"Moving the Stone..."
Israeli Women Telling Their Learning Empowerment Stories

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Abstract

This research set out to explore the experiences of participation in 'Empowerment groups' among women in Northern Israel, using feminist influenced research practices to focus on the stories and voices of the women involved in these groups. It builds on the experience of the researcher as a facilitator of such groups and seeks to discover if involvement in such groups leads to an improved sense of self efficacy for the women involved.

Most research conducted into women's empowerment has focused on either those who would define themselves as having suffered from forms of social, physical, educational, economic or employment barriers, or those who are high achievers. The uniqueness of the women participating in the empowerment groups, the focus of this study, was they did not suit either of these categories. On the one hand, they do not fit the classical definition of 'helpless', as most are working, active women, with well established social ties, and on the other hand they are not in positions where they have made some breakthrough, for instance, top management positions or in positions of social and political influence. This led to the definition of the participants as 'ordinary women', being in interim positions, which characterises the majority.

The goal of the research was to explore and observe a 'personal empowerment' process through the subjective eyes of the 'ordinary women' who experienced the programme. The research approach integrated 'personal empowerment', gender, and women's learning defined according to feminist theories and practices, and as such, a separate domain of adult learning.

The primary research question focused on the issues which 'ordinary women' expressed during the empowerment process they underwent and sought to discover if, in what ways and to what ends the women were aware of ways in which such an empowerment process affected their perspectives towards themselves and their self-efficacy in their different domains of life.

The methodology is post-positivist and based on interpretation of data derived from inductive, qualitative research methods. The research methods are qualitative-constructivist with a Feminist approach. The research was conducted in two stages
and the main methodologies of data collection were 16 in-depth interviews with women, observation of 15 three-hour sessions of the 'personal empowerment' process, the researcher's personal diary and two sessions discussing the findings with the participants, whereby they expressed their opinions regarding the research into the empowerment process and its products. Since the study is inductive, its conclusions cannot be generalised and they are valid only to the research population examined in this study.

The researcher identified and analysed the thoughts, themes and feelings which women raised in the course of learning their 'personal empowerment', and thus answered the main research question. The evidence shows that the women in the study reported a sense of growing self efficacy.

It was found that according to the women's perspectives, the processes of 'personal empowerment', as developed in the empowerment groups, led to implementation of changed practices by the women in their different life domains. A different level of implementation was found in the various circles. The study revealed that women's learning throughout the 'personal empowerment' process facilitated women's identification of, and ways of dealing with factors related to both advancing and halting their development and practice.

The picture as revealed from the women's subjective perceptions of their 'personal empowerment' enables insights into the world of 'ordinary women' in the 'Post Feminist' era of the early 21st Century.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Empowerment groups for women have been a worldwide phenomenon initially in different forms (consciousness raising, women's training and development groups) since the beginning of second wave Feminism in the 1960s. This thesis is built upon the researcher's extensive reading and first hand experience with women's empowerment groups in present day Israel. This thesis ensues from the researcher's exposure, in the framework of her professional work, to the phenomenon of women's empowerment groups that has become widespread during the last decade.

The fundamental intention of the organisations running women's empowerment groups is to promote women through the programme (Sadan, 1997). For their part, many women have proven to be responsive and very enthusiastic to partake in the activities these programmes involve. The enthusiasm of both organisations and women and the researcher's positive experiences with empowerment groups, led to the decision to investigate the work of these groups. This decision stemmed from the desire to understand the phenomenon in modern day in the north of Israel in the context of relevant social and gender-related issues, realms of knowledge and other published studies. The goal was to determine whether and how such activities contribute to and meet the needs of 'ordinary women' in their daily lives.

The research was conducted in the period known as the 'Post Feminist' Era (Rosin, 2000; Creck, 2003). The emphases lie in the Feminist approaches shifting from emphasising collectivist attitudes characterising the second wave of Feminism in the 1960s to different approaches to the role of the individual and uniqueness of women in the current era, the 21\textsuperscript{th} Century, which can be defined as the third wave of Feminism. The first wave of feminism refers to the starting points of the struggle in Europe in the middle of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, although some feminist struggles were earlier in history. But the mass point was at the middle of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, until the 1920s, when American women got their right to vote (Rosin, 2000). Despite the changes in perceptions of Feminism along the years, women still use the process of 'personal empowerment' developed during the second wave. Moreover, these processes are now in high demand by women. It is the researcher's understanding that the empowerment process contains a potential to help women in the 'Post Feminist Era'.
There is a wealth of research about women's groups and the success of women's empowerment groups (Ozer and Bandura, 1990; Stopha, 1994; Al-Krenawii, 1996; Rogers, 1999). It could be argued that no further work needs to be done in these areas. The origins of the researched phenomenon lie in the first years of similar groups as well as other actions and debates around women's equality following second wave Feminism in the 1960s. Much has changed both culturally and socially since those days and in gender equality terms. While much ground has been gained there is a new and pressing need to recognise the significance of women's empowerment groups which have also changed with the times. This research sets out to explore contemporary women's empowerment groups in practice with a particular focus on Israel in general and groups in the north of Israel in particular. The research journey depicted in this thesis focuses on the voices of 'ordinary women' expressing their personal empowerment stories through their own outlook. The research also sought to reach profound understanding of learning and the issues raised in the empowerment process as well as whether this learning leads to a sense of more self efficacy. The research examined the perception of 'personal empowerment' of women who have undergone a process. The research did not presume to assess the ways of implementing what the women had learnt, and certainly did not set out to test their reports objectively since it was not conducted within a scientific, deductive, positivistic paradigm. The materials lie in the main comments and responses collected from the women involved in the empowerment groups under study have been taken as a testimony of their perceptions of reality as they experienced it after the empowerment process. The research, thus, sought to uncover the themes, the issues and the dilemmas that were voiced, and those that were not voiced. They relate specifically to the 'personal empowerment' process of Israeli women in the beginning of the 21st Century.

An additional issue is that of the learning process and its products – the issues arising in the process of 'personal empowerment' and whether it helps to detect factors that halt or advance women in a direction of narrowing the educational and economic gaps between them and men. There is a terminology problem created by the researcher's choice to refer to the research participants as 'ordinary women' insofar as this could seem to suggest that the women in the research are stereotypical. This is not the intention. Despite the
issues around the term, nevertheless, the researcher believes this is the best definition to characterise the group of women on whom she chose to focus.

By using the expression 'ordinary women', the researcher refers to those placed between 'advanced' or highly successful women who have achieved significant breakthroughs and reached high positions in society, and women ranking 'low' on the empowerment continuum – those who are helpless both at home and in society. Much research on women's development either focuses on 'successful' women who break through glass ceilings, or women who have suffered marginalisation and even abuse. Neither of these groups are the focus of the researcher's work here, and the choice of focus on 'ordinary women' makes a significant contribution to knowledge in the field. The researcher did not want to use the term 'women in the middle' as it represents a statistical concept that does not suit this context. The term 'ordinary' is not stigmatic and leaves room for a comprehensive outlook, but still does not rule out individuality. The wide group of participants is in the interim social position, constituting a research focus that has not been sufficiently explored so as to examine its connection to 'personal empowerment'. Women at the focus of the research are concerned with 'empowerment' or 'personal empowerment', in the sense of a "personal process of helping women become much more efficacious" (Sadan, 1997).

These women find the use of the empowerment process to be relevant for them in the social, cultural and personal domains. The 'personal empowerment' process take place within a group of women. This research was conducted in such a group.

Deep knowledge and the researcher's gradually developing recognition following exposure to the written materials, the research literature, support the main argument raised in this study: even today, in the 21st Century, it is necessary to make thorough and in-depth investigations of gender issues and their relationship to 'personal empowerment' of 'ordinary women' and female pedagogy using Feminist research theories and practices.

The majority of empowerment programmes' participants pertaining to this research are working women who raise their children, and cope with daily tasks. Neither outside observers nor researchers who study empowerment would classify them as disempowered women. In contrast, such disempowered women would typically be
out of work, or unrewarded in their work, have low self-esteem, and have not achieved their potential in work and family or life terms. The current research group does not consist of women labelled as suffering from forms of social, physical, educational, economic, or employment barriers. The women in the group are not defined as weak and having to integrate into an orientation programme towards integration into employment and/or social or family frameworks. Researchers in the domain of empowerment tend towards the direction of helping women belonging to the weak socio-economic groups, who need to go through a process for enhancing their self-esteem so as to become more assertive and shift from helplessness to a sense of efficacy (Krumer-Nevo, 2002; Sadan, 1997). In terms of underpowered women who are considered weak, they are such women as single mothers, women suffering from violence, illiterate women, and unemployed women. The women in this research are mostly working women who are well integrated in society. The fact that 'ordinary women' are enthusiastic about participating in the empowerment programme serves as another justification for the need to conduct this research. An inquiry into the phenomenon will hopefully increase the researcher's understanding of 'personal empowerment' and how 'ordinary women' in Israel perceive it. This research also has another aspect, which is how 'ordinary women' living in the third wave of Feminism find the process of empowerment of the second wave of Feminism relevant. These tools help them perform a process of 'personal empowerment' in the group.

This phenomenon might reveal something about the lives of 'ordinary women' coping with questions regarding the reality which they experience via their empowerment as women in society in the north of Israel. These women chose to participate in a process of empowerment leading them to asking questions about themselves, their lives, their environments, thus making them think about their choices, the price they have to pay and the direction in which they are headed.

This knowledge might narrow the gap regarding the perception of reality of 'ordinary women' living in the third wave of Feminism using empowerment processes created in the second wave of Feminism – how they perceive their world and their empowerment.

Another equally important aspect concerns the organisations that develop and implement these programmes, although they will not be covered directly in this study. The researcher believes that there is still much to learn about gender and
'personal empowerment' and what it means for individual women who often encounter prejudice and inequity in their lives.

Another dimension, according to this researcher is the knowledge pertaining to the issues arising from 'women's learning' in the process of 'personal empowerment' in the case of 'ordinary women' as studied in this research. Discussions and the publications of the knowledge gained might expand the extant knowledge regarding the products of 'ordinary women' in the process of their 'personal empowerment'.

The knowledge gained in this research might provide grounds for discussions of women's empowerment in this era. The researcher believes that there is still much to be done in terms of Feminist action in Israel in particular, since the present study explores a local phenomenon in the northern region of Israel.

Israel is roughly divided into three main regions: north, south and the centre. Geographically, there is an inner division according to areas; the term 'between Hadera and Gedera' characterises the difference between Israel's centre and its northern and southern regions, considered as the periphery. This difference mostly pertains to the unjust allocation of funds to periphery: investments, access, investment per resident, salaries and more. This research was conducted in the north of Israel, a peripheral area in the Western Galilee, in the north west of Israel. Empowerment groups were held in cities, although one of the groups held in a city included participants from community settlements in the area.

The concept 'empowerment' was introduced in the 1980's, in relation to social sciences, and it later permeated to other disciplines such as Economy and Management (Sadan, 1997; Cohen, 2004). The concept has gradually become associated with women, mainly based on the definition of women as a weaker group compared to men, and thus on the inevitable need to equip women with tools and techniques that would promote their status and diminish gender-related gaps.

The researcher's professional exposure to materials pertaining to 'personal empowerment', 'adult education' and women, has led to her discovering gaps in the literature in terms of how the phenomenon of the 'personal empowerment' process in a group is seen from an individual perspective covering both 'personal empowerment' and 'women's learning' according to the Feminist approach in the perspective of 'ordinary women' during the Post Feminism era. 'Personal empowerment' is a political claim by men and women not to be prisoners in their
own home and to have the right to do things outside their home and be acknowledged (Ackelsberg, 1988). A more practical perspective is the definition of ‘Personal Empowerment’ as a process through which a woman shifts from a state of helplessness to one of relative control over her life and environment (Cohen, 2004). This shift is expressed in the genuine improvement in the individual women’s ability to control her environment (Sadan, 1997). This research adopts the notion that an empowerment process is ongoing, and as such it is a dynamic process of constant change and different intensities, taking a person from a state of given abilities to one of much improved abilities.

The 'ordinary women' in this research were not helpless, their willingness to go through 'personal empowerment', demonstrate according to the researcher the need and the potential of the 'personal empowerment' process to helps them and might lead to improved control over their lives and environment. To feel much more efficacy at the end of the process from the starting point (Sadan, 1997).

This thesis is written in line with Feminist viewpoint, based on women's own voices, and their individual perceptions of their own learning process during their 'personal empowerment' process. This description provides a 'peek' into the world of 'ordinary women' experiencing a process of 'personal empowerment' in current times. The information and knowledge in this research might contribute to knowledge about the issues and problems which 'ordinary women' face in these days in North of Israel.

The research question and the research design are based on a Feminist approach, with a combination of social, educational, and structural paradigms. These paradigms are drawn from the social sciences and provide explanations about women's place in society. During the structuring of the conceptual framework, the researcher raised several ideas on how to connect the different theories and studies in a way that is relevant to this study.

There is an extensive body of knowledge in literature regarding personal, group and community empowerment (Gutierrez, 1990; Browne, 1995; Sadan, 1997; Krumer-Nevo, 2002; Lee, 1994; Cohen, 2004). Furthermore, there is evidence that empowerment establishes and increases a sense of efficacy and capability in individuals, groups and communities (Lee, 1994; Sadan, 1997; Krumer-Nevo, 2002; Cohen, 2004). The starting point in relation to women's empowerment is working with a group that is 'weak' to which society refers as a 'different'. Studies have been conducted (Solomon, 1976; Parsons, 1988; Browne, 1995; Swigonski, 1995;
focusing on the process of empowering women and other weak groups within society. In relation to women's empowerment, emphasis has been placed on women who require help from social services and women living in developing countries, in order to help them undergo a process that will eventually result in their improved self-efficacy and a genuine change in their personal and social status. Certain approaches have tended towards regarding empowerment as an especially appealing strategy for women (Browne, 1995).

The researcher believes that focusing on women that have made breakthroughs could result in a bias, a misperception of reality caused by the feeling someone think about as a representative picture of women in general. Communication researchers maintain that the dominant image of women in the public discourse is that of a glamorous career woman (First, 2000; Benjamin, 2002). The women who form the basis of the present study are average women who live ordinary lives, each dealing with her place in society. It is this researcher's belief that it is important to explore their viewpoints via the process of these ordinary women's 'personal empowerment'.

The subjective knowledge we can gain from this research in the authentic voice of 'ordinary women' at the specific time of the research can be helpful in understanding the way 'ordinary women' learn their 'personal empowerment' in northern Israel. These 'ordinary women' have some common factors: they come of their own free will; most of them have jobs; they raise children and they cope with their daily tasks independently, in other words without the support of social organisations. These women are a large part of a group termed by the researcher as 'ordinary women', who are under-researched in the domain of empowerment. The researcher believes the current research perspective makes them relevant to the investigation by the fact that the research seeks to identify and learn phenomena arising in the 'personal empowerment' process, which they voluntarily joined. For this reason, the researcher believes it is important to research this phenomenon from a Feminist point of view. The fact that 'ordinary women' in the Post-Feminist era still find the empowerment process relevant for them leads to important inquiry so as to identify the results of their subjective knowledge accumulated during their 'personal empowerment' process. This knowledge, according to the researcher, can add
understanding of the status, the dilemmas of 'ordinary women' in the 'Post Feminist' era, in the north of Israel.

In the period of the third Feminist wave, other voices than those heard since the mid-19th Century to the 1960s – voices that are not as clearly collective as they used to be – going in one direction which women have to follow according to the researcher in order to change women's status in society (Irigaray, 2004). Voices in the third Feminist wave no longer regard reality in black and white. In other words, women are aware that the revolution is behind them. They live their daily lives knowing they might not conquer peaks, and yet, some of them do not seek to get to those peaks. They are 'ordinary women' who go to the group process in order to undergo an empowering experience for a variety of personal reasons. What they share is the choice to undergo a group process, discuss their difficulties, cope with the existing reality and talk about what they have done and what they wish to do as a matter of choice. The realisation of the outcome of the process will be different for each participant, and yet the research examined their subjective approaches to their 'personal empowerment' emerging from their personal experiences. The significance is that women report the change in the way in which they perceive it and their personal choice – not because of external dictations, but due to internal, personal changes.

Unique programmes are designed for Israeli women who have made a decision to advance their career and assume public positions and roles. These programmes are often referred to as 'developing female leadership'. Rosin (2000) refers to the leadership courses initiated by the Israel Women's Network, through which women learn to become leaders, leadership requirements, and how to establish connections correctly. Rosin (2000) refers to several famous Israeli women who have key roles in Israeli politics and are recognised by the entire Israeli public. An interesting point is that Rosin (2000), who represents a Feminist outlook, describes the training activities associated with the advancement and promotion of women. She distinguishes in theory between 'elitist' courses carried out by the Israel Women's Network (A Feminist organisation committed to the advancement of women), also known as 'leadership courses', and what she describes in her book What is Feminism Anyway? as the actual activity of the Network in the end of the year 2000 as 'empowerment courses' for women who live in the periphery. She describes this activity as a "Sort of leadership courses specially designed for women to act for the benefit of their own community" (Rosin, 2000, p. 399).
The researcher believes that a field study would uncover a picture that is rich and far more complex than the one referred to by Rosin (2000) as "sort of leadership courses".

The complexity of the public discourse on women is not only economic, but rather technical dealing with the way that organisations helps women to integrate into them, the services enabling women to work in the community while coping with children, couplehood and careers. The researcher also believes that things are much more complicated in relation to training activities seeking to encourage women to manage their lives and become leaders. Nor is there one clear direction one can point to. The studies that concentrated on women's empowerment have mainly emphasised the process and/or the outcome – personal and group empowerment - as a means of measuring advancement. The present study recognises the importance of this aspect and tries to cope with this question from an individual perspective: topics, thoughts and issues in empowerment and implementation of empowerment from the personal perspective. However, the study also focuses on women's learning, and adopts 'women's learning' as a unique branch of 'Andragogy' which, according to the Feminist approach, is understudied and much less known to the Israeli public. Coffield (1999) claims adult learning is part of a strategic outlook in the category of Lifelong Learning. Although Coffield (1999) refers specifically to England, he describes European studies on 'lifelong learning' of which one branch is 'adult learning'. The perception that underpins the undertaking of actions and involvement in the subject is the importance of knowledge to the establishment of a society that is much more developed economically, socially and nationally, and displays a much more advanced and modern international perception.

In Israel, so far there have not been sufficient professional and scientific studies on adult 'women's learning' as a separate branch of 'Andragogy' according to outlooks based on the Feminist theories discussed by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986), Culley and Portuges (1985), Jordan, Kaplan, Baker-Miller, Striver and Surrey (1991). 'Andragogy' is a theory focusing on the characteristics of the adult learner (Fox, 2002). In the present thesis, these realms of knowledge are integrated through the structuring of a conceptual framework, which is directly connected to the research question, claiming that the Feminist outlook is the most relevant for learning and there are things to be learnt from this outlook in terms of adult learning in general and 'women's learning' in particular. A connection is built
between the various concepts in the study and they are examined in light of the Feminist outlook. The research topics are studied from women's individual outlooks, as it is believed that these represent in the most authentic way women, their emotions, thoughts, and the complexity and many facets of the female entity and nature. The research topics are underpinned by the desire to legitimise and voice women's opinions in the way that women choose to tell their own stories of empowerment, in order to shed light and increase awareness of this on an academic as well as applied level. Following a subjective examination of the thesis a decision was made to adopt a qualitative-constructivist research approach which is the most suitable for answering the research question and the sub-questions deriving from it, and is therefore suitable for the study of gender and empowerment (Rappaport, 1995; Lieblich, 2003; Shkedi, 2003).

The researcher's view is in agreement with the definition of Feminism introduced in the book New French Feminisms (1981): "An awareness of women's oppression-repression that initiates both analyses of the dimension of this oppression-repression, and strategies for liberation" (p. X).

In current times, too, when the Feminists of the second wave have made their statement, we can still find 'ordinary women' facing dilemmas and examining their situation while being helped by empowerment processes so as to reach what they consider a better status in society as a matter of choice rather than a social-cultural dictation.

It is important to hear the authentic feminine voice of 'ordinary women', expressing the entrapment between the collective line and the current situation, the difficulties with which women cope and the essential question where all this leads women.

The present study is divided into several separate chapters. The introduction chapter presents the concepts that underpin the study, the justification for conducting the study, the gap in knowledge, the research questions, and empowerment groups for women.

The second chapter presents the theoretical perspectives providing a detailed explanation of key concepts which contribute to the sound theoretical perspective. The concepts are: Empowerment (particularly 'personal empowerment'), Gender, 'Andragogy' with a special emphasis on 'women's learning' according to the Feminist approach and how it perceives women's way of learning), Empowerment in a group,
and 'social mobility'. This chapter presents in detail the various realms of knowledge included in the study and its boundaries, with specific reference to the gap in knowledge which the researcher has identified.

The third chapter delineates the research method, methodology and research tools, and discusses Triangulation and Ethical Considerations.

The fourth chapter consists of a discussion and analysis of findings, which are presented in categories. The findings also integrate evidence from the researcher's personal diary, which serves as a documentary of the researcher's journey and is presented in the Appendices.

The fifth chapter displays conclusions and applications for future studies and a sub-chapter pertaining to the research limitations.

The present thesis is built on the inductive qualitative-constructivist research method and is judged from a Feminist point of view.

This research is a narrative qualitative-constructivist study using principles of Action-Research and Participatory Action-Research as it pertains to behaviour and subjective perceptions of behaviour. Emphasis was placed on cooperation, and conducting a research from an egalitarian point of view making room for the creation of collaborative knowledge, participants feedback about the findings and the development of a close relationship between the researcher and the participants (Maguire, 1987; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Data collection methods included 16 in-depth interviews with women and observation of 15 three-hour group sessions, a personal diary and finally, an introduction of the findings to the participants, followed by a specific request for their comments. Because the research is inductive the researcher has no intention of drawing general conclusions about empowerment groups and about patterns of behaviour displayed by women based on her findings.

The present study focused on one phenomenon and studied it based on the subjective outlooks and stories of individual women. The researcher wishes to make a point here, that because of her decision to conduct the entire study from a Feminist outlook, she felt that she needed to choose strategy that fits well into the Feminist approach. For that reason, great emphasis has been placed on the unique voices of women, striving to achieve subjective knowledge and recognising its virtue and quality as the foundation for the knowledge that women create. The interaction between the individual woman and other women has also been emphasised to the
same degree that it acknowledges the knowledge that is formed through the interaction between the researcher as a woman and the women she interviewed (Maguire, 1987; Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 2000 in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Lieblich, 2003).

Conclusions are presented following a thorough analysis of the materials and contents which were collected through several conventional methodologies.

