partly by temporary physiological or emotional conditions. One form taken by these complexes is that of contriving false charges of sexual offences by men.

(John Henry Wigmore, 1904, in Olafson & Corwin, 1993).

Sometimes after killing women who were not prostitutes he had worried that it might be the voice of the devil. But he was able to tell that they were prostitutes by the way they walked. He knew they were not innocent.

(*The Observer*, May 7 1981, in 'I just wanted to kill a woman' Why? The Ripper and Male Sexuality, Hollway, 1981)

Hare-Mustin states that '... men's sexual urges **are assumed to be natural** and compelling; thus, the male is expected to be pushy and aggressive in seeking to satisfy them' (1991:47, emphasis added). In a survey conducted with 60 college men in a rural area of the USA, for example, it was found that a high proportion of them experienced sexual arousal to deviant and 'criminal' activities, including frottage, paedophilia and rape. It was also found that a high proportion of them would seek a variety of sexual experiences, at least some of which would be punishable in law (Templeman & Stinnet, 1991 in Vizard *et al.*, 1995). Nussbaum (1991) found that 21% of college males reported sexual offending of some manner. Hence, the abusive behaviour of adolescent male sexual offenders is often minimized through the 'male-

sexual-drive' discourse and subsequently dismissed by professionals. The offender is then returned to the community and in this manner, the sexually abusive event is concealed. 'The power of a discourse resides in its hegemony, in the way it passes as truth, and in the way its premises and logic are taken for granted' (Hollway, 1981).

Our criminal law is also fraught with tensions and a number of contradictions and omissions exists in the description of abusive behaviour. There is, for example, no criminal offence labelled 'child abuse', 'child sexual abuse', or even 'child neglect' (South African Law Commission , Sexual Offences Against Children, 1997). The Sexual Offences Act, 1957 does attempt to describe some forms of child sexual abuse, e.g. child prostitution, procurement or abduction of a minor for sexual purposes, conspiracy or fraud or the use of drugs or alcohol to involve a female victim in sexual activities, and sodomy. However these definitions are often vague and make clear professional intervention unlikely except in the obvious case situation. Several of the relevant provisions of the Act are formulated in archaic terms unsuited to the present context, and discriminate unfairly between male and female victims. For example, there is dissatisfaction about the discrepancy between the ages of sexual consent applicable to males and females, i.e. 16 and 19 respectively. There is also a contradiction between the age of consent for girls in terms of this Act and the implication in section 14(b)(iii) of the child Care Act, 1983 that a parent may be found 'unfit' if he or she allows a child under eighteen years of age to be exposed to sexual activity. The Act is also glaringly inadequate and fails, for example, to address the growing problem of 'sex tourism'. In fact the South Law Commission considers the Act 'to be defective in the protection it affords children' (Protecting our Children: Blueprint for an Effective National Strategy on Child abuse and Neglect, Third Draft : 10).

Furthermore, the Films and Publications Act, 1996 prohibits the production, possession and distribution of pornographic material depicting children who are younger than sixteen years, and provides for the protection of children from exposure to pornographic material. This act has, however, been difficult to 'police'. This was apparent in the interviews conducted with the seven adolescent offenders for the purpose of this study. Almost all had been exposed, in varying degrees, to

pornographic material, either on television or in magazines. The act also fails to mention the role of the Internet in the dissemination of vast amounts of pornographic material that one adolescent had unlimited access to.

The failure of parents or witnesses or relevant authorities to acknowledge that a sexually abusive event/s occurred and the inadequacy with which the legal system has defined sexual abuse, often has the effect of minimizing and ultimately dismissing sexual abuse as perpetrated by adolescents. In fact, of the nine adolescents interviewed for this study, only two (Peter and Joe), were exposed to the criminal justice system. Peter was apprehended twice for two separate rape charges and was released on the first instance of rape with a warning by the police. He was finally apprehended and charged after the second report of rape. Criminal charges are rarely brought against adolescent sexual offenders and many are exempted from criminal liability. The criminal law therefore often has the effect of vindicating the legitimacy of the adolescent's behaviour and 'as a mechanism to protect children from abuse is to a great extent ineffective' (South African Law Commission, Paper 10 : 19).

2.2.3. Tensions and Dilemmas in Managing Adolescent Sexual Offenders, within the Criminal Justice Process:

The media has capitalized on the absence of arrests and poor conviction rate in the area of child abuse in general:

'This year up to May 4975 arrests were made in the 14 245 reported child abuse cases,' said Security Minister Sydney Mufamadi in a written reply to a question from Willem Fourie (NP). (*Natal Witness*, July 1998)

'Childline became aware of the low rate of conviction of sexual offenders (7%) at the outset of its therapy programmes for the children in 1998,' said Joan van Niekerk, Director of Childline, KZN. (*Sunday Tribune*, June 14, 1998)

A current conviction rate of 7 per cent appears to be the statistic quoted in discourse for adult male sexual offenders. This rate is considerably lower for adolescent sexual offenders. But once again no conviction rates could be obtained for this age group,

apparently due to a reluctance on the part of the relevant authorities to reveal the exact numbers of juveniles in detention.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the detention of juveniles without trial was an issue of particular concern. But it was only towards the end of the 1980s that the political detention of children was used less frequently as a sentencing option. However large numbers of adolescents still continued to be held in custody awaiting trial. In 1993, the South African Government undertook an investigation into alternative centres for children in detention. Additional rights to juvenile offenders were granted in Section 28 of the Constitution and included: '... the right not to be detained except as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time; the right when detained to be kept separately from persons over the age of 18; and the right, when detained, to be treated in a manner and kept in conditions that take account of the child's age' (South African Law Commission, *Juvenile Justice*, 1997:22). A media frenzy erupted subsequent to the publication of this section. There simply were not enough facilities for the adolescent offender and in many cases this resulted in the release of adolescent offenders (including rapists and other sexual offenders) back to the community, most often without supervision:

CPU national commissioner, Superintendent Anneke Pienaar, says: 'There are not sufficient places of safety, and the children cannot be kept in police cells as the police would be criticized for that.'

(*Mail and Guardian*, 20th March - 26th March, 1997).

Subsequent attempts to eliminate prison as a detention option for juvenile offenders have been abandoned. 'The application of the new legislation [Section 28] has been problematic, and the use of a schedule to determine the seriousness of the offence (and therefore the option of detention) has met with opposition from some role-players.' (South African Law Commission, *Juvenile Justice*, 1997 : 32). When presented with sexual offences, criminal courts appear to have been extremely variable and often sentences have had little relation to the age of the offender, type, number, or seriousness of the offence/s, or whether it is a first, second, or third offence. 'What is even more unfortunate is that our present criminal justice system is not catering adequately or is failing in its treatment of the juvenile offender' (South African Law Commission, *Issue Paper 10*, 1997:18).

Interfacing the criminal justice system and adolescent [sexual] perpetrators remains dilemmatic. There is no doubt that juvenile offenders in general, and sexual offenders particularly, have created more than their fair share of tensions not only for the government, who received admonishment for its management of this particular group, but also for the legal and social systems. Adolescent sexual offenders continue to remain a nebulous and confusing group of individuals and while these systems debate (albeit ambivalently) their future and how to interface them with the criminal justice and social systems, they are returned more often than not to their communities unsupervised, with the abusive event dismissed and hence concealed. The establishment of the South African Law Commission's Juvenile Justice Project, 1997 may go some way to addressing the numerous problems and providing the legislative framework for a separate juvenile justice system in South Africa.

2.2.4. Some Tensions and Dilemmas in Reporting Sexual Abuse :

Based on the argument presented above, very few instances of adolescent sexual offending are reported, even when the sexual abuse has been discovered by another. This is often due, on the one hand, to the fact that families and relevant authorities minimize the seriousness of adolescent sexual offending (even in cases of rape and sodomy) and are reluctant to report because of the serious consequences of adolescents being labelled or identified as a sexual abuser (Vizard, *et al.*, 1995). But there also exists, on the other hand, a reluctance on the part of the victims and their families to report the abuse (Vizard, *et al.*, 1995):

'Everybody knew it was happening, but no one dared speak about it...' (Darryl, a sexual abuser) (*Natal Witness*, March 27th, 1998).

Inspector Kobus Vlok of the Pretoria Child Protection Unit said parents were reluctant to co-operate to protect their families from the stigma attached to abuse. (*The Star*, 6th April, 1998)

Through the process of reporting, the young victim is often placed in a position of ambivalence and tension. Whilst the reporting may yield the victim a degree of safety, it also simultaneously exposes the illegitimate and shameful act/s that

occurred either within the family (incest) or outside of the family and positions the young girl as a victim with society. Likewise, the relationship that she protected through her silence, is often ruptured through her disclosure. Courage and shame become the 'double-sided mantle' of disclosure, the ideological dilemmas leaving the young victim vulnerable to discourses of confession (Byrne, 1985) and recuperation (McCarthy and Byrne, 1988; Alcoff and Gray, 1993).

Furthermore, in requesting protection a woman or young girl also designates a criminal act (Hyden & McCarthy, 1994). The consequence of this designation concludes in a request from the police or social authorities for her assistance in a criminal inquiry. In her dilemmatic positioning as the injured party and key-witness, her account is of fundamental importance. However, the police do not ask for any account. It is a search for a validated account. 'Here the legal system judges the account's compatibility with a network of prevailing practices for transposing the actualities of many women's and girl's lives and experiences into the conceptual realm of a criminal offence' (Hyden and McCarthy, 1994). The line between a valid and invalid account is drawn according to the skills of the narrator, in this case the abused girl. She must organize her account in terms of the judicial system's perspective of the world (Barry, 1991) and use her skills to appear 'trustworthy'. Her ability to achieve this will depend on her ability to deliver exact, non-contradictory statements and to reiterate these statements in the same wording at various points in time and place. Her 'trustworthiness' is also viewed in relation to her appearance. An 'aggressive', 'vindictive' and 'provocative' appearance announces 'untrustworthiness' in this context; a 'depressed' and 'obviously victimized female' appearance declares the opposite. 'The trustworthy account with its basis in defeat re-cites the patriarchal prescriptions for women and beckons an unthreatened paternalistic ear' (Hyden & McCarthy, 1994: 549). The once courageous disclosure is now policed (Foucault, 1978:18) and fitted for therapeutic treatment.

Through the 'validation process', the victimized girl is invited into close collaboration with the state, as the prosecutor/s must prove the case against the suspected abuser. The child now becomes a witness for the prosecution and hence, the responsibility for establishing proof and guilt rests with the victim, who thus assumes a role of

responsibility for her position (Hyden & McCarthy, 1994). She has to prove her own abuse, although the case is subjected to public prosecution. Contradictions in the legal discourse, as discussed in 2.2.2. and 2.2.3. mitigate against the very outcomes sought, that is, protection, the termination of the abuse and the allocation of responsibility to the abuser (Lees, 1993).

The consequence of this designation of criminality is that potentially the girl may be forced from her position as victim to one of accuser in a single expeditious move. Furthermore, her entitlement to accuse will be questioned repeatedly during the course of the legal process with regard to her 'trustworthiness' (Hyden & McCarthy, 1994: 550). In her new positioning as accuser, the young girl becomes a participant in a process which serves to maintain the very pattern she has tried to end through her disclosure. In contrast, the young male offender, through the process of evidence collection, is assigned the legal position of 'defendant', which, in my experience, calls for the discourse of defence, and not acknowledgement. It is hardly surprising therefore that when the young victim and her family realise the consequences of their position as accuser, they themselves disclaim the abuse through their silence and reluctance to report, thereby maintaining and endorsing the adolescent's disclaiming actions.

In conclusion then, South African society prohibits, incest, rape, indecent assault and other forms of child abuse. These acts have been legalized as a criminal act, punishable by imprisonment. But one has to ask if that is entirely so? Magazines or daily tabloids or even some television films openly display the figures of young women in varying degrees of exposure, for the public attention, for example. 'Young girls and women are legitimate sexual objects in the attraction of men for many purposes' (Hyden & McCarthy, 1994). Therefore, while there are legal and public disclaimers about the right of men and adolescents to abuse women and children, there also coexists an uncertain public acceptance of violence and sexually abusive behaviour by adolescents. Violence and sexual abuse are simultaneously socially promoted and also socially prohibited actions. Such contradictory sanction is likely to lead to confusion and ambivalence in the minds of young male adolescents attempting to negotiate their sexual development.

2.3. IDEOLOGICAL DILEMMAS WITHIN PSYCHOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ON MALE ADOLESCENT SEXUAL OFFENDERS.

Every profession, because of the monopoly of competence which it has or claims, 'considers itself the proper body to set the terms in which some aspect of society, life, or nature is to be thought of.' Sharing in this general function of reality construction gives every professional a minimum of social authority. In this sense, 'all professionals are priests; they interpret mysteries which affect the lives of those who do not understand.' (Larson, 1977, in Olafson & Corwin, 1993: 10).

Psychology has been a dominant 'social authority' and 'priest', and has had a wide cultural and political significance in contemporary Western society (Parker, 1994) For example, a number of psychological phenomena have become entrenched as part of our everyday language, we consider the use of feelings in everyday discourse or the power and influence of Freud's 1896 Seduction Theory or his latter conceptualisation of the Oedipus complex which was to become '... the irreducible foundation of psychoanalysis, ... a perfect reversal of the seduction theory. Now, children were traumatized not by actual sexual assault, but by projections of their own wishful, masturbatory fantasies' (Summit, 1988:48, in Corwin & Olafson, 1993) and the influence that such discourse has had on the manner in which we manage and conceptualise child abuse, for example. It is comprehensible therefore, that the contemporary status and construction of adolescent sexual offenders and offending is also enmeshed with dominant Western psychological discourse. An extensive review of available psychological literature on adolescent sexual offenders was reviewed for the purpose of this study. The review reveals that the factual knowledge base is sparse, theoretical understandings of the problem are limited and based predominantly upon so-called empirically objective studies.

2.3.1. The Individual Pathological Model:

The central and dominant discursive conceptualisation of adolescent sexual offenders, focuses almost exclusively on the individual offender within a medical

model, as a a-cultural, a-contextual and a-political individual who possesses a number of pathological characteristics. The literature reveals however that a tension exists here, as many of the pathological features that these adolescents are purported to possess, are in fact characteristics related to their interaction with society and a notable failure to address society's attitude to sexuality and male violence. Although a number of other ideological dilemmas exist in the discourse on adolescent sexual offending, I shall focus solely on the dilemma, 'adolescent sexual offender as pathology' and the absent counter-theme, which highlights societal, historical and cultural issues as possibly 'pathological'.

Before this dilemma is presented, it is worth mentioning that I was unable to access research that had been conducted in South Africa on adolescent sexual offenders. I am forced to ask at this point whether this is part of the ambivalence and concealment that exists with regard to this particular group of individuals in South Africa, particularly? The review of psychological literature presented below, is therefore based on British and American psychological discourse. In addition, our knowledge about adolescent sexual offending is confined to those cases that come to light and reach the state of legal and/or therapeutic intervention. The possibility exists that if we were to investigate all young sexual offenders, a different picture might well emerge (Vizard, *et al.*, 1995).

Firstly, most of the research consulted highlights aspects of adolescent sexual offenders' reported poor interpersonal skills. They are, for example, described as being isolated from peers, and experiencing poor relationships with family members. DeNatale (1989) noted that indicators of shyness, timidity and withdrawal were significantly more frequent in a male adolescent sexual offender population than in delinquents of nonsexual crimes. Chewing (1991) also found that child offenders were less likely to have intimate relationships, fewer friends, and fewer female friends. Katz (1990) and Becker (1990) conclude that child offenders' social skills deficits and isolation are risk factors which may predispose them to sexual crimes against younger children. Kahn & Lafond (1988) concur and maintain that 'some adolescents who are socially isolated because of social anxiety or poor social skills

engage in sexual conduct with younger children because they are unable to form relationships with peers.' (137).

Family dysfunction has been reported in several studies. DeMatrino (1989) reported that few male adolescent sexual offenders, in a sample attending treatment, were from intact homes and most had experienced the divorce or separation of their parents. Violence between parents and violence towards children in families were found to be a more common feature in the families of adolescent sexual offenders (Awad & Saunders, 1991; Lyon, 1996) .

We continue to be struck by the appalling levels of physical and emotional abuse and victimization in the histories of many of the abusers... We are also struck by the evidence that often the boy's difficulty in thinking about their abuse of others, and in taking full responsibility for it, seems to echo a childhood in which their parents did not acknowledge responsibility for the abuse and victimization which they inflicted on the child.

(Hodges, Lanyado, & Andreou, 1994:290).

Sexual victimization is also commonly reported among young sexual offenders (Vizard, *et al.*, 1995). Included together with the frequent reports of high rates of sexual victimization in childhood reported by adult offenders, such findings have led to the assumption of a causal link between early victimization and later abusive behaviour. However the discontinuities here are striking and physical violence appears to be more common feature in the histories of adolescent sexual offenders than sexual victimization.

Academic and behavioural problems in school are also commonly noted (Vizard, *et al.*, 1995), but here again the temporal relationship between problems in the school and the development of sexually abusive behaviour patterns have not been studied in detail. Certain adolescent sexual offenders have significant communication problems which may according to the authors contribute to their social isolation. Abel *et al.*, (1985, in Vizard, *et al.*, 1995) have suggested that between 10 and 15 per cent of the sex offender population have learning disabilities. However, the literature on sexually offensive behaviour by those with learning difficulties is still bedeviled by problems of defining 'inappropriate' sexual behaviour.

Kavoussi, Kaplan & Becker (1988) have drawn attention to the low self-esteem and depressive/anxious symptoms in sexually abusive boys. The evidence however is neither clear nor conclusive. One wonders though how much of the apparent low self-esteem and anxiety were related to the interview process in this particular study.

Bagley(1992) reported that sexually assaultive children were significantly more likely to show a wide range of psychosocial problems as compared with 'normal' children, indicating poor adjustment on health, academic and family variables. These characteristics may, according to them, render peer group integration difficult, and may also encourage the development of interest in less demanding, younger children. It does not, of course, explain why this interest in younger children should lead to sexually assaultive behaviour.

In addition, Kavoussi, Kaplan & Becker (1988), found that 48 per cent of adolescent sexual offenders sampled met the full diagnostic criteria of Conduct Disorder and 67 per cent met some DSM-III criteria for Conduct Disorder with poor impulse control, 34 per cent for ADD and 21 per cent for Adjustment Disorder/depressed mood.

A few authors (DeMatrino, 1989 & Kahn & Lafond, 1988) have focussed on puberty and the developmental conflicts which occur during adolescence and which may create internal conflicts which can, according to them, contribute to the adolescent's abusive behaviour. Once again this hypothesis is fraught with difficulties and of course does not explain why only some adolescents perpetrate sexual abuse.

Kahn and Lafond (1988:143) explore the possibility that dysfunctional attitudes and values may play a role in adolescent offending. They found that strong stereotypes that devalue females frequently surfaced. 'Strict practically puritanical values are sometimes expressed, such as 'sex is only okay when you are married'.'

The emphasis in most of the discourse reviewed above is predominantly, firstly individually and secondly, pathologically focussed and is concerned particularly with the causes of adolescent sexual offending. There is a preponderance in this scientific discourse, with 'normal' and 'abnormal' behaviour. One wonders though,

according to whose 'stamp of truth', is this 'normality' defined? In fact adolescent sexual offending can be located within the official classification system of diagnostic criteria used by clinical psychologists and other mental health officials (American Psychiatric Association, 1987, 1994). Araji & Finkelhor, 1986, for example, conclude that, 'almost certainly, sexually abusive behaviour in adolescents will be found to be multi-causal, with risk factors located in the abuser's history and personality and in characteristics of the victim and his or her environment.' It is interesting that this was one of the few studies that made some reference to environmental issues but fails to address broader societal issues. In fact I could access no research that locates adolescent sexual offending within society, culture, history, or gender, for example.

The treatment of adolescent sexual offending as a 'pre-given medico-psychological entity' reinforces the individualization of the diverse problems experienced by these boys and functions to exclude social and cultural issues. This preponderance in psychological discourse which locates the individual sexual offender within a medical, pathological model, positions them in a relatively passive position. It has also become a self-sufficient explanation in discourse which, avoids "considering the content of the acts and thus avoids seeing the link between society and individual" (Hollway, 1981). Current dominant psychological discourse therefore fails to address adolescent sexual offending as a cultural phenomenon at a particular historical moment. This psychological discourse becomes therefore yet another means whereby legal and social discourse, can avoid asking uncomfortable questions about society in general and male violence in particular.

2.3.2. A Critique of the Concept of 'Denial' in Psychological Discourse on Adolescent Sexual Offenders:

A notable characteristic of the psychological discourse on adolescent sexual offenders, is the predominance of treatment programmes for the young offenders and treatment outcome studies. A particular feature of this discourse, is the prevalence of discussions on 'denial':

... in our experience with adolescents, denial to some degree is found nearly universally. Offenders distort, minimize, blame or lie in order to avoid full responsibility for their sexual behaviour. Breaking through denial is commonly described as a **key indicator** of the treatment progress.