This thesis is written in alignment with Harding's (1986, 1987, 1991) approach to the use of scientific tools which underpin Feminist enquiries (Raccover, 1992). It is based on the recognition that precisely because the Feminist outlook is a separate discipline with an independent body of knowledge and theory, it is important to draw on traditional methods and methodologies rather than develop new ways of inquiry. Conducting research in the traditional approach strengthens the Feminist research and knowledge in the eyes of the researcher.

The researcher believes that the qualitative-constructivist method of inquiry underpinning the present study is the most suitable for this research. The readers might be able to use the research perception and findings as a resource and a platform for an examination of the main issues. The issues concern women who make an informed decision to make a profound change in their lives and display a higher degree of self-efficacy through a transition on the empowerment scale. The research suggests various ways of looking at the specific phenomenon of how 'ordinary women' are engaged in the process of empowerment and the consequential learning from an individual female point of view. Hopefully it will lead to an implementation of these in a variety of settings including the work world. Questions may arise, regarding the significance of 'women's learning', the means by which to become empowered, and whether empowerment should be recognised as a unique branch of 'women's learning' according to the Feminist outlook in Israel.

The variety of organisations which develop and manage women's empowerment programmes may benefit from discussing the findings and their implications for and potential contribution to the organisation in promoting its goals. Also, the findings may elucidate the issues that preoccupy women's minds with a view to helping them minimise the effect of whatever factors that hinder progress and to the same degree maximise the effect of whatever factors that serve as driving forces. The issues that emerge from the discussion can serve as a basis for further studies.
1.1 Empowerment Group for Women - Introduction to the Phenomenon

The present study explored the phenomenon of learning while participating in empowerment groups for women in the north of Israel. As indicated earlier, empowerment groups for women have been a phenomenon worldwide and have grown considerably in magnitude and scope during the last decade. The present chapter portrays the structure of the group and outlines the contents of the programme.

The titles of the programmes, which aim at promoting women from one state of efficacy to another, denoting higher self-efficacy, thus empowering these women, are multiple and include, for example, women's leadership, and women's empowerment. The ultimate goal of these courses is to empower women. Another equally important goal of a significant portion of the organisations that initiate and implement these programmes, women's organisations in particular, is to change the balance of power between men and women in society.

As indicated before, the goals derive directly from the initiating organisations, which are also part of a diverse spectrum and include, for example, women's organisations, welfare departments in local authorities, and community work organisations. Empowerment activities are also initiated by municipal women councils, basically apolitical women organisations whose goal is to amalgamate and unite the various municipal women activities into one group thereby promoting women's issues.

The courses are organised by the community and take place in community or municipal centres and clubs, public libraries and other public places. The activities are published in local newspapers, flyers and on billboards. The courses are held in the evenings in order to attract working women and are most convenient for women who have children and can still come after they put their children to sleep, or after their husbands come back from work.

Typically, there are 15 three-hour meetings. As implied by the name of the course, 'Empowerment Courses for Women', emphasis is placed on an individual, personal process of empowerment. There are, however, empowerment courses with a business orientation, which have become increasingly popular. These courses are
often initiated by 'Mati-Business Development Centre' and designed specifically for women, in order to meet the explicit needs of women who wish to establish their own businesses. Studies have repeatedly shown that business women, mainly those who run small businesses, need support groups in order to continue to lever their businesses.

This research sets out to explore 'personal empowerment' programmes. These are basically general courses and are not designed to focus on, or promote a certain issue, for example economics. The contents of the course provide a thorough explanation of the concept of empowerment, and illuminate several key concepts including, for example, assertiveness, group work, how to promote an idea, how to design and build a project, how to get volunteers for a certain project or initiative, how to cope with multiplicity of roles, and some contemplations on self-presentation.

The organisation that initiates the programme is responsible for the contents, together with the course leader. The latter is present in most meetings and is experienced and skilled in instruction and guidance, or in the leading of a personal change, some of which is gender-oriented. There is a notably a large degree of freedom in choosing the course contents and in adjusting them to the goal of the organisation in a given time. Consequently, there is a large variety of 'empowerment courses' programmes, and despite the sharp differences among them, they all place women at the centre, develop a discourse on the status of women and build a process which aims at making women stronger through 'personal empowerment'. This process is carried out in a women's group format. The reason for this is discussed during the course, but only superficially.

Since the women come from different places, much emphasis is placed during the course on the various stages of group development: acquaintance, the gradual building of intimacy and detachment. It is assumed that because the process is dynamic, it inevitably involves a transition from one stage to another, and the course leader administers the process. At the same time, the group gradually consolidates, the women learn more about the other group members, and a group contract is gradually built and based among other things on privacy and secrecy. Being a dynamic process, it requires adequate and appropriate principles and instructing methods. The course is workshop-based and includes simulations,
discussions and diverse activities. The basic idea is to encourage women to participate in various activities.

Since the method of leading the process is complex, the researcher chose to examine the phenomenon through the paradigm of women's learning in addition to observing 'personal empowerment' and its outcome in the eyes of the participants. The fact that the empowerment process takes place in a room where women interact in a way that is different from that practiced in formal learning frameworks, led the researcher to observe the phenomenon of women's learning and raise questions as to the ways of learning empowerment as reflected in the eyes of the women. The researcher states that an open and enabling instruction technique derives from the strong sense of 'togetherness' and sharing which characterise the process. This situation may set the grounds of women's learning. These led the researcher to observing the phenomenon through an additional angle relating to 'women's learning' and its role in the process of 'personal empowerment', examining the issues, questions and topics that arise from this synergy according to the participants.

The present study thus investigates the type of learning, a part of the more general category of women's learning, and its significance to the 'personal empowerment' process. The relationship of these two concepts, and a better understanding of these through learning and observations, is one of the gaps in knowledge which the present study discovered and sets out to explore and fill in.

In the empowerment programme which the researcher observed, she became involved in the insertion of contents of the programme and the placing of specific emphases based on the categories that had emerged from the first stage of the research.

The programme of the observed course was developed in cooperation with the chairperson of the women’s organisation in charge of the programme, the course leader and the researcher. The programme engaged in contents that are always a part of empowerment programmes, such as acquaintance with the term 'personal empowerment', team work and assertiveness. Furthermore, the programme included two more issues the first being 'women’s learning' and its connection to empowerment and the second – Feminism, the place of women in society and its expression in the individual women's life. As mentioned earlier, these issues arose
from the analysis of the interviews and the researcher's desire to understand 'women's learning' in the process of 'personal empowerment'. In this way, the researcher integrated the materials going beyond the regular courses and raised the discussion issues with the women and observed the process. The programme is suitable for individual women as it is constructed for women's empowerment processes.

During this stage, the respondents participated in a 15-session empowerment programme 90 per cent of which was held by the same discussion leader who was later in charge of the empowerment process observed and documented by the researcher.

The programme was structured slightly differently from previous programmes, following an introduction of several changes:

The sessions:

1. Definition of the goals of the training programme, participants' expectations, and the concept of empowerment
2. Women in the Israeli society - gender and status-related issues
3. 'Personal empowerment'
4. Women and their place at work – dialogues
5. 'Women's circles' and a lecture by the Chairman of the Israel Women's Network
6. Women's learning
7. Acquisition of knowledge and how to use formal and informal knowledge
8. Female leadership
9. Women and power
10. How to cope with multiplicity of roles
11. An introduction of participants' personal learning projects and effective feedback
12. Establishment of agreements, negotiation and decision making
13. Feedback
14. Life circles – a multi-dimensional outlook on women – employment and education
15. An introduction of participants' personal learning project (continued) and a summary of the course
The programmes are designed for diverse populations and various geographical areas all over Israel and also in local communities. The programmes and contents taught in one centre may be completely different from those taught in another and serve to help women advance and promote themselves and acquire both the necessary techniques and confidence that would allow them to successfully cope with complicated situations in life. This, in fact, is the common denominator among the different groups – the fact that there is a 'personal empowerment' process in the group framework.
Summary

This research examined the subjective perceptions of 'ordinary women' following a process of 'personal empowerment'.

The research questions focused on identifying the subjective knowledge which 'ordinary women' learn through the process. This learning results in a various themes, 4dilemmas, feelings and thoughts. The research also examined whether a process of 'women's learning' integrated into a process of 'personal empowerment' enables women to identify factors that enhance or impend their progress.

The use of the empowerment process increased during the second wave of Feminism in the 1960s. Nevertheless, the research took place during the third Feminist wave, when voices differ from those of the 1960s; when women have made major breakthroughs in many domains, and everything seems to be open to personal choice. In this era the research examines the voices and subjective attitudes of 'ordinary women' and their stories of their perceptions of the 'personal empowerment' process they have undergone. This might paint an authentic subjective picture of these women's coping as a result of the process they had chosen to undergo in a group. This research outlook constitutes the main gap issue in this research.

The conceptual framework combines the concepts 'personal empowerment', 'gender' and 'women's learning' as perceived by Feminists. This research adopted the Feminist approach as the leading research approach.

The following chapter will present and discuss the concepts of the research, and the ways they have been integrated into the conceptual framework of this research. The conceptual framework served as a basis for the research method and the selected research tools. The following chapter will present the research approach leading to the selection of the research method and tools.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives

2.1. Gender-Based Theoretical Perspectives

Introduction

The assumption that underpins the present research and is also supported by gender researchers and Feminist writers is that the place of women in society and their occupations are not merely the direct result of their predispositions and personal choices (De Beauvoir, 1949; Hewlett, 1986; Izraeli et. al., 1999; Herzog, 1999; Dahan-Kalev, 1999; Irigaray, 2004). Throughout history women's place in society has been greatly affected by patriarchal structures shaped and dominated by males (Kamir, 2002; Herzog, 2002). These social structures produced sets of beliefs with regard to the 'right state' for women, what women should do and how they should behave and live their lives, and the rules they should abide by (Malach Pines, 1997; Tamir and Ben-Porat, 2002). In some societies male dominance was so absolute that women were unable to make decisions about their aptitudes, skills and desirable courses of development (Helpern, 2001; Elior, 2001; Wolf, 2004). Throughout history, the lives and stories of women have been shaped by their endless struggle to make a transition on the empowerment scale from a state of oppression to the more advanced and desirable state of emancipation, a concept introduced by Freire (1972). Although Freire (1972) referred to oppressed groups in general, women are still considered one of the weakest groups in society (Sadan, 1997).

The rise of the second wave of Feminism in the 1960's came as a response to the reality of women's lives as a group in human society, and based on growing evidence that women were not enjoying the same rights as the majority of the population and their underprivileged stance in terms of equal rights and opportunities compared to men's (Kamir, 2002). Over the years, Feminism has undertaken different directions and courses of action ranging from active social involvement to theoretical contemplation and academic thinking (Kamir, 2002). Today, the discussions and inquiry encompass a variety of viewpoints and stances. Alongside the recognition and awareness of the underprivileged status of women as a group, discrimination against women, and the
price that women were obliged to pay for this rising awareness, some studies refer to the development of specific theories which grasp the uniqueness of the essence of women and its distinguishable features that encourage women to express themselves in a unique way, through their voice, their writing, their way of thinking and motherhood (Cixous, 1981; Gilligan, 1982; Azmon, 2001). These new perceptions suggest that women should not be judged and evaluated in relation to the 'others', represented by males. Rather, one should concentrate on the features that are typical of women and point to their distinctiveness and uniqueness, and the aspects that should be encouraged and strengthened and do not build on comparison or judged in relation to others. This perspective divides the broad term 'women' believing that relation to women should not only include similarities (homogeneity) but also diversity (heterogeneity).

These novel and original outlooks do not contend with, or challenge approaches that place emphasis on discrimination against women or women's underprivileged status. Rather, they suggest a new outlook on women's place in society and the direction to which women should aim as individuals.

The theoretical review presented in this chapter is consistent with some of the perceptions, and introduces a large variety of opinions and outlooks. This chapter refers to the effect that social structures have on the place and status of women and also dwells upon perceptions that emphasise the features that make women distinguishable and unique, which are sometimes perceived by society as a source of weakness. In addition, the chapter includes a precise description of the effect of the structures and systems that serve as barriers to women's development. All the materials introduced in this chapter are related to the concepts that underpin the present study.

The researcher's decision to write in length about this theme indicates her belief about the complexity involved in an inquiry into gender issues, and consequently any discussion would have to be thorough and comprehensive in order to present a broad picture (Kamir, 2002).

The discussion at the heart of the gender-related theories chapter focuses on the connection between the materials and contents and the research question. The researcher is well aware that global review of data may seem inappropriate in a research that focuses on an individual woman. However, it serves to promote an
understanding of the researcher’s fundamental assumption, which stems from her agreement with Feminist researchers that an individual woman’s place in society is greatly affected by social codes and norms (De Beauvoir, 1949; Izraeli, 1984; Rabin and Gur, 2002; Lubin, 2003).

Deriving from this assumption is the necessity to include in the present study trends and policies which bear implications for women and for the research question. These updated trends describe the state of women in general, and demonstrate the still high relevance of studies of gender issues.

An exploration on gender from a Feminist outlook serves to support further studies, elaborate on existing studies and knowledge and create new knowledge. The commitment of researchers who engage in Feminist studies is especially high, as any information that is gained about women and gender and publications in the field of gender promote public awareness and help in getting those issues on the public and academic agenda, thus possibly initiating and taking active steps towards diminishing the gaps between men and women in society.

The researcher claims that initiatives to diminish gaps between men and women in society require active social involvement and a change in individuals towards a more empowered position. Because the relationship between personal and social empowerment is synergic, problems or complicated situations may be resolved in a variety of ways, as the combined use of personal and social empowerment applies to a wide variety of situations and problems (Saleebey, 2002).

This chapter surveys global trends and their implications for women. It also focuses on the relationship between the concept of empowerment and women.

The 20th Century was a landmark and a turnabout in terms of placing Feminism on the public agenda as well as taking action based upon the necessity to change the status of women.

Change is expressed in public discussions of the issue, writing about it and taking action. The main centres of change were in the United States in the 1960s (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1978) and in France. This trend then spread to other western countries (Cixous, 1981, in Marks and De Courtivron, 1981; Culley and Portuges, 1985).

Awareness of women both as individuals and members of a group created the need to make a change. The change was carried out through institutional processes and reforms, the promotion of legislation and collection of data regarding the causes and
magnitude of the male-female imparity towards diminishing the gap. In the course of these developments, voices have been heard regarding the facts that theories rely on examples of white middle-class women (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982), whilst African women, their difficulties and struggles were missing from the Feminist discourse (Chodorow, 1978; Hill-Collins, 1990; Taylor, 1998).

Despite the progress, gaps are still remarkable. Based on OECD, figures of civic participation of Israeli citizens who belong to the age-group of 25 to 54 are 84 per cent for men and 68 per cent for women. This puts Israel in a relatively low place on the scale, compared to Switzerland, which is rated highest and rates of participation of men and women are 97.2 per cent and 77.6 per cent respectively. In the United States rates of participation of men and women are 91.7 per cent and 76.8 per cent and in Britain 91.6 per cent and 75.8 per cent respectively (Adva Centre, 1999).

Worldwide comparative analysis of percents of seats in parliament held by women according to the U.N. Development Agency reports (years 1994 and 1995 and part of 1997, compared to more recent reports on Israel from 1999) shows that Israel was ranked 57th among 94 countries (1997). Women constituted 37 per cent of the parliament representatives in the Scandinavian countries, 18 per cent in the Western and Southern European countries and 7.5 per cent in Israel (Adva Centre 1999). These findings indicate that in Israel as in many other countries women are still very much underrepresented.

Based on U.N. reports, representation of women in the Legislature and Cabinet also ranks Israel in the 84th place among 170 countries (1995). Here, too, Israel is seriously lagging behind the majority of the countries. In Scandinavia, for example, the average rate of women’s representation in the Legislature and Cabinet is set at 40 per cent, 21 per cent in North America, 14 per cent in Western and Southern Europe, 13 per cent in the industrialised countries, 8 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 7 per cent in Africa (south of the Sahara desert), 6 per cent in Israel and 4 per cent in South Asia (Adva Centre, 1999). Swirski and Yecheskel (1999) point to the discrepancy between the low ranking of Israel according to these reports and the fact that it is ranked 5th, according to U.N reports, for economic product per capita. Furthermore, they claim that discrepancy also exists between representation of women in political life and their representation in the education
system and higher education institutions. While rates of representation are low, Israel is ranked 5th in rates of women's participation in higher education.

One explanation for this gap between high representation of women in the education system, which should have equipped them with the methods and tools to apply in other realms and spheres, and the under representation of women in politics is given by Swirski and Yecheskel (1999). They acknowledge the centrality of the Israeli army and security system given the existential problems of the state of Israel since its establishment. This state inevitably permeates the public sphere. The army is dominated by men and is considered a masculine world. The army serves as a spring board for senior jobs even in civil society. As such it denies women access to politics and government, and the attainment of public status, as opposed to the almost free access that men typically enjoy. As a result, women fail to interact and develop useful contacts with key figures and are therefore left behind. To support this claim, Swirski and Yecheskel (1999) present reports issued by the U.N. which point to a direct connection between the money that countries spend on security and women's representation in politics. Based on the figures drawn from the reports, there is a direct opposite connection between the two, showing that as the amounts that countries spend on security increase, representation of women in the parliament and government decreases. The researcher agrees with Swirski and Yecheskel's claims regarding the centrality of the army and the opportunities that it offers to men, but disagrees with their inclusive statement regarding the tools that the education system has given to women, and the derivative inference that the education system treats men and women equally. The researcher claims that this statement has to be examined as researchers call for a gender based budget allocation, since this perception has to be applied in education as well.

A number of educational studies allude to the existence of genderism in education (Weiner, 1985) from preschoolers to teachers, which also affects the status of teaching as a profession, due to the disproportionately high numbers of female teachers. Herzog (2002) states the Feminist outlook challenges the assertion that teaching is a female occupation. She claims that the explanations provided for the widespread ideas about teaching and teachers are rooted in social mechanisms that seek to preserve and sustain the gender-based hierarchy and males' domination of the labour market. Very often, women choose to engage in teaching simply because
their access to other jobs and occupations is denied. Jenik (2004) states another reason for women's involvement in the field of education, which is the need of Israeli women to fulfil their desire to be mothers and at the same time to have a career. In this sense, education is perceived by many women as the optimal job that allows them to keep both. Because of this perception, teaching is perceived as inferior compared to other professions and is thus underrated. This detailed explanation serves as a prelude to the researcher's argument for the need for a comprehensive outlook on the subject and the distortion and bias that could result from an introduction of data from one point of view even in a gender-based analysis that builds on economic arguments, as was the case with Swirski and Yecheskel (1999). Presentation of facts based on economic and social data would have suggested a much more complicated and intricate picture. In addition to the centrality of the army, there is one more element that affects the state of Israeli women - the centrality of religion. Religion plays a central role in the making of decisions and the setting of national priorities. Jewish religion has formed a clear gender-based thinking whereby religion determines the role and place of women in a patriarchal society where women are inferior and have no access to knowledge and power (Kehat, 2001). This connection between two extremely powerful systems - religion and the military, both of which lean on a clear gender-based hierarchy with macho masculine principles, perpetuates male dominance of social institutions in Israel.

The 21st Century began with economic crises the outcomes of which may expand the already existing imparity between men and women. In recent years a new perception emerged, concerning the economic and social policy of the state of Israel, which calls to limit the control of the state and its intervention in society and economy and shift the responsibility to the business sector. This new perception, originating in the United States and England during the 1980s, has become the official policy of enormous financial bodies such as the World Bank, whose assistance and aid are now conditional upon the adoption of this new policy. The severe cut in governmental budgets has led to a cutback of 18.3 thousand budgeted positions. Given that women comprise 60 per cent of the human resources in governmental agencies these percentages translate into 11,000 jobs previously assumed by women. This cutback includes elimination of jobs and a new policy, according to which manpower agencies take hold of the jobs. Comparative studies of women's employment through manpower agencies indicate that in addition to the already
existing wage differences between men and women, women's rights and wages are further harmed through this new policy, of hiring them through manpower agencies (Swirski, 1999).

The present study investigates a specific phenomenon of empowerment groups for women, with a view to empowering women in a way that hopes to ensure their advancement and promotion. This is the ultimate goal. There are, however, equally important intermediate goals, for instance: to provide women with adequate tools and methods that would allow them to make a breakthrough and penetrate the labour market and the public sphere; to act to promote gender equality, and to help women cope with the constraints and barriers which they encounter. Women must overcome a variety of obstacles before they can achieve gender equality. Women are seen as ones who have to change. Society must change as well, or there will be no advance. From a social outlook, these hindrances relate to the place of women in society, and the fact that society has not done enough to create structures and mechanisms that support women and enable them to manage a career, for instance: the non-existence of solutions for children's absenteeism from school due to illness, long vacations or unexpected strikes initiated by the education system, which become increasingly frequent (Izraeli, 1999).

In her book 'Tipus Nashl' (Achieving Israeli Women Talk about Their Path to Success) Jenik (2004), summarises nearly three years of research on Israeli women who have had successful careers. Some of the findings distinguish the Israeli career woman from her counterpart in the west. Israeli women try to "have it all": marry, have a family, raise children, and invest in their career paths. Although their husbands are very supportive and display profound respect for their wives' ambitions, they do not (for the most part) take over family responsibilities. Jenik (2004) states that successful Israeli women still encounter many organisational obstacles: They are under-utilised, under-represented in executive positions, and earn about 30 per cent less than men for comparable jobs. Most have experienced the hardship of being the "token woman" in a man's world.

They have to balance their need for power and position with "feminine" behaviour - or else they are chastised for being "bitchy". The struggle to break the Glass Ceiling places the Israeli career woman in a very lonely position – having almost no mentors (seeing that men shy away from mentoring women).
And they also have the "second Shift" – all the extra load of managing the family and taking care of the children all (http://www.haderech.co.il/book.html)

Jenik’s (2004) description of the obstacles that Israeli women typically encounter, which refers specifically to successful women in Israel who had made a breakthrough, becomes even more important and significant when the case involves women who failed to climb up the hierarchical ladder and make their path to success, who cope with these barriers and obstacles from a much inferior position. To describe women who aspire to make a successful career, Jenik (2004) used the image of salmon swimming against the current and climbing up rock-strewn creeks filled with obstacles. Jenik's (2004) metaphor is reinforced within 'ordinary women' who are the focus of this research. The researcher believes that while women who have made breakthroughs are still coping with unique difficulties that women have to face, 'ordinary women' in the interim situation encounter more difficulties in their desire to change their position in life. This research focuses on a group of women who chose to engage in the empowerment issue. According to the researcher, the 'personal empowerment' process in the group enables women to reach significant knowledge about dilemmas, issues, thoughts and feelings that occupy them. The variety of issues that came up during the process will reinforce Jenik's metaphor via the difficulties and issues 'ordinary women' cope with while they are trying to move 'against the tide' and make their way in a small stream in order to eventually reach the big current.