(Lafond & Kahn, 1988:140, emphasis added)

... however, denial and cognitive distortion, such attempts to minimize or justify offending behaviour, seem to be a particular problem for those young boys convicted of sexual offences, a phenomenon that is well documented in the literature on sexual offenders (Langevin, 1988; Segal & Stermac, 1990; Wilson & Shine, 1990; Kennedy, 1992) (Epps, 1994:115, emphasis added).

... a significant issue in treatment has been identified by Ryan *et al.* (1987) and others (e.g., Scavo & Buchanan, 1989) as denial and minimization... for the offender to accept responsibility for the abuse is frequently cited as a **key treatment task**. Blaming others or external forces for the abuse is seen as an example of the underlying cognitive distortion which enables the child molester to maintain their pattern of offending... (Vizard, *et al.*, 1995: 744, emphasis added)

A notable feature of the vignettes from psychological discourse presented above, is the dominance of the view held that 'denial' is a 'universal', 'well documented' 'frequently cited' 'commonly described' and hence expected phenomenon. The hegemony of this discourse is further expanded by the 'truth' that it can in fact determine the success or failure of the treatment outcomes for the young offender; 'key treatment task' or 'key indicator'. Epps (1994) extends this 'fact' further, 'On a more cautious note, it is important to recognize that it is those boys who have been caught in their abusive behaviour, **or who continue to deny** the seriousness of it in the face of clear evidence, who **remain the most dangerous** to themselves and others' (emphasis added).

'... who remain most dangerous...' stresses a point made earlier in 2.3.1, that 'denial' in adolescents sexual offenders is presented by dominant psychological discourse, as yet another internal, pathological, and characteriological trait unique to these boys. 'They have tended to resort to a refusal to think about their lives in a manner which amounts to **thought disorder** ... The capacity to think may be so reduced [by the denial] that the therapist is left with the impression of a terrible inner emptiness **where thought and emotion cannot exist.**' (Epps, 1994).

Although the authors agree unanimously about the presence of 'denial', its function, '... is not entirely clear' (Epps, 1994). There is some agreement though that 'denial' is a defense mechanism that protects the individual adolescent's internal psyche against a variety of factors, '...in addition, ... some of the boys [in the study] have been so defended against their own trauma and violent ways in which they behave that very little has happened in the sessions' (Epps, 1994, emphasis added). Epps(1994) and Kahn & Lafond (1988) concur that 'denial' protects the offender from the shame and stigma of having committed a sexually deviant act.

... it seems reasonable to assume that many of these boys have a vested interest in denying and minimizing the extent to which their offending behaviour was **sexually** motivated.

(Epps, 1994: 115, emphasis included in original)

Furthermore, Kahn & Lafond (1988:140) refer to the 'fact' that offenders are considered to be the 'scum of the earth' and may therefore be subject to intimidation, threats, or even abusive acts by other offenders. A second function of denial mentioned in psychological discourse, refers to the possibility that it protects the offender from rejection by family, friends, and counsellors. 'Since many offenders have family members who advocated for them during legal proceedings it is not uncommon to find offenders who are denying out of fear that their relatives will reject or abandon them' (Kahn & Lafond, 1988). A further related function of the denial is that it protects the offender from further legal sanction.

'Denial' is in fact a concept that was inherited from psychoanalytic theory and has been assimilated into commonplace discourse. As Moscovici (1976, in Billig, 1997:143) has shown, psychoanalytic concepts are no longer confined to professional, psychoanalytic circles but have been represented, and altered, in ordinary language and '... have passed into common sense.' Psychoanalytic² theorists essentially work with hypothetical, and essentially unobservable, inner states. The psychoanalytic theorist treats outward social activity, such as denial and repression, as a cipher for unobservable, inner and hidden, unconscious motivational

² In discussing psychoanalysis, I shall refer throughout this study to the work of Freud. I do however accept that there are other schools of thought that fall within the tradition of psychoanalysis.

processes. 'Denial' would therefore refer to the defence mechanism (outward social activity) that simply disavows or denies thoughts, feelings, wishes or needs that cause a measure of anxiety. The term then is used to describe unconscious operations that function to 'deny' that which cannot be dealt with consciously. In the instance of adolescent sexual offenders, psychoanalysts would theorize that the unconscious anxiety caused through people's response, for example, to the abusive event perpetrated, causes young offenders to 'deny' the event.

2.3.3. Some Conclusions:

In this chapter, I have attempted to highlight the ambiguity, ambivalence and ideological dilemmas that exist in dominant Western legal, social and psychological discourses towards violence and sexual abuse, as perpetrated specifically by adolescent sexual offenders. In 2.2.1. , 2.2.2. and 2.2.3., I attempted to illustrate how legal and social discourse have had the contradictory effect of both socially prohibiting sexual abuse as perpetrated by adolescent sexual offenders through legalized legislation, as well as socially promoting sexual abuse through a collective ambivalence that exists towards the acknowledgement of sexual abuse by young offenders, a collective failure to report the abuse to relevant authorities and through a variety of other social means, such as films, advertising, magazines, tabloids and so forth. Essentially the dilemmatic effect created by this ambivalence, ambiguity and confusion in these discourses, has resulted often in the sanctioning of this form of violence, through concealing and then dismissing it. Furthermore, in 2.3.1. I explored how dominant psychological discourse has individualized and pathologized the apparent numerous problems experienced by adolescent sexual offenders according to a predetermined model of 'normality' and thereby excluded social and cultural factors. Such a position, I felt, fails to address adolescent sexual offending as a cultural phenomenon of our times and this essentially 'passive position', has allowed us to avoid questioning society in general and male violence in particular.

In 2.3.2. I explored the concept of 'denial' as constructed in the psychological discourse on adolescent sexual offenders. Essentially 'denial' is constructed in this discourse as a defence mechanism, used specifically to 'explain' the minimizing,

dismissing, distorting and concealing behaviour of individual adolescent offenders in order to protect them against internal, unconscious processes that have become too threatening. At this point I begin to question whether the behaviour, the outward social activity of these adolescents, is perhaps socially congruent with societies construction of sexual abuse, rather than as evidence of individual adolescent deviance?

Denial has therefore been constructed as non-dialogic, internal, and individual. Some evidence though is beginning to emerge of a denial that exists on an external, societal level, that is possibly dialogic in nature. This creates another ideological dilemma. Can we understand this minimizing, distorting, concealing behaviour from both sides of the dilemma? As illustrated above, conceptualising adolescent 'denial' as the function of a particular individual's internal psyche, has allowed adolescent sexual offenders essentially to conceal their sexually abusive event, but also disregarded broader social 'denial' of the abuse of children. Conversely though, a social understanding of adolescent offending ignores the subjective experience of the adolescent. In order to circumvent this dilemma, we require a new site for discussion about 'denial' and hence adolescent sexual offending, a site somewhere between the individual and the social, perhaps a site which is both individual and societal.

2.4. WHAT CAN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OFFER IN THE SEARCH FOR A NEW UNDERSTANDING?

Traditional social psychology in fact can contribute very little in theorizing a non-dualistic analysis of 'denial' because dualistic ways of reasoning have framed the thinking of (traditional) social psychologists to such an extent that they have, for example, regarded the study of the 'individual' to be their domain, and the study of the 'social' to belong to sociology or political science. Even when society is taken into account (as part of the individual's experience) it is usually understood by psychologists to be 'a static and unchanging world of solid physical objects' (Potter & Wetherell, 1994). Ultimately those attempts by psychologists to modify the

association between the individual and the society have 'left the basic terms of the couple untouched' (Hendriques *et al.*, 1984:13).

Recent challenges to this dualism from within psychology have appeared in a variety of forms, often dilemmatic themselves. Sampson (1977, 1981), for example, has asserted that psychology's responsibility to the individual (or more appropriately, the 'subject') has ideological functions and that 'studying that character and presenting so called 'facts' about its qualities and focusing on the development of individual self-sufficiency perpetuates the notion of an independent, trans-historical subject and hence significantly contributes to societal reproduction' (Sampson, 1977:769). Other critics however, have argued that an individualistically focused conceptualisation of the subject is not only ideological but fundamentally flawed, as it ignores the socialized nature of the subject's identity (Hendriques *et al.*, 1984).

Therefore what becomes apparent, is that as psychologists, we need to reveal 'how individuals are constituted through the social domain' (Hendriques, *et al.*, 1984:17). Social constructionism, with its focus on the study of discourse, provides us with this opportunity.

2.5. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND THE PROMISE OF DISCOURSE:

Social constructionists assert that language (constituted in discourse) provides us with the resources to re-conceptualise the relationship between society and the individual. Discourse about the world is viewed, according to social constructionists, not just simply as a way of expressing ourselves, 'but as an artifact of communal interchange' (Gergen, 1985:266). Hence, the site of investigation 'is not the social structure, style, nor the individual but language' (Widdicombe, 1993:96).

Traditionally social psychologists have regarded language 'merely as a medium used to represent processes inside the human subjects (e.g., beliefs, attributions) or phenomena in the world' (Dixon *et al.*, 1994:279). However recent developments

(particularly in semiology and literary studies, for example) have enabled us to now recognize language as 'neither an outer expression of inner states or a reflection of reality but [as] social in origin, uses and implications' (Gergen & Semin, 1990 in Durrheim, 1997:21). Language therefore 'can **actively** produce a social reality as well as describe it' (Macnaghten, 1993:56, original emphasis). Shotter & Gergen describe this understanding as the 'recognition of the role played by linguistic constructions in social life... how the relations people have with society are constituted by the ways of talk informing them' (1989: x). Rather than considering the mind as if it were outside language, we study 'the spoken and written texts... the conversations, debates, discussions where images of the mind are reproduced and transformed' (Burman & Parker, 1993:2).

Discourse therefore has a 'doing' function within social constructionist thinking; it constructs social life and the individuals who constitute the social world. 'Who one is and what one is like is established through discursive acts' (Wetherell & Potter, 1987). In 'constructing the self in one way, other constructions are excluded, hence... the creation of one kind of self or subjectivity in discourse also creates a particular kind of subjection' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:109)³. The task of discursive psychology therefore, is to: demonstrate how institutions, practices and individuals can be understood as produced through the workings of a set of discourses. In general therefore, discourses are social practices which have social implications and effects.

Essentially, a discursive understanding of social life establishes 'whose story will be accepted and become part of the general currency of explanation, whose version of the events, whose account of the way things are?' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Hall emphasizes this point further:

... events, relations, structures do not have conditions of existence and real objects, outside the sphere of the discursive; but that it is only within the discursive, and subject to its specific conditions, limits and modalities, do they have or can they be constructed within the meaning. Thus while not wanting to expand the territorial claims of the discursive infinitely, how things are represented and the 'machineries' and regimes of

³ The concept 'subjectivity' refers to "how we come to know and experience ourselves" (Wilbraham, 1996:29).

representation in a culture do play a constitutive, not merely a reflexive, after-the-event role.
(1988 in Wetherell & Potter, 1987).

It has become commonplace in social psychology in recent years to distinguish between two or more alternative frames to the study of discourse (Wetherell, 1998:388). Lines of demarcation, it appears, are drawn between styles of work which affiliate with ethnomethodological and conversation analysis, and analyses which follow post-structuralist or Foucauldian lines. Widdicombe & Wooffit (1995, in Wetherell, 1998:388) differentiate firstly a discursive psychology offering a fine grain analysis of the action orientation or performative qualities of discourse, as offered in conversation analysis. Research and writing about 'discourse' in this tradition center upon how accounts are constructed and bring about certain effects for the speaker or writer (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The second demarcation is concerned with the 'imbrication of discourse, power and subjectification which take the lead from the work of Foucault' (Wetherell, 1998). The difficulty, though, is that an eclectic or synthetic approach that incorporates both methods of analysis has not yet been developed in discursive psychology. Margaret Wetherell's article (1998) "Positioning and Interpretative repertoires: conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue" raises the dilemma as one which is experienced by discursive psychology in general.

2.6. A CONVERSATION ANALYSIS:

Discursive psychology provides us therefore with access to a new site for interpreting the ideological dilemma of both individual and social 'denial', a site in which 'denial' is not a list of behaviours people 'do' but a set of effects, whose derived meanings are generated in and through discursive practices (Hyden & McCarthy, 1994:546). Discursive psychology, is therefore interested in the outward activity rather than upon hypothetical, and essentially unobservable, inner states.

The type of discourse to be explored in this study is that which has been heavily influenced by conversation analysis, ethnomethodology and the latter philosophy of Wittgenstein, as interpreted and extended by Michael Billig (1997, 1998).

Conversation analysis studies the actual utterances in their particular context (Billig, 1997:141) and is in addition, interested in the way in which social organization is accomplished in talk. The talk-in-interaction represents therefore, 'a/the' socio-cultural site, a place where culture and 'the social' happen (Wetherell, 1998: 391).

Of particular interest though, is that conversation analysts have revealed to us how 'everyday morality is routinely accomplished in conversational interaction' (Billig, 1997:140). When a young child learns language, for example, he does not merely acquire an abstract structure, but also participates in social dialogue. This activity is however bound by 'cultural and moral precepts, so that learning to speak in dialogue is tied to the acquisition of morality, which itself is central to the oedipal story' (Billig, 1998:16). For example, the speaker must acquire the relevant codes of turn-taking, the recognition of sequential organization and conditional relevance such as, a question typically demands an answer. Without such codes, dialogue would be almost impossible. If these codes are ruptured within interaction, even in the most subtle ways, then other speakers are liable to interpret the infraction in moral terms.

In this sense, learning to talk- to take appropriate turns, to wait until the other has had his or her say, to respond to his or her turns, to follow the norms of linguistic behaviour- is learning to act in morally appropriate ways. Consequently, the teaching of speech involves in no trivial way the teaching of morality. When the social skills of dialogue have been acquired, and participation in more mature conversations can be successfully accomplished, then this morality will be habitually and, without conscious awareness, daily practised.
(Billig, 1998:17).

The internalization of adult moral standards does therefore not, according to Billig, 'wait patiently for an Oedipus complex to develop' (Schweder, Mahapatra & Miller, 1990, in Billig, 1998), but is a product of, and is practised within, routine conversations. It's central focus is on the fine-grained analysis of sequences of interaction and of turns within sequences. 'Thus conversational analysis is centrally concerned with the study of the sequential organization of interaction and of reasoning that is inherently imbedded in it' (Heritage, 1988, in Antaki, 1988: 131).

The teaching of appropriate codes of speaking does however contain a paradox. The parent, by teaching politeness, inevitably informs the child about the counter-theme, rudeness. 'Temptation is thus created, for, as Freud would have recognized,

prohibitions create their own desires' (Billig, 1997). Rhetorics of argumentation, particularly justification and criticism are acquired in this manner (Billig, 1998). In learning about reasonableness therefore, the child acquires the rhetorical routines of argument, for example (Bonaiuto & Stirponi, 1966, in Billig, 1998) and thereby becomes a proficient conversationalist and social being.

However, as the child matures, he cannot rely on the caretaker to impose dialogical propriety through direct authority. The decency needs to be internalized; the codes of language must become second nature, to be accomplished routinely without thought (Billig, 1998:20). In short, a dialogic repression must be accomplished. This is not a mysterious, internal process located within the inner psyche but is achieved in the practice of dialogue (Billig, 1998).

This 'dialogic unconscious' allows us to re-interpret traditional psychoanalytic themes in a constructionist, discursive psychology. Thus, 'Little Hans is to be observed being instructed dialogically by his parents in the business of morality, desire and repression. This occurs in the sort of ordinary conversations. Such conversations, analysed in the type of detail pioneered by conversation analysts, can show the dialogic unconscious being acquired in social practice.' (Billig 1998,20).

... repression can be shown to be constituted within the everyday moments of development, as parents, unaware of both the repressive and directive nature of their own activities, pass on the habits of repression to their children. In this way, children, as they acquire and use the social codes of talk, are shown to develop psychically complex hinterlands. (Billig, 1998:21)

This new discursive site takes us to a new intellectual space where we are able to consider 'denial' in need of outward rather than inner criteria, and therefore enables us to study it directly, as constituted through social, discursive interaction. 'If the unconscious, as well as the conscious, is constituted in interaction, then the everyday interaction is not only reproducing moral norms, but it also reproduces immoral temptations, which are routinely resisted and repressed' (Billig, 1997). We are therefore now able to not only study the presences in dialogue, but also the absences, the dialogic unconscious, 'those words which could well have been spoken, but remain unspoken in a particular conversational setting' (Billig, 1997).

These are utterances which have been dialogically repressed in particular conversational settings.

Thus traditional conversational analysis as a methodology is very limiting. It is useful in that it provides us with a technical analysis but is essentially disinterested in the question of external social or natural causes and the side-step which takes the analyst immediately from the conversation to something seen as real and determining behind the conversation (Wetherell, 1998). A number of analytical tools, such as: the 'dialogic unconscious' (Billig, 1997, 1998); interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherall, 1988) and ideological dilemmas (Billig, 1987) are employed in this study and enable us to take a more integrated stance towards traditions such as conversational analysis and post-structuralism, and will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

In Chapter three then, we explore in greater detail the methodological processes involved in creating the data and in analysing it.

CHAPTER THREE: CREATING THE DATA

Qualitative designs are not copyable, off-the-shelf patterns but normally have to be custom-built, revised and 'choreographed' (Huberman & Miles, 1994:431).

3.1. INTRODUCTION:

According to Huberman and Miles (1994:430), the design of a qualitative study in itself can be examined as an analytical process. They maintain that, 'choices of conceptual framework, of research questions, of samples, of the 'case' definition itself and of instrumentation all involve anticipatory data reduction - which as we have noted is an essential aspect of data analysis.' Consequently, choices that are shaped in this process obviate that other choices are excluded and this process requires analysis. Chapter three therefore foregrounds particularly discursive site one, the adolescent sexual offenders and their positioning within the discourse, and discourse site three, the researcher situated within the discourse. Complex and often multi-layered choices were made throughout this particular research process, in order to 'contain' and focus the study. These choices were made inter-subjectively by me, the researcher, thereby implicating and interweaving me in the 'text' of the thesis from the outset. I will return throughout this methodology section to the inter-subjective nature of this qualitative research, and outline the method of data collection, data display and data analysis used, for 'not to be explicit as regards one's method makes for ambiguity of results' (Huberman and Miles, 1991:16).

3.2. SETTING THE SCENE:

The nine interviewees selected for this study, were selected according to specific criteria. Firstly, they had to be male adolescent sexual offenders, who were at the time either in individual counselling or consistent members of the Adolescent

Offender Group at Childline, KZN. They had all been referred to Childline by either the local Welfare department, the South African Police (SAP) or by their parents, due to the fact that they had committed either an inter-familial or intra-familial act of sexual offending, such as indecent assault, rape, sodomy, or incest, as constructed by the South African criminal law. In addition, the sexual offence had to have been directed towards a child/adolescent younger than themselves. Upon reflection later, it became evident that the group was also characterised by the fact that in all of the nine cases, the victims or a witness had reported the sexual offence to one of the social systems above. In other words, none of the offenders had voluntarily reported their offence. Although this had not been an initial criteria for selection, it was one that inadvertently characterised the group and will be discussed in Chapter 4. Eight of the nine offenders had abused a young girl. Joe had however sodomized a young boy of 12 years on two separate occasions. I decided to include his discourse, upon reflection, perhaps from a curiosity point of view and perhaps I was also interested in the promise of the similarities and differences his discourse might create.

Secondly, interviewees had to be adolescents in the age group 13 - 18 years of age. Reasons for the choice of this particular age group were given in Chapters 1 & 2. Cognisance is taken of the fact that the South African Law Commission in Issue Paper 13, Project 110 is attempting to extend the definition of childhood to 21 years of age (South African Law Commission, 1990). However no subjects in the age group 18 - 21 were available at Childline at the time of data collection. Thirdly, interviewees had to be male, although once again cognisance is taken of the fact that American and British researchers are beginning to take note of the fact that female adolescents are responsible for a degree of offending (albeit a very small amount). Vizard, *et al.*, (1995:739) and Kahn & Lafond (1988) estimate that 1% of sex offences are currently attributed to females.

Fourthly, subjects had to be fluent in English. This was a practical choice also influenced through my selection of methodology, viz.-a-vie conversation analysis, which attempts to describe and explicate the 'collaborative practices speakers use and rely upon when they engage in intelligible interaction' (Heritage, 1984: 265). Interacting with second-language speakers would therefore not have necessarily

exhibited the organized patterns of 'stable and identifiable structural features of conversation' (Heritage, 1984), that conversation analysts seek to analyze. Therefore Zulu-speakers were not considered for selection. Seven of the adolescents were Indian and two, White. This selection was driven by the availability of interviewees at Childline, which is located adjacent to the Indian areas of Phoenix, Chatsworth and Isipingo. The sample selected therefore was not driven by a concern for representing racial representiveness in South Africa but rather for detail, variability and 'conceptual density', a theoretical rather than political choice (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

And lastly, parents of the adolescents had to give formal written permission that the interview could be audio-taped and transcripts used for research purposes.