Another obstacle is rooted in the social perceptions that separate the family from the market. Izraeli (1999) quotes Bourdie (1993), "the family is a place where the standard rules of economy do not apply. Unlike the workplace, to which people come specifically to earn money and produce materialistic benefits, the family is where the ruling ideology is the lack of interests" (Bourdie, 1993: 12). Izraeli (1999) believes that this is partly the reason that the world of family directly related to women, and the world of work and paid jobs strongly related to men, are built and structured as two opposite worlds. Fletcher (1999, in Izraeli, 1999, p. 181) suggests a graphic presentation of the differences in perspectives between the private and public domains:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Public Domain</strong></th>
<th><strong>The Private Domain</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work is imperative, something that needs to be done</td>
<td>Work is something that you want to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The motive is money</td>
<td>The motive is love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid job</td>
<td>Non-paid job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis placed on rationality</td>
<td>Emphasis placed on emotionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract and Intangible</td>
<td>Concrete and Real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specified time range</td>
<td>Non-specified time range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The product: negotiable goods, services and money</td>
<td>The product: people, social relationship, establish a community, attitudes, values, Eliminate tensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The context of differential rewards</td>
<td>The context of creating a collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual-oriented</td>
<td>Community oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary skills can be taught</td>
<td>Necessary skills are innate and inherent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work not seen as too complicated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These limitations are relevant to this research as it engages in 'ordinary women', who are not defined as 'breakthrough makers', and although career women also encounter the same problems, 'ordinary women' are under more stress in terms of their empowerment.

Empowerment groups have developed during the last decade as a mechanism by which women are inspired to deal with inequality and discrimination with a specific intention to provide them with adequate tools and methods that enable them to cope with the obstacles they face (Kieffer, 1984; Lee, 1994; Sadan, 1997).

Empowerment groups are built and activated by women's organisations, regional and municipal women's councils and welfare departments in local authorities. Some of these are advocating organisations while others are state organisations and/or associations sponsored and supported by the state and a variety of social institutions. The significance of these public and governmental agents lies in that they were the ones to envisage the enterprise/idea and the underpinning ideology.
The ideologies that serve as the driving force for the promotion of various empowerment groups are numerous; for instance: community workers working at the social services departments in the local authorities are doing this as part of a strategy that calls to empower weak groups in society or an opposite approach reinforcing those who are strong in the community according to an ideology maintaining the strong attract the weak and strengthen the community.

Women's Councils activate empowerment groups based on the mandate they receive from the local authorities to promote the status of all women in a community and the lion's share of women's organisations are advocates of the Feminist perspective. Women's empowerment groups are gradually seen by a variety of organisations as the operative product of the realisation of the concept of empowerment and how it applies to weak groups in society, primarily women. Underpinning the activity of these groups and organisations is the ideology that a strong and healthy society is committed to the values of equality and social justice, and therefore must undertake the responsibility to minimise gaps between the various groups, including those between men and women. Another principal notion is that a society that has empowered individuals is a strong society which provides for its needs and thereby becomes a stronger, society that maintains mechanisms that ensure problem-solving and synergism between individuals and the community (Saleebey, 2002).

Sadan (1997) states empowerment is predominantly an ideology and an outlook on the world, and only those who are truly committed to its fundamental values are able to focus on the process and practical methods of implementation (p.11). The organisations that operate and manage the empowerment groups have a fundamental belief that through the implementation of empowerment processes women become stronger and more empowered both as individuals and members of a group.

The goal of the empowerment groups is to introduce a change in women's attitudes and demonstrate significantly higher levels of self-efficacy at the end of the process. The researcher wishes to elaborate on the concept of self-efficacy and what it implies for 'ordinary women'. Research and academic literature refer to 'self efficacy' as 'personal empowerment'. The theoretical review in the empowerment chapter provides a detailed explanation of the sources of empowerment and various attitudes to and perceptions of the phenomenon. This chapter focuses on 'personal empowerment' and how it is related to gender according to the views of various
researchers, including that of the writer of this thesis. In addition to a brief and focused explanation of individual empowerment based on theoretical literature, the chapter introduces relevant studies held on women's empowerment.

Perception of the concept of empowerment in the present study builds on a variety of researchers, primarily Sadan (1997), an Israeli researcher who conducted studies on the subject of empowerment and published a book, *Empowerment and Community Planning*. This book, which is an elaboration of her doctorate thesis, is still seen in Israel as the ultimate and essential handbook that provides a comprehensive and detailed explanation of the concept of empowerment and its roots.

Sadan (1997) states the concept is dynamic, and encompasses the individual, group and community level. According to Sadan (1997), these levels are interconnected. She also believes that empowerment profoundly changes women's evaluation of their ability to cope with society and the environment.

Sadan's (1997) principal assumption is that a person's life is shaped not only by heredity, genetics and the conditions in which they were raised, but also, and equally important, by the experiences and opportunities that the environment provides. Among these experiences and opportunities particularly important is the ability to make decisions and act to achieve goals. This ability (or lack thereof) has a direct effect on the degree to which they become effective players in the show otherwise known as their life (Pinderhughes, 1983; Sadan, 1997).

According to Sadan (1997), empowerment is an interactive process taking place between an individual and the environment, and marking a profound change in the individual from perception of self as worthless to a new outlook on the self as an assertive individual with evident socio-political virtues. Embedded in the process of empowerment is an external but also interior change. The interior change is manifested through the belief of a person in their ability to make decisions and solve problems. The external change is demonstrated through an ability to act and implement the practical knowledge that was gained, the information, the new skills and competencies and the new resources which they acquired in the process (Parsons, 1988).

The phenomenon which is the subject of the present study, women's empowerment groups, is built on the programme organiser's assumption that through the acquisition of skills, tools and methods of creating a change in self, are women able
to take active steps to introduce the external and interior change indicated by Sadan (1997). The present study deals with the operative realisation of individual empowerment, with specific questions posed regarding the way in which women implement the change in accordance with their individual perceptions. Is it true that, in line with the views of Parsons (1988) and Sadan (1997), women are interested in making decisions about themselves, identifying the exact elements in their near environment which serve as obstacles and those that serve as facilitators with specific reference to the knowledge and skills that they gained from the process. The researcher considers whether women make an informed choice to act to diminish the gap between men and women in the various life cycles including relation to the work world.

The researcher wishes to emphasise that the answers to these questions will derive from the women's subjective perceptions rather than from an objective examination of the reports or descriptions. The truth this research seeks to find is the subjective truth reported by the participants.

The structure of the empowerment groups for women in the present study coincides with the principles of adult learning also known as 'Andragogy': a process for women which aims at meeting the need of adults for education in a case of this study the women needs. It adjusted to the four crucial assumptions that characterise the adult learner according to Knowles (1996).

1. The adult is a self-directing human being.
2. The adult has gained experience, which is a source of learning.
3. The adult is willing to learn.
4. The adults' orientation for learning shifts from one subject to one of problem centeredness.

These characteristics are implemented in the empowerment group for women, the phenomena researched in this thesis. The observing at the women group from the direction of 'women's learning', its characteristics and integration into the 'personal empowerment' process is part of the gap in knowledge discussed in this research. The concept of 'women's learning' was adopted by the researcher based on a variety of Feminist approaches seeking to place women's learning on the public agenda as a separate domain of adult learning (Culley and Portuges, 1985; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1986; Jordan, Kaplan, Baker-Miller, Striver, Surrey, 1991). The expression of 'women's learning' in this research is that the process focuses on
women and their experience, and the whole atmosphere in the room revolves around women, their thoughts and feelings – an enabling atmosphere. The combination of all these elements extends women's formal and informal knowledge and might make them equally important.

This connection between the training-based process that aims at increasing women's degree of empowerment, and the activation of the process in the format of women groups, corresponds to the statement by Sadan (1997) that the uniqueness of empowerment lies in the integration that it proposes between an individual level of analysis and more far-reaching social and political implications. This integration is also evident in the Feminist view, which argues against the separation between personal and political and states that whatever happens in the life of an individual woman is not only an individual experience but also a manifestation of her social state (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1988).

The separation of the private from the political sphere in relation to women has had several consequences and side-effects: it has led to the definition of women's problems as private, prevented public recognition of their problems and treatment of these problems, separated them from the rest of society and from each other, and through this revoked women's right to live in a community that accepts their views and legitimises their perceptions. Their isolation and seclusion and remoteness from political sources of influence became a permanent state. The entire public sphere was under male dominance and women were and still are associated with the private realm, more specifically their home and family (Sadan, 1997). This situation drives women to take part in the empowerment process in order to confront the obstacle they phase. The fact that the 'personal empowerment' process is undertaken by a group of women adds another dimension to their individual power.

The present study was interested, in addition to women's subjective feelings about their individual empowerment, in other elements, which emerged from women's stories of empowerment and their perception of the place and significance of the group of women.

Literature on empowerment suggests that the product of learning through a 'personal empowerment' process is the development of critical awareness. Sadan (1997) asserts that critical awareness refers directly to the process by which people increasingly gain an understanding of the social and cultural reality that shapes their lives and their ability to change reality. Van Den Bergh and Cooper (1986) state that critical self-awareness suggests people's recognition of the need to give a name to
their experiences, to speak in their own language and voice and to call by name the various components of their world. This definition accords with the present study's intention to reveal women's subjective code and encourage women to speak in their own voice about their perception of the components of their world.

The principal research question seeks to reach a profound understanding of the learning and issues that women raised in the empowerment process as well as whether this learning leads to a sense of more self efficacy. Another question regards the implementation of this learning in the different life domain according to the women subjective perception.

Empowerment groups may seem somewhat naïve, given the power of global trends and decisions made at a local level. However, the researcher claims that the ideology which lies beneath the empowerment groups challenges the existing order by developing a person who gains power and challenges the social order. The researcher refers to it as developing 'critical awareness' (Kieffer, 1984; Gutierrez, 1990; Freire, 1973). Another term which relates to the sense of self-efficacy is the term 'agency', the right of an individual to control their space as to become an agency for him or herself (Findley, 2005). Bandura (1989) who coined the term 'human agency' to describe self-referred behaviours, connected self-efficacy and locus of control as contributing to the notion of agency (Lennings, 1994).

This change in the individuals indicates the power and ability of the individual woman to make a change in her immediate environment based on self-efficacy, which may lead to her decision to act for herself from an empowered position. The assumptions beneath the empowerment theory are that an empowered individual contribute to himself and to its surrounding (Sadan, 1997). She or he becomes a citizen with a political notion and changing orientation. Those who accept Sadan's (1997) view must also recognise that empowerment can eventually lead to women's engagement in the political sphere, as it enhances a person's social understanding and builds a connection between individuals in a similar condition. "Empowerment broadens a person's horizons, instils in them the belief in the feasibility of social change and offers an opportunity for them to make a change" (p. 54). According to Sadan (1997), women's journey of empowerment does not come to its completion at the end of the programme. Rather, women become aware of the existence of additional channels and sources of influence. At the end of the process, women who gained self-efficacy have the potential to influence the factors which they recognize
as as obstacles. These factors seemed at the beginning of the process as inaccessible and unreachable for the women. The phenomenon investigated in the present study is a means by which women can implement an individual process of empowerment. Sadan (1997) referred to the significance of the group in promoting meaningful learning maintaining the group in a perfect environment that helps increase awareness, mutual assistance, development of social skills and the exercising problem-solving and interpersonal influence.

Kieffer (1984) states that individual empowerment alludes to the influence of the group, which promotes the establishment of a peer group in an organisational-collective structure. It also suggests the existence of a relationship with an instructor/tutor and how this relationship builds a significant and meaningful experience. Participation in a group is an ideal (though not exclusive) way of encouraging individual empowerment, because of the unique contribution of the group to the participants, which includes emotional and social support throughout the process, concrete help to other members of the group and the acquisition of new skills, including an ability to engage in public activity in the future (Dodd and Gutierrez, 1990; Cox and Parsons, 1994).

In drawing conclusions about the importance of the group in the process of empowerment researchers referred to both men and women (Dodd and Gutierrez, 1990; Cox and Parsons, 1994).

De-Castillejo (1973) and Bolen (1984) dwell upon the place and importance of the group for women. They posit that women need to discuss things in a group and to consult other women, because they gain power through this process as their thoughts, queries and doubts are recognised as legitimate. The researcher was interested in finding out just how much the group is seen as a source of power, and the weight that is given to the group of women, from the participants' point of view.

The establishment of empowerment groups and the conduct and management of these groups by socially oriented non-academic organisations with a distinct and clear institutional or social role, stem from several different roots and directions. Some organisations embrace an ideology that supports women's promotion and the diminishing of gaps between men and women, an ideology that rests on the Feminist outlook. Others represent an ideology that seeks to improve the state and status of weak and underprivileged groups, and women definitely fall into this category. This institutional act creates two mechanisms of change: the first relates
directly to the organisation and execution of activities, a change that is initiated by
the organisation and goes down to the individual level. The other is a change
initiated by the empowered individual and gradually encompasses the various
systems with which the individual interacts.

The researcher states that a change that comes from two directions – top-down (a
change that begins on an institutional level and goes down to the individual level)
and bottom-up (a change that begins with an empowered individual and climbs up
the organisational hierarchy) entails a comprehensive and valuable potential for
change.

Swirski (2002) referred to two other trends that have severe implications for Israeli
women. The first is the cutback in social services: governmental budgets that are
allocated to women, including child allowance, old age pension, unemployment
compensation and income assurance. The second is the further cutback in the
central social services provided by the state, including education, social and welfare
services and health services, which increased the burden on women who had to take
responsibility for their children and were therefore unable to work in jobs and
workplaces that demand long hours or full-time jobs.

Researchers and organisations with social orientation analyse economic trends and
disagree with the assumption that economic decisions allegedly affect everyone in
much the same way (Swirski, 1999; Swirski, 2002; Swirski, Kunur-Attias, Swirski,
2003). However, gender studies serve as evidence that the decisions made
predominately affect women (Izraeli, Friedman, Sc rift, 1982; Izraeli, 1999; Swirski,
1999; Swirski, 2002; Swirski, Kunur-Attias, Swirski, 2003). Israel was built by
immigrants. In the first years of the State of Israel (1948), women had struggled to
take an equal part to that of men in building and settling the country, which was
supposed to be built on egalitarianism (Friedman, 1999; Zohar, 2002). Very soon,
Israel found itself in a position where it had to struggle for survival and protect itself
from enemies. This struggle had set the central role of the military in civic life and
the adoption of a 'male code'. As a result, women were in the rear while men were
in the forefront of decision, allocation of revenues, income and promotion. Women
were seen as the backup, and their job was to support men. Although during the last
decade the gap between men and women has diminished to some degree, things
are still the same as before, and the number of women who work in areas and jobs considered weak or undesirable is still much higher compared to men.

It is this researcher's belief that Feminist movements, and the initiatives and actions undertaken by its members, have made a noticeable change and introduced impressive accomplishments. However, there is still much to be done in order to significantly increase the number of women in key positions and make changes in policy towards more equality, particularly in Israel – given the context explained above.

A wide variety of organisations engage in activities and initiatives which aim to diminish the gap between men and women, but each takes its own course and comes from a different background and espouse a different ideology, so there is no uniform trend or course of action, which is imperative for the introduction of a meaningful and powerful change.

There is an Israeli Prime Minister's Advisor on the Status of Women and a Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) Committee for the promotion of the Status of Women. The goal of this committee is to promote and lead legislative acts of egalitarianism. Although actions are being taken to achieve equality, there is still much work, and Israel is still far from reaching the levels of equality and egalitarianism of Sweden, for example, which takes immense steps towards gender equality.

Israeli Feminists benefit from the accomplishments of the Feminist movements in other parts of the world and from the dialogue which takes place and in the meantime maintain a unique local version of Israeli Feminism. Izraeli (1999) states as a multicultural immigrant society, which for many years espoused the values of unity, uniformity and assimilation within dominant groups in society, Israel has created a culture of subjugation and power relations. Izraeli (1999) claims Israeli society has only recently begun to cope with multicultural, multiethnic and multinational issues, including a definition of the exact place of women in it. Izraeli (1999) asserts women still do not feel comfortable showing their identification with and commitment to the Feminist movement, and therefore not too often do women organise around issues pertaining to their status.

The present study addressed the state of affairs described by Izraeli (1999) and examined the contribution of the women's empowerment group from a subjective point of view. The study examined whether the group increased the participants' identification with the promotion of Feminist goals and issues as well. It also
examined whether empowerment groups adjusted to women's needs. Women's responses to the group are in line with the approach advocated by Izraeli (1999) concerning the women's clear preference to act on a more individual level and to refrain from involvement in public struggles on equality, or in other words, women seem to support a more active course of action.

It is the researcher's opinion that it is important to examine what happens in the junction between the needs of organisations to apply their policies and the needs of women expressed in their response to the call to participate in such empowerment courses.

The desire of women to participate in the empowerment group and their responsiveness serves the needs of both sides. The present thesis attempted to pinpoint the motives and forces that drove women to participate in the course through women's individual and personal stories and to determine what they gained from the course according to their own views.

Simone De Beauvoir's book 'The Second Sex' (1949) serves as the ideological foundation of the Feminist theory, as it coined the gendered concept of 'The Other', indicating the perception of women as different by society. Men were believed to be the objects and the women were thus the subjects.

De Beauvoir (1949) claims that socialisation rather than sex is what makes woman a woman. This expression became the mainstay of Feminists. During the 1960's and 1970's millions of women had protested against their role and perception by society, a process that was marked by group organisations and acts of protest against the system which they called the patriarchal structure of society. It was an awareness of this personal oppression and castration that gave rise to the central notion that underpins Feminist thinking - "The personal is political" (Rabin and Gur, 2002).

The state of Israel was built on egalitarian and socialist vision and values, which, according to Izraeli (1984) were also extremely 'masculine', reflecting the admiration of power and strength, and the ability to cope with problems, to conceal emotions, and not show weaknesses. Women accepted this set of values in order to be seen as equal, but felt that they could not adjust. They therefore asked to receive back some of their traditional roles as women. This claim by women was not made from a position of power. Rather, this was an act of concession (Izraeli, 1999). This story illustrates how a woman becomes a woman through socialisation, according to De-
Beauvoir (1949). Israeli women's attempts to integrate into society through self-adjustment to the 'male code' and their decision to give up eventually, have led to women's attempts to look for individual equality in the near environment. The present study investigates these attempts through an examination of individual women's perceptions of the changes in their immediate work environments following their participation in the course and with specific reference to the question of whether the empowerment course may serves as a mechanism by which to diminish the gaps between men and women.

Feminist theories attempt to understand the continuing gender inequality. The theories that were built in order to identify and explain the gaps differ in their underlying rationale and the disciplines which provide an explanation for differences between men and women in society.

Post-modern disciplines that emerged in the last decades criticised the Feminist theory on the grounds that it has fallen into a trap of categorisation and that the central theories that developed apply only to white middle-class women (Creck, 2003).

Rosin (2000) maintains that embracing a 'Post-Feminist' stance is a matter of personal preferences, style and choice. The main idea in Post-Feminism is that each woman should live by her choices and let other women live by theirs. Rosin (2000) states there is no sisterhood, only individuality. She quotes Keren Lerman, the author of the book 'Lipstick Provido': "This continuing need to turn every subject into a matter of politics, including subjects which are at least in my eyes personal takes responsibility off women's shoulders and impose it instead on society and the government" (In Rosin, p. 316). Lerman (in Rosin, 2000) refuses to accept the declaration by the Feminist movement that 'personal is political'. She believes that everything today is about self-confidence and self-esteem. The Feminists victimised women and the Post-Feminists emphasise their power positions. The researcher claims that any inquiry into the state of women must take into consideration a variety of aspects. For example, an individual woman who wants to manage a career and thus has to stay at work for long hours needs a support system, otherwise her plan becomes unfeasible, so this is not really a matter of free choice. The still unregulated relationship between men and women in society affects mainly women. A gender-based inquiry into women's integration into the labour market and the way
in which decisions are made about segments of the population shows that gaps between men and women still exist.

In the current research group of 'ordinary women', participants choose to perform the process of their 'personal empowerment' in a group. Despite statements made by Rosin (2000) regarding the individual orientation and the notion that there is no 'feminine sisterhood', in practice, women still seek empowerment and find answers to their needs in empowerment groups. This research may shed light on these groups' influence on individual 'ordinary women' and the fact that in the daily life, such a group is found to be a great support in the process of 'personal empowerment'.

The researcher argues that women have the power, the ability and the responsibility to change their status in society and it would be wrong to place the responsibility for the inferior place and status of women entirely on social structures. In the researcher's opinion, women have taken active steps towards 'personal empowerment' and the present thesis serves as evidence. However, important as it may be to encourage women to develop their individuality, the responsibility is not only women's. Efroni (1998) points to the necessity to combine the individual and collective, based on the fact that Israeli women are not seen as the main breadwinners. Efroni (1998) presents figures according to which 70 per cent of the people who receive minimum wage are women, and this is because women are traditionally and typically found in low-ranked, low-paid jobs. Also, because of the wages discrimination, women are paid on the average 30 per cent less than men for comparable jobs. According to Efroni (1998), this state derives from the implicit assumption that the majority of low-ranked employees affected by this discriminating policy are women, which explains the social legitimisation of this discriminatory policy. The words of Efroni (1998) illustrate the need and the relevance of an inquiry into gender issues and the undertaking of practical actions. The researcher claims that on the individual woman's level, the ability to change policy is limited without a group lobby, hence lobbying and group work are imperative. At the same time, the present study is based on individual women's points of view. The study explores women's choices regarding the areas in which they wish to implement the new knowledge. The research examines through women's narratives the nature of the relationship between them and the process of empowerment with specific reference to the contribution of the process to the
women's breakthrough. Breakthrough can be achieved, according to the researcher, by combining the individual empowered women with collective actions of women. That means a combined action of the two approaches to Feminism: individual as the Post-Feminists assume and the collective action as in the second wave of Feminism.

The psychology discipline has made a long way in terms of its perception of and reference to gender issues. The researcher decided to introduce the principal perceptions and landmarks as she believes that social and psychological disciplines have had a remarkable influence on the status of women and the overall outlook on women and femininity.

In the theories that he developed, Freud (1948, 1954) described women in terms of their anatomic deficiency instead of in terms of what they do possess in their body and soul. Freud believed that the fact that women lack a penis has made them deformed and inferior. He argued that for this reason women who are suffering from penis envy are usually masochistic and narcissistic and also have inferior consciousness since their super-ego is not developed in full.

According to the Freudian psychoanalytic theory a talented, skilful woman who is also confident in realising her skills and intelligence suffers from a "manliness complex". Freud (1948, 1954) claimed that excellence in women is the result of either a manliness complex or denial of reality. He also argued that any woman whose sexual activity is equal to that of men is unable to enjoy her sexuality or to express her sensual nature. She behaves in a compulsive manner to alleviate her fear of castration. Freud's perception of the essence of women as the product of autonomic deficiency and its implications for the state of women contradicts the conceptual framework of the present study. The main question in this research engaged in the issue of the woman's efficacy following the process of 'personal empowerment', and the issue whether a woman can apply this empowerment better in the different life cycles including the work world. The research engages in 'personal empowerment', meaning the significance of the transition from one empowerment state to another, better one, which has something to offer and to contribute and not one of emptiness and deficiency. The researcher claims that the explanation provided by Freud (1948, 1954) is a good example of the effect that the process of socialisation had on women, as in the past this socialisation could have served as an obstacle to women seeking to realise their wishes to advance to higher
capabilities states; these theories have probably affected women, and not their gender, as De Beauvoir (1949) claimed.

Over the years, Freud's doctrine had been taught to generations of professionals and practitioners, who became enthused advocates of his ideas. Naturally, his many advocates did not necessarily believe that women deserve to promote their status and perhaps this doctrine was partly responsible for the development of prejudice. Many Feminists have challenged and criticised the writings and work of Freud. Rosin (2000) relates to the words of Weistein, a Harvard University psychologist, who said that Freud is to be blamed for concentrating on features and characters instead of social contexts. She also criticises and complains about the inability of psychology to offer an insight into the questions of who women are, what they need and what they want. Gilligan (1936) criticised psychology for developing models based on a masculine prototype, which implies male dominance, and attempting to shape women according to the male model. According to psychology, the gaps between the female experience and description of human development serve as evidence that women have not developed properly. The New French Feminists (1981) assume that the symbolic "father language" is masculine. Cixous and Irigaray (1981) disagree with the added value which De Beauvoir attributed to symbolic language. According to Irigaray (1991 in Azmon, 2001), the womanly body in Freudian theory is lacking. She maintains the woman's body consists of erotic pluralism, a body that is all erotic. This Feminist literature discusses women's silence, lack of representation of women's bodily experiences, of their actions and relationships with others from their own point of view. The French Feminists cope with the meaning of women's silence – does it exist or do women use another voice which does not count as "speaking" and does not have room in the public agenda, where the masculine language rules? Cixous and Irigaray (1981), known as the "French Feminists" accept the claim that women's silence is a different type of expression which has no verbal representations as those of the masculine language, and hence is not accepted as a language. In other words, a woman is a creature that has consciousness, but this consciousness is expressed in a different language. Cixous (1975 in Azmon, 2001) takes one step further in acknowledging the existence of a different language. Researchers claim that Cixous and Irigaray's thinking led to further isolation of women from the language, the symbolic order and the culture.
Kristeva (1976 in Azmon, 2001) focuses on the unique discourse concentrating on the speaker, without gender categorisation.

Contrary to Freud, Carl Jung (Storr, 1992) believed that women were not castrated or deformed men. Instead, he believed that every male possesses a female side which he calls the anima, while the respective archetype for the female, i.e. the maleness principle for the female is the animus. Jung believed that the female personality is characterised by several attributes: acceptance, passivity, nurture and subjectivity (Storr, 1992). The male personality, on the other hand, is characterised by common-sense, spiritualism and an ability to act in a decisive and impartial manner. Women with personality attributes identical to those of men who demonstrate wonderful attainments possess extremely developed male animus which is much less conscious to begin with, thus inferior to that of men. Women's animus may be hostile, forceful and unreasonably assertive. Jung believed that the creative drive of women and their ability to think and act objectively are inferior to those of men. He perceived men as creative people and women as the assistants in this process of creation. Hence, any woman who assumes a typically male job and works or studies in a similar way to men behaves in a way that is not in line with and sometimes even contradicts her feminine nature. According to these male oriented theories, Rosin (2000) relates to Freud and his sexual theories published in 1905 and women's sexuality in 1931. She perceives Freud as responsible for some of the greatest crimes against women, mostly pertaining to the perception of women as morally inferior to men and to the fact that women's femininity had been usurped from them. Despite these perceptions, female researchers have studied feminine issues and provided different understandings, as described earlier.

Despite the difference in opinions between Freud (1948, 1954) and Jung (Storr, 1992), both provided explanations about the inferior status of women. Both believed that women's desire for promotion is inconsistent with their nature or indicated a sexual deficiency. Both provided explanations for women who want to make a breakthrough, but different ones. Freud explained this through something that women lack. Jung explained this through surplus (in the sense of higher than normal representation) of animus, which is, needless to say, 'masculine'. For some reason, the motives for success in men need not be explained, but women's motives for success demand an explanation. The present thesis concentrates on an activity that is only available for women, because men are not the target population for
empowerment programmes, precisely because of these early social perceptions of women by Jung, Freud and many others, erroneous perceptions about the fundamental need for men to succeed in their life and career and to advance, hence the superiority of men and the subjugation of women. According to the researcher, this perception which is rooted deeply in society has led to the assumption that men have no need for empowerment programmes.

Female psychologists and psychiatrists began to develop female orientated psychology and provided explanations about the differences and/or imparity based on the specific therapeutic theory which they espoused and out of the shared belief that theory is simply insufficient in providing an explanation of the female existence and essence of women (Bolen, 1984; De Castillejo, 2000).

The works of De Castillejo were published in the 1960s (1967). One could also point to the works of Gilligan who first published her book, *A Different Voice* in 1982, and Chodorow who set out against masculine bias in psychoanalytic theories in 1974. They sometimes rejected the very foundations of the theory as was the case with Freud and Jung. However, all of these psychologists and psychiatrists were women who wrote about women and offered, instead of a one-sided view of the phenomenon, an integrated view that contained internal and external elements. Their well-thought-out professional attitude towards women consists of several elements: the professional approach, society’s point of view, self-perception and their own experience as women. It is believed that only by joining these elements could one fully grasp the essence of women and ways to achieve self actualisation and fulfilment (De Castillejo, 2000; Talpaz (2000) in De Castillejo 2000; Bolen, 1984). Female psychologists and psychiatrists explain the differences between men and women based on the unique features of women and the qualities embedded in them rather than the things that they lack and need to achieve. Their explanation is built on an understanding of the essence of women rather than how women differ from the prototypic male model.

According to De Castillejo (2000), there are three barriers or obstacles involved in the meeting between the masculine and feminine. The first indicates a difference in levels of consciousness. While the female consciousness is scattered and constitutes part of the perfection of nature, where all things are interrelated, the male consciousness is more focused, and enables men to phrase ideas, to change, invent and create more easily. In general, the masculine attitude to life is more focused,
and it is easier for men to make changes, while the feminine attitude is more responsive, aware of the importance of unity and relationships-oriented. Masculine and feminine characteristics exist in both genders, but the dominant awareness of each is different, and even unaware of the existence of the other consciousness. While an over-scattered consciousness in women could cause paralysis and an inability to act in the external world, an over-focused consciousness could lead to the disappearance of the feminine part of a man's personality. The second barrier is role playing. According to Jung the effect of this obstacle is seen when a woman unconsciously gives the masculine part of her personality and her focused consciousness, the animus, permission to speak. In this state, she expresses through her animus collective attitudes that do not reflect her state of mind or feelings.

The third obstacle is that people do not listen to each other. We do not often say what we mean, and at the same time, those on the other side do not really listen. According to De Castillejo (2000) our lack of patience, which prevents us from listening to what others say, is a defence mechanism. Each attitude poses a threat to the other party.

Contrary to De Beauvoir (1949), De Castillejo (2000) believes that women develop the masculine part of their personality relatively quickly and to the same degree, the number of men who connect to the feminine part of their personality, the anima, is on the increase. De Castillejo (2000) argues that the whole issue of gender causes confusion, as we cannot be sure that women are feminine and to what degree men are really masculine. She also claims that given the precedence women give to career and economic independence, they tend to forget that the role of women is to mediate between men and their creative inspiration, to act as a channel through which the treasures of unconsciousness would flow much more easily than if they were not there. The researcher states that De Castillejo (2000) imposes another role on women and, once again, the individual woman and her specific needs become peripheral and secondary to her educational role. In the researcher's opinion, the perception represented by De Castillejo (2000) derives from a desire to find the features that only women possess and make them unique, and not to compare women to men in the real world. Women must be realistic and understand that in order to get equal rights to those of men and narrow the gaps, they must assume key positions in which decisions are made and principles are set, with direct and
broader implications for their equality and/or power, primarily in the work world. Furthermore, the alternative route of finding the qualities and characteristics that distinguish women from men, as suggested by De Castillejo (2000) in her criticism of women who give priority to career and economic independence, cannot lead to the desirable breakthrough; quite the opposite, it perpetuates women's underprivileged position and they march on the spot without moving forward. The researcher claims that real coping implies not women's need to be similar to others, but rather their need to make sure to be in the right place. Women need to be where decisions are made and resources are allocated, and only then will they be able to make a decision about the place where they want to be. If they make a decision to assume an influential position, they must be aware and alert and pave the way for other women.

The words of De Castillejo (2000) receive support from another direction which posits a different view. Hewlett (1986) in her book 'A Lesser Life' examines if the claim that American women are the most liberated women in the world is true. She vehemently criticises the state of American women and the price they pay for their attempts to reach equality. Hewlett (1986) criticises the gap between theory and practice, specifically the gap between the Feminist spirit in light of which students are educated in school and college on the one hand, and the price that women pay for having a career on the other. Deriving from her personal impression based on the many conversations that she held with women, and her own point of view, she arrives at the conclusion that even the most ambitious modern women yearn for children. Hewlett (1986) maintains that they suffer greatly and undergo a prolonged painful experience in order to be able to find the right way for them to live their lives. This leads her to the conclusion that despite their recognisable efforts, they very often draw a blank. Hewlett (1986) claims the reason for this is modern society, especially American modern society, which poses difficulties for women wishing to have a career and family at the same time. The question of the price that women pay becomes very difficult and even cruel. This state of affairs is a painful reminder of the obstacles society imposes on women on the one hand, and women's desires on the other, which demand them to make a choice between various alternatives. Perhaps this last point makes the words of De Castillejo (2000) relevant as they reduce the conflict within these women. The question pertaining to who decides to choose career routes is whether such a situation of getting equal rights will make
women happier. This refers to those women who choose a career course. This significant question will not be addressed in this research, but is significant and compelling for the future of Feminists.

Bolen (1984) states that her knowledge in the field of women's psychology is primarily based on her life experience as a woman, and the undertaking of traditionally female roles as a daughter, a wife and a mother, and also on conversations with friends and women groups. She indicated two other elements that shaped her knowledge regarding female psychology, which had occurred in 1963, just before she assumed her position. The first was the publishing of Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique* (USA, 1963). This book described the emptiness and lack of satisfaction of a whole generation of women who actually lived for and through others. It also drew the American public's attention to cultural stereotypes and manipulations of women by the media. Following the publishing of the book the Women's Liberation Movement and the National Organisation for Women (NOW) came into being in the United States (October, 1966).

The second historical event was the publication of the report initiated by President Kennedy (1963) regarding the status of women, which described the inequality in the American economy.

The theoretical part of this work describes the development of approaches to women, which the researcher believes contributed to the way society relates to women and the way in which women relate to themselves. These descriptions were chosen as part of the research approach claiming that society's influence on the perception of women applies to this day. Nevertheless, researchers of various schools of thought have developed different perceptions of female identity and its components. Since I have described theorists who affected the concepts of 'woman' and 'feminine', I would also like to describe a different approach developed by Bolen (1984).

Bolen (1984), who represents the Jungian theory, claimed that women are affected by strong internal forces, or archetypes, embedded in the Greek goddesses, and also by Feminist outlooks on the external forces, or stereotypes, which represent the particular roles which society expects women to fulfil. These forces support certain goddesses and repress others. Being archetypical, we are familiar with the gods, who represent forms of existence and behaviour which we know from the collective unconsciousness we all share. When women are aware of the goddesses that are
most dominant in them they realise the power of some of their drives, priorities and capabilities and the option of finding personal meaning through choices of which other people may disapprove. These patterns also affect their relationships with men and relationships which are affected by the archetype of certain goddesses, i.e. father and daughter, brother and sister and the like.

While De Castillejo (2000) described the dichotomy in states of consciousness of men and women, Bolen (1984) attributed a focused dominance to the virgin goddesses that represent the part in women that has not yet been affected by the collective, social and cultural expectations set by men and enabling women to concentrate on the pure gist of their nature, values and the things that they consider sacred and most important. According to Bolen (1984), when women follow this pattern they are appreciated for their ability to express themselves and remain loyal to their beliefs in a much similar way to the goddess they resemble or identify with. They neither suffer from a manliness complex, as Freud (1948, 1954) posited, nor do they identify with their animus or take a manly attitude, as Jung (Storr, 1992) suggested. De Castillejo (2000) posits that in this focused state of mind women tend to forget their primary role as mediators, which could lead to the disappearance of the part in them that is relationship-oriented. Bolen (1984) claims that virgin goddesses often live a life that has one dimension, a life of loneliness and solitude, with no significant other in their lives.

The unique way in which Bolen (1984) describes the women's personality and state of consciousness can serve as a key to the perception that the choice is made by women based on their specific needs rather than a social need to compensate for the shortages, the things that they do not possess. It allows the existence of individuality and variance that is so important when we start to place women in categories and build a male-female dichotomy. The researcher states that the achievement of goals by women, their right to decide about their personal way of coping, and the decisions they make whether to join others in a social action or not, coincide with the conceptual framework of the present study, which makes a thorough inquiry into women's individual point of view and through this sheds light on women, their specific place in society and the way to achieve gender equality.

Irigaray (2004), a post-structural Feminist philosopher, argues that the way in which women perceive the issue of egalitarianism and equality is a mistaken expression of a concrete goal, since their demand to be recognised as equal to men suggests the
grounds for comparison. Irigaray (2004) wants to know what the women's basis for comparison is. For instance, do they measure themselves against men, or perhaps they wish to be comparable to men on the wage that is paid to them, or their ability to hold a public position? She wants to know if they measure themselves against some absolute standard and why women should not measure themselves against each other instead. Irigaray (2004) claims that a meticulous analysis of women's aspirations to be equal and comparable to men shows that these aspirations are justifiable only as a superficial criticism of our culture, but are nothing more than utopia as a practical means of liberating women. The exploitation of women is based on gender differences and is solvable only through these differences. Irigaray (2004) goes on to argue that if we followed the Feminist claim to eliminate altogether the issue of gender differences, the human species would cease to exist. Consequently, it is essential to develop specific applicable gender-oriented values, to recognise that both genders are equally important and from a stance of respect for both genders, develop a gender-based culture. She claims that as a society, we lack positive and ethical values which allow two genders belonging to the same generation to live together as a couple and maintain a productive rather than merely reproductive way of life. Irigaray (2004) claims that in comparison with the time when De Beauvoir (1949) wrote her book ‘The Second Sex’ it is clear and understandable today that social justice in its simplest and purest form requires that we balance the power of one of the genders over the other through the attribution (or reattribution) of cultural values to women's sexuality. Irigaray (2004) maintains this is the reason why Feminism has not left its mark in history. In the struggle for equality energy is very often the channelled to the rejection of certain positive values and in fact, the quest for nothing. Irigaray (2004) claims the achievement of gender equality inevitably involves the adoption of a new way of looking at gender as a sexual matter and the rewriting of the social rights and obligations of each gender. Irigaray (2004) believes the goals of women's struggle for emancipation are still closely related to a culture which has no chance of ever achieving female subjectivity. Because of the lack in women of a separate identity, women still fumble about and search blindly for a place they can call their own in this technological era which needs women's resources of energy in order to develop illusions about a better future. Irigaray claims that this process is disturbing and even depressing and denotes women's inability to make a meaningful progression, even if on the surface this diversion of intention is convenient for many. One cannot overlook the strong
and vehement words of Irigaray (2004) who explores women's current place in society and discusses the need for women to constantly deal with their identity as a key to a life that acknowledges gender differences and the distinct culture of women.

The starting point for choosing the current research orientation was the wish to seek a subjective truth, present it authentically within what the researcher considered the central process – that of 'personal empowerment'. The researcher believes that the place where 'ordinary women' choose to engage in their empowerment is where the main issues discussed by Irigaray (2004) raise. A place of empowerment within a group of women leads to a discussion of their personal place as well as their place as a group in society. In addition, it also engages in the direction each 'ordinary woman' takes her empowerment process. That is where 'ordinary women' cope with what is accepted in society and the restrictions they face as individuals and as a group. A process of personal empowerment may set the grounds for discussion of the tools to be used when attempting to progress to a more empowering situation, one of choice and change. The goal is to reach a situation challenging what has been true thus far, leading to another situation out of the women's choice and activities in the desired direction.

The researcher believes that striving for a separate identity of women and womanhood is of great significance and value, especially in a research seeking to present the subjective voice authentically. However, the researcher believes focusing only on the feminine without comparing it to the masculine is taking the risk of perpetuating the women's place in society. This situation might remove women from decision-making positions and where resources are divided. Therefore, the process has to be both internal and external.
2.2. Empowerment-Based Theoretical Perspectives

Empowerment is central to the underpinning beliefs which inform the groups run by the researcher and which are the focus of this research. Perceptions of empowerment reached maturity in the 1980’s (Cohen, 2004). The roots of the concept of empowerment are in the ideology of social action which emerged during the 1960s and the self-assistance perspectives of the 1970s (Berger and Nehaus, 1977; Rappaport, 1981; Simon, 1990; Frans, 1993; Strawn, 1994; Cohen, 2004).

The concept of empowerment was first comprehended, internalised and used in practice in the social and interpersonal realms and by activists who encouraged groups and communities to claim responsibility for their lives and to act. A new realm of knowledge was established, in social sciences, social-community work and other fields pertaining to civic participation. Gradually the concept became usable and part of the vocabulary of other fields and disciplines such as education, psychology and economy.

Unfortunately, the extensive literature on empowerment does not propose a clear definition of the concept. Definitions are traditionally associated with concepts such as coping skills, mutual support and assistance, community organisation, participation in forms of communities and neighbourhoods, self-satisfaction, self-efficacy, talents and self-esteem (Cohen, 2004). Kieffer (1984) believes that all these are closely associated with empowerment but more accuracy and preciseness are needed in order to propose a more useful definition of the concept.

Rappaport (1984, 1985) argues that it is difficult to define empowerment in a positive manner, as it is demonstrated differently by different people and within differing contexts. It is also perceived differently, depending upon the level of diagnosis. It is easier to define the concept from a different point of view – the absence of empowerment reflected through alienation, a sense of helplessness, impotency and lack of power (Zimmerman, 1990; Sadan, 1997).

The word "Empowerment" consists of two words. Solomon (1976) interpreted the prefix "em" as reflection of the desire of the helpless, powerless person to achieve or take control of power (Cohen, 2004).

In order to better understand the concept one needs to engage in a thorough investigation of the individual, his/her ambitions and desires, and those who have authority and power over the individual. Sometimes this requires an enquiry into the meaning of these connections to people, organisations and communities and of the
nature and essence of these settings in situations where empowerment exists or not. The concept of empowerment encompasses one's interests in relation to economic, social and racial justice, human rights and the needs of the entire humanity for health and educational justice. Empowerment may expand in a society whose social policy promotes cultural diversity. However, empowerment as a tool is used by the professional for the weakest groups of society in order to enable the members of these groups to make a transition from a previous state of impotency and helplessness to a state of potency, strength and efficacy. However, intervention must be specific rather than a general, systematic policy implemented in the form of socio-cultural ideology.

Reflecting upon the different definitions of empowerment requires an investigation of how empowerment is expressed in practice by empowered and un-empowered individuals - those who have a significant degree of control over their lives and those who do not. It is necessary for the latter to learn about the mediating structure of transition from one state to another. In order to understand people we must observe people in their different life settings and study individuals in different and specific life contexts.

Development of the concept of empowerment in different societies should be viewed as a continuum. Perception and definition of empowerment will be introduced according to the specific profession in the framework where the concept is used, with many reservations and recognition of the fact that there are similar principles. The basic unique principles that underpin each of the professions will be introduced, in order to prevent repetitiveness. The concept is used in its more general meaning when working with weak populations in developing countries and weak groups within the population in general, such as the elderly, women, the poor, and minority groups. Perception of empowerment depends upon several elements: the specific view, the specific profession and the selected methods of implementation.
2.2.1 Evaluation of Empowerment Based on Social Work

Rappaport (1987) relates to empowerment as a process, a mechanism through which people, organisations and communities gain control over their lives and affairs. Empowerment will be demonstrated differently by different people, organisations and settings.

Dealing with empowerment motivates people to start looking for solutions to different sorts of problems. Embedded in the perception of empowerment is the notion of interests, and is therefore an appropriate subject worthy of theorising. Rappaport (1987) uses the definition of the American Language Random House Dictionary to explain the meaning of the word as consisting of two distinct, separate words – 'em' and 'power'. The word empower has two meanings. The first is to give power or authority to someone, to authorise a person. The other is to allow and enable. The English dictionary (1971) proposes another meaning: to invest with power, especially legal power or official authority, in the sense that people or settings may be empowered for specific goals or intents. Rappaport (1984) believes the process of empowerment may be carried out in many different ways, all of which have in common the intention to activate people's personal and organisational control mechanisms.

Sadan (1997) defines processes of empowerment as ones by which people and groups gain control over their lives, and act to achieve goals they regard as important (Gal and Frisent, 2003). Empowerment theories lean upon the premise that every human being has certain powers and skills which they try to realise (Giddens, 1991; Sadan, 1997; Saleebery, 2002). In order to do this, the individual must have a positive self-perception and most important, a sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Self-efficacy, which is very often perceived as self-capability, pertains to the degree to which individuals believe that they possess skills and abilities that are necessary for an efficient functioning and for achieving one's personal goals in a specific realm of life.

According to the literature, this concept is closely related to the individual's levels of motivation and how well they perform various tasks and encounter a variety of challenges (Gal and Frisent, 2003). Other researchers perceive empowerment as an integrated process taking place on two levels simultaneously: the personal-specific and the social-collective. Staples (1990) argues empowerment is a personal process
that entails development of skills and capabilities, as well as awareness and an optimal self-concept. The individual's personal development derives from and feeds on the social environment and is affected by that environment. Parsons (1991) perceives empowerment as a process that is closely linked to a social setting, one that offers a group of belonging, an opportunity for support, learning and mutual assistance, all of which promote the communication of knowledge, acquisition of new skills and improved existing capabilities (Gal and Frisent, 2003). Solomon (1976) perceives empowerment as a process by which people gain control, manage their environments, learn to define themselves, and cope with the sense of helplessness which derives from a negative self-esteem, bad experiences and belonging to a minority group, or a fringe group, and what this belonging implies.