The transcripts of two adolescents were eventually abandoned due to poor quality of the taped interview and one interviewee had been particularly inarticulate and unwilling/unable to provide a detailed account of the abusive event. This meant therefore that I selected to work with seven transcripts. It was a case of 'less is more' and more interviews would possibly have 'simply add[ed] to the labour involved without adding anything to the analysis' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:161). Since conversation analysis focuses on the discursive and performative function of language and because all texts are rich with socio-linguistic constructions, a few texts would supply enough material in order to investigate the event of adolescent sexual offending.

In summary therefore, seven male adolescents were interviewed individually during a 45 minute interview at Childline. A brief description of each of the interviewees is presented:

Peter:⁴

Peter is currently 15 years of age. He was found guilty by the Durban Regional Court of raping a seven-year old female neighbour, on two separate occasions, a year ago, and for interfering with another girl at school this year. He was referred to Childline

⁴ Names and identifying details of interviewees have been changed.

by the Durban Courts as part of his sentence and has participated in the Adolescent Offender Group for the past 6 months. His parents were divorced when Peter was four years old and he now resides with his grandfather and aunt. His family life has been described by Childline as 'dysfunctional' due to the presence of alcohol and violence. Peter had repeated grade 1 and currently attends a special training school in Durban. The following extract is in response to a general question about himself and illustrates some constructions of his family life.⁵

L: What else can you tell me about Peter?

P: Well sometimes I get cross because um (...), because my aunt she tells me I can't watch videos and that if my grandpa's at work, he's at work now and if I ask her if I can watch a video. Like this video they taped of um, Arnold Schwarzenger and that. If he's gone to work, Mandy won't put it on. As soon as I get home and I say, can I watch that movie and she says no!

L: I'm wondering what you do then, Peter?

P: I just sit there and watch the (.....) and then if I don't watch a video, I ask if I can watch K-TV and she says no. She switches the TV off and puts the radio on and then I go and lie down.

L: It seems that you like to lie down when you are cross.

P: Ja because sometimes she swears at me. Then I swear at her because (...) last Friday my aunty, my granny, my granny asked if I can go sleep there by her house. So when I went home, she was in the room and my grandpa was bathing. She started to shout at me as, as grandpa came out and he was looking at her. He was standing right there and went like that [illustrates]. She turned around and saw my grandpa. My grandpa walked here and they has a fight inside the room and my grandpa came out and said we're going. And then we packed my bags and the next day we went to my aunt, my granny. And now when I cam back I don't know if she's going to fight with me again. 'Cos my grandpa said every second Friday I can go sleep there. Not every second Friday 'cos tomorrow we, I think we're going (.....) and then (...) the next day we're going on this (..) train down to (.....) I don't know what place it is.

Peter has an older brother who is 16 and a younger sister who is 9 years of age.

Douglas:

Douglas is 17 years of age. He was referred to Childline by Child Welfare for allegedly touching and fondling younger girls and boys over a two year period. Douglas has been at Childline for the past three years where he is part of the Adolescent Offender Group. He has been in foster care since he was one year of

⁵ Transcription conventions can be found in 3.4. "Transcribing the Interview".

age. He has had no contact whatsoever with his biological father but has seen his biological mother on two occasions. He constructs them as follows:

- D: Um (...) My real dad I haven't met up with him at all. My real mom I have at on two occasions. And um it's not a very good sight. It's not a very good sight.*
- L: Why is that Douglas?*
- D: Um for one she's an alcoholic. Okay? And uh she hasn't got a home for me. Right? Uh she like all over the show. Like today she'll be here, tomorrow she'll be on the other side of this end. And, like, all her kids are not with her. Right? And uh (...) maybe in a way I did feel sorry for her. But I mean I have to go back. Because there's no chance of that. No chance of even trying.*
- L: Was it something you wanted Douglas?*
- D: That? No, no. That's something I don't want, ya (.....)*
- L: How often have you seen her?*
- D: Um on two occasions. Once we, my uncle the one that uh just passed away on Tuesday, ya. Um he took me once. He said he heard she was somewhere around. So anyway we investigated and stuff, we found her. And like it was after, how many years? It was after (....)14 years that she saw me. Yes. Just recently at the Child Welfare she saw me.*
- L: How do you feel about the fact that she left you Douglas?*
- D: Um in a way could I say (.....) at a stage um I was upset. Very, very upset. And I never wanted to hear of her at all. Not even to talk about it, um (....) but in a way I had to accept the facts. And uh now that I've accepted the fact, I don't really worry. Because uh in a way I know she won't want me. Neither do I want her back. So um I'm not really worried. Yes.*
- L: Douglas, and your biological dad?*
- D: Well uh that's one part I'm still cross about. Ya. I mean um I've been sitting here thinking about it when I first heard about it. And um (....) I sat down and I thought about it. It makes you think now - okay (.....) that's your real father. Okay? What's if he really tries and get in contact with you. What if he tries and finds out. Okay? Where's this person, particular son of mine? But there's nothing, nothing.*

Douglas attended a practical training school in Durban but is currently residing at home where he has temporary employment with a friend.

Rakesh:

Rakesh raped his four year old niece when he was 13 years of age, on two separate occasions. He is currently 15 years of age. He was referred by Child Welfare to Childline, where he has been part of the Adolescent Offender Group for the past two years. Rakesh currently resides with his paternal uncle. He met his biological father for the first time when he was six years of age. Until then, he had lived with his

maternal granny. Shortly thereafter his father was murdered. He then resided with his paternal aunt until he sexually abused his niece. His mother passed away when Rakesh was twelve years old due to a drug overdose.

He has constructed his father's murder as follows:

R: My mom and dad were divorced. I should stay with my granny - my mom's mother. I should live with them 'til the time I was six and then my father came along and I never knew he's my father because I never know my father at that time. Anyway he came along and (.....) and then it took transfer of me. I stayed in Chatsworth at that time. And (...) from Chatsworth he took me to Isipingo and I went to school and I lived with my father for 1 or 2 months. And then he was, he passed away. It was about, it was night. He went to the um (...) Royal Hotel. He went to buy drinks to drink and apparently he went there, some guys came up to him and asked him for some money to buy drinks. So he bought them drinks and he gave them, he had about R10 I think it was in his wa- pocket. And as he was walking, coming home (.....) these boys, these mens uh they like (...) saw him closely. They thought he had money. So they sent (...) two black womens after him. They him, they made them follow him and as they coming as he was coming along, they come up to him and said that they want the money. My father took out R20 that he had in his pocket and he gave them. He said he has no money anymore. So then he tried to poke him (.....) so he ran away and then he slipped because he had his sandals on, so he slipped and fell and that's when they came up and stabbed him.

Rakesh is currently in mainstream schooling but repeated Grade 7 in 1995. He is reported to be below average at school.

Ashwin:

Ashwin is currently 16 years of age. He repeatedly raped his sister over a period of two years. The abuse was finally disclosed by the family physician when Ashwin's sister was reported pregnant and required an abortion. Ashwin was referred to Childline by the Welfare Department and has been a member of the Adolescent Offender Group for the past 6 months. Ashwin comes from an intact family and attends mainstream schooling. Ashwin presented as a very reserved young man who found the interview session very uncomfortable, even discussing agreeable topics was difficult, as is evident in the following text:

L: So where does a guy your age go out?

A: Uh it was rough like that. But we just go to dance, balls uh (.....).

- L: *And your teachers Ashwin.*
 A: *Teachers (.....) Not at all*
 L: *Anyone that stands out?*
 A: *Um Mr....., he's a kiff teacher. He's, he's fun to be with. We can just talk to him directly and while we do our work.*

Akash:

Akash is currently 16 years of age and was referred to Childline by the Welfare Department. He has a history of alleged sexual deviancy - peeping under girls' dresses, bringing pornographic material to school and fondling girls in his class. He is also reported to have had sexual intercourse, on one occasion, with an 8 year old girl at school. He has a history of alleged deviant and disruptive behaviour such as, use of abusive language, attention seeking behaviour, smoking and stealing. He is currently in mainstream but is battling according to his teachers. Akash comes from an intact family and constructs himself as follows in the interview with me:

- L: *What are you like as a person Akash?*
 A: *Uh he's kind, stuff like that. A little bit aggressive, know when the time comes. Uh most time he'll be very friendly and very kind, helpful.*
 L: *Aggressive?*
 A: *Well sometimes you'll make me mad, like plus like if you say something bad about me. So like I'll just take a walk rather than stay and talk to you and say something.*
 L: *So when you get aggressive, you walk away.*
 A: *Ja, when at home too, when we have a fight like a small fight my mother and father and me sometimes. Then I'll just take a cool walk with my friends, go play and come back in about two hours when everything is forgotten.*
 L: *You mentioned your friends earlier. Tell me about them.*
 A: *Well sometimes they are a little bit childish. You can't have a girlfriend (.....) The other day I had a friend of mine we met in a party uh last week Saturday also.*
 L: *Friend?*
 A: *Just friend - boy friend, I mean girl friend at least. So she gave an appointment about and all those things. She wanted to take it serious but I said, "I don't know". So my friend said, "got the number". My friend's birthday was Monday. So what happened? Ya we were sitting here like this having a pizza, we bought pizza - you buy one you get one free. So we went plaza and we bought it and come back. Then the letter was in my pocket with her phone number coming sticking out. So my friend pulled it out and he phoned that girl when I wasn't here. He took it down on his hand and he phoned that girl. She, she asked me whose that guy, that guy. Plus I never replied. I want to know which one of my friends. But now she knows all. All my friends so I don't know what's going to happen.*

Viloshan:

Viloshan is currently 16 years and was referred to Childline by his family, after he raped his niece, allegedly on a number of occasions. He is in mainstream education. Viloshan, like Ashwin, was fairly resistant and/or uncomfortable during the interview and many of his replies were 'short' and long silences after followed. I had to work hard to obtain a response from Viloshan, as is evident in the following extract.

- L: *So you're younger than your sisters Viloshan?*
V: *Ja.*
L: *And the only boy?*
V: *Ja.*
L: *What does that feel like?*
V: *You feel like a pet.*
L: *That's interesting. Does that mean you are spoilt?*
V: *Um no. Like if there's a fight going on with your sisters, a joking fight. Ma would take my part in it.*
L: *So being the only boy has it's advantages. How do you get along with your mother Viloshan?*
V: *Ah, we get on well (.....) We get on (.....)*

Joe:

Joe is currently 17 years old. He was referred to Childline by a Regional Court after he sodomized a 12 year old boy on two separate occasions late last year. Joe has attended only one session of the Adolescent Offender group and is therefore one of the most recent members to the group. Joe is in mainstream education but is, according to his own accounts, experiencing difficulties. He repeated Grade 1 and spent two years at a remedial school. He is the only child from an intact family unit. He constructs below his understanding of some of the difficulties that he is currently experiencing at school:

- L: *Her [a past girlfriend] rejecting [a construction he had used earlier] you, this had a big impact on your life?*
J: *Ja, and then that would hurt pretty much and also at school. I'm struggling at the moment.*
L: *Tell me about that.*
J: *Well I don't know. I was failing the year you know. Finding it very difficult especially with maths and science.*
L: *Those are difficult subjects.*
J: *Yeah.*

- L: *What does it feel like to be failing these subjects?*
- J: *You feel like, you look at what the other guys get. It hurts you because you think you're less than they are and stupid because you getting these marks and they're getting those marks. Why can't you get those marks?.....*

3.3. THE INTERVIEWS:

3.3.1. Setting up the interviews:

Parents of all interviewees were contacted telephonically by Gloria Hlope who facilitates the Childline Adolescent Offender group. In this manner, Childline could maintain each adolescent's right to confidentiality. Once parents agreed to their child's participation in the research, they were given a consent form by Gloria to sign (See Appendix A). It was only once this form had been signed, that I was given the names of the potential adolescents. Interviews were conducted on Saturday mornings during their Adolescent Group times, between June and August 1997. I was therefore, for practical reasons, only able to meet each adolescent for the first time, just prior to our interview. I personally felt, upon reflection, that I was positioned as a relative stranger to these adolescents. They however, upon numerous readings of the text, had possibly positioned me as being aligned with Childline.

With some adolescents, I had the opportunity of accessing their files and details prior to the interview. This would have influenced the character of questions asked as I had a fair idea of the nature of the offences committed and was therefore able to probe through their descriptions of the abusive event. With the majority of interviewees however, I was only able to access these files much later and hence conducted the interview without any prior knowledge of the offences committed and hence may have colluded with their descriptions of the abuse event. There is no doubt however that my access to some of the files prior to the interviews, positioned me in a relatively 'knowledgeable' and hence powerful position. Where I had no access to files, I was obliged to work solely in these cases from the adolescents descriptions of the offence event. This required a 'creative hearing', focusing on what was unsaid.

What became evident during this early phase of setting up the interviews was the fact that it is not possible to operate within a so-called 'objective' structure because as Gergen & Gergen (1991:6) state, 'there is no means of removing the observer from the production of scientific accounts.' The fact that I had access to their files detailing their abusive event/s, the fact that Gloria had contacted them as the facilitator of their group and possibly aligned me with Childline and the fact that I was given access to them by Childline, made it evident at this early stage that a number of complex, multi-layered subject positions had already been structured between us, for example, White/Indian, adult/adolescent, professional/student, female/male, woman/abuser, guest at Childline/ abuser receiving 'treatment', and so forth.

3.3.2. The focus of the interviews:

The interviews were conducted at Childline in Durban. This was certainly not the ideal setting as the adolescents are well-known at Childline for their particular sexual event and would have affected the subject positioning they held. However it was the only setting available and perhaps one that the interviewees were more familiar with (except perhaps for Joe). At the outset of each interview, I provided a brief introduction to what the research project involved and what had motivated the research :

L: I am a master's student in psychology from the University of Natal, PMB and I am conducting research looking at adolescents who have perpetrated sexual abuse. As far as I am aware, no one has really studied this group of children before. I am interested in exploring how they talk about what they did, why they think they did it and learning a little more about their backgrounds. What will happen is that you and I will spend the following 45 minutes talking together and I want to find out what your ideas, opinions, views and attitudes are to a number of topics. I am not here to say whether they are right or wrong, but am interested in exploring what you think. I am wondering whether you have any questions so far?

I then stressed that the interviews were confidential, that I would disguise identifying details through for example the use of pseudonyms and then explained the process to them. Once again I provided the adolescents with the opportunity to ask questions, a process I repeated often during this initial phase. Interestingly though, none asked any questions, either during this early phase, during the interview or even during our

de-brief session. This surprised me at the time, but with the luxury of numerous readings of the text and reflexive thinking, I realise that out positioning was already entrenched early in the process.

L: As Gloria explained, this discussion is confidential - it is between you and me. Probably after today, you won't see me again unless we bump into each other in town. Um, your name will be changed - I'll give you another name when I write up my research. And if you mention any other details that could possibly be used to identify you, I will also change them. Protecting your right to remain anonymous is very important. So you and I will spend the following 45 minutes together talking. I am going to tape our discussion and will write it out later, so that I can use the information contained within for my research. I have nine interviews, so you aren't the only one I 'm interviewing. Are you happy to be part of this research Ashwin and do you have any questions?

Finally, I explained each interviewee's right to leave prematurely if they so wished and their right to dismiss answering a question should they feel so inclined. Again this option was never exercised, despite the fact that I did ask many uncomfortable and potentially embarrassing questions, 'Do you know why you are here at Childline?' or 'What made you think she was confused?', for example. I am even compelled to wonder, now upon reflection, why they participated in the interview at all? In many regards, however, the options presented to them were exercised, but perhaps not quite in the manner I had expected. This discussion will form part of Chapter 4.

L: If at any stage during the next 45 minutes you feel that you don't want to stay, you may leave. I would however ask you to remain an extra 10 minutes so that I can make sure that you don't leave anxious or distressed. Also if I ask you a question and you don't want to answer it, it is your right to say "Leigh, I don't want to answer that question." Do you have any questions you want to ask me before we start or is there anything you didn't understand?

Before each set of interviews, I established a set of questions which would be used to inform the general direction and themes of the interviews. The interviews were therefore intended to be semi-structured, open-ended and reflective, and would hence allow for the 'ubiquitous features of talk-in-interaction' (rather than talk and interaction) (Heritage, 1984) to be observed. I was therefore less restricted in the interviewing process and was able to discuss the abusive event from a different angle more than once during the interview. This process again being influenced and driven by my access to their files, either prior to or after the interview. In this manner, I was

able to access some of the nuances and variables which would not have been available in a more structured interviewing style. Despite the fact that I had a schedule of questions, which I did manage to ask each interviewee in different ways, the interview texts were all quite unique and highly variable. In a discursive study, variation and diversity are as important as consistency (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:165).

During the interviews, I was influenced by the interviewing techniques of 'ethnography'. Atkinson (1992:5) refers to ethnography as an illustrative term which means 'the writing of culture'. The ethnographic approach emphasizes the uniqueness and particularity of experiences and the particular significance that shared experiences may hold for particular individuals. My goal therefore during the interviews, was to encourage the adolescents to describe their experiences as if to a novice who has not yet acquired the rules for membership of that particular group. Upon reflection though, I realise that this was a difficult process, particularly when the experience being expressed was, 'a morally unacceptable, denied or disclaimed act' (Hyden & McCarthy, 1994). It was to the absences that I turned instead, in order to understand the subjectivity of each experience.

As I had not met the interviewees previously, I had to work particularly hard at establishing rapport, for the discussion to be productive and fruitful. The fact that the interviews were to be relatively unstructured, also meant that the interviewees' participation and engagement was vital to the process. I therefore began each interview asking the adolescents to tell me about themselves, their family, their friends and their hobbies, likes and dislikes. This was essentially a very broad theme that was not only aimed at building rapport but also gave me a sense of issues that these adolescents were grappling with. For example, Peter's main concern was the state of his relationship with his aunt, Douglas is concerned with his father and Akash with relationships in general.

Once I felt that rapport had been established, the second and main theme, that of exploring the abusive event, was undertaken. This was approached from a variety of angles such as establishing how they understood why they were at Childline, how

they felt about being a member of the Adolescent Offender group, what had happened prior to, during and after the offence event and how they had then made sense of the event. We also explored people's reaction to the abusive event and how and if their lives had subsequently changed as a result.

A third theme explored was the adolescents' attitudes to women. It had initially been my aim to investigate whether the language that the adolescents used to discuss women, relationships and abusive acts functioned to: (1) justify the abusive act/s, (2) conceal this form of violence, and (3) support positions of gender power, using Gender theory as a theoretical framework. The intended focus had therefore been on the more subtle features of the adolescents' accounts using a rhetorical analysis. The first couple of interviews were therefore gender-oriented and hence the inclusion of this particular phase in the interview. However it soon became evident that interviewees, in most cases, displayed a poor language ability and hence did not display many of the subtle features of language, such as metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche, for example. What they did present though with was in fact an interesting description of the offence event that had been constructed between us as talk-in-interaction in order to 'explain' the event. I therefore adapted the method of data analysis from a rhetorical analysis to a conversational analysis and focussed only slightly on this third phase in subsequent interviews. The nature and definition of the themes changed therefore during the research process and appears to be a feature of qualitative research in which the research design, data collection and analysis are all simultaneous processes (Bryman & Burgess, 1994:217).

The interview ended with a de-brief phase during which the tape-recorder was switched off and the interview was examined and interviewees were again provided with an opportunity to ask questions.

It is obvious from the above description of the interview, that the decision to follow particular themes and that the construction and interpretation of the 'texts' to analyse is a highly subjective process (Atkinson, 1992:16-17) and that 'what is generated as 'data' is effected by what the ethnographer can treat as 'writable' and 'readable' (Atkinson, 1992:6).

3.3.3. The interview process:

The various subject positions within the interview, me as woman and researcher, and the adolescents as offenders and male, for example, significantly influenced the interview process in terms of what was spoken and how it was spoken about. This is perhaps one of the key aspects of qualitative research that recognition of the subjective nature of the research is acknowledged.

In talk participants display to each other, as they perform their own contributions, their understanding of the setting and context, and their grasp of the emergent activities. Members of society display what they know- their practical reasoning, skills and competencies. It is possible to see, for example, how utterances are designed to do tasks while the replies or turns of other participants demonstrate how those utterances are intersubjectively understood and are taken up. (Sacks, 1992, in Wetherell, 1998:391).

A number of tensions occurred in the space between myself as interviewer and the adolescent offenders I interviewed. For example, some questions were greeted with confusion by the interviewees and while 'the spoken word has always a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and report or code the answers' (Fontana and Frey, in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:361), at times our exchanges were characterised by a fragmented interaction which indicated that we were simply not connecting. For example, during this exchange, Peter and I were talking past each other:

- L: *I'm wondering whether you know why you are part of the programme at Childline Peter?*
- P: *Yes, no because what I done wrong is not supposed to be right and (.....) I've come here because of that. And the police um the police station bought me here. They like they bought me here and my grandpa followed them. I've enjoyed it. It's fun.*
- L: *Do you have any goals while in this programme?*
- P: *Girls that are-*
- L: *- No goals Peter.*
- P: *Goals. Yes school goals-*
- L: *- No, goals for Childline Peter.*
- P: *No. I haven't. I don't know if they're doing that still.*

In this particular extract, lack of clarity rendered our interaction fairly chaotic and fragmented. There were other occasions like this when I realised that the phrasing of

a particular question would not be apparent, but could not think of a more suitable way to word it. This left us on occasions, talking at cross purposes, with 'mismatching' of my questions and their answers. Other interactions were characterised by more obvious disconnection's. I found this especially so when discussing the concept of 'girlfriend' with these adolescents and there were times when we were talking about dating and socializing that I felt that our frameworks for understanding the world barely overlapped. The socially constructed nature of our realities were created within the context of our cultural and historical experiences. We were as Wittgenstein (1968) termed it, using 'different language games' (Steier, 1991:175).

It is this apparent 'messiness' that qualitative research provides us with, that enables the researcher to access the variability, richness, intricacy, tension and the uncertainty of the patchwork creation of human experience, in a way that quantitative research cannot. 'Such 'messiness' reflects the complexities and realities of the interviewees' views of themselves and the complexities of their view of the researcher - and so, may end up being a more accurate picture of their lives' (Bhavnani, 1990:143-144). As Heritage says (1984), 'no order of detail can be dismissed as disorderly, accidental, or irrelevant to the ongoing interaction.' It was precisely these tensions, dilemmas and contradictions in the text of the interviews that I conducted, which led me to change the method of data analysis. Consequently, 'rather than treat this variation as a source of error I have tried to see what these contradictions indicate about the range of interpretive practices respondents bring to bear in the interview' (Jorgenson, 1991:215). My intention therefore was to launch myself into the 'discourse around a given set of events and to expand continuously on their meaning through dialogic procedures' (Gergen & Gergen, 1991:88); to utilize the images, understandings and interpretations of the world I was studying in order to tell a story about that world (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:3).

Postmodernists have influenced our understanding of the fact that there 'is no clear window into the inner life of an individual' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:12). It became apparent to me that my observations were being filtered through the lenses of 'language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:12).

There were a number of instances (which are highlighted in Chapter four) when our meanings were socially shared and this proved to be a barrier to our conversations. This illustrates the futility of attempting to extricate myself from the discourse and focus solely on the adolescents' accounts. How they responded in the interviews was connected primarily to who we are in relation to each other, and how we have positioned ourselves relative to each other in the social matrix (often in an asymmetrical accomplishment). Sherrard (1991:173) for example, points out that doctors can restrict their patients from raising certain topics, through their selective professional interest in the patient which 'omits normal components of conversational turns', the same danger exists for the academic interviewer. One of the strengths that conversation analysts claim for their approach, is the fact that they focus 'on how participants themselves produce and interpret each other's actions' (Pomerantz, 1988:360-361). I recognise therefore that 'what I describe in my research is in no way existent apart from my involvement in it - it's not 'out there'' (Steier, 1991:1) and that research takes place within and constructs particular power relationships.

This research project therefore is positioned within a social constructionist framework in which, 'meaning comes not from seeing or observation alone... neither is meaning lying around in nature waiting to be scooped up by the senses, rather it is **constructed**, [where] 'constructed' in this context means produced in acts of interpretation' (Steedman, 1991:54, emphasis in original). Furthermore, it acknowledges that conversational interaction 'can have repressive functions, as well as expressive ones' (Billig, 1997: 139). Billig criticizes discursive psychology, for its tendency to overlook the repressive dimensions and to focus 'upon the presences rather than the absences in discourse' (1997:139).

These types of interactions with the interviewees made me very conscious of how research activities can be said to be 'telling ourselves a story about ourselves' (Steier, 1991:3), how 'the self constructs as the other is invented' (Fine, 1994:72). In a process similar to that of counter-transference in psychoanalysis, I recognised that I could monitor my own experience of the interactions in the interviews and develop insights about myself. But I was also able to learn about, for example, the kind of power relations which were produced in the encounter between myself and the

adolescents. The fact that, according to these adolescents, I was symbolically aligned with Childline, meant that this reflexive process was a 'useful way to understand what others were doing' (Steier, 1991:3).

A further important recognition I had to acknowledge as researcher, was the role my values were playing in the data collection. One example of this is my abhorrence of violence. This was an important value to recognise because of the influence it may have had on the questions I put or antithetically didn't put to the adolescents. As Ravn (1991:97) points out, by recognising how our values are imposed on data, they become less so, i.e., values can be useful if they are elucidated rather than allowed unwittingly to ingrain the data in an unknown manner. There is therefore no value free science (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:3). Recognising this therefore is an important process of recognising the importance of being self-conscious of myself as 'an other' in the research (Steier, 1991:7).

In summary therefore, I have examined how these interviews were constructed out of the various possible positions occupied by both myself and the interviewees. I then reflected closely the role that I played in the production of the discourse to be examined and finally alerted the reader to the fact that this relationship was often an unequal one.

3.4. TRANSCRIBING THE INTERVIEWS:

Transcribing the interviews, was possibly one of the most difficult aspects of the research process. Not only was it extremely time consuming, one 45 minute interview took approximately 12 hours to complete. But it also became evident that this process did not simply entail keying in words from the audio-tape onto the word processor. There were many times when it was extremely difficult to hear the words clearly on the tape and I was forced to make decisions regarding what I understood I was hearing. This was particularly difficult when transcribing the interviews of the Indian adolescents, and I had on occasion to try and represent their words and sentences in a conventional orthographic system (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:165).

These conventional representations of speech were ‘themselves matters of interpretation and can be thoroughly implicated in the writer’s preoccupations and presuppositions, ‘readability’, ‘accessibility’, and the like’ (Atkinson, 1992:24). In addition, the task was further complicated by the fact that many of the adolescents interviewed often had poor verbal language ability and a degree of arbitrary imposition was required on occasion. As Atkinson (1992:29) says, ‘these decisions will have implications for just how those social actors are constructed in the text’. Unfortunately I did not find the literature particularly useful in dealing with this particular dilemma. Not only did I attempt, therefore, to be as sensitive and self-conscious as possible about the way I represented the speech, but many reviews of each tape were also applied.

Unfortunately, it was only after transcribing the interviews that I became aware that it would have been more useful to utilize current transcribing conventions already in use. The following transcription notation has therefore been used in this study:

- Names of the interviewees and myself are referred to at the commencement of each line of speech and are referred to by the initials of our first names, for example,
‘L’ for Leigh, ‘R’ for Rakesh, ‘D’ for Douglas, etc.
- Pauses in speech have been represented by dots enclosed in brackets, e.g. (...). Each dot is equivalent to approximately half a second. For example, the pause in the following case indicates a break of two seconds in total:
D: And uh (...) maybe in a way I did feel sorry for her.
- Text which has not been spoken but which indicates some non-verbal interaction that is included for clarity of reading, is indicated through the use of round brackets, for example:
A: Not to say I don’t smoke and drink (laughs).
- I have indicated that an extract is not complete, through the use of square

brackets at the beginning of a particular extract. For example, the following complete extract,

V: So we got into some problem there and we had to sort it out.

Could be recorded as,

V: [W]e had to sort it out.

- Pertinent texts have been highlighted, in those cases where I needed to embolden extracts within extracts. For example,

*V: No um, see uh another girl and I was involved in incest. So we **got into some problem there** and we had to sort it out.*

- Commas have been used in order to assist, to some extent, with the flow of reading of the extracts. For example,

D: Mmm, it's, it's like uh, ya I won't know how to explain it right now.

- A dash at the end of a speaker's utterance and at the start of the next, indicates the interruption of one speaker by the other. For example:

P: Yes school goals -

L: - No, goals for Childline Peter.

- Finally, the use of dots without brackets in the middle of an extract indicates that parts of the extract have been omitted in order to shorten it and to highlight only the relevant material from a particular extract. For example:

R: Uh, she, she was also a cleaner in the school.....she took really good care of me.

Perhaps one of the greatest absences in these conventions, is the one which indicates which words were uttered with added emphasis.

3.5. CONVERSATION ANALYSIS AS METHODOLOGY:

As discussed in Chapter two, discourse analysis is a broad methodology within which there appears to be contrasting camps between those styles of work which affiliate with ethnomethodological and conversation analytic traditions (of which this thesis follows) and which focus on the performative qualities of expressed and absent discourse; and analyses which follow post-structuralist or Foucauldian lines and which focus on issues of identity, selfhood, personal and social change and power relations. However Wetherell (1998:388) argues for a more integrated stance towards both traditions, preferring a 'more synthetic approach in line with earlier attempts to weave a range of influences into a viable approach to discourse analysis for social psychological projects and topics.' In Chapter two, I motivated for a discursive study and in particular a conversational analysis in line with the work of Michael Billig (1997, 1998), in which he introduces the notion of the repressive functions of the discourse.

In selecting the type of discourse analysis which would best suit this thesis, it was the literature of Michael Billig then which had the greatest influence on the particular discourse analysis operationalised in this thesis. Billig's work is particularly useful in this regard because of the connection he draws between analysis of discourse and studies of repression, and presents us with the analytic tool of the 'dialogic unconscious', in order to examine 'how processes of repression can be studied discursively' (Billig, 1997a: 139). Hence, not only are the expressed, but also the 'absences' or the repressive dimensions of the discourse extrapolated. In this regard, he has been strongly influenced by the traditions of Wittgenstein and ethnomethodology.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) provide us with a relatively detailed account of the discourse analysis 'method'. They do however admit that a definitive set of procedural rules does not exist, because discourse analysts are opposed to what Potter and Wetherell view as the 'deterministic premises of empirical methods' and hence wish to 'eschew the deterministic implications of fixed analytic rules, valuing interpretation above categorization' (Sherrard, 1991:172). Since the nature of

discourse analysis itself is 'subjective and interpretative,... it is not possible to describe it adequately in 'recipe-type' terms' (Burr, 1995, 163).

One of the key elements in performing a discourse analysis, is that it is a (very) reflexive process which involves, firstly, reading accounts and continuously reconsidering how each participant is making sense of, and accounts for, their sexual offending, for example. The analyst therefore has to take seriously what the narrator and interviewer are actually saying and doing respectively, rather than assuming that they are actors who are 'simply re-enacting given roles within a hypothetical social structure' (Billig, 1997:145). However Billig extends traditional conversational analysis which he finds 'theoretically restricting' (Billig, 1997), and acknowledges that sometimes the social actors are unaware of the reasons for their actions (sexual offending) and that their accounts may in fact express 'a lack of knowledge and, indeed, repressed self-knowledge' (Billig, 1997a). The analyst would therefore consider questions like, ' Why did he select that word and how do the connotations of those words relate to his way of viewing the world? What is the effect of using that word? What dilemmas exist with this discourse? Why does a particular flaw arise? Why has it not been repaired? Or, why and how has it been repaired? How is conversational immorality kept at bay? And finally, what codes of moral etiquette are being/not being followed?'

'The complexity and specificity of the structural organization of interaction is such as to make the mechanical application of research techniques [in a conversational analysis] inappropriate' (Heritage, in Antaki, 1994). Once the texts have been selected and transcribed, a process of coding occurs. It is perhaps more accurate to refer to this process of coding as, cyclical, for the analyst moves and alternates between analysis and coding (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). An important feature of this process that occurs right to the end, is the need to read and re-read the text. For, it is often, 'only after long hours of struggling with the data and many false starts that a systematic pattern begins to appear' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:168). In this process of reading and re-reading, the analyst brings with them to the inquiry 'disciplinary or professional knowledge, as well as both research or personal experiences' (Strauss & Corbin, 1994:280). A lot depends therefore on the ability of

the researcher to identify regulations and patterns in the data with an over-generalization. Once more reflexivity is required, for that which is constructed, is constructed through my lenses, through my ability to construct a 'text-of-the-field' and through my interpretation and contextualisation (Atkinson, 1992:9). Some patterns that emerge through the coding process may have been abandoned by me, as too contradictory, or too difficult to sustain, for example. However cases where the established pattern is departed from, are noted as well as ways in which the 'participants, through their actions, orient to these departures' (Heritage, in Antaki, 1988:131).

Potter and Wetherell (1987:167) refer to coding as a process that involves condensing 'an unwieldy body of discourse into manageable chunks... An analytic preliminary preparing the way for a much more intensive study of the material culled through the selective coding process.' It provides the association between data and conceptualisation and involves a high degree of 'reading for detail' and variation (Potter and Wetherell, 1994:55).

Initially coding involved 'breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:61), and in this manner patterns and contradictions or deviant cases in the data are established. Rhetorical devices were also identified and the manner in which they resourced the discourses, was further explored. Careful note was also given to the absences, those things that weren't said, but could have been said. The subject positions that the adolescents and I took up in the discourses, were also identified. Essentially this represented a first stage in the analysis and focussed particularly on the way in which social organization was accomplished in the talk. According to Duranti & Goodwin (1992, in Wetherall, 1998:391), the study of conversation 'permits detailed analysis of how participants employ general, abstract procedures to build the local particulars of the events they are engaged in'.

It was at this stage that I moved to a second level of analysis. This involved the construction of categories. Essentially conversational analysts maintain that the researchers should not import their own categories into the discourses but should

instead focus on participant orientations (Heritage, in Antaki, 1994). However Wetherell (1998) argues that it is the analyst who, in selecting part of the conversation for analysis, in fact defines relevance for the participant. 'We do not seem to have escaped, therefore, from the imposition of theorists' categories and concerns' (Wetherell, 1998:403). Categories were therefore selected for this research, for I have extended the research methodology beyond the boundaries of a strict technical analysis but also wish to explore the social and cultural significance of patterning and tensions and contradictions embedded in the ideology towards sexual abuse. Categories were, therefore, related to the research questions asked. Hence, the relevant pieces of interview texts were gathered together under specific categories.

Once preliminary coding procedures were undertaken, interpretative repertoires were identified. These interpretative repertoires were then related to discourses already identified in society by Hollway (1981,1984), in order to provide discourses for comparison and to enable us to ascertain, 'whether they constitute what looks like the 'same' objects in different ways' (Parker, 1992:14). This involved an ongoing process of 'exploring connotations through some sort of free association' (Parker, 1992:7), trying to establish what 'objects' were being referred to and then describing them within the framework of a discourse. Schegloff (in Wetherell, 1998:392) again argues that it is self-indulgent to import knowledge *a priori* into analysis. However, as argued above, I wished to raise my eyes from the text and conceptualize the adolescents as embedded in cultural practices and as having 'agency and intention in line with cultural, historical and gendered expectations' (Hyden & McCarthy, 1994). Therefore I also needed to refer to other texts as part of the discursive practice of understanding some of the implicit and layered aspects of the discourse, and to try and understand how and where these discourses, historically speaking, had emerged from (Parker, 1992) and what their ideological dynamics and implications were in particular discourses related to sexual abuse..

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCOVERING THE DATA

Discourse theorists have claimed that people generally do not have simple, unvaried attitudinal stances, but express in their discourse a complex mixture of positions... Variability poses the most fundamental challenge to the assumptions of attitude theory, and undermines the notion that individuals carry around with them a fixed attitudinal position or stable orientation to 'attitude-objects'... In different discursive contexts people, should be expected to do different things with their speech and therefore there will be variability in their utterances.

(Billig, *et al*, 1988).

4.1. INTRODUCTION:

This chapter explores the rhetoric of denial and in doing so, examines some of the strategies and techniques used by the adolescent sexual offenders in order to maintain their disclaiming positions, in this particular conversational setting. Chapter four employs some of the methodological techniques of conversation analysis in order to explore those presences within the discourse that enable the adolescents to maintain positions of morality and politeness. However the study extends the range of conversation analysis and also explores the absences, the dialogic unconscious (Billig 1997, 1998), 'those things which are not said, but could easily have been, and indeed, on occasion are almost said but then removed from the conversation' (Billig, 1997). The study of the dialogic unconscious in adolescent sexual offenders, therefore extends the scope of conversation analysis, while remaining within discursive psychology's intention to illustrate how psychological phenomena are constituted within social activity. I was interested therefore in what issues and meanings were brought to the actual discourse, and what the narrative attained by using, or not using, certain kinds of rhetoric. Attention is therefore drawn in this chapter towards some of the performative aspects, the "what is done?", of the conversation.

In this chapter then, I reflect on the questions that I the researcher ask and hence explore the subject positions that arise from these questions, for the researcher in the interview is inextricably interwoven in the discourse. This discursive site, researcher in the data, will therefore be foregrounded throughout. I also examine the discursive site, adolescent sexual offender within the data, and using the analytical tools of conversational analysis, as explicated and extended by Billig (1997, 1998) to analyse specific vignettes drawn from the data and hence explore the performance aspects of language used to maintain particular positions. As Davies & Harre` (1990:62) maintain, 'The focus is on the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions. A subject position... is what is created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons.' Finally I explore how the above relates to the psychological phenomenon of denial and repression.

4.2. DENIAL IN THE SELF REPORTS OF THE ADOLESCENTS:

Even within the interview process, I was consciously aware of the fact that there was a noticeable contradiction in the stories the adolescents told of their abusive event, and the information obtained either from Childline and/or from their files. In fact a continuum of denial was noted in a first reading of the seven discourses. Joe was possibly the only adolescent, for example, whose information correlated completely with Childline's report and will be examined in detail later.

On the other end of the continuum, Akash was the only adolescent who denied that a sexually abusive event had occurred at all:

L: You are part of an offender programme here at Childline. How do you understand why you are here?

*A: Ya (.....) Uh well (.....)my school I should be very weak, backwards. So uh I'd, what you call it, get into **too many fights** and uh (...) my name would be in the book every week like. So because of that now they had the Childline thing like.*

L: So why are you here at Childline?

- A: *Ya because I was like, how can I say it, I should like **fight**, play uh (...) **fight**. I should **go hit the boys** and that thing. Should get into trouble for mostly everything.*
- L: *Were you ever involved in offending Akash?*
- A: *No but I got accused once. But I never did it.*

Akash maintained that he had been sent to Childline because he was aggressive and had been involved in a number of fights. In fact prior to my raising this question, we had spent considerable time discussing the difficulties that he was experiencing with anger management (a vignette of this discourse is provided in 3.2., page 43). His disclaiming response had rather surprised me, as I wasn't sure whether he had mis-received me and hence the more direct question on the second turn, 'So why are you here at Childline?'. 'It is in terms of adjacency pair rules, which relate a first to a second action, that speakers can influence or even constrain the conduct of their co-participants' (Heritage, 1988, in Antaki, *et al.*, 1988). I had had access to Akash's file previously and was well aware of why he was at Childline. My position within this interview became, on occasions, somewhat interrogatory. In fact, reflexively, the question 'You are part of an offender programme here at Childline. How do you understand why you are here?', was an invitation to provide a justification and makes an account conditionally relevant as an appropriate next turn (Schegloff, 1968 in Edwards, 1997). In doing so, Akash draws from a broader culturally familiar line of argument or an interpretative repertoire (Potter & Wetherall, 1987), that of the patriarchal discourse. He therefore uses, what is for him, a more socially acceptable line of argument, his male anger and aggression (these extracts have been highlighted). Admitting to sexual abuse could potentially have positioned him on the moral low ground within the conversation. Akash maintained this position throughout the discourse, except for the following contradiction (Nofsinger: 1991, in Billig, 1997):

- L: *How did you feel at the time?*
- A: *No I was very angry but (...) my friends was like there for me. So uh I was calm and everything too.*
- L: *Akash, it was with only one girl?*
- A: *Ya. I think so. Ya.*
- L: *You think so, maybe you aren't sure?*
- A: *Well it **was a long time back ma'am**.*
- L: *Could it have been with other girls?*
- A: *Hey I'm not too sure. Well two schools are, a couple of uh, in my district there are lots of lots of schools. I attended to most of the schools.*
- L: *So you really moved around a lot.*

- A: Yeah.
L: So it could have been with other girls.
A: (.....) Yes.

I had been informed prior to the interview that Akash had been accused of having had sexual intercourse with an 11 year old, allegedly on two separate occasions at school and also was reported to have had a history of sexual deviancy including indecent assault. My position within this vignette was again interrogatory, and in order to deflect the criticism that underlined the interrogation, Akash positions himself in order to escape the responsibility of shame that could be the outcome of an acknowledgement position. His use of the formal, courteous and highly occasioned 'ma'am' suggests an effort to repair the 'acknowledgement flaw' made in the previous statement, 'Ya. I think so. Ya.' According to Nofsinger (1991), 'it is important for our understanding of each other that we fix these flaws before they lead to more serious and fundamental problems.' As this could potentially have threatened the structure and accomplishment of the conversation, Akash needs to re-position himself as morally polite. Thomas Scheff (1990) has suggested, that the fear of 'shame' holds social interaction in play. Rules that relate first to second actions are not therefore just important resources by which interactants can shape the trajectory of sequences of action. But, '... they are also important resources through which interactants can grasp how others understand their actions' (Heritage, 1988, in Antaki *et al.*, 1988: 129).