Kondrat (1995) perceives empowerment as a meta-concept. She leans on Habermas theory of knowledge and adapts it in such a way that it would constitute a meta-educational and epistemological realm of social work that belongs to the process of socialisation of social workers rather than merely an applied technique they are using in their work. Habermas (1975) argues that people hold on to their beliefs about knowledge for reasons other than specific epistemological attitudes. They are guided by their commitment to specific types of human activity and accomplishments. Habermas (1975) joins together two concepts – people's need to know things, and the pragmatic commitment of the actions of individuals around the world. He posits that the cognitive and functional interests of people who engage in specific actions determine how their knowledge of how to use these actions is structured and promoted. He argues that people have three basic needs they employ in order to manage or change social conditions. These are work, interaction and power. Each of these demands has a necessary preliminary condition the effect of a basic human interest. Through work individuals and firms are trying to manage their social and physical world in a way that it would meet their needs and desires. The fundamental human interest is instrumental – changing one aspect of the human environment in order to meet a designated need. Through interaction individuals and groups try to justify and attribute meaning to their collective existence. They are interested in communication, in finding a shared meaning and reaching consensus. Through the exercise of power individuals negotiate and turn their claims into something that is materialistic for society and symbolic resources into something that is legal, and based on their designated priorities. In this state
they are interested in maximising the freedom and autonomy of the individual and
the group to pursue the future that they choose for themselves. Kondrat (1995)
named this interest 'empowerment perspective'.
The researched phenomenon in this study will enable the personal perspective of the
interaction as well as the social and personal issues pertaining to how each woman
perceives her place in society, where she would like to be and how she perceives her
place in relation to other relevant figures. The research seeks to find what is
significant for the participant in the process of her 'personal empowerment', how she
perceives her interaction with the system and people around her, what her priorities
are and where women take their need for freedom.
Empowerment is believed to be productive if it covers the macro and micro levels of
implementation. In the realm to which Habermas (1975) referred to as power, the
functional commitment is liberation, or emancipation. Emancipation is operationally
defined in terms of an action undertaken by people for purposes of disconnecting
and liberating oneself from limits placed upon them in order to exercise autonomy.
The researched phenomenon in this study might suit this definition as participation is
voluntary, and the title of the activity is 'empowerment'. The same is the content of
the phenomenon. The collected evidence might reveal whether women, from their
own perspective, indeed get accustomed to emancipation and liberation as claimed
by Habermas (1975).
The issues arising in the process are relevant to the lives and the constraints they
have to face in the beginning of the 21st Century. The research focuses on 'ordinary
women' who have made some advancing steps in their lives. These women are living
at a time when the Feminist revolution of the 1960s has long been over, but
difficulties pertaining to the role of women in society have not been totally resolved.
Some might even say these difficulties have intensified as women have been
assigned an additional role of sharing the family’s economic burden in addition to the
responsibility to the household.
It is interesting that these days 'ordinary women' choose to participate in 'personal
empowerment', feeling it will enable them the chance to discuss issues and reach a
state of acceptance or a change, but out of their own choice rather than being
forced to accept it.
Measures undertaken to achieve emancipation may well be materialistic, social or
psychological. The emancipation-oriented interest is an expanded meta-interest that
covers the two other interests – the instrumental and communicative. According to
Kondrat (1995) empowerment in terms of the third category of power has the potential to become a uniform epistemological work setting. Functional commitment within this category is emancipatory. Emancipation as a meta-interest means that all the activities included under the category of practical support are meant to ensure that groups and individuals treated by social workers will be free to decide for themselves what their interest is and how they want to pursue it. This is actually the basis for the concept 'empowerment meta-framework'.

If empowerment is defined in terms of self-determination, self-assistance, involvement in community’s life, and an ability to have an impact on decisions made by organisations or communities or interpersonal effect – a direct connection exists between empowerment principles and the emancipatory interest. Once individuals or groups become empowered they become active agents, and direct their lives in a more active way, especially with regard to maintaining their personal needs and objectives. According to this view both the technical effective interest and interpersonal capabilities are means of promoting full-scale participation and personal decisions by individuals within the framework of community life and cannot be purchased at the expense of these values.

Although literature relating to disciplines such as education, adult learning ('Andragogy') and gender studies has investigated the relevance of an empowering and liberating perspective of learning and teaching (Hart and Mechthild, 1992; Hughes and Kennedy, 1985), much is still missing in the field of social work about instructing new practitioners. Kondrat (1995) tried to establish a meta-framework for the training of vocational social workers that is similar and corresponding to the fields of adult learning and gender studies where she believes things are quite different. One of the core perceptions of this research is that people who are involved in empowerment need to have an ideology and also take measures in order to be able to use empowerment as a technique when they work with professionals and clients in each of the realms mentioned above. Having said that, a variety of operative techniques is yet to be established and designed and it is not clear whether empowerment is perceived in the same way by everyone. This research embraces the integration of several theories, as was presented by Kondrat (1995). Integrated theories and Habermas philosophical doctrine are very much compatible with the researcher's perception of empowerment, that is – a method that combines multidimensionality - an intra-disciplinary view.
Saleebey (2002) presented empowerment as an active state claiming it is something that people must discover inside themselves and is not reflected by others. In other words, this is the active state of an empowered object. When people are controlled by others, they are unable to behave in an empowered manner, and they lose their right to be the owners of their inner resources, or to have a degree of control over their cognition, physical state, history and tradition (Holmes and Saleebey, 1993). It is possible to empower one person without having to disempower another (Swift, 1984). It may be argued that this claim should encourage people to use empowerment on a regular basis.

Women in this research experience 'personal empowerment' as a group, and one of the principles in this process is that each woman can be empowered. Furthermore, not only is this process not at the expense of others, but an empowered individual can be an asset to the development of an empowered community, which in turn strengthens each individual in it.

However, embedded in the concept of empowerment are other forces, for example imbalance of power, or a state in which because of their empowered position clients diminish the power of professionals and pose a real threat. Cohen (2003) claims that powerful professions, including advocacy and medicine, are clearly occupations and practices that thwart empowerment. As it turns out, despite their empowered positions, and the powers they have, these professionals do not even consider empowering their clients. The very existence of a "professional language" which only one group, or one side is able to understand, builds inequality and therefore eliminates trust and dialogue between professionals and their clients and does not allow implementation of empowerment (Habermas, 1975; Rappaport, 1985; Sadan, 1997).

The following section presents an evaluation of empowerment based on the medical model as part of the presentation of the broad approaches to empowerment. This approach is described here so as to reflect an opposite approach to that of empowerment suggested in this research.

As mentioned earlier, the phenomenon described in this research is the initiative of organisations that set a goal of empowering individuals, in this case – women; to help women undergo a process of 'personal empowerment'. The help derives from a paradigm believing in empowerment as a process-tool for motivating individuals to make the transition from one starting point to a higher point on the empowerment
continuum. The individuals get to the group voluntarily and choose the emphases, doses and directions of their empowerment. In other words, the empowerment process enables each woman to choose her own implementation. This research seeks to present the insights, emotions and issues that accompany this process of learning 'personal empowerment'.

2.2.2 Evaluation of Empowerment Based on the Medical Model

Hambers (1974, in Holmes and Saleebey, 1993) claims that while social work is located on the more empowering side of the scale, and as a profession it promotes social justice, psychiatry belongs to the medical model, which concentrates primarily on the prognosis of medical problems and pathologies and definitely not on empowerment. According to the medical model, the relationship between the patient and therapist is built on inequality, as one of the sides (the doctor) has the knowledge while the other, the patient, serves as an object that lacks knowledge and therefore depends on the environment. This state of dependence is the complete opposite of empowerment.

The medical model places much emphasis on the expert-client relationship, which implies dependence and a lack of power. The client, who is willing to seek help, is labelled. These premises are part of the medical model that plays a role in society (Palmer, 1989 in Holmes and Saleebey, 1993).

Weick (1983, in Holmes and Saleebey, 1993) states that the medical model demands the patients to grant the assistants the right and authority to treat and cure them. Very often, the nature of the relationship between a patient and a doctor is disempowering in the sense that the patient does not even feel secure enough to describe his or her medical history or experience to the doctor. The researcher argues for the necessity to use empowerment in therapy and make it part of the medical agenda (Hillebrand and Stone, 1986 in Holmes and Saleebey, 1993). These social values become the foundation of the organisational culture, where groups establish a common history through which they can define themselves better. When new members enter the organisation, they immediately undergo a process of group socialisation. Those who do not immediately fit in feel uncomfortable and become the enemy (Schein, 1985 in Holmes and Saleebey, 1993). The experts have a tendency to talk and behave as if they are always correct and accurate in defining the behaviour of their clients. They fail to realise that they are actually performing a political act with serious implications.
It is assumed in general that clienthood and a state of self-autonomy cannot co-exist. This notion has a far-reaching effect on clients, their families and societies in general. Professionals (experts) show possessiveness towards the client in the sense that they decide whether they are entitled to their services or not, inasmuch as clients play their part being dependent on professionals and never challenging their decisions. In this state of unequal power and knowledge, self-management and the ability to make decisions are rather limited (Galper, 1980). Due to the technology and a classification system that underpin the medical model, it is possible to give names to different anomalies and exceptions in clients such as pathology and abnormality. Holmes and Saleebey (1993) introduced a view that was supported by some of the other researchers mentioned earlier. This is a very extreme and critical view regarding the classic medical model. They raised the following inevitable question: assuming that the medical model provides the type of assistance that disallows autonomy and growth because of the inequality in power and knowledge, how would it be possible for social services to move from this model towards a new model of empowerment? They believe that the answer to this question is to be found in the connection that exists between attitudes, techniques, public policy and the social control functions of the auxiliary professions. They believe that the integration of all these constitutes a "way of life". In order to overcome this barrier to empowerment one must seriously consider autonomy. While the medical model employs a technique of separating the client from the community, which creates imbalance and a state whereby much more power is given to the therapist, Holmes and Saleebey (1993) argue that the social professions must maintain a high degree of collaboration between the two, ignoring the fact that one of them is wearing the doctor's white coat (the white coat represents the medical model and is also used as an image of the professional-client buffer and the derivative implications).

The model presented here is far-off the phenomenon studied in the present research. In the researched phenomenon, the leader of the process is indeed an expert at leading processes and group dynamics. Her role and responsibility is to lead the framework, but the contents derive from the women. The group enables the personal experience to be of value for research and serve as grounds for discussion and implementation should one choose to use it. In the course of the empowerment process, women are invited to share their experiences with others, and in fact, there is no one theory that is presented as true, but rather stories and
examples provided by the women. What is right is what each woman takes. There are no uniform rules, but those that each woman chooses to implement in her life.

2.2.3 Evaluation of Empowerment Based on Education

The view of Habermas (1971) as the philosopher of knowledge constitutes the basis of many educational theories. As mentioned earlier, principles of his knowledge theories were borrowed and adapted by other professions. At the basis of the educational perceptions lies the ideology that one of the products of knowledge and schooling is 'emancipatory action' of the individual or the group. This is done by providing individuals with tools and techniques that enable them to choose alternatives, to promote themselves and display higher levels of self-efficacy. In a similar way, knowledge is communicated to groups as a means by which to promote their group (collective) interest. In such a way knowledge becomes the power to achieve greater resources.

In his educational perception, "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Freire (1972), a renowned educational reformer, proposes a different perception of the place of education and its role in diminishing gaps and imparity. He claims that the role that is played by education in times of depression is not propaganda, as was argued by the Marxist doctrine. In order to eliminate all signs of depression a more comprehensive and thorough action is needed than revolutionary propaganda and the studying of the human cultural legacy, as argued by the Marxists. The key is to be found in a concept that Freire calls 'conscientisation' of the principle of oppression and the attributions brought about by the act of depression and that can be seen in the oppressed person. Freire claims that the oppressors are incapable of giving; the oppressed cannot receive anything from the oppressors except for the oppression and its justification. Just like any other education, education for liberation needs to be supported by a political force, a support that the oppressed do not possess. The solution exists in the distinction between systematic education which is carried out when power is involved and non systematic campaigns, which may be carried out under conditions of depression. Liberation requires the denial of the dominant culture and the power and hegemony of the oppressors. Education is a process by which a person gains a deeper consciousness. It begins with perception of reality. 'Conscientisation' is perception of reality from a critical standpoint. Such a standpoint is the result of the recognition of the contrasts of which it consists. Freire (1972)
believes that this process leads to the liberation of the individual and their life interweave in the political campaign. Freire (1972), then, perceives education as a revolutionary act, or perceives the way by which political activity is defined as an educational act. Education and revolution are carried out by making depression, its causes and effects, the main concern of the oppressed. In their process of 'conscientiation', the oppressed will identify the signs of de-humanisation caused by society in their oppressors but also in them. Revelation is people's way to reach authenticity, which means uniting thinking and action into one whole. A liberating education is achieved through a dialogue with those we wish to liberate. Education that strives to achieve a conscious, critical and active person is only possible through a continuous dialogue between the tutor and the learner, trainer and trainee. Freire (1972) believes that oppressed people tend to undervalue themselves, as they learn to adapt the opinions of their oppressors. They cannot make distinctions as what they know is what they had learned from their relations with the world and with other people.

2.2.4 Theories of Power as the Basis of Empowerment

Staples (1990) claims any discussion of the concept of empowerment inevitably involves a discussion of the concept of "power". Location, focus and outcomes are the milestones of the two concepts. Lee defines power as the ability to act or to prevent an action. According to Webster New World Dictionary (1982) the prefix "em" that precedes the word "power" is meant to transform the word into a verb, in the meaning of transformation. To empower means to create or make power. The practical definition of the verb "Empower" is: 1) to give official authority or legal power to. 2) Enable. These definitions relate to processes while power is given, imparted and authorised. Unfortunately, in contemporary societies, power is still not given to the groups that lack it. Power must be developed or taken by those who are powerless, but also granted (Hess, 1984). The definition that we offer to the word "empower" as a verb in a state of transition goes back to the connection between the prefix "em" and the noun "power". Staples (1990) defines the concept in the following ways: 1) To gain power. 2) To develop, achieve, take or grasp power. 3) To receive or enable power. 4) To give, impart or enable power. The noun "empowerment" which does not exist in the 1982 version of the Webster New World Dictionary, relates to a process by
which one purchases or achieves, develops, grasps, alleviates or gives. Individuals or
groups experience a shift from relative powerlessness to relative power through the
process of empowerment. Being empowered also encompasses a state of possessing
or controlling power, being able to act or to prevent an action. Empowerment is the
product of that process. Perception of empowerment consists of two dimensions –
process and product – and the relations between them are sometimes complex.

The Marxists believe that culture is a power without which it would be impossible to
defeat and eradicate bourgeoisie. This power is maintained by the bourgeoisie, thus
access of the masses which the bourgeoisie exploits to that power is denied. The
Marxists believe that those who are exploited must receive and learn from the
bourgeoisie in order to overcome and defeat them eventually.

In summary, the perception of 'personal empowerment' is linked to the definitions of
the term, discussing the process, at the end of which the individual believes in his or
her abilities and develops a critical attitude to the environment. The power is
expressed both in the individual contribution to the self and to society.

In this research, empowerment is implemented among 'ordinary women' seeking to
feel the sense of empowerment that will help them examine reality through their
subjective eyes, having been through a process which has led them to believing in
their ability to be in a better place. This outlook helps 'ordinary women' observe
themselves and their environment and interact with it. The goal of the present study
is to present the voices, thoughts and issues arising in this process from the
personal perspective of the participants.

The following section presents the concepts of 'Andragogy' and 'women's learning', a
unique field of knowledge according to the Feminist approach, and its connection to
empowerment and gender.
2.3. 'Andragogy' Based Theoretical Perspective

"My house is not to be surrounded by a wall and my windows are not to be locked. The cultures of all countries are to blow through my house with as little hindrances as possible. But I shall not let myself be blown anyway by anyone" (Mahatma Gandhi).

The current research population consists of adult women (over age 20). The research raises questions pertaining to the women's learning empowerment and issues arising from the process of empowerment. For this reason, the research integrates theories pertaining to adult learning.

The research also chose to focus on 'women's learning' as a unique body of knowledge. This perception is part of Feminist theories which will also be presented in this section, since the researcher chose to observe the phenomenon of 'personal empowerment' through the prism of issues, contents and thoughts accompanying 'women's learning' in the process of empowerment.

Education has been, and still very much is, a fundamental cause of change in people's lives, the key to equal opportunities and advancement, ever since the first human has learned that knowing how to read and write and communication shared by only very few people meant power, hegemony, and domination over the masses. Without education, and particularly without attempts to gain the same level of knowledge and education, skills and qualifications, men and women of the same social group and status are doomed to living an inferior life in terms of their personal development and growth, employability, access to different jobs and occupations, and also as civilians and in their ability to affect the rule, the leadership and national decisions which affect their lives (Weiner, in Byrne, 1978).

Education as a means of emancipatory liberation was first introduced by Freire (1972) and has been used as an ideological basis and one of the pillars of many educational doctrines and theories. Freire (1972) has made a real revolution in the perception of education by pointing to the clear connection between literacy and liberation. Freire (1972) believed that being a human means that one builds a relationship with other people and the outside world. A person, he claimed, does not only live in a world but is also part of it.

Freire claimed that a person is not limited to one model of response. People organise themselves, choose the reaction they believe is best, and act in a certain way, and
their reaction then changes accordingly. People associate themselves with the world in a critical way. It is through this critical perception that people are exposed to their temporariness, develop an attitude that is not time-constrained, and learn to liberate themselves from the specific context of "today", their relations with the world become more complete and meaningful. People should learn to be active in order to become part of the world. People can be involved in the everyday reality in order to change it. People's ability to integrate with others is what makes them different from adjusting persons. Integration derives from one's ability to adapt to reality, in addition to one's critical ability to make choices and integrate oneself within the changing reality based on these choices. As opposed to the adjusting person, who is also seen as an object, the integrative person is a subject. Adjustment in this context is seen as a very weak form of self-defence. When people create, renovate and make decisions, historical eras begin to shape. Historical periods are characterised by a series of aspirations, worries and values, in search of actualisation and fulfilment. In order to integrate with the world, people must be able to capture things in real time in a critical way, to actively interfere with the reality. During transition times education becomes an uppermost mission (Freire, 1972).

Habermas (1971) presents a model that includes the domains of the adult learner's knowledge. The model integrates knowledge with the needs this knowledge meets. According to Habermas 'perspective transformation' involves 'emancipatory action'. Mezirow (1981) studied women participating in college re-entry programmes and discusses a number of elements involved in their learning:

1. Disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination
3. A critical assessment of personally internalised role assumptions and a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations
4. Relating one's discontent to similar experiences of others or to public issues – recognising that one's problem is shared and not exclusively a private matter
5. Exploring options for new ways of acting
6. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles
7. Planning a course of action
8. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
9. Provisional efforts to try new roles and to assess feedback
10. A reintegration into society on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective

Despite differences in their approaches, both Freire (1972) and Habermas (1971), perceive education as an 'emancipatory' factor. It is believed that education is a potential source of liberation and is also strongly connected to the perception of empowerment. Judged from a holistic point of view, adult education is believed to be part of a wider perception of lifelong learning, but only very few countries shape their educational strategy according to that perception. The original adult education perceptions referred to the learner as an individual seeking self-actualisation, and in this process the individual's contacts with other people and the world constitute the basics of learning and change. Based on adult education perceptions, the individual is a social creature who must interact with the world to achieve individual growth and progress. Later approaches connected education to empowerment and constituted the seam between the two. Even later theories connected education and 'Andragogy' on the formal-informal continuum and the issue of women's empowerment and the Feminist approach (Thompson, 1983; Hughes and Kennedy, 1985; Hart and Mechthild, 1992).

2.3.1 Lifelong Learning

Education is believed to be a lifelong process, which is closely associated with the individual's life experience, a process that is significant and realistic for the learner, where the student plays an active part (Leigh, 1930). 'Adult learning', or 'Andragogy', is but one branch of lifelong learning. The fifth International Conference on Adult Education, which took place in Hamburg Germany, in July 1997, set as its target the shaping of a new vision that considers changes in the political, economic and social world. Adult learning is seen as an integral part of the life-wide learning processes, whereby family and community learning are regarded as a dialogue between cultures, as learning that respects changes and variations and therefore promotes a culture of peace. According to the speakers in the Committee, continuing education is something that will bear fruits in the future. 'Adult learning' must integrate people as actors who will make their own decisions in a social process of change. It has to provide them with the necessary knowledge for this purpose. However, it is their responsibility to seek knowledge. Being open and limitless, being able to form new alliances between the state, civic society, non governmental
organisations (NGOs) and private companies - here rests the opportunity, importance and challenge of 'lifelong learning'. The strong connections between education and economic productivity and the need to ensure high-quality 'Andragogy', from a Lifelong Learning perspective, have the potential to increase the well-being and welfare of many communities worldwide. Even the poorest and developing countries could become exposed to new growth opportunities through technological renovation and progress. Learners will no longer be seen as objects but rather as the subjects of their own learning processes. 'Andragogy' should contribute to:

- The struggle for social and economic development and growth, justice, equality, respecting traditional cultures and human dignity, complete individual empowerment and social change.
- Referring to all aspects of human suffering – oppression, poverty, child labour, genocide, and unequal learning rights based on status, gender, race or ethnicity.
- Individual empowerment and social change.

'Andragogy' should be relevant for powerful and intelligent elites as well as for the unprivileged and illiterate, for the reason that the macro-political policies such as globalisation and structural adjustment, which severely affect human conditions, are formed by the enlightened, well-educated, rich and powerful persons. Conversely, in light of the new vision, 'Andragogy' is made of comprehensive, all-inclusive learning societies which lean upon the potential and resources of all people and environments.

Education and adult education accelerate and promote competition, values and behaviours towards the meeting of tomorrow's challenges and allowing the different world nations to live in peace according to Vocherau, Hasina, Herzog (Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, Hamburg, Germany, 1997).

In England, Lifelong Learning policy is implemented under the heading "The Learning Society: Knowledge and Skills for Employment". Coffield (1999) states that the programme was designed as a response to the increasing consensus in England to make a radical transformation in thoughts about, and implementation of education and training, in order to survive as a main economic power and to offer to the residents high living standards, political freedom and social justice to all civilians. The purpose of the programme is to examine the nature of the learning society and
explore how it can increase knowledge and skills, thus promote employability and other realms of adult lives. The programme concentrates on post-compulsory education learning, continuing formal and informal training and qualifications covering many different types and contexts. The programme contains fourteen projects throughout England. It was first designed as an operative programme customised to the vision, as defined by the Labour party, in order to sustain competition and economic well-being and as a solution to a wide variety of economic, social and political problems.

It was meant to be an all-inclusive solution for:

- Creation of national competition
- Managing industrial and technological change
- Employment for individuals
- Social prevention programmes
- Active citizenship
- Self-fulfilment
- Quality of life

Coffield (1999) believes that the potential of Lifelong Learning for individuals, businesses, communities and nations is huge and limitless. This realm covers everything and there is no need to back it with evidence. Lifelong learning has the huge power to achieve all these goals but it still must find the way to become one of the indulgences of life, to quote Kennedy (1997).