This short vignette was the closest Akash came to acknowledging that a sexual event could have occurred. Akash's positioning of himself as guilty of sexual abuse, in the vignette presented above, is highly occasioned for immediately after this acknowledgement position, he continued to maintain that he had been falsely accused and constructed a rhetorical sequence using a number of rhetorical devices (that will be examined in detail in 4.3.1., 4.3.2. and 4.3.3.) in order to maintain his position of innocence in the discourse and hence 'untrouble' (Wetherell, 1998) the acknowledgement position. Akash in his discourse, illustrates the ability to hold contradictory positions through his use of oscillations - providing simultaneously a disclosure but also a denial - and thereby illustrates his tolerance for ambivalence and ambiguous discourse.

Douglas felt that he wasn't really sure why he had been sent to Childline and in the extract below positions himself within a relatively passive subject position:

- L: *Douglas you are part of a programme here at Childline. Do you know why you are part of this programme?*
- D: *(.....) um (.....) actually, it's not actually, ya, how could I put it now? No uh (...) it was this child that she the one day we were actually all the guys were joking and playing around and uh (.....) while we were joking around, um how could I say it? We started joking and playing around. So while I was running I slipped in fact and I hit this girl in the place I wasn't supposed to and she thought I did deliberately bump her in that place. And she went and told her mother and her mother came and told my mother. And then it just went on from there. I mean I didn't do it on purpose or anything like that.*

Unlike Akash, Douglas admits that an event occurred but 'denies' that his role in the event was either deliberate or sexually offensive. In fact he positions himself in the vignette above and in the latter discourse as a victim of unusual circumstances. In contrast to Akash's interview, I had not had access to Douglas's file prior to interviewing him and on a number of occasions began to wonder why, indeed, he was at Childline and whether a mistake had perhaps been made. Reflexively, I realise that I often positioned myself alongside Douglas, avoiding any interrogatory responses that could have appeared conflictual (as occurred in the interview with Akash) or conversationally inappropriate. Of particular interest in the above vignette is that Douglas goes to a great deal of effort to construct his explanation of the event as polite and socially acceptable, "How could I put it now?" or "How could I say it?" These features, together with the numerous pauses used in the vignette above, are referred to in the literature as 'delay features' (Pomerantz, 1984). This is the dialogic unconscious in operation, and functions to provide Douglas with opportunities to revise his prior actions, in order to make his following turn more morally acceptable. Like Akash, he also draws upon the patriarchal interpretative repertoire, "... **the guys** were joking and playing around" in order to maintain a position of acceptability. This strategy is explored in more detail in 4.3.3.

Peter, Rakesh, Ashwin, and Viloshan all admit, on the other end of the continuum, that they did offend:

Peter: It only happened once...

Viloshan: ... I was involved in incest....

Ashwin: I had sex with my sister...

Rakesh: I'm here because I sexually abused another person.

Despite the fact that the adolescents personally admit involvement, they also utilize a number of rhetorical devices, in order to reduce the shame of acknowledgement, to avoid a rejecting action and therefore maintain a morally acceptable position within the discourse. Shame according to Scheff (1990) is 'probably the most intensely painful of all feelings.' These devices and strategies are now discussed in some detail in the following section.

4.3. THE RHETORIC OF DENIAL:

4.3.1. The Language of the Mutuality of Participation:

Surprisingly very little attention has been given to how offenders label the sexually abusive event. In other words, surprisingly few questions have been raised concerning how the adolescents view the kind of events they have been involved in and instigated. The vast majority of texts on adolescent sexual offending deal with the concept of 'sexual abuse' as if there was a general understanding of the meaning and use of the concept. In fact the adolescent sexual offenders interviewed rarely named the abusive event in the seven discourses. It is often spoken about as if there was a shared understanding between us. In the following vignette, both Rakesh and I are talking about sexual abuse, but neither of us communicate this overtly. Pertinent extracts have been highlighted:

L: What was it like the first time you came here [to Childline] Rakesh?

R: I felt scared and uh and I was um nervous.

*L: How do you feel when they start talking about **what they have done?***

R: I feel relieved because I know that I can also talk with them and get into a discussion and, and try and solve our problems.

L: I'm wondering whether you knew much about sexual abuse before you came to Childline?

- R: *No I didn't know anything.*
 L: *What do you know about **it** now?*
 R: *Um let em see. I know that uh you not supposed **to do those things** uh like (...) you should have been married or something like that **and then start.***

I did not pursue Rakesh's understanding either of 'to do those things' or to gain greater clarity on what he meant by 'and then start'. Reflexively though, both of us were avoiding a potentially sexually awkward moment. Rakesh is about to tell me what sexual activities one is not supposed to perform, checks himself with a possible repair, 'uh, like...', followed by a pause, and then constructs a culturally and socially acceptable line of argument (interestingly, one used by most of the adolescents), 'you should have been married or something like that.' The delay features used above have enabled Rakesh to dialogically repress a number of constructions, that he may well have constructed with a male interviewer or even a male peer, in order to add a moral quality to his speech in this particular conversational setting. In fact, in Indian and to some extent Western culture, the discussion of sexuality between an adult (in particular a woman) and an adolescent (in particular a male) is in fact *ipso facto* violating a rule of polite discourse. The adolescents brought to my attention that sexuality is very rarely discussed with adults or even peers, as Peter and Viloshan explain, respectively:

- L: *I'm wondering whether you talk about sex amongst your friends Peter?*
 P: *No, we only play. But we don't talk because we 'cos the ones that want to **talk to it** they always sitting by the teacher. Ja they are not allowed talking about **it**. The teacher and office says they not allowed talking about **it**. They **talk about it**, they phone their mother and the mother comes pick them up.*
- L: *Do boys your age talk about sex Viloshan?*
 V: *We are interested mostly in like, biking and other sports.*
 L: *Where have you learnt about sex then?*
 V: *At school they came and **told us about it** and they explained **it** to us.*

In fact Peter's understanding of sexuality is that if you discuss it (particularly at school), you are sent home. Peter has learnt to practise the culturally appropriate moral code of dialogue. For Viloshan, the sum of his sexual education amounted to one occasion where he was 'told' about it. Once again, sexual explicitness is dialogically repressed in the above two examples through our collaborative need for

and the conversational constrictions of politeness. We have learnt that some things, particularly sex, are to be hidden, physically and dialogically.

The adolescents also classified the abusive event according to their construction of the degree of both seriousness and reciprocity. In the following vignette Viloshan draws upon a cultural truism (Billig, 1989) to 'explain' the fact that his actions were not serious:

- L: *How serious do you rate what happened Viloshan?*
V: *(.....)*
L: *Was it, for example, very serious or not so serious?*
V: *No (.....). It wasn't very serious, we were just being a fool.*

Once again the question posed, invites the rhetoric of argumentation, most notably, justification. Viloshan is initially unable or unwilling to respond to what is essentially a difficult question to answer and a fairly long silence ensues. Two types of interpretative options are available in the face of Viloshan's silence. The first, is that the rule that questions should be answered no longer makes, or applies to the current situation and that some other rule now applies to the present context. The second interpretative option may be explained by his failure to recognize the question, rudeness, lack of willingness to answer, or inability to answer without self-discrimination. Essentially though, his silence violates the politeness of conversational turn-taking. Conversation analysts (e.g. Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Nofsinger, 1991) have stressed the importance of the code of turn-taking, amongst others, in order to facilitate and make social dialogue possible. 'If these codes are broken within interaction, even in the most subtle ways, then other speakers are liable to interpret the infraction in moral terms' (Billig, 1998:17). In order to keep the conversation flowing, I have inserted another question, assuming that my first question had not been fully understood or perhaps rebuffed. The implications of a second rebuttal are negative, and this factor may have been a major motivation for Viloshan to comply and produce a compliant action during his second turn. Viloshan therefore answers the question in the negative, in order to remain on the moral high ground and draws from a culture common-place, '... we were just being a fool' in order to argue his position. 'In arguments, one does not merely state a position, but typically one argues for the superiority of one's position over that of the rival position'

(Billig, 1989:172). The use of the plural 'we', in the vignette above, suggests a position of mutual participation and will be discussed in more detail later in this section. The use of 'just' further minimizes the responsibility and 'fool' suggests that they had 'just' been involved in a mutual game in which 'we' had lacked a sense of judgement. In fact many of the adolescents construct their abusive event within the metaphor of 'play' or a 'game', a morally and dialogically more polite and conventional account or justification than that of sexual abuse.

Viloshan explains his stance further:

- V: *I did not force her. I wasn't violent (...) we just started.*
L: *Does that make it less serious - do you think?*
V: *Yeah*
L: *What would make it more serious then?*
V: *If I had forced her or was violent (.....) it would be serious.*

The fact that this vignette is found further on in the dialogue might suggest that the initial question, 'How serious do you rate what happened Viloshan?' was phrased to invite Viloshan to express the fact that what he did was in fact serious. It is a question I posed to all the adolescents and interestingly all, in their defence account, felt that their abusive event had not been serious, as violence had not been involved. In order to create an account in this particular rhetorical context, they draw upon the arguments of mutuality of participation (as opposed to the contrary position of total individual responsibility), and the argument of experimentation (will be discussed in 4.3.3.).

A common feature then of the discourses constructed above, is the use of the first person plural pronoun 'we', or 'us'. 'Among the most effective devices by which speech is linked to speaker and listener is the system of pronouns of its equivalent... Pronouns are indexical expressions since they mark the relation between speech acts and person, place, and time of their utterance' (Harre`, 1988, in Antaki, *et al.*, 1988: 156). In the following extract, Peter makes use of the pronoun 'we' thirteen times:

- L: *Peter we have 10 minutes left, is there anything you'd still like to say?*
P: *No, because when I did that that thing, I uh I when I went down and that and into the tunnel **we're, we're we** were running through the tunnels and that*

*and then **we** found a little open space and we went out and then she said to me let's go back down to the other side that **we** came in. So **we** went down and **we** went all the way up and then **we** got there, then **we** got a little bit lost and that's where **we** done, **we** done. I sat down and that's when **we** did it and **we** walked out.*

Again, sexuality and sexual explicitness is dialogically repressed through phrases such as: 'that thing', 'that's where we done, we done', 'that's where we done it'. In fact Peter starts out by admitting that he committed the event, 'when I did that thing', but then simultaneously negates some responsibility by maintaining a position of mutual participation. Peter, like Akash and most of the adolescents interviewed, illustrates the ability to hold together contradictions and oppositions and accept oscillations.

L: *So [Viloshan] you are relatively new here. What do you do here? Are you part of a group?*

V: *No, um, see uh **another girl and** I was involved in incest. So **we** got into some problem there and **we** had to sort it out [.....].*

Again Viloshan, like Peter, implicates the girl in the abuse, a partnership that 'got into some problems' through being a 'fool' and they had to 'sort it out'.

The use of the mutual pronoun 'we' enables the adolescents to acknowledge some responsibility and admittance for the abusive event, but also provides them with a distancing strategy to protect themselves from potential criticism within this conversational setting, for 'social norms force them to make a good impression' (Van Dijk, 1993). Hence the strategy used deflects potential criticism which could emanate either from me, the interviewer, or from themselves. This form of dialogical projection (Billig, 1997, 1998) enables the adolescents to maintain a position that gives the impression of consensual agreement, 'that's when **we** did it'. This somewhat ambiguous statement enables Peter to construct the abusive event in a 'reasonable' manner, that allows him to escape direct personal agency (which would not have occurred had 'I' been used) and thereby retreat to a position of neutrality. The acceptability therefore of Peter's account presented above, turns on his choice of the pronoun 'we'.

The following vignette is found at the end of the discourse with Viloshan and illustrates how the position of mutual participation is maintained in the discourse to the end:

- L: *Coming back to the abuse Viloshan, do you have a better understanding of how she may be feeling?*
- V: *(.....) I'm sure now she realises what's wrong, not so?*
- L: *That she was wrong?*
- V: *No, that what we did was wrong.*
- L: *You don't see her as a victim then?*
- V: *No, because I, she wanted to do the thing. I didn't force her to do anything. **She did it freely.***

Buttny (1993:24) maintains that accounts are needed 'when the event becomes recognised by interactants as no longer routine and ordinary, but instead, problematized or unusual.' Viloshan in his conversational slot and in response to my request for an account to defend himself, again breaks with the conversational code and asks me a question, albeit rhetorically, 'not so?' My response, reflexively, is fairly defensive and suggests that I may have perceived Viloshan's previous statement as threatening. It appears that subject positions and power relations have shifted in this particular vignette and that the discourse has the potential for conflict. Essentially, up to this point, I had controlled the dialogue through my questions. Viloshan's question has therefore challenged this position. Again my question, 'You don't see her as a victim then?', invites further justification and argument, but also places me back in the position of asking questions whose form is, upon reflection, 'designed to restrict the range of answers (McTear 1985, in Billig, 1998:38). Viloshan responds with a reference to 'I', which up until this moment has been dialogically repressed. He recognizes the flaw and quickly repairs the error with a discursive projection - 'she'. Viloshan further reduces responsibility for the abusive event through his use of the line of argument that, the fact that there was no violence involved meant that 'she' must have been a willing partner who never resisted. The reality that the girls do not resist, appears to be a construction that the adolescents draw upon often in order to neutralize the seriousness of their action and maintain their position in the world of respectable morality.

In the vignette below, the fact that his sister does not resist, creates a classification dilemma for Ashwin:

- L: *What did you know about rape?*
A: *That's when you have someone against their wishes.*
L: *Is that what you did with your sister?*
A: *Unsure. I didn't actually force her.*

Rape, according to Ashwin, is when you '... have someone against their wishes'. Something he feels that he didn't do because, 'I didn't actually force her'. One wonders though why Ashwin has not constructed his statement in the more emphatic and certain, 'I didn't force her.' The use here of 'actually' suggests that a number of elements have been dialogically repressed. Perhaps Ashwin meant to say, 'I didn't mean to force her' or 'Only a small amount of force was used' or even, 'She actually wished for the event'. Such statements would have appeared morally and culturally inappropriate and placed Ashwin on the moral low ground.

In the following three vignettes, Peter oscillates between attributing blame to 'she' and 'we':

- L: *And the first time Peter?*
P: *The first time we were at (...) um we were down there was there was a like a (...) there was a drain, okay, and we went down there and there was a umm was a circle, like a pipe. And **she wanted to go down there and I said no.** So that's where so that's where **she, we did it there.***
- L: *And while it was happening?*
P: *Sad. Because she was she was a umm **she was, she was holding me down** (...) the first time. **So I wouldn't let her** and when **we were finished she was let go of me** and she was walking and we played and my brother came to play and she went upstairs and that's when she called me from there when I was playing soccer with my brother.*
- L: *You were feeling scared?*
P: *... So now I know that I'm not going to do it again. If **she** asks me if I'm **going to do it. I'm going to say no** because what happened or I'll go out and play with my brother. Because now I'm playing with my brother there, at, when I go visit, sleep. **My brother doesn't even do it.***

Peter, like the other adolescents, appears to have dialogically repressed the fact that both the girls he raped were in fact 4 years old respectively. This makes the

statement, 'she was, she was holding me down' rather unlikely. The strategy however situates Peter in the victim position of subordination and hence absolves himself of acknowledgement. Perhaps Peter intended to say, 'I was holding her down', a dialogically repressed statement that could have had a number of consequences within the discourse. The following sentence, however, appears as a contradiction, 'So I wouldn't let her'. Here he positions himself back in the role of domination and then quickly draws upon the rhetoric of consensual participation '**we** were finished'. This vignette again illustrates the power that grammar has both to express and to offend.

The 'degree of reciprocity' here refers to the asymmetrical relation of dominance and subordination. The three vignettes above present an interesting example of Peter's apparent ability to tolerate contradictions - both symmetrical and adversarial relationships and his ability to tolerate both ambivalence and ambiguous discourse. Wetherall and Potter (1987) maintain that this variation is a consequence of function and can be used as an analytic clue to what function is being performed in a particular stretch of discourse. People construct different versions according to the function of the context. It is often only when we step back after numerous readings of the discourse as a whole, that the fragmented and inconsistent nature of the talk becomes apparent.

4.3.2. The Use of Minimizing Descriptions:

As witnessed in the vignettes presented above, the adolescents attest to the abusive event in varying degrees along a continuum of denial, but then minimize the impact of the effect of the acknowledgement position through the use of a number of minimizers. These minimizing descriptions to some extent neutralize and conceal the adolescents' responsibility for the abusive event. Some of the following strategies were used:

4.3.2.1. 'Only' and 'just':

Peter, in particular, makes use of 'only' in describing the abuse event. Peter's use of this word, suggests that he has heard my question/s as a challenge inviting justification. It is used therefore to defend his action, making it justifiable (Billig, 1998:31). Shweder and Much (1987, in Billig, 1998) note from their data, that the addition of 'only' or 'just' functions to disclaim the blameworthiness of an action. The following two vignettes are presented as examples:

*P: It **only** happened once **but** these were other policemen's. Ja other policemen's. These ones had, these ones that caught me had umm no name thingey on. The other ones that caught me a long time ago they said that I mustn't do it again - they had badges here (indicates)*

L: Peter that sounds like twice.

*P: ... it was **only** those twice times that I did it.*

In the first vignette presented above, Peter uses 'only' together with the conjunctive 'but'. He acknowledges and discloses that an abusive event occurred but then attempts to lessen the impact that this acknowledgement position may have on the conversation through the use of 'only'. He also surrounds his acknowledged position with a rhetorical sequence about the police. He has simultaneously presented two essentially contrary themes. He concurrently proclaims responsibility for the abuse, but then negates some of the responsibility through his inclusion of the police theme. Van Dijk (1987) maintains that, '... on the one hand people want to express possibly negative experiences or evaluations, but on the other hand social norms force them to make a good impression.' What Peter presents us with here is not only a conflict or dilemma that exists between the individual and extraneous social customs, but also a conflict that exists within the individual who has two contrasting ideological themes upon which to draw (Van Dijk, 1987). What is also interesting about Peter's discourse, is that he took most of the interview to acknowledge that two instances of rape had occurred. The second vignette above is presented almost at the end of the interview and then is again accompanied by the minimizing modifier 'only'.

The adolescents also make use of the modifier 'just' which serves a similar function as 'only': The following two vignettes serve as examples:

P: Yes. Umm because, I when I when I I was when we were walking in this tunnel (...) she **just** (...) I **just** sat down and then I was like falling asleep...

*R: ... she was over there the small one, so I **just abused her** in my bedroom.*

Rakesh, like Peter, acknowledges his position of responsibility for the abuse but also adds a modifier, in an attempt to reduce the impact of his acknowledgement position. He also lessens the severity of his acknowledgement position through the use of the rhetorical device, synecdoche in 'the small one'. Synecdoche is generally understood as a reference which substitutes either a species for a genus - a part for a whole - a whole for a part (Adams, *et al.*, 1995). In this particular instance, its effect is to de-personify the child or victim or in this case, Rakesh's niece. It serves therefore to camouflage the 'colonizing effects of language' (Adams, *et al.*, 1995). For readers less familiar with Rakesh, the statement, 'the small one' portrays Rakesh in an understandable and reasonable position of caring and love. But for Rakesh's niece who has been repeatedly abused by him, the statements function synecdochally not only to diminish and dismiss the severity of his actions, but also casts him in a position of dominant physical superiority. 'She was over there the small one...' also serves as an axiom marker which functions to qualify the adjacent statement, 'so I just abused her in the bedroom.' The statement then functions to proclaim omniscience and justifies the abuse.

4.3.2.2. '... and that...'/ '... things like that':

Another feature particular to the adolescents, was the use of the phrases '...and that...' or '... things like that'. The following three vignettes illustrate their use:

*P: Ja, I did know her but I didn't know her name. 'Cos every time I asked her for her name she said, she she'd like ran away and she said and I'd have to chase her **and that**.*

R: Does make me feel guilty but it is to my benefit that I come to Childline and

*try not to do it again and **keep away from things like that.***

- L: So you believe that you are part of the offender programme here at Childline because you were misbehaving at school - smoking and hitting people.*
*Akash: And this **same thing.***

In all three examples presented above, the adolescents refer to sex, sexuality and their abusive event indirectly through non-literal references like, '... and that'; '... things like that' and '... this same thing'. In many regards these references can be classified as examples of metonymy. The adolescents have substituted and associated them with their abusive event and need only make reference to them, for me and them to understand the association. This enables the adolescents to exploit these associations and to make indirect and vague reference to that which is not mentioned. As explained previously, these constructions enable both the adolescents and me to avoid a potentially awkward sexual moment and to remain within the boundaries of cultural and moral precepts. Although the associations permit dialogical decency, they do however also allow for vagaries through their dialogical repression of the sexual event and thereby enable the adolescents to maintain positions of innocence, 'denying' the abuse.