### 2.3.2 Adult Education

The concept "Andragogy" was coined by the Yugoslavian researcher Dusan Savicevic in 1967 (Fuchs, 2002). Knowles, Holton and Swanson (1998) point out that the field of adult education, also known as 'Andragogy', was not given sufficient attention, despite the fact that it interested a variety of organisations and people for a long time. Despite this critique the feminism raise another aspect of critique in questions regards to relevance knowledge for women and the ownership of knowledge (Maher, 1985; Rich, 1985; Hill-Collins, 1990; Harding, 1991). The ancient Chinese and Hebrews invented what we know as "case method", a state in which a leader or one of the group's members describes a situation and together with the other members investigate possible ways to solve the situation. The Greeks invented the Socratic
dialogue, where a leader or one of the group's members poses a question or a dilemma and the group members reflect upon their experience and use their brain to come up with a solution.

"The Art and Science of Children's Learning" pedagogy developed in the 17th Century, constituting the basis of the educational system. After World War I, knowledge was developed in European countries, pertaining to the unique characteristics of adult education. This field was first perceived as integrative adult learning framework several decades ago (Thorndike, 1928, 1935; Sorenson, 1938). At the end of World War II, researchers presented evidence that supported the learning abilities of adults and how they are different from the learning capacity of children.

Linderman (1926) laid the foundations for a systematic theory of adult education, with the evident influence of John Dewey. His premise was not that teachers and subjects are the origin and the central elements of the academy and students adjust themselves to both. Alternatively, he stated that curricula should be especially adjusted to the needs and interests of the student. Ceremonies and lectures are only secondary in importance in adult education and the learner becomes the centre of the process. The important thing is the learner and not the lecturer, the organisational timetable, structuralism or the syllabus. Linderman (1926) perceived adult education in terms of new learning techniques which he believed are substantive for college graduates and assembly-line workers as this is a process through which learners become aware of their own experience, learn to appreciate this experience and use it, differently from the learning of trivial subjects which one can only hope would be relevant for them some day. In this learning much consideration is given to situations where the learner's self-actualisation and self-fulfilment are difficult to achieve, with a view to solving the problem (Linderman, 1926).

The high value of adult education derives from the experience of the learner, which becomes the key element in the learning process of the adult learner. It is believed that just as much as education is the essence of life, the life of an individual is an extremely important part of education (Knowles, 1996).

Adult learning theories should be dynamic, thus they challenge static perceptions of intelligence and conflict with conventional education and learning, which are much more structured and leave no room for flexibility, and with the theories according to
which the process of education and learning only takes place in the classroom. 'Andragogy' places much emphasis on the life of adults outside the classroom, their own life experiences at work, at home and in their families and does not accept the argument that intellectual learning and learning in general can only occur in the classroom. 'Andragogy' is a process by which the learner becomes aware of a significant experience (Knowles, Holton and Swanson. 1998). The 'Andragogy' model consists of several elements which can be fully or partly adjusted. This is not an ideology and one of the underlying qualities of 'Andragogy' is its flexibility. Women's empowerment groups are built in a way that corresponds to the principles published by Linderman (1926) and Holton and Swanson (1998). The programmes focus on the woman and her experience as the major learning materials. The pace of learning and progress are flexible.

Linderman (1926) has set several hypotheses which were later supported by several theoreticians:

1) Adults are motivated to learn when they sense this is necessary and when they have interests they expect to achieve through the process of learning.
2) Adults' orientation towards learning is life-focused.
3) Experience is a very rich source of adult learning.
4) Adults have a strong drive for self-direction.
5) Individual changes among people increase with age.

Being a distinct field, adult education requires a different type of teaching. Mackaye (1931) argues that this requires a teacher who is able to work with a group of adults that repeatedly undermine his claims, and challenge his assertions and arguments, but nonetheless admire and appreciate the teacher for the opportunity to gain knowledge and to be satisfied. In addition, the teacher must liven up the adults' lives as the members of a group in a way that adds value to their knowledge (Rogers, 1938). Since the adult learner has a need to have a vision, create that vision and maintain it, the teacher or tutor must support the learners and help them (Fuchs, 2002).

Guidance and mentoring in these empowerment groups is significant. In most of the cases the process leaders are women, experts in the guidance of dynamic processes. Along with responsibility for guidance and contents, the mentors make room for the
learning that takes place in the room, for the knowledge that is created and the fact that the process is mutual.

Education techniques must be flexible and place the learner at the centre. The motto is that the classroom should be doing the work, through forums, discussions and arguments and lean, in addition to conventional textbooks, upon newspapers and magazines as well (Field, 1940). Houle (1961) published the results of a study that examined the reasons why adults choose to engage in learning, based on three different learning orientations:

1) The learner's goal is orientation, namely – The learner identifies and recognises an interest.
2) Action orientation – Adults engage in learning when they are very much aware of the problems and pressures which they encounter.
3) Educational orientation – The desire to simply gain knowledge.

The current research question examines the issues, thoughts and feelings according to the women's subjective perceptions after the empowerment process. The answers to this question might lead to understanding the issues that occupy 'ordinary women' at this time, leading them to participation in the 'personal empowerment' process. We can find which interest of 'ordinary women' is met in terms proposed by Houle (1961).

Tough (1978) elaborated on a study which was originally conducted by Houle (1961). According to his findings, adult learners undergo several different stages during their learning:

1. The decision to engage in the process of learning. This stage is made up of 26 possible steps including the setting of action goals, assessment of interests, search for information pertaining to opportunities, selecting the most adequate and suitable knowledge and skills, implementation of the level and scope of knowledge one wishes to attain and cost-efficient analysis.
2. The personal choice that is made by the learner following a decision about the steps they wish to undertake. They need to decide whether they wish to lead the process or prefer the process to be organised and led by a consultant or any other source. Through individual and group methods adults
improve their self-insight, awareness of and sensitivity to other people and interpersonal skills.

The Andragogic model is based on several key assumptions:

1) The need to know: adults must know why they have to learn something before they learn it. Tough (1978) found that adults are willing to spend energy on learning if they know the benefit this will bring them. The learners discover the discrepancy between their present state and their target. The instructor/teacher helps the learner become aware of the "need to know".

2) The learner's self-perception: adults recognise that they must be responsible for their own decisions and lives. The role of the instructor/teacher is to create a learning experience that enables the adult learners to move from a state of dependent learners to autonomous and self-directed learners (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 1998; Linderman, 1926).

3) The importance of the learner's experience: compared to young learners, adult learners bring with them experience that has different intensity and quality. Every group of adults is heterogeneous in terms of their background, specifically learning styles, motivation, needs, interests and goals, and this is also different from young learners. Much emphasis is placed on individualism and the learning of strategies. For many different forms of learning the real and main source is the learners themselves. Experiential techniques are closely associated with the experience of the learner such as group discussions, simulations, problem-solving activities, case studies and laboratory methods instead of directed learning techniques (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 1998; Linderman, 1926).

4) Readiness to learn: adults are ready to learn the things that they must know in order to be able to cope with real life situations.

5) Learning orientation: in their learning, adults are life, task or problem-oriented. This means that they are motivated to learn until they reach the point where learning will help them carry out tasks and assignments or cope with real-life problems.

6) Motivation: whilst adults respond to extrinsic motivations (such as a better job, promotion, higher salaries), potential motivations are intrinsic: inner pressure and a strong drive for satisfaction at work, self-esteem, quality of life and the like (Knowles, Holton and Swanson, 1998; Linderman, 1926).
2.3.3 Feminism and Andragogy

For this research in particular it is important to look at the relationships between 'Andragogy' and Feminist research and practice, since the participants are women in empowerment groups. Along with basing knowledge and assumptions regarding motivation for 'adult learning', 'Andragogy' was mainly criticised by Feminist researchers for the 'assumptions of equality in learning' as these are constructed in 'Andragogy'. The main criticism relates to diversities among individuals, which researchers cannot measure or assess due to lack of tools. Another criticism of 'adult learning' has its roots in the Feminist approach which perceives 'Andragogy' as a wider term than that which is commonly used. Such 'Andragogy' encompasses all the adult learner's life domains.

Feminism has raised questions regarding ownership of knowledge, and the way knowledge is used to reach a transition from oppressing situations to one of control and the creation of new knowledge (Maher, 1985; Rich, 1985; Hill-Collins, 1990; Harding, 1991). As such the concept of 'adult education' ought to contain a large number of factors including for example vocational education, adult literacy education, training in business and industry, continuing education for professionals, labour education, and religious education (Hayes and Flannery, 2000).

The personal empowerment phenomenon that occurs in a group process is, according to this researcher an example of the ultimate combination of the principles of 'adult learning' as described in this chapter and the desired principles according to the Feminist approach.

The empowerment group in which 'ordinary women' chose to participate in this research meets the following criteria:

1. The empowerment group exists in the community in a place that is accessible to the women.
2. The process is voluntary.
3. The group focuses on women and their empowerment.
4. The process is managed by a woman-mentor who imparts knowledge and skills while emphasising the women's experiences and learning.
5. The women in the group share their knowledge and create common knowledge.
6. The knowledge pertains to the issue of women's place in society, to their difficulties and feelings and to anything that is relevant to them. These characteristics turn the empowerment phenomenon into one that combines 'adult learning' and 'women's learning' and enables the 'personal empowerment' process to develop in an individual and group direction.

2.3.4 'Women's Learning'

The research development pertaining to 'women's learning' is the outcome of gathering information and the setting of a theme as a separate realm of learning within the wider framework of adult education. This action is part of the perception of some Feminist researchers regarding this domain as an independent realm of knowledge describing learning from the women's perspectives and personal experiences, the learning created in patriarchal structures, and how women use this learning to develop and create their own knowledge.

Observation of the 'personal empowerment' process stems from accepting and acknowledging 'women's learning' as a domain of knowledge in its own right: a domain which accumulate knowledge about the issues, thoughts and feelings that accompany women in the process of their 'personal empowerment'. This knowledge will constitute, in the researcher's opinion, grounds for the knowledge created by women for women (Thompson, 1983; Hughes and Kennedy, 1985; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Traule, 1986; Jordan, Kaplan, Baker- Miller, Striver and Surrey, 1991; Hart and Mechtild, 1992).

The development of the Feminist movement and research in the field led to the thinking that it is proper to discuss 'women's learning' as an independent body of knowledge in the domain of adult learning (Thompson, 1983; Hughes and Kennedy, 1985; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Traule, 1986; Jordan, Kaplan, Baker- Miller, Striver, and Surrey, 1991; Hart and Mechtild, 1992). These work assumptions and attitudes emphasise the complexity, the knowledge and learning that are especially adjusted to women and perceive women as learners and producers of knowledge in all formal and informal systems in which they operate. Working in this field means that one is ideologically committed to social and political justice. Within the framework of the pure andragogic model and the process of developing and implementing a theory especially for adult education, adult curricula ignored the field

Feminist researchers also emphasised the connection between learning and education as key factors in changing women's status in society. There are different approaches to the ways of reaching the goal, but researchers are in agreement as to the connection between education and women in the direction of empowerment. This connection between education and knowledge, a fairer distribution of resources and the possibility of expressing different voices characterise the call for developing Feminist approaches within 'adult learning' as key factors in changing women's status in society (Lather, 1984; Wisker, 1996; Hernandez, 1997).

Rubinstein, 1984 (in Weiner, 1985) states that status discrimination in education was first recognised in the United States between 1950 and 1960. It was only with the establishment of the women's movement that equality in education in its wider sense, in terms of equal educational outcomes and access to and equal opportunities in the field of education became part of the discourse.

Studies conducted in the United States show that women students were, at best, undervalued, less appreciated, took a lesser part in the school's activities, were ignored or suffered from disgraceful treatment (Nut, 1980; Spender and Sarah, 1980; Kelly, 1981 in Weiner, 1985). The discrepancy between education in practice and equality-related rhetoric has gradually become more salient and obvious.

Many studies began to investigate why there were very few women in key positions and well-paid jobs (Fogarty, 1971 in Weiner, 1985; Rapoport and Rapoport, 1978). In order to bridge these huge gaps a demand was raised to improve learning theories and to distribute research findings to all students with an emphasis on improving the education of girls. The prevalent thought that inequality in education is directly related to women's subordination to men was ignored altogether. Many Feminists believe that this trend has only had an impact on the school life, if such impact existed at all, but that it did nothing to change the power division and the decision-making aspect in education. It was claimed that even the decision whether women/girls' access to educational resources should be expanded was made by men.

Rich (1985) and Foster (1985, in Weiner, 1985) claim that women's ignorance in relation to their state and culture has played a major role in their oppressed status
(in Weiner, 1985). This is an example of what Cohen (2004) named "the empowerment-obstructing explanation". The belief according to which the state, preferences and even the culture of the weak person or the person in an unprivileged position are the source of their weakness, explains why entire populations remained in a poor, underprivileged condition, despite the many resources allocated in order to improve and better their state (Katz, 1984; Mueller, 1990). Empowerment theories believe these explanations to be part of an unconscious, yet systematic and steady method to oppress the weak and detach them from decision-making processes that concern their own fate (Lee, 1994; Sadan, 1997).

Weiner (1985) argues that Rich (1980), in her words, represents the main difference between the egalitarians, those who are pro equal opportunities, and the Feminists, who espouse and call for anti-sexist or women-focused education. While the first approach failed to grasp the correlation between patriarchal patterns, power and women's subordination, the Feminist approach has placed these at the very heart of thinking. According to the Feminist approach, any declaration of an equal opportunities policy that denies or ignores competition on education-oriented and economic interests and does not specifically and openly demand recognition of the failure of educational institutions to acknowledge the constant competition over hegemony, control and power between men and women, black and white people and different status interests - will never lead to a real change. These Feminists believe that such recognition will make it possible to expand opportunities to acquire education and to take bigger pieces of the education pie. In this way, men will have no choice but give up their dominance and control of the system, which cannot be achieved without a fight. Feminist teachers who saw how the declaration of equality brought no real change believed that a steady change in the long run can only be achieved if women and girls are placed in the centre and the importance of women-oriented education is fully recognised. This demands an investigation into the relations between sexes, women's oppression and sexual harassment at school and in the workplace, the establishment of a women-oriented school in order that women have the freedom, space and time to fulfil their potential and at the same time receive the support of a female group (Weiner, 1985).
Another wide angle that relates to 'Andragogy' with Feminist origins, based on the belief that Feminism is a field of learning and knowledge which has important implications for an understanding of 'women's learning' was introduced by five Feminist researchers, who studied women and joined together to collect information and materials, introduced a wider picture and phrased a theory under the title "Women as Learners" (Hayes, Flannery, Brooks, Tisdell and Hugo, 2000). Their ultimate goal was to change the existing situation in which women as learners are only addressed and referred to as a part of a wider context and not as something that exists in its own right. Their perception challenges the philosophical view of adult learning, which assumes universal relevance and implementation of dominant learning theories in all learning frameworks and for all participants. They argue that an understanding that 'women's learning' is an important field of knowledge will lead to the establishment of a convenient learning environment that empowers women, serves as a source of satisfaction for them, and inspires the development of strategies that will eventually alter the politics of knowledge structuring and exchange so that women will be free to make choices and become responsible for their learning.

Tisdell (1995) presents three Feminist theories which pertain to women's knowledge and learning:

- **Psychological Feminist theories**: Researchers place much emphasis on differences between men and women and use structures such as socialisation and gender roles. According to this approach, women's knowledge orientation can be explained primarily in terms of their relations with authoritative male figures and models of family interactions during their childhood. The concept 'connected learning' points to the women's inferior place in society and their dependence on others whose needs are similar to their own. This is a political-liberal perception that seeks equality within the existing social order. In terms of education, it would mean achieving equal opportunities for women rather than criticising the structure of society and education. The contribution of this perception is on the individual level and the challenging of the invisibility of women in processes of knowledge building. The limitations of this attitude derive from the uniform and categorical perception that does not acknowledge the differences between women and the lack of discussion of the structural element that oppresses women.
Theories based on this attitude seek to change the female status in society but do not question the nature of the social order. The current research examines a subjective angle of the way in which women perceive themselves after the empowering process. Part of the learning consists of raising issues of differences between men and women and the influence of social structures on women's status. The goal of the organisers of empowerment courses is to change the women's status. Nevertheless, the process places the responsibility on the learner to be able to find her own strength and recreate her reality from this angle of power.

- **Structural Feminist theories:** This approach concentrated on the understanding of the social structures that result in women's oppression. It attempts to explain how patriarchy (leading to gender-based analysis) and capitalism (leading to an analysis based on social hierarchy) affect women's experience and status. Luttrel (1989) used a gender analysis to explain women's perception of their knowledge as effective and intuitive more than cognitive. She learned about women's lack of appreciation of their intellectual skills. In her research she described and analysed how working class black and white women defined and claimed knowledge. Both groups were able to tell between knowledge that was formed at school or from the reading of textbooks, through authority, and knowledge that is the product of experience. Both had similar ideas about the virtues of the 'common sense' in caring for others. Their way of knowing is embedded in the community, family and work relations and cannot be judged by dominant academic standards. More important is the fact that the knowledge defined as 'common sense' cannot vanish, minimise or be withdrawn. The Feminist framework helps us place 'women's learning' in light of social structures, drawing attention to the perception of power as central to an understanding of the 'women's learning' experience. The limitations of the perception are the difficulties in explaining how the oppressing factors affect the individual woman. According to this perception, it is dangerous to see women as the passive victims of oppressing powers. Empowerment groups relate to the understanding how social structures perpetuated the place of women in society. Some of the learning and understanding resulting from this process involves the influence of social concepts on the creation of women's knowledge. Part of the internalisation is
that women need an empowering process because of the way these structures behave, and the outcome is the understanding of power and its place in women's learning.

- **Post-structural Feminist theories:** Theoreticians who support this approach try to understand how each of us is at the same time oppressed and possesses fundamental rights and how this changes steadily according to the specific contexts of which we are part. Post-structural Feminist theoreticians emphasise the understanding of the interaction of many systems with oppression and privileges. Much emphasis is placed on individual resistance to oppressive social forces and how women as individuals respond to the specific and unique experience of oppression, much more so than on the development of theories about different types of oppression and how they affect groups of women. The importance of language to the structuring of reality is a major contribution of post structural Feminist theories. Some of the works in this context are those by Debold, Tolman and Brown (1996). They show how individual women have a different experience of voice and self, which is not steady and whose development cannot be predicted. They studied adolescent girls of different social backgrounds and status to demonstrate how these young women fight against and learn how to conform to oppressive cultural notions of women's "ideal behaviour". This allows us to integrate individual experience and social structure in new ways. This can show us how the names that we give to our experiences are not something neutral but based on assumptions which could strengthen privileges and oppression. By concentrating on the individual we can see possibilities of resistance and change. Post-structural Feminist thoughts legitimise the uniqueness of each woman's attempts to recognise the complexity of one's identities, differences and similarities. The limitations of the individual perception are the lack of a shared knowledge of their experience or identified action and the difficulty to set a political agenda relating to the need for social and individual change in order to overcome oppression.

The process of 'personal empowerment' which takes place in a group, as examined in this research, includes principles of three Feminist theories about learning as discussed by Tisdell (1995). The researcher believes that the Post-structural theory
is the theory with the best potential for describing the researched phenomenon. This potential describes the difficulties that 'ordinary women' face on the one hand, and the opportunities and responsibility that women have to change their status on the other. The theory gives an explanation to the choices, to the complexity of the system, and to the individuals' responses.

Since this research engages in the subjective perception of 'ordinary women' after an empowerment process, it is close to the third approach, but in the context of the actual process, some of the learning, mostly in the beginning, emphasises the understanding of structural factors and their role in the development of 'women's learning'. The process then focuses on individual approaches. The researcher believes that although the current Post Feminist era is characterised by individualist approaches, in practice the personal empowering process still takes place in a group of women, a collective action; the type of action which characterises actions from the 1960s. This tendency, according to the researcher, is relevant to understanding the 'personal empowerment' process and its importance to 'ordinary women' these days.

The writers of "Women as Learners" (2000) used several Feminist approaches in their studies, but they mostly represent the post-structural Feminist view. They concentrate on the way in which women become active agents who resist the oppressing power and shape their ways of learning and lives. The differences and similarities between women are revealed in this way.

Brooks, Tisdell, Hugo, Flannery and Hayes (2000) claimed that stories are a rich source of knowledge of women's learning. Much can be learned from women's stories in formal education settings and even more can be learned from women's stories about studies conducted in informal settings. The approach used in the current study embraces many elements of the researchers' view (Brooks, Tisdell, Hugo, Flannery and Hayes, 2000) perceiving 'women's learning' in a way that is very much compatible with the female perception and the way in which the uniqueness of women, their contribution and the complex learning process are implemented in many fields. This understanding is the key to a breakthrough and a genuine change. In their study they examined 'women's learning' stories in many different settings; stories about women who decide to learn and acquire new gender roles at the age of 65, and women who wish to clarify their identity through their relations with others. They found that women learned and became empowered through caring.
This involved learning in groups of women with effective and emotional variables such as learning, intuition, social, personal, historical, ethnical, and economic effects. All these subjects are closely associated with and a substantial part of 'women's learning' and cannot be separated from it. In order to understand 'women's learning' one has to engage in an in-depth investigation.

Hayes (2000) claims that formal knowledge of 'women's learning' refers to only some aspects and does not present the whole picture. 'Women's learning' in formal education, mainly higher education has received much attention. Her perception covers all meanings of all social contexts of women's learning: at home, in the community and in the family. Hayes (2000) claims there are three aspects of formal contexts, which affect 'women's learning' in formal settings: curricula, interpersonal interactions and institutional culture.

The current research examines a field that is not defined within the framework of formal learning – learning empowerment in a group in informal frameworks. The examination of the process might shed light on this learning that, according to Hayes (2000), has not gained the deserved attention.

**Curricula:** Textbooks, training materials and lectures have a considerable amount of influence on gender-related learning. In formal education the concept "latent curriculum" implies tacit messages. In order to understand 'women's learning' one has to understand the response to the "text" that relates to gender, race, social level and social structures.

**Interpersonal interaction:** Hayes (2000) asserts that nothing has changed since the report written two decades ago by Hall and Sandler (1982), which identified several ways in which higher education faculties could maintain different interaction with men and women in the classroom, reporting power inequality based on gender roles and this is still pretty much how things are in the classrooms. Men may receive more formal and informal encouragement and support and have higher chances of maintaining more instructional-consultative relations and being selected as assistants. The instructor's gender and race can violate the power relations in the classroom. There is evidence that it is easier for women to create an atmosphere that encourages higher rates of participation of both sexes (Tisdell, 1995).

**Institutional culture:** The institutional culture of an academic institution has an overt and latent effect on women's learning. One of the clear aspects of institutional support is the provision of services, for example: a day-care-centre that allows adult women to participate in lessons. Another aspect is whether the course hours allow
women to participate, given their commitment to their work and family, and their need to adjust to these hours, and another is the percent of female students, which increases the sense of belonging of the other women and their sense of comfort with the learning climate (Johnson- Bailey, 1994 in Hayes et. al., 2000).