4.3.2.3. Maintaining a paradoxical passive role:

Many of the adolescents in the discourses studied, adopted fairly passive positions towards their abuse event. In this manner, they further negate responsibility for the sexual abuse. This is particularly well illustrated in the discourse with Douglas:

- L: How do you feel about being part of the programme at Childline?*
*D: In fact I feel I'm not ashamed of it because (...) I mean um actually now (...) I'm not that uh I'm **not that guilty of anything** because I know I **never do it on purpose**. Right? And uh, it's nice to be here because (...) some people think you have a problem okay, but you're here on a basic where you can explain to other kids who've done it. And I mean I spoke to many kids and all.*

Again, Douglas constructs a rhetorical sequence in which he attempts to explain why he does not feel he is 'that guilty'. The fact that he 'never d[jid] it **on purpose**', exonerates him of blame. He then continues this line of argument through a construction in which he explains his moral position at Childline as one of 'helper'. It

is socially more acceptable to be at Childline to help the other 'kids who've done it' than to be at Childline to receive help, especially for offending. Douglas is able to draw from two essentially contrasting and dilemmatic ideological themes. In selecting the position of assistant/helper, he dialogically represses the contrasting position of abuser and presents himself as a co-operative helper 'who does not possess a clouded hinterland' (Billig, 1997: 148). He continues this line of argument in the following two vignettes:

L: You want to keep coming back?

*D: Um I mean you could be a **help to others okay. Okay?** Many times Gloria came up, she said uh I may need your help to experience to the others. And uh she asked for my opinion within the group many a time. And uh I mean I gave others my opinion...*

*D: Actually when I slipped, yes, (...) I had no one to actually lean on. Okay? So when I fell my elbow, hit her. Right? And then she screamed. Okay? I turned round and asked her what happened and **she said I've hit her and all.** And uh like all those boys they've made fun of me and said go and tell her mother. **So I just sat there thinking that I never do anything.** Right? But I never knew that like I **never do anything.** Right? But I never knew that like I have her in the wrong place. And that it's wrong of me. So her mother came out and she started blabbing at me and stuff like that. **So I just kept quiet and took everything.** She went and told her mother and everything. **And like I never took any action afterwards. I just kept quiet (yawns). I listened to everything (yawns).***

In the second vignette presented above, Douglas positions himself within a passive position when describing the abuse event, a position that is essentially contradictory to the active helper/assistant at Childline who speaks 'to many kids...' and 'g[I]ves others my opinion'. His frequent use of 'just' is an interesting modifier to this passive position. Towards the end of this vignette though, he proceeds beyond the position of passive bystander who finds himself in unusual circumstances, to the position of victim in which he 'took everything' and 'never took any action afterwards'. His yawning, which was fairly explicit and audible on the audio cassette, functions to emphasize the dialogic routine created above. Another feature of Douglas's discourse is his frequent use of 'Okay?' or 'Right?'. Not only does this polite conversational device reproduce Douglas as a tolerant, moral, and polite individual but also functions to elicit agreement from me with regard to his position of helper. As mentioned earlier, many readings of the discourse with Douglas reveal that I often

colluded with Douglas's position of denial. He was possibly aware of this and uses this particular device to elicit further agreement on my part.

In fact most of the other adolescents also positioned themselves as the assistant/helper in the construction of their rhetorical sequences. Akash, who vehemently disclaims any involvement in an abusive event, also draws upon this position:

L: How then have you found the programme here at Childline?

Akash: (Yawns) Well it's interesting. Uh I like helping uh all the people also. See most of the time you come here we talk, you talk from like 1 ½ hours from different, different things - views, uh behaviour, and all sort of things. So I get on with (...) all these people.

The yawn at the commencement of Akash's response is fairly contradictory to the statement, 'well it's interesting.' Like Douglas, he uses the ideological theme of helping to explain his position at Childline and thereby dialogically represses the contrary theme of requiring help for his offending. He also utilizes the non-literal reference to sexual abuse, '... and all sort of things'. 'So I get on with (...) all these people' further qualifies the helping position, despite his earlier contentions that he had difficulty managing his anger with friends.

The adolescents therefore describe their position in relation to the abusive event as a passive one, but juxtapose this with the active position of being a helper or assistant at Childline, to other 'kids who've done it'. These are essentially fairly contradictory positions but illustrate the importance of the exact circumstances 'of the invoking for understanding what is invoked' (Wetherell, 1998). Both positions, however, function to enable Akash and Douglas to disclaim responsibility for their abusive event. The term 'disclaimer' was introduced by Hewitt and Stokes and defined as 'an interactional tactic employed by actors faced with upcoming events or acts which threaten to disrupt emergent meaning or discredit cathected situational identities' (1975, in Hyden & McCarthy, 1994). Through the use of disclaimers, the adolescents simply appear as the victim or witness of happenings whose origins and explanations lie entirely outside of their own sphere of influence - outside of one's 'self' and the device therefore wards off potentially obnoxious attributions. The concept of

'disclaimed action' well captures the essence of the passive-active ambiguity that the adolescents hold towards their behaviour. 'Disclaimers create a form of variation which presents a particular problem for the realist model of discourse and the assumption that the individual actions can be assumed to be a coherent consistent starting point for analysis' (Potter and Wetherell, 1988). Once the sexual event has been disclaimed, in their eyes they are freed from the charge of sexual abuse. As is evident therefore, the adolescents draw upon a repertoire of indexical positions. As Antaki *et al.* (1996, in Wetherell, 1998: 396) note :

Such bringings-to-bear are briefly over and done, of course, but their accumulated record is what gives a person their (portfolio of) identities. Ephemeral as they might be, they become available for future invocation as instances of times when the person was (understood to be) a linguist, a Kennel club member and so one. The speakers are doing three things at once: invoking social identities, negotiating what the features or boundaries of those identities are and accumulating a record of having those identities. They will be able in the next round of their interactional history, to draw on having all been exposed to this conversational display of identities. (p.488)

4.3.2.4. Discursive projection:

Most of the adolescents remove themselves from any discussions about sexual abuse and position themselves as an observer, reporting on another group of individuals who have offended and find themselves on the moral low ground. In the following vignette, Douglas deflects potential criticism and maintains a distant, depersonalized position through the use of the generalized third person pronoun:

- L: *Douglas how serious would you say was your alleged offence?*
 D: *I would say that it was very serious. Because uh **you** could be locked up for it (...). That's um (.....) I mean okay **you** could be locked up for it... It's **everyone else**. Ya .*
 L: *Everyone else?*
 D: *You know if you look at it, the **kids that have done it, these things before, they are the one's getting the bad reputation**. Mmmm (.....).*

The received meaning of 'you' in the above vignette is likely to be 'you' - *the listener* or 'you'- *sexual offenders but not including the speaker*. His use later on of 'everyone else' and 'kids that have done it' might suggest the latter interpretation. In the following vignette, Akash also distances himself from any sexual abuse that he may

have perpetrated through the maintenance of a punitive position towards sexual offending:

L: I'm wondering what you think about child abuse Akash?

*Akash: I feel they must catch **that person** and lock **him** up.*

*L: So you believe that putting **him** in jail is the best solution?*

*Akash: (Shakes his head in agreement). You must give **him his** punishment back. Uh (...) make **him** like, how can I say, make **him** go to jail and make **him** to like how **they** dig, **they** dig uh stones and all those things. Make **them** do that. And **he** must like uh chains on **his** legs and go from there.*

*L: Even though you are part of a group of young men who have offended, you feel so strongly that **they** should be harshly punished?*

Akash: Mm, yes.

In both vignettes, the adolescents draw upon the conversational device of 'othering', a distancing technique which deflects criticism away from themselves and onto another group of individuals, 'him', 'them', and 'they' who have offended. This technique enables them, once again, to disclaim their sexual event. The nature of the questions in the above vignette, clearly reflects my position in this regard!

4.3.3. Drawing Upon Familiar Interpretative Repertoires:

The feature questions in the interviews with the adolescent sexual offenders were posed along the lines: 'You are part of the Offender programme here at Childline, I'm wondering how you understand why you are here?... Can you tell me what happened?... Then what happened?... How did it end?...' and so forth. Faced with these kinds of questions, the adolescents often returned to a favourite description/s. Wetherell (1998) refers to this as the use of familiar interpretative repertoires. The term 'interpretative repertoire' is an attempt to capture the 'doxic' (Barthes, 1977, in Wetherall, 1998) nature of discourse. 'An interpretative repertoire is a culturally familiar and habitual line of argument comprised of recognizable themes, common places and tropes (doxa)' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Social norms force the adolescents to make a good impression (Billig, 1997) hence they draw from a number of cultural common-places, viz.-a-vie sleep, games/playing, experimentation and the male patriarchal discourse, for example, as resources for creating more than one kind of account. These common-places 'represent values which themselves are not matters for debate but which rhetorically are often used to support contestable

positions' (Billig, 1987, 1988). In the vignettes presented below, the adolescents all build a rhetorical sequence that either brings about a disclaiming meaning in their accounts or one of entitlement. For the sake of clarity and brevity therefore, I have arranged these interpretative repertoires into analytic units, viz.-a-vie, (1) A rhetoric of exculpation, and (2) A rhetoric of entitlement. There is considerable overlap between the two repertoires, but for academic convenience they will be addressed separately.

4.3.3.1. A Rhetoric of Exculpation: The disclaiming of sexual abuse

In the following vignette, Peter positions himself once again in the uninvolved, passive position and in supporting this position, draws upon the metaphor of sleep to construct his rhetorical sequence. This particular positioning promotes a multi-leveled response from listeners which can serve to camouflage the abuse:

- P: *Yes. Umm because, I when I when I I was when we were walking in this tunnel (...) she just (...) I just sat down and then I was **like falling asleep and then when I when I woke up when I woke up when I woke up we were doing it. Only when I opened my eyes I saw (...) ja...***
- L: *Did you feel anything for this girl before you went into the tunnel Peter?*
- P: *No! We were running through the tunnel to see how to see where it leads to and then coming back and then we stopped and I sat down and I **slept. I I closed my eyes and I woke up (...) and I was doing it.** Then when they, when they took me up to her, the police came and took me to the police car. They first went down to my mother. Because my mother never knew this. They spoke to her and then they took me, took me to the police station down here. Then they spoke to me.*
- L: *What were you thinking while it was happening?*
- P: *That I was bad. Then my grandpa came and he was crying. Ja but I cried a little but then I stopped. Because the policeman said that that, then this lady took me into this, this and spoke to me about it. **They knew that the girl I had done it to was silly too.** She went to the doctor. Ja and now she is at home We don't go past there anymore. I only go see my mom and then I go back to my grandpa.*

Peter, like all the adolescents interviewed, has essentially committed a morally unacceptable act that may place his position in the family, and in society in some danger, '... then my grandpa came and he was crying', '... they, they said to my mother that I can't sleep, that I can't stay with her', '... my dad that went to Richard's Bay he said that I mustn't do it...'. His discourse reflects his attempts to handle this

task referring essentially to two different contexts, one in historic time and one in present time. He has, firstly, had to face the risk of his family and friends possibly abandoning him and he has, secondly, had to face his self-image as a sexual offender. In the conversation with me, a female interviewer from his own cultural context, presumably (although I think, reflexively, I made this position fairly obvious through the selection of my questions and some responses) embracing the notion of sexual abuse as a morally unacceptable act, he has had to correct his appearance and handle the fact that, due to his action, his image is a bit corroded and shabby and that he is occupying a position on the moral low ground. I do not therefore enter into the accounting episode as an individual but rather as a representative of the moral community and his 'obligation towards a guilt admission is qualitatively different from a friend's' (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985, in Antaki, 1988).

It is socially more acceptable to say that he had fallen asleep and that someone else had abused him, than to say that he had been fully conscious and raped a young girl. In this vignette, Peter has again dialogically repressed the contrary theme of abuse and drawn upon the socially more acceptable one of sleep. A consequence of the sleep position, is that he positions his victim as awake and in a position of domination and hence as the abuser. The double positioning therefore is: *Peter/adolescent-as-victim; young girl-as-offender*. The fact that on both occasions the girls were four years old, remains dialogically repressed or 'asleep'. This blaming of the victim appears to be a fairly common feature of sexual offenders in general. Kate Clarke (1992, in Edwards, 1997:244) illustrated how descriptions, in the *Sun* newspaper in Britain, of acts of violence against women often managed to blame the victim. It is also interesting that in this positioning of himself as the passive - 'asleep' partner - he finds it safe enough to use the personal and direct 'I' as opposed to the consensual 'we' which has characterised so much of Peter's previous discourse. Once the sexually abusive act has been disclaimed, in his eyes he is freed from the charge of sexual abuse. He may then be permitted to continue as a member of his family and society. The fact that his victim may not have accepted this positioning remains irrelevant and dialogically repressed. The imagining of some agreement in fantasy is enough. In the vignette above and in others presented by Peter, he refers to an agreement from an authority outside of the family - the police. In the statement, "they

knew that the girl I had done it to **was silly** too', Peter uses the authority of the police (as he has done in previous vignettes) to maintain a position of acceptance and entitlement (explored in 4.3.3.2.)

The statement, 'Only when I opened my eyes I saw (...) ja...' indicates a flaw and subsequent attempt to repair it. Peter is about to tell me what he saw when he 'woke up', dialogically represses what he was about to say and then pauses. It is interesting that I assist in the repair by quickly interrupting the pause, to pose another question in the adjacent pairing, thereby maintaining the moral quality of the conversation. Talk's sequential organisation is captured in the vignette above and in most of the vignettes used in this study as question-answer pairs. This is referred to as an 'adjacency pair' (Sacks, 1974, in Edwards, 1997) and has the following characteristics:

(1) two utterance length; (2) adjacent positioning of component utterances; (3) different speakers producing each utterance... [there is] a typology in the speaker's production of the sequences ... [which] partitions utterance types into 'first pair parts' (i.e., first parts of pairs) and 'second pair parts' ... A basic rule of adjacency pair operation is: given the recognizable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop and a next speaker should start and produce a second pair part from the pair type of which the first is recognizably a member.

Therefore the question, 'What were you thinking while it was happening?' makes the adjacent pairing, 'That I was bad', conditionally relevant as an appropriate next turn and again illustrates the ability of the adolescents to deal with oscillations of disclosure and denial. Once again, the impact of this acknowledgement position is later offset somewhat by the position of mutual participation '... the girl... was silly **too**'. Therefore, by positioning himself in the ambivalent positions of sleep and subordination, and mutual participation, Peter can escape the responsibility, and shame that may be the outcome of a dominance, acknowledgement position.

Four of the adolescents all constructed a rhetorical sequence drawing upon the familiar cultural common-place, the media, in order to create greater acceptance and entitlement for their sexually abusive events and hence disclaim their actions.

Rakesh, for example, described how he watched 'Basic Instincts' on M-Net⁶ and then raped his sister. In the following three vignettes taken from the discourse with Joe, Joe talks about the videotape 'Showgirls' also shown on M-Net :

- L: *Joe, what abuse did you perpetrate? In other words why are you here at Childline?*
- J: *Well (...) I had sexual intercourse with a boy who was younger than I was. I was sixteen, he was twelve. I had a video which I borrowed from my friends 'Showgirls'.*
- L: *What showed?*
- J: *'Showgirls', like a stripper, okay? And I asked him to come watch it and -*
- L: *- This young boy?*
-
- J: *Ja, we watched some of it but it was a bad quality tape and then (...) we went into my bedroom and that's when I, I sodomized him.*
- L: *Can you talk about the video?*
- J: *Well I didn't see much of it because it was a bad quality tape. But it was about a woman who wanted to become a show, showgirl, like a dancer. They dance naked and **basically deal with their problems in life (...). How she got through***
- L: *You saw 'Showgirls' on M-Net as well?*
- J: *Ja.*
- L: *What did you find so intriguing about the video?*
- J: *I **just** wanted to watch it again because of the scenes and (...).*
- L: *The sexual scenes?*
- J: *Ja, the nudity scenes.*
- L: *That was something you hadn't seen before?*
- J: *Not to that degree.*

Unlike the other adolescents, Joe directly admits that he 'had sexual intercourse with a boy who was younger than I was' and that 'I sodomized him'. Joe therefore personally acknowledges responsibility for the abuse event. However it is interesting that he juxtaposes and qualifies his acknowledgement position with an adjacent statement about the video, 'Showgirls'. The effect of this axiom marker was that in the adjacent pairing, I explored the meaning of the video for Joe, and dialogically repressed the abusive event he had perpetrated. The function of this strategic juxtaposition was that we never, in the entire discourse discussed Joe's offending again. He was also the last adolescent that I interviewed for this study and I had therefore, already noted a pattern of media as a habitual line of argument in the other discourses. I consequently colluded and collaborated with Joe's position, which has

⁶ M-Net is a privately owned television channel. Two of the movies screened on this channel and directly referred to by the adolescents, include 'Basic Instincts' and 'Showgirls'. Both movies have age restrictions of 18 years.

the effect of positioning him as a victim of a TV show whose origins and explanations are found outside of his sphere of influence.

Joe again uses juxtaposition strategically when he describes the dancers dancing naked and then they 'basically deal with their problems'. Just prior to the first vignette above, Joe had spent considerable time discussing the many problems that he had and so positions himself, in the vignette above, alongside the showgirl who also has problems and thereby places himself as a casualty of a TV show. Joe has therefore neutralized his earlier acknowledgement position by disclaiming intentional responsibility through his transformation into a victim of a TV show who is overwhelmed and enticed by the nudity of a number of showgirls, into abusing a young boy. Accountability is therefore being managed here on two levels, both in the story itself and in the current interaction.

Ashwin also draws upon the media to exculpate his abusive event. In contrast to Joe though, Ashwin was one of the first to raise the issue of the media and it is interesting that, unlike in Joe's case, I never pursued the line of argument beyond the vignette below. Ashwin had mentioned earlier on that he had seen a video. I return to this statement, in the following vignette:

- L: *Did you normally watch a video before you felt the urge?*
A: *Ja.*
L: *What sort of programmes did you watch? I don't have M-Net, so you're going to have to help me here. Was it predominantly M-Net?*
A: *Not really.*
L: *What time of the day did this happen?*
A: *At night.*
L: *Did these programmes make it feel right to have sex with your sister?*
A: *(.....) Ja, it did.*
L: *I'm wondering what in these programmes made it feel right?*
A: *It didn't make it seem **all** right. (.....) It's stimulating.*
L: *It stimulated something in you.*
A: *Ja.*

Ashwin, also positions himself as a victim of television, an explanation that has its origins outside of his sphere of influence. In fact the effect of the TV show was that it was 'stimulating' and hence supports entitlement to sex with his sister. In this statement, Ashwin draws upon the interpretative repertoire of the 'male-sex-drive'

discourse or the discourse of natural entitlement (discussed in more detail in 4.3.3.2) and juxtaposes it with the television programmes, indeed a socially more acceptable line of argument. His use of 'all' in the statement, 'It didn't make it seem **all** right...' is interesting for the programmes didn't make the abuse altogether correct and they didn't make the abuse altogether incorrect either. Once again the sexually abusive event has been neutralized through Ashwin's transformation to a victim of television programmes, which 'stimulated' his male sex drive and so legitimated the abuse of his sister.

4.3.3.2. A Rhetoric of Natural Entitlement : The Disclaiming of Sexual Abuse

The rhetoric of natural entitlement presents another example of the way in which rhetorical devices and discourse combine to resource assumptions about male dominance. In its simplest form, it advocates that men are entitled to dominate women either, because of the way that men are made (Hollway, 1981, 1984 refers to this as the 'male-sex-drive discourse) or because society demands that they take charge, as in the patriarchal discourse. The adolescents resourced their dialogues with both these ready-made enough discourses 'to be intelligible for its users, but flexible enough for it to perform (with considerable invention or 'witcraft') an unending variety of locally managed, indexically specified, situated actions' (Billig, 1987). In the following two vignettes, Ashwin draws upon the position of experimentation to justify the sexual abuse:

L: *Ashwin, you said earlier that you had a problem.*

A: ***I just wanted to experiment.***

L: *How do you explain what happened?*

A: *I can't. **But something that was really stupid (.....). Not going to do it again. I just wanted to try and experiment.***

In explaining what happened, Ashwin maintains that he was '**just** experimenting'. This is a line of argument that a number of the other adolescents draw upon at various stages in their discourses. Ashwin has paid a price though for his experimentation position. The way of neutralizing the act has transformed him into an

irresponsible child who was experimenting with his sexual urges and perhaps went too far:

A: *Um, I would **just fight the urge, Ja.***

He becomes the irresponsible 'little one' and his sister, the enduring 'bigger' person of an 'experiment'. The 'male-sex-drive' discourse constructs male sexuality as the manifestation of a powerful biological drive (Hollway, 1981). Men and male adolescents are therefore seen as having a basic need for sex which they cannot ignore, and which they must satisfy. Ashwin draws upon this discourse in the above vignette and in doing so, positions his sister as a 'sex-object' and himself the victim of 'uncontrollable urges'. Douglas, in the vignette presented below, also draws upon the same interpretative repertoire to resource his discourse and thereby disclaims intentional responsibility:

- D: *... So um, I say that I came up with some points. In a case like that you should do is like to see a girl, you don't look at her. You may greet her and walk away, but **don't really associate with her.** Don't like go and sit and talk to her. **Because when you sit and talk to people like that you really get these feelings like.** And uh to get things like that off your mind you do something with your mind like take a walk, or go to town and all, relax, sit on the beach or listen to music in your house, for instance. And uh I think by listening to music basically you get everything of your mind.*
- L: *Douglas, you spoke earlier about feelings you get when you sit next to a girl.*
- D: ***You know guys, they get feelings like they want to interfere with girls.** Right? And that's something **everyone's** trying to avoid. So by basically sitting next to a girl (...) these feelings of saying, okay this is what I'm feeling right now. Right? That child will, that person, or that child may not say anything at that time but afterwards it will come to him that when they with their parents or something. They'll open up to their parents.*
- L: *They will tell their parents?*
- D: *Uh well like what happened like. Ja, so uh (...) that's one thing. It's okay to say okay you're walking down, you greet the person and stuff. But like by sitting with them and **like associating and walking - all of a sudden you get these stupid feelings (....) and that's something, like I told you now, everyone's trying to avoid.***
- L: *They're all trying to avoid them? Why?*
- D: *Uh, for one I'd say they're trying to **keep a good reputation by keeping away.***
- L: *Sounds like it's quite difficult to get it off your mind Douglas?*
- D: ***No, it's simple** to get it off your mind, like I said. Um (...) you may do a lot of things that can get it off your mind. I mean go and **join the boys, sit and talk to them or go and play soccer** or like go and listen to music or like uh or even you know by just telling something else. That doesn't you know involve this conversation.*

In the vignette presented above, a combination of rhetorical devices are presented. Operating alone, the individual devices add colour and interest to the text. But, as this vignette from Douglas's interview illustrates, when multiple devices work together, the performative function extends beyond mere decoration. They can be seen to operate together throughout this rhetorical sequence, for example, in constructing Douglas both as a credible helper/assistant at Childline but also as an acceptable member of the moral community. This vignette is presented as an extension of Douglas's description of himself as a 'helper/assistant' at Childline in which he discusses some of the strategies that he shares with 'the kids that have done it, these things before', in order to avoid sexual abuse.