The Feminist researchers' uncompromising demand seeks to get to a unique approach to the variety of issues pertaining to 'women's learning' that are relevant to changing the gaps between men and women. These Feminist works point to required changes in learning contents, the syllabus, the learning environment and other aspects pertaining to learning that suits women. The present study examines a phenomenon that fit into the framework of 'women's learning' according to Feminist approaches, as the programme is for women, and is guided by women. The contents are Feminist, and theoretical materials integrate relevant experiences of participants. Special emphasis is placed on experience and mutual learning. In terms of form, sitting in a circle and creating an open atmosphere are part of the 'women's learning' experience.

The 'personal empowerment' process takes place within a group of women. The assumption underlying the process is that the women's group serves as a support group, a place of understanding, sharing an experience; a place where womanly sisterhood may develop, so as to support the 'personal empowerment' process. Within this thought, the research attempts to identify thoughts, feelings and personal issues raised by 'Ordinary Women' as part of their learning process accompanying 'personal empowerment' process.

2.3.5. Learning in Other Social Contexts

Learning at Work

Feminist approaches to 'women's learning' maintain that learning takes place everywhere. One such place where it is relevant to progress and to narrowing the gap between men and women is the work world.

This research does not presume to examine the application of the empowerment process in the workplace. Rather, it examines whether the issues and dilemmas arising during the empowerment process relate to the different life cycle and to the work world. It has to be emphasised that this examination occurs via the women's subjective perceptions regarding the work world in which they operate.
The women's sense of capability was perceived according to their subjective seeking to find whether these issues pertain to the work world as well. Another question is if during the empowerment process women learn which factors halt and which advance them. Izraeli (1999) perceives the work world as lacking equality, and a change in it might lead to narrowing gaps. The following section describes the context of 'woman's learning' according to the Feminist approach, perceived as broad learning that includes many aspects, some of which were described earlier, and will now describe 'women's learning' and work.

The number of women who work outside their homes has increased significantly in the last decades. Kopka and Korb (1996) report that the number of women aged 25 to 54 who worked or looked for a job between 1970 and 1993 increased from 50 per cent to 75 per cent. The nature of women's paid jobs and the specific context of the workplace affected the skills and knowledge women had to acquire. Gender has remained a discriminative element at work with many women working in traditional female jobs. Women are paid less than men for the same job (Kopka and Korb, 1996; Swirski, 2002).

In some cases as part-time workers, women have not been given the same opportunity as men to receive formal training at work. The lower esteem and appreciation of women's employment and the belief that this does not require many skills minimise the opportunities for formal training. Typical training programmes may ignore subjects that integrate family and work or sexual harassment. Informal 'women's learning' in the form of on-the-job-training is clearly affected by gender. Workplaces can re-embrace and support a latent curriculum similarly to what is done in formal education. Male mentors and supervisors may also give women inappropriate guidance that is based on their own experience as men (Flannery et. al., 2000, p. 37). Stalker (1994 in Flannery et. al., 2000) argued that workplace mentors might also help women learn ways of challenging structures that perpetuate inequalities based on gender as well as on race and class (in Flannery et. al., 2000, p. 37). Career counselling plays an important role in expanding or limiting 'women's learning' about work.

This work examines the question whether a process of 'personal empowerment' and the learning which accompanies it enable women to identify factors that halt or advance them in their workplaces.

The current research attempts to ask whether one of the results of the empowerment according to women's reports is the identification of norms that have
halted them all along; whether the 'personal empowerment' process is accompanied by the identification of factors or issues whereby a change might remove barriers. Another direction of inquiry is identification of advancing factors that constitute strong points with the women. Identification of these factors might, in the researchers' opinion, lead the women in the direction of awareness and activity in constructive ways. The research examined these questions out of the subjective evidence provided by the women. The research does not examine application in practice, but rather seeks to find whether the 'personal empowerment' process relates to the work world among other issues that the process evokes with 'ordinary women'.

Learning in the Family and Home

'Women's learning' at home and in the family has received little attention from adult education researchers (Hayes, 2000). The structural view suggests that the patriarchal structure of society has made this learning invisible, as it is closely associated with women's work in their homes, thus traditionally perceived as inferior to and less significant than work and learning in the public domain. Luttrell (1989) believes that many feminine skills and abilities were learnt and used at home and considered more intuitive and natural than something that can be studied. Women's perception of men as more intellectual than them has strengthened this pattern.

Luttrell (1989) presents research conducted among black and white working class women seeking to examine how women define and claim knowledge. The findings distinguish between knowledge produced in school or in textbooks and knowledge produced through experience. They also have some similar ideas about their "commonsense" capabilities to take care of others. The women revealed their belief that common sense is not a genderless concept. Instead, they indicated that men's claims to knowledge are superior to women's and affirmed the idea that men are more powerful by virtue of their knowledge, not the privilege they have as men. When talking about intelligent people they knew, the white working-class women gave only men as their examples. Although they described their mothers, aunts or sisters as having common sense as "real intelligence" – those that are associated with men's work and their activities" (p. 39).

Perceptions of home and family are a good starting point for a better understanding of women's learning. What is perhaps clearer is that a different family structure
provides different opportunities and concentrates on 'women's learning' (Hayes, 2000). Single mothers can learn to become more independent than women who are surrounded by adults with whom they share responsibility. Single women can also establish stronger social bonds and relationship with friends, which can be a source of information and learning. A basic conflict for women exists between their desire to serve the needs of other people and satisfy their own needs. Many women are taught in their homes that they must sacrifice their own interests and well-being for those of their families, a choice that can be very costly and painful in the long run.

Therefore, the researched phenomenon, in this case an empowerment group directed at women, might meet the need of women to be supported by other women, but on the basis of equality, and not that of dependence. One of the directions the researcher points to is the possibility of the group to enable women coping with similar issues to experience a different type of acceptance and this time they come to the group to receive and be strengthened. Although in this process, too, they seek to be supported by the group and the individual women in it, the giving and receiving stem from identification with the chosen way, in other words, with the empowerment group, discussing women's empowerment, thus leading each woman to greater empowerment.

**Learning in the Community**

The phenomenon studied in this research combines learning and experiencing in the empowerment process in the community where the participating women live. In the researcher's opinion, one of the advantages of the programme is its accessibility as it is held within the community, so women can participate in an experience that combines learning and an empowerment process in an atmosphere that is different from that of a formal academic framework.

The existing formal settings illuminate the opportunities offered by different groups within the community and the overt and latent contents that women learn in these groups. Women can acquire skills and knowledge in any type of community groups and this is often made through real action such as more organised learning. Bingham (1995 in Hayes et. al., 2000) suggests that women who are active in local community centres demonstrate a wide variety of learning outcomes, including instrumental skills, improved self-comprehension and grasp and a better ability to
work with other people. Their experience has changed their perspective of what they can do with their lives and within their communities.

'Women's learning' in groups, according to Cains (1998 in Hayes et. al., 2000) does not guarantee success and on several occasions women left their groups because of the competitive style of the male members (Cains, 1998 in Hayes et. al., 2000). When group learning is effective, women report an ability to share their experience with others, identify common fields of interest and become aware of social structures which affect them as women. Taking steps to improve their collective state is an essential part of the learning experience. The self-support groups which concentrated on formation of health-related knowledge and sharing it with others is an example of emancipating learning (Zimmerman, 1987 in Hess and Ferree (Eds.), 1987).

The focus of 'women's learning' is the presentation of learning that is uniquely feminine. This learning enables different learning occasions in the woman's different life domains, as well as learning pertaining to questions regarding the influence of social structures, contents and women's absence from the discourse about learning, and it certainly relates to learning in a state of oppression and inferiority that has prevailed for years (Hayes et. al., 2000). This research examines the place of 'women's learning' in groups within the community for the purpose of 'personal empowerment'. The investigations relate to the gaps in research literature as to 'women's learning' and its contribution to the process of 'personal empowerment' in an environment that is not a formal academic framework, but rather the initiative of community organisations such as welfare and Women's Councils in the local authority as is the case in this research.

Feminist theorists (Hayes et. al., 2000; Luttrell, 1989, 2000) believe that 'women's learning' is unique and involves formal education learning that takes place in academic institutions as well as informal learning that takes place through interpersonal interaction, work and community. This learning is based on the view that women are a gendered product of society, with multiple roles, and, as such – experience an inner conflict between self-fulfilment and actualisation and the costs of that fulfilment (Luttrell, 1989; Bingham, 1995 in Hayes et. al., 2000).

Hayes (2000) lists a number of risks in studying women's learning. The first risk is such work can lead to assertions that certain attributes or qualities of 'women's
learning' are innate, fixed and uniform across situations (essential attributes of women) rather than integrally connected to a particular set of situational, social and historical circumstances change (p. 218).

One example is that of "connected learning", which is perceived as fixed in women, with no one considering why women prefer this type of learning. Hayes explains it by stating that connected learning is preferred as it is less competitive and the preference stems from a sense of lack of confidence in other learning contexts. Hayes maintains Belenky, Clincy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) provide an example of this risk by generalising the differences between men and women, whilst the similarities between the sexes could pose a threat to genuine understanding, and learning about different types of 'women's learning'.

The current research examines a phenomenon of empowerment in a group of 'ordinary women' who participate voluntarily. Obviously this group has something that is relevant for these women in the present era – the third Feminist wave, when voices advocating individualism and diversity among women are heard. Obviously, the use of the empowerment tool has made the phenomenon more intriguing from the subjective angle. The products of subjective learning are the goals of this research. The research is interested in the learning products as those are seen by the women, while being aware that some of the 'attractiveness' of the phenomenon in the eyes of women is the group's accessibility, the geographical proximity, and the fact that participation does not require them to take tests. This framework is different from other, structured learning programmes. The process provides an opportunity for change. Perhaps Hayes's claim (2000) is correct and learning does take place in a situation of lack of confidence in other learning frameworks, but the current research can examine whether this group enables a springboard to other systems. Perhaps a change in the individual women's perception enables them to break through barriers and resolve issues thus connecting to other formal systems. This is another thought of the researcher following a significant discussion of 'women's learning' and its role in a world of gender (Belenky, Clincy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1986; Hayes, 2000).

Crawford (1995) regards learning in a way that Hayes considers as enabling one to avoid generalising gender differences, as our conceptions of masculinity and femininity are the products of socially and culturally determined belief systems rather than purely biological factors.
This issue promotes the examination of how societal and cultural belief systems about gender shape women’s learning. It enables the possibility that men and women think, behave and learn in the same ways, and perhaps reach the conclusion that gender is irrelevant.

Another risk that Hayes discusses is that of the inability to assess learning women’s diversity. This research may also relate to this claim, as the research seeks to examine the subjective aspect of ‘women’s learning’ in the process of ‘personal empowerment’. And ‘Ordinary Women’ experience those issues. The researcher agrees with Hayes’s claim that by choosing the personal investigation way, "we have the potential to build knowledge about 'women's learning' more generally. That also helps us understand diversity among women." (p. 221).

Indeed this research focuses on the knowledge accumulated with 'ordinary women' in the process of 'personal empowerment' in a group. This knowledge might shed more light on 'women's learning' via the perception of empowerment.

The current study will interpret the findings in terms of the influence of gender. Thus women can be researched as a group without resorting to generalisations or a "dichotomy" but rather to generalisations and diversity. This research does not generalise but will still attempt to point to a balance of thoughts and feelings arising in the course of learning.

Coffield (2000) agrees with this wide outlook on learning that encompasses more than learning that takes place in the classroom. However, he makes no distinction between male and female learning. He argues that formal education and training are only a very small part of the entire process of learning which takes place in schools, colleges, at work, in people’s homes and within the community. Moreover, he claims that although the government, employers and the majority of the researchers ignore informal learning, it is sometimes imperative and necessary, whereas formal training is not always necessary. To support his claims he introduces the debate between Lave and Wenger (1991) about the sharp dichotomy between 'formal' and 'informal' learning. In their study they tried to address the problem of how learning can occur without teaching and how training can be organised in a formal and informal way in a community. Another example set by Coffield (2000) is a study conducted some 20 years ago by Tough (1979), which shows that most adults undertake projects of independent directed learning outside the school or on-the-job training. Coffield
believes that informal learning has the benefit of joining together students of different ages with the purpose of promoting joint learning and helping those who encounter difficulties in formal education and learning.

This research examined a phenomenon belonging to the informal education domain, though initiated by the formal establishment. This work may shed light on the products of the learning of 'ordinary women' in the process of 'personal empowerment' as it occurs in the informal community framework. Since the process takes place in a group, the following part will engage in reviewing the issue of empowerment in a group.

2.4 Empowerment in a Group

Lee (1994) opens her discussion of the empowerment group approach by quoting the writings of Paulo Freire (1973a), which coincide with the present research paradigm and the various connections through which the researcher investigated the phenomenon of empowerment: "Every human being is capable of looking critically at (the) world in a dialogical encounters with others.....Each wins back (the) right to name the world....No one can say a true word alone" (Freire, 1973a).

Freire's words (1973a) represent the nature and the processes that underpin the group empowerment process, its dynamics and how this dynamics contributes to each participant. The focus of the present study was how 'ordinary women' perceive their empowerment learning process from a personal outlook, and although the research question concentrates on the individual woman, and how she perceives the process, the researcher claims that it is impossible to separate it from the environment, which in the present study was the women's group. For this reason the researcher decided to include a separate section on group empowerment.

According to Sadan (1997), the group is the ideal environment for programmes that aim at increasing awareness, mutual assistance and reciprocity, elaboration of social skills, problem-solving, and experiencing interpersonal influences (p. 54). Lee (1994) sees groups as the "optimum medium for empowerment on all levels" (p. 209).

An overall perception of the significance of a group, and how it may be used as a therapeutic tool and empower the individuals that comprise it is widely discussed in the social work group. Lee (1994) maintains that many groups have the power and ability to empower the members of the group, and the groups therefore differ in "the
Lee (1994) asserts that in an empowerment group "the content and process must reflect empowerment principles and purposes" (p. 208). The group builds an atmosphere of equality, and the group members feel that there are no givers-and-takers in this situation, and that each is able at the same time to contribute to the other women and receive something valuable backing return. Being part of a collective organisational structure in which all members are equal, and the close relationships that gradually develop with a female instructor, make this experience of women rich and powerful (Kieffer, 1983; Sadan, 1997).

The act of giving something to the group in addition to receiving something in return intensifies participants’ satisfaction (Maton and Rappaport, 1984; Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988; Sadan, 1997). Sadan (1997) argued that participation in the empowerment group belongs in the wider and more general category of self-assistance groups, and that participation in empowerment groups is an ideal though not exclusive mechanism by which to encourage individual empowerment. Equally important, the empowerment group has a clear potential for a more general empowerment, which is manifested through women's ability to provide others with concrete help, and to acquire new skills, including possible public actions in the future (Dodd and Gutierrez, 1990; Cox and Parsons, 1994).

The role of the group in the empowerment process is significant if one details the factors that compose it: the ability to share an experience, to share knowledge and create new knowledge – all these are emphasised in the process of 'personal empowerment' of women in the framework of a group. The experience of togetherness creates the added value developing in the room. Hence the role of the group will be described via the women's subjective perceptions.

The following section was inserted in the process of reconstructing the conceptual framework. This section discusses 'social mobility' and is required as part of this research conceptual perspective.
2.5 'Social Mobility'

'Social mobility' as a field of knowledge and concept is used by the political and sociology science. Sociologies have paid much attention to 'social mobility' (Davies, 1970). The political science and the sociology of mobility are not part of the agenda or the conceptual framework of this work. The conceptual framework of the research combined three realms of knowledge ('personal empowerment', 'women's learning' and 'gender'). This combination of 'personal empowerment', 'women's learning' and 'gender' according to the research paradigm has the potential for motivating women to take action so as to change their place in society, towards moving up an existing hierarchy.

From the researcher's point of view, the research concept is that above the three factors of the research is the motivation to change the individual place of men/women in society. This belief that resulted from the research evidence has led the researcher to include a separate paragraph on the key concept of this research, which is 'social mobility'. The researcher did not intend for changing the structure of society, but rather a personal change in society, i.e. getting higher on each participant's given hierarchy.

The researcher referred to basic principles of the theory. According Weber (1930) people may be mobile in society in three ways, through changes in their occupation, through shifts in status and through alterations in political ranking. Davies (1970) says that "Weber provides the basis for a distinction between occupation mobility, status mobility and political mobility. A man may improve his occupational ranking by getting a job which requires greater skill, involves more control and carries with it higher income without necessarily gaining in status vis-à-vis other status groups (Davies, 1970, p. 18). This theory of Weber's (1930) is connected to and relevant for the research in two ways. One is in the research question regarding the issues and dilemmas arising as a result of empowerment process and whether these issues pertain also to the world of work. Work is a factor which according to Weber promote 'social mobility'. The second way is through political mobility by being part of a group of women who have in common the will to make an effort and become more mobile through a political change. With regard to the political level, Davies (1970) says that "the important question is not simply that of who gets to the top, and how do shifts in social stratification affect the political system, but how power is itself defined and distributed" (Davies, 1970, p. 19). This question can also be very interesting as the
research deals with Empowerment. The root of empowerment is power, and dealing with empowerment says something about the distribution of power in society and the active action to change it.

This research focuses on the perceptions of 'ordinary women' going through a process of 'personal empowerment' and the issues arising in the process. Do 'ordinary women' engage in the issues of changing the power relations between them and their environment? Are they ready to take action as to change these relationships?

If the answer is positive, a connection builds between the political level of 'social mobility', 'personal empowerment' and Feminist attitudes. Feminist attitudes are created through the individual-political encounter, as it is believed that everything that happens in the life of an individual woman reflects her social state as well (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brentley, 1988; Sadan, 1997).

The potential of 'social mobility' is embedded in the research approach, in the sense of progress within a given hierarchic structure, some of the findings will relate to it. However, the research will not relate to 'social mobility' in the broad sense of changing social structures as it focused on 'personal empowerment', 'gender' and 'women's learning'.

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2.6 Integrative Summary

"[T]he journey begins right here,
in the middle of the road.
Right beneath your feet.
This is the place.
There is no other place...
[There is] no other time".

David Whyte

The subject of this thesis is the personal journey of 'ordinary women' who, at a
certain point in their life, decided to embark upon a process of 'personal
empowerment'. The research questions focused on the issues which 'ordinary
women' expressed in their learning through the empowerment process and sought
to discover if, in what ways to what ends the women were aware of the ways in
which such an empowerment process affected their perspectives towards themselves
and their self-efficacy in their different domains of life.

The research was concerned with the individual outlook of women on their
capabilities following their participation in empowerment programmes for women
towards diminishing the gaps and increased sense of self-efficacy in their life-
domains. The conceptual framework includes three realms of knowledge all of which
have both the power and potential to introduce a change: 'personal empowerment',
'women' and 'women's learning', which is a separate and unique realm of adult
learning ('Andragogy') according to the Feminist approach. All three realms are
present in the conceptual framework and demonstrated through the research
question, based on the rationale that the empowerment process is a significant and
meaningful process that allows learners to re-evaluate themselves, through this
exposure to new materials, a process that Aschroft (1987) described as "Empower,
empowered, empowering, empowerment"...say the words and watch the barriers fly
up" (p. 142).

The conceptual framework which combines these three realms of knowledge and
their operative expressions in the research phenomenon pointed to wide knowledge
accumulation potential within groups of 'ordinary women' in the process of their
empowerment. This knowledge tells the stories of 'ordinary women' in the Post-
Feminist Era and might lead to awareness of their situation and position in
contemporary society and the factors that halt and advance 'ordinary women' in the north of Israel. The knowledge is represented according to the subjective eyes of women.

The research concept argues that it is important to refer to the significant process of women's 'personal empowerment' and observe it from the integrated view of the two elements: 'personal empowerment' and 'women's learning' according to the Feminist views and as captured by the participant women.

'Women's learning' stemmed from an approach maintaining that 'Andragogy' does not represent the complex female experience consisting of years of structural male superiority, absence from the public and academic discourse and 'women's learning'. Women learn, identify and experience events through which they learn, interpret and behave. Hence it is appropriate that women create a body of knowledge for women and about women (Hayes, Flannery, Brooks, Tisdell, Hugo, 2000; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Traule, 1986). This body of knowledge has to recognise formal and informal knowledge while attributing equal significance to the knowledge and its creation.

The idea to research 'women's learning' in the 'personal empowerment' process and to find what feelings, thoughts and issues it awakens with women, and whether this knowledge helps women identify factors that enhance or halt empowerment, including issues pertaining to the work world is part of the Feminist study. As such it connects to statements made by Hayes (2000) that writing about 'women's learning' is political: "It was political in that we wanted to give more visibility and credibility to 'women's learning' in its own right not in comparison with men's learning" (p. 218).

An empowerment process which integrates principles drawn from female pedagogy may turn out to be a very useful connection on the individual level. Women who make a decision to participate in empowerment programmes for self promotion and on the gender-oriented level, with the assumption that expansion of knowledge on 'women's learning' and 'personal empowerment' of ordinary women is something that could promote knowledge about 'ordinary women' these days can add to the knowledge both in everyday life and in the academic world. A closer look at each of the realms of knowledge reveals a variety of studies and publications, but the integration of these three subject as it builds in the conceptual framework of this
work answers to a gap in knowledge that the studies and publications about it is insufficient and scarce, especially in Israel. The goal of the present study is to provide an answer to the existing gap through the research question. A study of what the researcher identified as three overlapping and interrelated realms in the eyes of 'ordinary women' may serve as a contribution to knowledge about 'ordinary women' in the north of Israel in the 21st Century.

Researchers maintain that the domains discussed in this research are interconnected as they all have the potential to introduce change and 'social mobility' aiming to improve women's status. The main concepts in which this research engages, 'women's learning' and 'personal empowerment', are part of the basic values pertaining to equality and social justice.

'Ordinary women's' empowerment in an Israeli context, one of the main concerns of this research, becomes ever more relevant today, given the difficulties that Israeli women face on a daily basis. Nevertheless, the ordinary women's choice to find answers in the empowerment group generating from the 1960's requires understanding of the needs these groups meet as well as the ways to meet those needs as perceived by these 'ordinary women'.

Studies, publications, articles in newspapers and statistical data - all these lead to the conclusion that there is still much to do in order to diminish gaps between men and women in employment, wages, promotion to more influential jobs, politics etc. (Izraeli et. al., 1999; Swirski, 2002; Swirski, Kunnur-Attias and Swirski, 2003; Grinstein, 2004; Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). The researcher argues that anyone who deals with gender issues must adopt and present a broad perspective that encompasses statements regarding social and cultural structures, and policies in order to understand the macro level, and its influence on the micro level. The researcher's story is not typical of most middle and low class women, for whom things are completely different. The concern here is that when things are presented in this way, and emphasis is placed only on women who have succeeded greatly, a bias could result, and the picture is very different from the one that was published by the ADVA institute in March 2004.