Like Ashwin, Douglas draws upon the 'male-sex-drive' discourse to explain 'these feelings'. What is particularly interesting about this vignette, is Douglas's contradictory use of positions of power. The use of the 'male-sex-drive' interpretative repertoire places Douglas in a position of dominance and entitlement, an essentially powerful position in which he is driven by a biological imperative to 'interfere with girls'. But it also represents 'girls', as potential triggers which can set these 'urges' in motion. Douglas's discourse endows 'girls', young women, with a certain measure of power, for they have the ability to elicit a male's desire, '... and talk to **people like that** you really get these feelings like', and are therefore a potential source of danger to Douglas, 'but like by sitting with them and like associating and walking - all of a sudden you get these stupid feelings...'. Again Douglas draws upon the rhetoric of mutual participation to position himself with 'the guys', for it is not him alone who battles with 'these feelings' or these urges to 'interfere with girls', it's something 'everyone's trying to avoid'. Therefore in the discourse above, Douglas has positioned himself in the contradictory positions of both entitlement and also of victim-to-female-entrapment, for he was trapped both by his biological needs and the simultaneous enticement of girls. The outcome of these positions is that he absolves himself of any intentional responsibility, and hence conceals and justifies his abusive event.

And finally, Akash, like Douglas also draws upon the position of natural entitlement to exculpate him from the abuse. Pertinent extracts have been highlighted:

Akash: No but I got accused once. But I never did it.

L: Accused?

*Akash: Uh of petting a girl, at school at the time. **But she's a little bit, how can I say, she's uh (...) she's uh not all there.** So uh what do you call it, I was in the game shop with all my friends. **I've got proof.** Have a couple **of boys there.** But now they (the authorities) saying that I was interfering with her.*

L: They said you interfered with her?

*Akash: Yes. Like touching her. But I had no worries about it because I know I'd never do it. So when I came down they said no I done that. So then the police came so, so **my old man** said the police can come you know we got proof that my son was inside the game shop. And every time when I was small right 'til now I still go in the game shop. Every time I go, like my whole life is like in the game shop (.....).*

Akash's discourse here presents multiple and overlaying messages of male authority. I selected this particular vignette to end this chapter, because of the dense variety of ways in which Akash implicitly supports his position of dominance. In his statement '... but she's a little bit, how can I say, she's uh (...) she's uh not all there', Akash describes his victim as someone who is either mentally unstable or is intellectually impaired, in order to cast himself in a position of superiority and by implication, her in a position of inferiority, and therefore supports his position to entitlement. In order to maintain and garner support for this position, he references the patriarchal interpretative repertoire, '...have a couple of boys there', and of his father, 'my old man', both described in terms of endearment. It is also interesting that Akash minimizes the accusations of rape made against him as 'petting a girl' and later as 'touching her'. Both behaviours are considered in some cultures as part of 'normal' adolescent sexual behaviour and far removed from a rape accusation.

4.4. CONCLUSION:

The qualitative results (obtained by following the procedures set out in Chapter Three) were presented in this chapter. The results presented indicate that a considerable degree of variability exists in the discourses of the adolescent sexual offenders within this contextual setting. The adolescents, for example, vacillated between positions of (a) contradictions and oppositions, (b) accepting oscillations -

disclosure and denial, for example, and c) developing a tolerance for ambivalence and ambiguous discourse. The variation in their accounts, it can be argued, is an essential feature of the natural language use, and an important route to understanding function. The adolescents find themselves both in the current context and historically, being accountable for and evaluated in terms of how they design and package their utterances. They therefore draw on different and often inconsistent resources as they appear morally appropriate, in the construction of their accounts.

A number of rhetorical devices were used by the adolescents in order to maintain their positions of denial. The following devices were examined: the ambiguous use of pronouns to support positions of mutual participation, axiom markers served to secure assumptions made and protect them from challenge, metaphors subtly reinforced the correctness and reasonableness of positions of male dominance, for example. Examples of synecdoche and metonymy were also examined and the manner in which they resourced positions of entitlement, dominance and justification, explored. In addition, I explored the manner in which the adolescents drew upon interpretative repertoires, in particular the male-sex-drive discourse and the patriarchal discourse in order to generate a sense of naturalness and correctness to entitlement.

Finally, I explored the constrictions of polite conversation within this particular conversational setting and the effect of the turn by turn sequential organization of talk on the adolescents accounts. I used this sequential organization of action as an interpretative resource, because each action in a sequence inherently displayed both the adolescents' and my interpretation of the prior actions in the sequence.

In the following chapter, I present a discussion of these results.

CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTIONS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DATA AND THE BROADER DOMINANT DISCOURSE.

... in the new South Africa with its Bill of Rights. This states emphatically that 'everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected... everyone has the right to be free from all forms of violence.' What can be a greater assault on that dignity than being forced to submit? The answer it seems is only one thing - believing that you have to. (The Star, 11th January 1999, Editorial, emphasis added).

5.1. INTRODUCTION:

In Chapter four, I attempted to elucidate some of the complex codes of utterance and absence that the adolescent sexual offenders presented us with in their discourses. In Chapter five, then, I attempt to examine how the codes displayed by the adolescents, in fact, re-presents a broader social code of utterance and absence, and in such a manner allows sexual abuse to gain entry into respectable homes and communities with the demeanour of ambiguity, ambivalence and denial.

I begin this Chapter, by exploring the peculiar nature of the conversations between myself and the adolescents. I do this by exploring a question I asked earlier on in Chapter two, 'Why do the adolescents communicate with me anyway?'. This leads to a more detailed examination of the variability witnessed in the accounts of the adolescent sexual offenders, and I relate this to the repressive culture that both adolescent sexual offenders and their families have drawn around the sexually abusive event. I then explore the role of polite talk in the creation and origin of individual repression as encountered in the conversational setting of this study. This

leads us to examine the notion that the public discourse often provides the model for individual functioning. Here I turn to Billig's proposed rhetorical model of thinking (1989), in which he suggests that the internal debate is often based upon public argumentation; that children, for example, learn to think inwardly based on their participation in the outward rhetoric of debate. We explore in detail, then, the three interpretative repertoires; the male-sex-drive, the patriarchal and the permissive sex discourses, that represent the public discourse that the adolescents so readily draw upon in the construction of their accounts. And finally we explore the repressed messages, the dialogic unconscious, that underscores this public discourse.

5.2. THE NATURE OF THE CONVERSATION - A DISCUSSION:

The conversations between myself and the adolescents were not your ordinary conversations, as they might appear to conversation analysts. The conversational setting, the power relations and social dynamics between us, the nature of the topic that we were explicating and the nature of the adolescents and the researcher, mitigated against an ordinary conversation. The dialogic unconscious depicted these conversations as more psychologically and ideologically charged.

5.2.1. Why do the Adolescents Communicate With Me, Anyway?

On numerous occasions throughout this study, I often pondered why the adolescents had even participated in the research. I was after all a complete stranger to them, who also happened to be a woman, older, white and professional. In many regards I came to represent during our 45-minute interview, through the questions that I asked, the manner in which they were phrased and through the way that I was presented to them at Childline, as a member of the moral community 'policing' system. But even more poignantly, the task I presented them with, of re-accounting their abuse event, was in fact extremely anxiety provoking, for it runs contrary not only to what is considered in our South African culture at this time in history as normal and appropriate discourse, but also contrary to the wishes of their family.

Peter and Viloshan referred to the fact (also discussed in 4.3.1.) that sex and sexually related issues are very rarely discussed between family members, and friends, let alone with a total stranger. In addition, most of the adolescents revealed, at some stage during their discourse, that their families had drawn a veil of secrecy around the abuse event. The following three vignettes all illustrate this point:

L: *How do people outside of Childline treat you now?*

A: *No. No one knows about it.*

L: *Have you and your mom ever been able to talk about what happened?*

V: *No, she never speak about it to me. She just forgets it.*

L: *And with your sister?*

V: *She never spoke to me, they told me whatever happened here must stay here, it mustn't come out.*

L: *It seems like talking about the abuse is very difficult for you Rakesh.*

R: *No. I just want to forget about it and uh go on with my life and try to achieve what I want to achieve but that is going to keep on bringing me down. So... Sometimes when I think of it I get like I do lack of work and lack of studies.*

L: *Sometimes when you see it on TV or things keep on, that play on your mind this what you did and that and like disrupts your whole life. Ya.*

L: *You're saying that the abuse feels like it's holding you back.*

R: *Not too many people know. I don't like communicating too much with them. I like to sat away from them and be on my own.*

For Viloshan, Ashwin and Rakesh, a repressive culture towards the abuse event has therefore been created by their families. Douglas, in the vignette below, illustrates the traumatic consequences of the counter-theme of disclosure:

L: *You said earlier, '... in case the memories come back.' What did you mean?*

D: *Ya.*

L: *I'm wondering what those memories are?*

D: *You know like uh (...) when kids used to mock me and stuff like that. Yes. Ja they used to call me funny names [clears throat] and stuff like that. So like uh (...) I don't talk about it.*

L: *So talking about sexual abuse reminds you Douglas of the time that you were teased.*

D: *Mm. A lot of people found out about it. And uh (...) you know they started mocking me and uh making fun of me. So like it brings a lot of (...) back. Ya.*

L: *It feels like it was a very unhappy time Douglas.*

D: *Mm. So that's why I don't really talk about it. When I (...) That's why when people ask me, I don't really talk about it because I try and get it off my mind. I just try and talk about something else or (...) go home.*

For Douglas, the public disclosure of his abusive event, has had shameful and dire consequences for him. Later in the discourse, he talks about how it has affected his moral standing in the community, '... where I was living it really brought my reputation down' and still later, 'You know by people talking about it and they may talk to other people who may know me and walk past and know about it and things like that.' There is little wonder, therefore, that in this particular and somewhat unusual conversational setting, where the consequences of an acknowledgement position are potentially high, that Douglas maintained to the end of the discourse that what happened was 'not on purpose'. The repercussions of an acknowledgement position have caused him to be largely ostracized by his peers. The adolescents therefore, in their dialogues with me, dialogically repress so many details of their abuse events. As Douglas has illustrated, the ideological consequences of an acknowledgement position are high. This is a dilemma that each adolescent faces in terms of rationalizing and maintaining a particular status quo in society.

5.2.2. Variability Within the Adolescents' Accounts:

How then does it become possible to talk about what appears to be more or less impossible to talk about? How can these 'impossible conversations' be constructed? The concept of 'impossibility' within this particular conversational setting, referred often to the silences which frequently contained the abusive and violent actions of the adolescents, and created a conceivable context for oscillations of contradiction and disclaiming discourse, that characterised much of the adolescents' ambiguous accounts.

Potter & Wetherell (1988, in Antaki, 1988: 174) argue that this variation witnessed in the adolescents' individual accounts, is an essential feature of natural language usage, and an important route to understanding function. 'We suggested... that discourse is variable in the sense that any one speaker will construct events and persons in different ways according to function'. This does however not imply that regularity cannot be fixed at the level of the individual speaker. There is, as will be illustrated later, regularity in the variation.

5.2.3. Constraints within the Conversations:

Other factors which contributed to the maintenance of variation within each discourse, were the constraints of the conversation itself. Drew (1995:70, in Billig, 1997, emphasis added) notes that according to the perspective of conversation analysts, what people say, 'is not determined by, or the automatic product of, the processes of the mind, instead, utterances in **conversations are shaped most proximately** by the sequential position in which the turns are produced'. Conversational analysts maintain, therefore, that it is the process of turn-taking and the sequential structuring of action, which are situated at the centre of social interaction. These structures are so normatively powerful, that according to Billig (1998), they shape what is said in the conversational interaction. Such are the constraints, that speakers find themselves inhabiting a normative structure which is 'more powerful than their individual feelings and to which they have to conform for interaction to proceed' (Billig, 1997).

As illustrated in Chapter four, through the use of conversational analytical tools, the dialogues were constructed in such a manner, that there was a preference for concord, which facilitated expressions of agreement between myself and the adolescents and mitigated against expressions of outright disagreement or a refusal to participate in the study. In the discursive site, the adolescents and I demonstrated a number of ways of 'doing' politeness, and essentially promoting a friendly and cooperative atmosphere. The practice of adjacency pairing, that characterised so much of the discourse with the adolescents, had a rather syncopated and agreeably collaborative quality. For example, (1) we rarely spoke directly about sex, sexual issues, or the abuse, but hedged our discussions in indirectness or, (2) the adolescents responded, in some form or other, to all the questions presented to them, despite the fact that I provided them at the beginning of the interview with an opportunity to omit questions that were difficult or perceived as offensive, and hence politeness prevailed. As Chilton (1990:222) notes, 'Politeness formulations are universal and pervasive in everyday discourse largely conventionalized and often benign. The preferred response is reciprocal politeness'. In this manner then, social order was reproduced, for at the root of the codes of conversation and politeness are

the codes of morality (Billig, 1997). Turn-taking therefore becomes a moral matter. The result, however, is that it is fairly simple for the adolescent sexual offenders to appear analytically as 'cooperative turn-takers who do not possess a clouded hinterland' (Billig, 1997).

Conversational analysts have, therefore, focussed on how conversational morality is achieved, as opposed to the contrary theme of how immorality is subsequently repressed. The propensity for 'politeness', therefore depends upon the capability for 'doing rudeness'. Billig (1997, 1998) would argue, therefore, that a flaw exists in the conception of an apparently agreeable, cooperative structure. Hence, in the teaching of politeness, which is itself constituted through language, models for doing rudeness are also provided. Dialogue must create its own ways to drive the temptations of rudeness aside from the routine consciousness, and to permit the conscious aims of dialogue to continue.

Therefore, in the unusual dialogues with the adolescents, they were able to reproduce themselves as tolerant, moral and polite, through talking politely and agreeably and through the use of a number of other conversational devices, such as, the use of repair, delay features, indirection and self-other attentiveness, for example. In so doing, however, the intolerant, rude, hurtful potentialities and desires, and the sexually abusive events were routinely driven aside from conscious awareness. The maintenance of discursive etiquette requires, therefore, considerable constraint and dialogical repression. 'It might be said that the routine conversational intricacies, which are revealed by conversational analysts, depend upon a repression which is not routinely revealed' (Billig, 1997). As the adolescents and I chose one set of topics, we kept others from discussion.

In Chapter four an exploration of the individual dialogic unconscious in discursive action was presented. It does, however, also lend itself to an ideological analysis. For one needs to discover how the explanation of the sexually abusive event relates to a wider pattern of explaining sexual events. 'Repression, is not a universally static process, but something which is part of ideological and socio-historical currents' (Frosh, 1989, in Billig, 1997). The pattern of the individual adolescent's thinking

should therefore be interpreted in terms of broader historical and social patterns. Particular codes of politeness differ, therefore, both culturally and historically, as do the topics on which people are expected to converse and also remain silent. We only have to consider, for example, how prevalent debates on racism have become in South African society. If repression is dialogically and socially constructed, then topics of repression will vary culturally and historically. This we refer to as the conditions of ideological analysis. 'Analysts not only have to stand back from what particular speakers are saying, but must also attempt to distance themselves from, and reflect upon, the social conventions and ideological assumptions which enable such accounts to be given' (Parker, 1992, van Dijk, 1993). An analysis of the dialogic unconscious needs, therefore, to investigate how routines of talk can prevent the utterance of particular social themes, or accounts, or even questionings, which might appear reasonable to others but which are collaboratively avoided by the particular speakers as a localized form of politeness. It may then appear as if a joint conspiracy is in practise, in order to achieve a collective denial of knowledgeability (Billig, 1998). It is to some of these ideological themes and absences that we now turn.

5.3. SEXUALITY AND SOCIETY:

This country has the ability to generate frightening statistics. More murders than anywhere else, more escapes by prisoners. And now comes news of shocking findings on sexual violence. According to a survey, one in three girls in Johannesburg' southern council area has been a victim of this rape culture. The agency Community Information, Empowerment and Transparency (CIET) also reveals that 12% of the girls said they did not know they had a right not to be subjected to sexual violence... Girls must know what their rights are and must receive the protection promised by the constitution; boys must be made to understand that sexual violence is not the norm and will not be tolerated. (The Star, 11th January, 1999, emphasis added).

The above vignette appeared in a recent daily newspaper and presents a challenge to the 'male-sex-drive' discourse identified by Hollway (1981,984). It also illustrates Billig's notion of the 'dialogic unconscious', operating at a broader social level, in which 'boys need to understand that sexual violence **is not the norm**' and the

socially concealed dialogic unconscious counter-theme, that ‘girls **did not know** they had a right not to be subjected to sexual violence.’ Such is the power of the prevailing ‘male-sex-drive’ and ‘patriarchal’ discourses, for example, that their dominant presence, have ensured that the stamp of ‘truth’ maintains the power inequalities described above. We need to look, therefore, at how discursive practices serve to create and uphold this particular form of social life. Discourse, as the adolescent sexual offenders have shown us, provides a framework for people against which they may understand their own experience and behaviour and that of others, and can be seen to be tied to social structures and practices in a way which masks the power relations operating in society (Burr, 1995).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest the concept of the interpretative repertoire as a way of understanding the linguistic devices that people draw upon in constructing their accounts of events. Interpretative repertoires can be seen as:

the building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena. Any particular repertoire is constituted out of a restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion. Commonly these terms are derived from one or more key metaphors and the presence of a repertoire will often be signaled by certain tropes or figures of speech.
(Wetherell & Potter, 1987:172)

As I illustrated in Chapter four, particular interpretative repertoires provided the adolescent sexual offenders with a tool-kit of resources, for use in constructing a credible account of their abuse event. They represent, as pointed out in Chapter four, a consistency in accounts which is not located at the level of the individual adolescent sexual offender. That is, although an individual may display a degree of variability and inconsistency in their account of a single event, we nevertheless all draw upon the same tools in the tool-bag from time to time (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The adolescents used these repertoires in order to enable them to justify their particular versions of the abusive event, to excuse and validate their behaviour, to fend off criticism both internally and externally, and finally to allow them to maintain a credible position in the conversational setting of the study. The ‘male sex drive’ and the ‘patriarchal’ repertoires were used therefore to accomplish different effects within the discourse and we examine them now in some detail.

5.3.1. 'Male-Sex-Drive', 'Permissive' and 'Patriarchal' Discourses:

As evidenced in Chapter four, the adolescents were particularly concerned to position themselves within the dialogue as acceptable, with respect to the moral rules and expectations of their culture. 'We can locate them as actors or performers in a moral sphere, whose prime aim in constructing their accounts was to construct themselves and their actions as morally justifiable' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). They are therefore located within a local moral order in which they have to negotiate a viable position for themselves. The functions of their constructed accounts were primarily: offering explanations and excuses, making justifications, apportioning blame often to the victims, and making accusations (for example, Akash was adamant that he had been framed for the abuse). The concluding function though, is that the abuse is ultimately sanctioned. People are therefore actors in a moral universe, concerned with negotiating for themselves a credible (and creditable) moral position (Burr, 1995). In order to provide a socially acceptable account of themselves according to context, it is necessary for the adolescents to draw upon different cultural representations.

The male-sex-drive discourse was certainly one cultural representation that all adolescents drew upon. It is essentially a system of representations about male sexuality, ways of talking and thinking about it, which constitute the prevailing, common-sense view, that was challenged in the vignette presented in 5.3. above. The male-sex-drive discourse is regularly encountered in our culture and is often used to legitimate such behaviour by men as rape and infidelity. 'It has been common-place for men who rape to be treated sympathetically by the courts, in recognition of their assumed undeniable sexual requirements' (Burr, 1995:77). The discourse has had, therefore, the effect of reproducing a view of the world which has masked male violence against women, and in particular, the adolescents' sexual abuse of young girls. Male sexuality is considered by this discourse to contain an element of sexual aggressiveness considered so because of 'the primitive necessity of pursuit and penetration' (Hollway, 1984). The patriarchal discourse also sees as quite 'natural' a bit of aggression in male sexuality (Hollway, 1981). Sexual violence according to Hollway (1981) is considered a 'most significant and deep-rooted form of

men's oppression of women and often goes unchallenged'. The male sexual desire is conceptualised therefore as an untainted urge, a product of nature and not of society.

The discourse does however, as I indicated in Douglas's interview, have the counter-effect of blaming women or young girls. Reasoning often given is that women's attractiveness (as sex-object) 'stimulates' male sexual arousal and desire for gratification (as is so often argued in rape cases to absolve them of responsibility). The discourse therefore represents women and young girls as sex-objects, to be dominated, and pervades our culture in: sexist jokes, advertising hoardings, pornography, television and film, male conquest boasts and other social and legal discourses. These patterns of discourse present the predatory man for the male public (particularly impressionable male adolescents) to identify with, for it is through their sexuality that young boys, more often than not, are expected to prove themselves.

Hite (1977, in Gavey, 1989: 468) addresses aspects of both the 'permissible sexuality' and 'male-sexual-drive-need' discourses:

This glorification of the male sex drive and male orgasm 'needs' amounts to justifying men in whatever they have to do to get intercourse - even rape - and defines the 'normal' male as one who is 'hungry' for intercourse. On the other hand, the definition of female sexuality as passive and receptive, amounts to telling women to submit to the aggressive male sex drive.

5.3.2. Comment:

We love the criminal and take a burning interest in him, because the Devil makes us forget the beam in our own eye when observing the mote in our brother's, and in that outwits us. (Jung, in Hollway, 1981: 33)⁷

What is particularly poignant, is that the ambiguity and ambivalence witnessed in the individual adolescent sexual offenders' accounts, appears to epitomize the ambivalence and ambiguity experienced in broader society, particularly South African

⁷ I have used this quote here to focus on the responsibility of men as a group for recognizing the problem as one of contemporary masculinity and society rather than focusing on the individual offenders as the 'scapegoat'

society towards the sexual abuse of young girls, more especially by adolescent sexual offenders. The accounts presented by the adolescent offenders are a representation of our culture's ambiguous attitude towards violent and sexually abusive actions against children. Sexual abuse is therefore sanctioned to the extent that it is allowed, through the dialogic unconscious that operates in the various social, legal and psychological discourses, such as 'male-sex-drive' and 'patriarchal' discourses. But it is also prohibited to the extent that it is penalized.

Throughout this study, I have often asked, why this community of adolescents, among these members might this possibility work as an adequate justification? Why is this assumed to be a possible defence? By equating sexual abuse with the individual, a focus on societal sexual norms and attitudes towards women and sexual abuse becomes a logical impossibility, for how can a society harbour irrational sexual norms, for example? By making these societal norms an impossibility in theory, the types of discourses presented above, are justified in practice.

We have presumed that the denial expressed by the adolescent sexual offenders is individual and non-dialogic, operating as an unconscious internal defence mechanism. We have paid little attention, therefore, to the conversations in which the adolescents have routinely participated. How we ask, has society been permitted to treat young girls as sex-objects in the glorification of the adolescent male sex drive? It has indeed been a convenient failure for all, except of course the young victims. Thus, a process of repression has been socially produced in overt social activity. A pattern has been established in society, so that repression is reinforced through routine, particularly dialogic routine. As such, all have neglected to challenge or ask some obvious questions about male dominance and entitlement, and this collective repression, this collective dialogic unconscious has functioned to repress other, more obvious interpretations about sexual abuse. The discursive balance or status quo has been secured through the avoidance of awkward questioning, as we collaborate to accomplish the collective projection. Maintenance of the status quo has been guaranteed.

5.4.1.2. An ambivalent dis-position⁸

This strategy involves the therapist avoiding a fixed position on one or another issue related to the abusive event, within the therapeutic process. Such a stance also avoids the categorization of individual adolescent pathology and thereby enables the therapist and adolescent to focus instead on the dominant discourses at work behind the dialogic unconscious of social prohibitions. This strategy, therefore, creates opportunities for the adolescents to re-position themselves once more and to liberate themselves from initial polarized positions (Byrne & McCarthy, 1988).

5.4.1.3. Re-membering⁹

Hyden & McCarthy (1994) maintain that a dis-position enables less conflictual re-memberings within the discourse surrounding sexual abuse disclosure. Within this mode of interviewing, all activities begin within an analysis of the position of the interviewer him-or-herself. It is a self-reflexive disposition in that it is as much about the descriptions of the adolescent sexual offender, as it is about the sexual abuse outlined within the account itself. This strategy of re-membering is created to encompass the (re)-inclusion of: (a) professional emotional and ideational responses; (b) the viewpoints of different family members in the minds of professionals (particularly when the abuse is intra-familial); and (c) the imagined viewpoints of those members of the social system directly surrounding the abuse disclosure.

The therapist consulting with the adolescent sexual offender and significant others needs, therefore, to recognise the discourses (and the positions provided by them) that are currently shaping our subjectivity within the discursive setting. Such a recognition can be beneficial in itself, by re-locating problems away from an intrapsychic domain towards an interpersonal, societal one, for example. Furthermore, we

⁸ This is a term used by Hyden & McCarthy (1994). It is hyphenated to illustrate a movement away from the taking of a position by a therapist. 'Dis-' is a prefix meaning away from or the reverse of some noun, adjective or verb.

⁹ This is a term borrowed from American feminist and philosopher Mary Daly (in Hyden & McCarthy, 1994), to illustrate the dual meaning implied by the word 'remember'. The hyphenation highlights the ambiguity of the word.

need to take greater cognisance of the positions we are being offered and that we offer to others in interaction with them. We are therefore less likely to adopt positions we did not intend and can then devise strategies, such as the ones presented above, for how unacceptable positions might be resisted and positions in alternative discourses provided.

5.4.2. Towards a Greater Acknowledgement Within Society in General:

The power of the male-sex-drive, permissive sex and patriarchal discourses cannot be disputed. They pervade our culture in all aspects including our attitudes to sexual abuse and remain firmly entrenched in the status quo. As illustrated in Chapter two, the body, and particularly sexuality remains a major site of power relations, established as such and entrenched in routine dialogue or antithetically in the collective dialogic unconscious over hundreds of years. Foucault, (1975: 25-26) describes how this came to be:

At the heart of this economic and political problem of population was sex: it was necessary to analyse the birth-rate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile or sterile, the effects of unmarried life or of the prohibitions... Things went from ritual lamenting over the unfruitful debauchery of the rich, bachelors and libertines to a discourse in which sexual conduct of the population was taken both as an object of analysis and as a target of intervention.

Hence challenging this status quo is particularly complex, especially one so deeply entrenched in society. The prevailing and dominant discourses related to sexuality and ultimately sexual abuse, are so closely aligned with cultural practices between men and women, boys and girls, and routines which support the status quo and affirm the powerful positions of men and young adolescents. Perhaps then the greatest contribution this study can hope to make, is the mobilization of other research towards a greater societal awareness of the dominance of male power and entitlement in South African society. This becomes a political discourse, a search not for truth but for the usefulness that the researcher's 'reading' of a phenomenon might have in challenging the status quo (Foucault, 1976). Therefore the change hoped for in society, is the revelation of marginalized and repressed discourses, making them available as positions from which to fashion alternative identities. The value then of

this discourse study, is in revealing and reflecting to society the dilemmatic nature of the dominant discourses that influence our daily cultural practices, maintaining men and even young male adolescents in positions of power and entitlement, and women and young girls as oppressed, often 'submitting' sex-objects at the mercy of the male sexual desire. Hence this 'consciousness-raising' is aimed at challenging, and pressurizing policy that permits sexual abuse by adolescent offenders to remain sanctioned, particularly, within legal, social and psychological discourses. The purpose of it is not to impose another, though different, identity (which would be as oppressive) but simply to free us from our usual ways of understanding ourselves.

CHAPTER SIX: REFLECTIONS

This chapter is comprised of two sections: section one attempts to gather together the theoretical thinking about adolescent sexual offenders in society, as detailed in the previous five chapters. Section two of this chapter focuses specifically on the critical issues of validity and methodology. There is of necessity an overlap, but for academic convenience they will be addressed separately.

6.1. DISCOURSE AND THE ADOLESCENT SEXUAL OFFENDER:

A conversational analysis, as extended by Billig (1997, 1998), revealed that the seven adolescent sexual offenders interviewed all vacillated, in varying degrees, between oscillations of acknowledgement and denial. This ability to hold together simultaneously, contradictions of ambiguity and ambivalence, was a prominent feature that characterised much of the discourse in this unusual conversational setting. It can be argued that the adolescent sexual offenders find themselves both historically and in the current confines of this conversational setting, being accountable for and evaluated in terms of how they design and package their abusive accounts. This is a dilemma that each adolescent faces in terms of rationalizing and maintaining a particular status quo in society. The ideological consequences of an acknowledgement position bear with it the potential for shame and ostracism from peers, family and the community. Paradoxically, though, the ideological consequences of a denial position not only sanctions the abuse but also results in a failure to accept responsibility for the event. In most cases, families of the offenders have created a repressive culture towards the abuse event, in which it is simply not discussed. The adolescents draw on different and often inconsistent and varying resources, as they strive to maintain positions on the moral high-ground.

A number of rhetorical devices were used by the adolescents in order to maintain their positions of denial. These included the ambiguous use of pronouns in order to support positions of mutuality of participation, axiom markers served to anchor fundamental assumptions and protect them from challenge, metaphors, although sparsely used, subtly reinforced the correctness and reasonableness of positions of male dominance. Examples of synecdoche and metonymy were also examined and the manner in which they resourced positions of entitlement, dominance and justification, explored. The adolescents also drew upon a variety of interpretative repertoires, in particular the male-sex-drive, patriarchal and permissive sex discourses in order to generate a sense of naturalness and correctness to entitlement.

A complex code of absences were also noted in the discourses. These silences, or unsaid actions, frequently contained the abusive event, and created a context in which oscillations of contradiction and disclaiming accounts could function. This ability to dialogically repress much of the abusive event was tolerated within the confines of this unusual conversational setting, through the preference for concord and agreement that characterised much of our conversations. The nature of the conversations were such, therefore, that they often mitigated against expressions of outright disagreement or refusal. It was possible then for the adolescents to produce themselves as moral and polite through the use of a multitude of rhetorical devices, enabling the dialogic unconscious to repress details of the sexually abusive events and the rude, intolerant selves from conscious awareness, resulting ultimately in the abuse event being sanctioned and legitimized.

The conversations with the adolescents were in no way ordinary conversations, but conversations that were psychologically and ideologically charged. Our society sanctions male dominance and entitlement through routine cultural dialogue such as: male-sex drive, patriarchal, and permissive discourses, (witnessed in the adolescents accounts), and which pass as 'truth' and whose premises and logic are rarely challenged. These discourses through the dialogic unconscious, mask male aggression towards women, in particular sexual abuse as perpetrated by adolescents, and repress the right of young girls to be protected from sexual abuse

and not to be used as sex-objects, for example. They further present the predatory male for the male public, particularly young impressionable male adolescents, to identify with, for it is through their sexuality that young boys are often required to prove themselves. These discourses pervade and influence, therefore, almost all aspects of cultural practices thereby maintaining a status quo that entitles men to positions of dominance and sexual abuse.

The effect of these discourses is that the seriousness and prevalence of adolescent sexual offending is often minimized and concealed by parents, police and professionals as 'experimental', 'normal for boys to be curious', and 'normal childhood exploration'. The result is that very few cases of sexual abuse perpetrated by adolescent sexual offenders are ever reported, either by witnesses, victims or the families of the young offenders. There appears to be a collective reluctance on the part of the relevant authorities to deal with cases of abuse perpetrated by young offenders, partly out of concern for the serious consequences of labelling them 'sexual offenders'. The criminal justice system further mitigates against the protection of the young girls. It is the young victims who apart from dealing with the consequences of the abuse are mandated by law to report the abuse. Our legal system is such that the victim becomes the accuser, who is responsible for establishing proof and guilt of the offender. In her positioning as accuser, the young girl becomes a participant in a process which serves to maintain the very pattern of dominance and entitlement she has attempted to terminate through her disclosure. The young offender is assigned the legal position of 'defendant', one that calls for the discourse of defence, and not acknowledgement. It is hardly surprising then that challenging the system remains complex and very few cases are reported. South African society legally prohibits incest, rape, indecent assault and other forms of child abuse. These acts are regarded as criminal and are punishable by imprisonment. Therefore while there are legal and public disclaimers about the right of men and adolescents to abuse women and children, there also co-exists an uncertain public acceptance of violence and sexually abusive behaviour by adolescents. Sexual abuse by adolescents, and even adults, is a simultaneously socially promoted and socially prohibited action.

Hence, the ambiguity and ambivalence expressed by the adolescents, is reflected in a collective ideological denial. I contend that the accounts presented by the adolescents offenders are in fact a re-presentation of our culture's ambiguous attitude towards violent and sexually abusive events against women and in particular children. The individual adolescent offender who is 'caught', bears the dire consequences of shame and ostracism. They become society's 'fall-guy' (sic), the scape-goat for a collective dialogic unconscious. I would contend therefore that sexual abuse is sanctioned so long as you 'aren't found out' and prohibited so long as you are. These adolescent sexual offenders are in many regards the victims of a collective dilemmatic ideology. But then aren't we all victims of society's ideological dilemmas?

6.2. CRITIQUE:

Schwandt and Halpern (1988, in Huberman & Miles, 1994:439) suggest six levels of attention to the verification process. I intend to tackle five of these levels here (level six regarding the appropriateness of the category structure, was discussed in Chapter three), discussing attempts made at maintaining validity in the study, difficulties experienced in this regard, and general 'process' difficulties.

6.2.1. Are the Findings Grounded in Data?

In other words, we question whether the data are weighted correctly? Perhaps one of the greatest advantages of a conversational analysis, is that they provide a careful attention to the contextual and sequential details of the action orientation of the interaction. I believe that the overall account was plausible and that it meshed with other studies (Potter & Wetherall, 1994:60). I attempted to ensure throughout, that the individual discourses 'fitted together' (internally), and illustrated how the discursive structure and individual devices produced effects and functions (Potter & Wetherall, 1987:170). When attempting to assess how to focus my analysis I was careful to be sensitive to select 'data' which seemed 'weighted' in the interviews and hence was 'relevant'.

6.2.2. Are the Inferences Logical?

Despite the fact that every effort was made on my part to ensure that the inferences that were made were logical and the analytical strategies that were used were applied correctly (through, for example, the supervision process, consultation with other academic staff and peers and through the reflexivity process), I am nevertheless rather tentative in responding to this particular question. Firstly, throughout Chapters five and six, I drew attention to the fact that the conversational setting and the nature of the conversations were rather unusual. Not only is a discussion about sex, sexual issues and sexual abuse *ipso facto* violating a rule of appropriate discourse, but in most cases the families of the young offenders have created a repressive culture towards the sexually abusive event. Furthermore, the interviews took place between myself, a complete stranger, and the boys, at Childline in a one-to-one setting. In addition, all the adolescents (except for Joe) had been attending a specific group therapy programme at Childline for a varying amount of time. The inferences made are therefore particular to this specific conversational setting. The adolescents behaved in ways, made use of the dialogic unconscious, and acknowledged and denied their abuse events, in accordance with the peculiarities of this setting. It is therefore difficult to assess the logicity of the inferences for a broader audience of adolescent offenders.

Secondly, the logicity of the inferences can only be determined in time as numerous readings and re-readings are performed by others.

6.2.3. Can Inquiry Decisions and Methodological Shifts be Justified?

The technical analysis provided by conversational analysis was essential for this study, as it offered a fine grained study of the action orientation of the adolescents' accounts. However, it felt on numerous occasions as if it was merely a first step in a long process, that it was on occasions, unable to fully answer the question, 'why this utterance here?' and finally, it was unable to explore the absences and silences which were 'hearably' not part of the adolescents' sense making. I wanted to focus on the situated flow of discourse, and also explore the formulation and negotiation of

psychological states, identities, and the interactional and intersubjective nature of the abuse events. The analytical tools of the dialogic unconscious (Billig, 1997, 1998), ideological dilemmas (Billig, 1987), variation, and interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, 1988) were used. Justifications for the methodological shifts were presented when such shifts were thought to be necessary.

However this approach created its own difficulties. Not only did it extend the scope of the study in such a way that it was difficult to contain, but also may have jeopardized elements of validity. Margaret Wetherell (1998: 405) raises the very same issue and argues that a synthetic approach is required, in order to '... focus on, the development of analytic concepts which work across some of these domains such as, for instance, the notion of positioning, interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas, and so'. Later on, she argues that, '... the terms of engagement between post-structuralism and ethnomethodology/conversation analysis need re-visiting...'.

6.2.4. What is the Degree of Researcher 'Bias'?

The power relations between the adolescents and myself were structured in such a manner that I often felt as though I was, by and large, another figure at Childline with whom the adolescents had to firstly comply and secondly re-account an event that most were trying hard to forget. Despite the commitment to engage in 'egalitarian research, it was impossible to 'create a research process that erase[d] the contradictions (in power and consciousness) between researcher and researched' (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1991 in Olesen, 1994:166).

I regularly reflected on my ideas and the data with my supervisor, other academic staff and on occasions with peers. This is another way of increasing the verification and credibility of the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1994:274). A degree of researcher bias was inevitable given that 'we cannot rid ourselves of the cultural self we bring with us in our intuitive perceptions about the new and strange world we have entered' (Scheper-Hughes, 1992 in Olesen, 1994: 165). I did however attempt to be honestly reflexive about my perspective, in order that the bias was a conscious rather than an unconscious factor in this study. Numerous references were made throughout about

these possible biases, more especially so in the methodological section in which I attempted to corroborate my interpretations and findings with a reflexive account of myself and the processes of my research (Altheide & Johnsen, 1994:489, in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

6.2.5. What strategies were used for increasing credibility?

A compromise to the credibility of the research was the absence of a second set of interviews, either individual or group (or even both) in order to increase the validity of my findings and even reduce the degree of researcher bias (particularly with a group interview). This creates a possibility for further research. A second round of interviews would have enabled me to assess consistencies or inconsistencies within the individual accounts of the abusive event (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:170). Another strategy that could possibly have compensated for this notable absence, was a search for 'negative cases' with which to refute or amend my interpretations. I did disclose inconsistencies and variations within each account, but could reflexively have provided a greater account of the negative cases between the adolescents.

I attempted throughout to rigorously problematize aspects of the research process in order to resolve or address the issues as they arose in this reflexive process with my supervisor and in this manner produce a disciplined account of the world that was coherent, methodological and sensible (Atkinson, 1992:51).

An additional method of addressing the issue of validity, is to ask whether the knowledge is useful? Does it, for example, liberate or empower? (Altheide & Johnson, 1994:488). Potter & Wetherell (1987) pose this question slightly differently, when they ask whether the research was 'fruitful', where 'fruitful' refers to the 'scope of the analytic scheme to make sense of new kinds of discourse and to generate novel explanations'. It is hope that this research will access 'fruitfully' a wider community and challenge some of the positions and discourse that we so readily occupy in society. This study was perhaps more of a theoretical exploration and it is

hoped that from it, a more practical approach to adolescent sexual offending will be adopted.

6.3. THE VALUE OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS:

Performing a discourse analysis or a conversational analysis can often be a slow, cumbersome, and difficult (especially for the novice!!) process. It does require more complex ways of thinking and this can be time-consuming and challenging. However, the individual and cultural practices being investigated in this thesis were also complex and did require complex forms of analysis. Male dominance and entitlement, as witnessed in adolescent sexual offending for example, regulates and reforms in ways which make it 'invisible' to many other non-discursive forms of analysis. Discursive approaches, in addition, identify practices of dominance and entitlement which create a new discursive site through which these practices can be challenged. As Hoy says, 'Change does not occur... by transforming the whole at once but only by resisting injustices at the particular points where they manifest themselves' (Hoy, 1986, in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As therapists and counsellors who claim to be informed by the significance of language and meaning in our work, we need to consider deconstructively, the consequences and parameters set by our thinking, if only to prevent the narrative from becoming just another approach, legitimizing discourse.

APPENDIX

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