This research focused on 'ordinary women' as this research chooses to call them, in the sense that it involves women who are not considered helpless, women who cope
with the daily tasks: most of them have jobs and raise their children; some of them have grown up children; women who are not defined as needy or not integrated into society on the one hand, and on the other hand, women who do not hold top positions in economic or social centres of influence.

This focus of the research examining the integration of ‘women’s learning’ into the process of ‘personal empowerment’ in the eyes of ‘ordinary women’ is yet another gap that this work is trying to bridge. The research approach does not relieve women from their personal responsibility, but on the other hand, it acknowledges the responsibility of institutions and policy pertaining to the fact that women are still not at the heart of the public discourse in Israel, but are still struggling to achieve the desired change. With this approach in mind, the research seeks to present data that reflect the economic and social situation in Israel. This situation has implications on Israeli women's status. One of the highlights of the Feminist discourse is bringing it to the centre of the agenda and reaching a state that is contrary to the one created due to pushing women off the centre and emphasising men's discourse as the right one representing society and its conventions (Friedman, 1982, 1999; Izraeli, 1999; Krumer-Nevo, 2002; Lieblich, 1994, 2003).

The evidence presented in this work might shed light from a subjective angle on the thoughts, emotions and issues that arise in the process of learning empowerment as the women experience it. According to the researcher, knowledge is significant for advancing the status of ‘ordinary women’ as well as developing further research so as to expand knowledge about and for women.

On the one hand, the researcher points to economic trends which are determined on the political level that there result women pay the price, and on the other hand, organisations leading empowerment programmes are public organisations some of which are funded by government budgets.

Organisations operating empowerment programmes are social service departments in the local authorities, women’s councils and various women’s organisations like 'Naamat', 'WIZO' and the 'Women's Lobby'. The present study reviews one of the ways in which these social organisations try to introduce a change and promote women – empowerment groups, which provide tools for women, allowing them to identify their own inner powers in order to make a change and fulfil themselves. The first empowerment programmes developed in the 1960s. The present study concentrates on a phenomenon in which 'ordinary women' who are part of the
middle-class partake, women who, in their everyday lives, are forced to cope with the operative implications on the macro level, women who still fail to break through the boundaries. These 'ordinary women' reflect, according to the researcher, the real state of affairs for many women in Israel. The present study will shed light on these women and present their lives and experiences based on their own voice and in the way that they see fit. It is the researcher's view that the measures which are taken by these women, and their willingness to cope with empowerment serve as evidence of their motivation to make a change. The present study investigated the process of 'personal empowerment', what is the change they are telling about, which issues and emotions are raised in this process and what are the main themes which this process of personal women's empowerment entails all from the personal perspective. The research seeks to listen to the change that women undergo in their personal experience.

In this process, individuals go through a transition from one state of efficacy to a higher one. Ashcroft (1987, p. 143) said that this process is about "bringing into a state of capability to act". She goes on to say that this is a dynamic process, by which the individual becomes "an empowered person...someone who believed in his or her ability/capability to act, and this would be accompanied by able/capable action" (Ashcroft, 1987, p. 143).

The researcher believes this is a process, after which there is no 'turning back' at least on the conscious level. After the significant process where one feels, and knows, as if removing the blindfold, one cannot turn back. The research focused on the essence of the process and the subjective voices depicting it.

The research questions examine whether an Israeli woman undergoing processes of empowerment sense, according to their testimony, a change and an increase in their sense of self efficacy, and feels empowered in the sense that she, for instance, is capable of identifying advancing and restraining factors in her environment, has much more confidence and faith in her ability to act towards reaching her goals and realising her choices.

The primary theory in the present study addresses issues such as 'social mobility' in order to change women's place in a given hierarchy towards a better stance. Hill-Collins (1990) maintains African-American Feminist thinking emphasises the ongoing interplay between African-American women's oppression and African-American women's activism. This is a perception of the world as a dynamic place
where the goal is not merely to survive, to fit in or to cope; rather, it becomes a place where we feel ownership and accountability. There is always choice and power to act, no matter how bad the situation may appear to be. Viewing the world as one in the making raises the issue of individual responsibility for bringing about a change, (Hill-Collins, 1990).

The current study examines a phenomenon whereby women discuss their empowerment in the pattern in which the process is conducted, the atmosphere, and the contents might lead to the development of a more genuine discussion of essence regarding what is required of each individual and of the group when seeking to introduce a change. The researcher believes that the empowerment group might serve as an ideal platform for raising authentic issues, and that this women's discourse under the title of empowerment might lead to the direction of equality (Richardson, 1987 in Hill-Collins, 1990).

In order to reach this knowledge, women's subjective reports were analysed regarding their stories, examples of situations in their everyday lives. The research attempt to find stories, discussion and situations whereby following the process, women perceive themselves changing the dynamics between them and their environment in the direction of narrowing the gaps between them and their immediate environments.

This research assumes that power is a key concept in Feminism just as it is basic in the concept of empowerment, and hence it is important to understand whether women have power and seek to use it so as to understand the power relations between women and society (Yoder and Kahn, 1992).

The current research examines subjective perceptions of empowerment and gender. Empowerment causes women to claim responsibility for their lives, to find the power within them and act within the framework of the social structures in order to diminish gaps (Sadan, 1997).

Women going through an empowerment process become more responsible. According to the researcher, finding the balance between the personal and collective and between these realms may be the key to 'personal empowerment'.

Gender-related writing is in a way a 'patchwork', as it introduces a complex colourful whole, when each of the parts exists separately and independently from the other.
parts but is also interconnected in a unique way to the other parts. The researcher states that the way in which these parts interweave and how much of each part is used is the key to an understanding of the recesses of this field of gender. Feminist studies according to Herzog (1999) are conducted in a field that contains paradoxes: it demands gender equality, including gender differences; it aspires to achieve freedom and equality for individuals while gaining group solidarity based on gender.

The Feminist approach has made the issue of gender an inseparable part of the public and scientific agenda and also serves as a catalyst to the structuring of a scientific body of knowledge contemplating the causes and the outcomes of women's place in society.

During the 1980's the 'Post-Feminist' view emerged, which strongly opposed to what it believed was the categorisation made by the Feminist approach and which resulted in a strong tendency to ignore differences and niceties (Creck, 2003). This research integrates the two ways of thinking: the one referring to the individual woman and her uniqueness in relation to other women, society and other relationships and from her own point of view. The research focuses on subjective perspectives and hence the researcher has to act with caution, separating the unique from the general, generalise where necessary and identify the ways in which women learn, in this case 'personal empowerment'. The second way of thinking relates to the group where the empowerment process takes place, using a process that originates in the 1960s but is still relevant to 'ordinary women' and examining the significance of this process to their 'personal empowerment'.

Rappaport (1995) suggests "the study of empowerment may be fruitfully combined with a narrative approach to theory and method. The narrative approach spans levels of analysis. It explicitly recognises that there is a mutual influence process between community, organisational, and personal stories."(p. 795 – 796). For Rappaport (1995) it is clear that these stories not only exist but they have powerful effects on human behaviour. They tell us not only who we are but who we have been and who we can be". Rappaport (1995) argues that "Understanding how community and organisational narratives are created and appropriated into our personal life stories (and vice versa) and how these stories influence identity and behaviour, personal and social change, is one of the aims of narrative theory and research. Narrative theory is an approach to knowledge that opens new methods and ideas for those committed to the empowerment social agenda." (p. 795-796).
The researcher agrees with Rappaport's (1995) attitude which builds a connection between the narrative doctrine and empowerment and the derivative authentic knowledge. Rappaport strongly supports the idea of listening to the voices of the people we work with and allow them to tell us what it means to be empowered in a certain context. Rappaport claims that the narrative doctrine allows us to do this. In line with Rappaport's (1995) standpoint, one of the goals of the present study is to identify the voices of the participating women and, as already indicated in the introduction chapter, this thesis was written following the researcher's exposure to a variety of empowerment groups and women's willingness to participate. The research method allows the researcher to listen to their voices, to identify the voices of the customers, or as Rappaport (1995) put it, to identify the empowering mechanism based on the principles of feminine pedagogy, to identify components of the all-inclusive and significant concept of 'empowerment' and what it means to women.

The conceptual framework and the Feminist principles led to the choice of method and research methodology and tools to suit the nature of the present study. The principles were:

1) Constructional perception of knowledge - as knowledge is perceived as a reproduction rather than production, scientific knowledge claiming to be objective is actually an expression of patriarchal ideology representing a world dominated by male values, preferences and experiences, thus the entire female experience is misperceived (Krumer-Nevo, 2002). The Feminist alternative is hence offered as an alternative with theories based on the female voice.

2) Discovering and legitimising the female voice– the fact that women live in a patriarchal society leads to differences between female and male experiences. In order to create a separate social niche and place for women one must rely upon women's knowledge, accept it, its legitimacy and uniqueness (Krumer-Nevo, 2002; Anderson and Jack, 1991; Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1987).

3) The importance of the social context – understanding reality and women's consciousness based on the prevailing social reality of inequality in terms of gender power relations (Krumer-Nevo, 2002).
4) Women perceived as agents – The Feminist studies consider women as active players in the social game (Gilligan, Rogers and Tolman, 1991).

5) The quest for feminine subjectivity. Post-Feminist theories from the 1980's onwards point to the necessity to learn from similarities among women, but equally important - from differences among women (Krumer-Nevo, 2002).

In view of these principles the researcher held interviews, collected stories of different women, observed the group's behaviour, analysed the stories, posed questions, listened to the feminine voice as a subject and an object and tried to confront the complicated task of scientific structuring of different sources and materials which are introduced in a 'feminine language'. These stories and interviews were collected scientifically and aim to preserve the authenticity of the feminine voice.

One of the methodologies in this thesis deals is the researcher's personal diary. The diary records the process which the researcher underwent as a woman, a researcher, a mother, a wife and a person who is familiar with the contents and issues at the heart of this study and how these affected her own 'personal empowerment'. The researcher's personal experience is also described and analysed and is based on the principles of Feminist pedagogy, which legitimises the use of personal experience in an intellectual study and emphasises the relatedness of affect and intellect. She maintains Feminist educators realise that this knowledge is far from being neutral and both the students and teachers bring their own texts to the classrooms, which shape and determine the nature of learning (Culley, 1984). This, she believes, is the space perceived as the place of knowledge reproduction (Krumer-Nevo, 2002). The diary is in the appendix.

Additional support of the decision to include the researcher's personal story of empowerment in the present study stems from the constructivist paradigm, which asserts that it is not possible to separate the researcher from the subjects and study the phenomenon from an objective outlook (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, 1998, in Shkedi, 2003).

The challenge that lies in the qualitative-constructivist approach and the Feminist outlook, together with the researcher's own experience and even more so, the fact that both the qualitative and Feminist studies recognise that being a woman – an opportunity arises for both the researcher and the participants. This recognition and coping with it including issues arising in the process are presented in this research. The researcher coped with ethical dilemmas and potential ethical problems. In the
end of the research process, the researcher evaluated the research limitations. The following section discusses the main gaps in knowledge which the research addresses.

### 2.7 Gap in Knowledge

The present study, which integrates three subjects and realms of knowledge, seeks to explore the phenomenon of 'personal empowerment' groups from the individual outlook of 'ordinary women' who experienced this phenomena voluntary once or even more. During the process of building the concept around these themes, a gap in knowledge was identified. This sub-chapter summarises the main gaps which the researcher identified and to which this thesis can contribute.

- Through women's stories of 'personal empowerment' and the phenomenon of empowerment groups for women the present study explored women whose location on the scale of 'personal empowerment' in terms of efficacy is higher than one might expect, since very often, empowerment is closely associated with the weak and unprivileged segments of society. This study investigated a phenomenon called 'personal empowerment' through the eyes of women whom the research calls 'ordinary women' in north of Israel, who go to work everyday, raise their children and family, who have social ties, encounter a variety of obstacles, but are determined to make a change. The 'personal empowerment' process is conducted in the framework of a women's empowerment group. 'Ordinary women' constituted the research population enabling a peek into the issues and dilemmas, the thoughts and the learning of women in the current era, when Feminism shifts from the collective to the individual. These women are helped by a process developed in the 1960s so as to make changes in a more empowering direction. The concentration on this group, which is under-investigated and the use of their stories offers a unique contribution as it sheds light on the thoughts, feelings and issues that concern women, 'ordinary women', as they participate in empowerment programmes. Very often, researchers and Feminist studies concentrate on successful women who made an impressive breakthrough and serve as an example for other women, that success for women is manageable. They also concentrate on downtrodden women or underprivileged women who are not enjoying the same rights or
standard of living as the majority of the population. 'Ordinary women' rarely have an opportunity to be in the centre of a Feminist research, and in this sense the present study offers something new. The connection between focusing on 'ordinary women' and the time of the research might contribute to further knowledge about this population and the ability of a tool from a previous era to be relevant to 'ordinary women' in the present.

- The period of the research in the 'Post Feminist' era is another contribution to knowledge in the sense that it sheds light of the 'ordinary women' and the problem they cope. This knowledge can be useful to both individual women and to the women as a collective.

- The research revolved around the question of the necessity and need to design scientific and research tools built specifically for a Feminist study. This question derives from the perception of Feminism as a separate and independent realm of knowledge. This realm gradually develops and is based in several ways, as a separate body of knowledge, research and teaching in both traditional and innovative ways. It strives to accumulate knowledge in unconventional ways. One of the challenges and goals of the Feminist study is to achieve knowledge in ways which are not typically used in studies, as a result science's and social systems' disregard for the needs of this discipline and its significance. The researcher's view accords with that of Harding (1986) who claims that although a Feminist study represents an independent body of knowledge, it can still use the traditional research tools in order to gain and accumulate the knowledge that it seeks to achieve. The present study's choice of a qualitative-constructivist method and the use of interviews, observations, discussions with the participant women on the research findings and a personal diary, and, serve as evidence that a study that builds on Feminist knowledge and outlook and employs traditional and conventional methods can still produce significant knowledge. The products of the encounter between classical scientific approaches and the Feminist one might constitute a significant body of knowledge for the development of tools for working with women.

- The phenomenon of 'personal empowerment' was studied in this thesis from another point of view. Normally the perspective is through the product, in this case the ability to feel more empowered. This research seeks to reach the learning components in the process of 'personal empowerment' of 'ordinary women' as they perceive it.
Emphasis is placed primarily on women’s stories of how they became empowered and their active undertaking of actions in order to become empowered. In many cases, Feminist studies concentrate on oppressed and deprived women, as Feminism was built on the notion of women as a disadvantaged group. The present study makes an inquiry into a story of empowerment and active participation. The story of the participant women is a story of empowerment rather than a story of oppression and discrimination, a story that challenges the perception of women as weak and powerless.

The exploration of the phenomenon relates theory to practice. It is often argued that theories and the academic world are disconnected from the real world. The investigation of the phenomenon may build the connection between the two worlds represented by the desires and wishes of the 'ordinary woman'. This connection may lead to the establishment of theory which is related to practice.

Luttrell (1989) posits that "despite the call of Feminist scholars for a more comprehensive discussion of differences among women and examination of the construction of gender in specific historical and social contexts (Dill 1983; Jaggar, 1983; Rosaldo, 1980; Stack, 1986; Throne, 1986 in Luttrell, 1989), we still know little about the multiple meanings that women attach to the knowledge they have or are seeking and its relationship to the concrete conditions of their lives." (p. 35). This research was very much concerned with the subjective point of view of the 'ordinary women', the similarities and the differences and the issues which they encounter in their daily life and in the 'personal empowerment' process. The findings can provide a picture about the multiple meanings of the knowledge which they gained from the 'personal empowerment' process which emerged from the observations, interviews, the discussions and the personal diaries.

After presenting the conceptual framework connecting the different concepts in which this research engages, the following chapter will introduce the consideration for choosing the research methods and the rationale underlying the research methodology.
Chapter 3: Research Methods and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research method, the considerations that underpin the choice of the method and methodologies, and provides a theoretical explanation of the method and the operative course of the research. The choice of the specific method to be used in the research is a significant part of the execution of the research in a way that provides the best answer to the research question.

The research journey depicted in this thesis focuses on the voice of 'ordinary women' expressing their personal stories of empowerment through their own outlook and it seeks to discover if it is possible to tell whether their personal stories include a view that is geared to closing the gaps between men and women.

The conceptual framework in this research amalgamates the 'personal empowerment' process of women's way of learning, a separate branch of 'Andragogy' according to Feminist approaches. The researcher investigates women's way of learning from a Feminist approach and argues that women's knowledge has unique characteristics.

An inquiry into the relationship between 'personal empowerment', women's way of learning and implementation relates specifically to 'ordinary women' who participated in an empowerment course.

During the development of the research paradigm, its conceptual framework and the research process some other questions arose. This process was part of the nature of the research.

The research paradigm leans upon social, educational and Feminist theories. In order to gain the knowledge required and to be able to answer the research question, the researcher conducted a post positivist, inductive piece of research, based on an inductive qualitative method of inquiry. This research is guided by Feminist theory and is a qualitative constructivist research.

The research consists of two stages. The first stage is based on constructivist qualitative inquiry of women's narratives and the second stage follows the principles of 'Participatory Action Research' and 'Action Research'. The researcher conducted neither Action Research nor Participatory Action Research. The use of the term...
'principles' relates to the fact that the second part of the research used principles taken from the two above methods by sharing the research process and results with the participants.

The researcher used another research tool, a personal diary. The rationale for the writing of the diary was the Feminist approach that the researcher, being a woman investigating women, is involved, connected to the situation, and influenced, and hence accompanying the process of investigation with a written diary can help in identifying influence factors and contribute to the research credibility and the readers' ability to rely on the findings (Shkedi, 2003).

The decision made by the researcher to write a diary has been supported by Feminist researchers who wrote about the influence and the interaction developing between the researcher and the researched women in Feminist research (Krumer-Nevo, 2002; Lieblich, 2003).

The explanations of what is going on in a researcher-researched situation might derive from a number of sources. In this research the focus is that as a woman who investigates other women and is also exposed to materials pertaining to empowerment and 'women's learning' according to the Feminist outlook, she can lean from her own experience to shed light on certain aspects of the phenomenon, or broaden an understanding of the studied phenomenon. Another justification for the diary is the ability of the researcher to identify the mutual influence between her and the respondents and thereby maintain the reliability of the research.

This chapter provides a thorough explanation of the considerations which underpin the selection of the method and methodology. It delineates the research process. The chapter refers as well to the triangulation and ethical considerations. Preceding an introduction of the methods is a graphic description of the research process.
3.2. Graphic Description of the Research Process

| Starting point: In the framework of her professional work the researcher was exposed to the phenomenon of empowerment. In addition, she expanded her knowledge through the reading of relevant materials, identification of basic and central concepts, and critical thinking and discussion. Together, these provided the learning and structuring of each of the domains that underpin the thesis. |
| Construction of the primary conceptual framework, formulation of research questions, identification of the gap in knowledge, and setting the research boundaries. |
| The researcher designed the research, selected the method and derivative methodologies and began her fieldwork based on the paradigm and the conceptual framework. |
| Initial conduct of the research, analysis of the materials according to the structural method that stood at the basis of the three stages. The analysis was developed by Shkedi (2003). The researcher identified new questions following her fieldwork and identified a need to design a new stage of inquiry: stage two, which builds on the materials from stage one. Initial design of the method and methodologies. |
| Activation of stage 2 of the study, including an analysis of materials, debating with the theories and the primary conceptual framework. |
| Build a sound theoretical conceptual framework. Structuring of categories and sub-categories and re-identify the research issues, concepts, and the gap in knowledge. |
| Conclusions and applications for future research or practical implications. Conclusions are phrased and written with a degree of cautiousness in order to refrain from generalisations. |
3.3 Comprehensive Review of the Research Process and the Methods and Methodology

During the first stage the researcher interviewed women who participated in the empowerment groups. Some of these women were members of the same group while others belonged to different groups. The empowerment course was held in the Northern region of Israel. The structure of the course was the same for all groups. The second stage was an observation. This stage was built in the course of the study and followed an analysis of findings drawn from stage 1 of the research. The results of the analysis led to the researcher’s decision that another stage is required in order to better understand the issues which emerged during stage 1 and answer them. During this stage, the researcher was involved in the design of the course and the inclusion of relevant contents and materials that deal with empowerment. The result was the inclusion of specific materials pertaining to women’s unique way of learning and gender-related issues. These issues emerged from the analysis carried out in stage 1 of the research. Following the rearrangement of the course and the design of the new programme, the researcher has undertaken several roles. She observed the meetings. During the observation the researcher sat in the cycle, a little bit outside, she had a notebook in which she took notes throughout the meeting. The researcher took notes of the women’s words, behaviour, feelings, feedback, and in some cases decided on changes and amendments according to these feedbacks following a discussion with the professional instructors and the Chairman of the organisation, who served as an active participant. During the observation stage, the researcher documented the participants’ personal stories and relevant materials including for example their words, feelings, and details and anything that pertains to the 'here and now'. The researcher played several roles during the dynamic stage 2 of the research.

Stage 2 of the research is built on principles of the two methods - action research and participatory research, and the selected methodologies for this stage were observation and a journal that relates directly to the observations.

As described earlier, the researcher did not conduct Action Research, but rather used its principles such as making changes in the empowerment programme so as to suit it to the knowledge on which the researcher chose to focus. The partnership between the researcher, the programme managers and the participants relies on these principles.
Stage 2 of the research relates to principles of participatory research, in which the researcher is involved in the study and becomes a participant in the sense of the active role the researcher assumed: changing the programme, consultations, observations and active note-taking during the group's activities. This type of research coincides with the Feminist agenda, which promotes the sharing of knowledge with others and the creation of knowledge by women through participation and action (Krummer-Nevo, 2002). During this stage a session was led by the researcher and findings were presented to the participants who were either interviewed or observed. A thorough discussion of the findings followed. The researcher wrote down notes and asked women to write whatever they wanted: feelings, thoughts, ideas, stories etc. A detailed explanation of the exact principles of action research and participatory research employed by the researcher in the present study is provided later in this chapter.

The method and methodology are both the result and the expression of the perception that underpins the research, and the integrated use of methods as a means by which to illustrate Feminist research approach and the ways to gather information as well as the researcher's outlook. In order to gain knowledge, particularly in a Feminist study, women are perceived as partners in the research process, and through their participation the researcher can achieve authenticity.

The following principles guided and informed the present study:

1) It is the researcher's opinion that Feminist thinking is legitimate in every realm and activity in which women engage.

2) Concentration on women involves an observation of social structures and the effect these have on women, and hence, the influence these structures have on individual women's thinking.

3) This research is not merely about women but also for women. Being a Feminist study, it is committed to changing the space within which women act and live their lives. It is committed to listening to the feminine voice and spreading it in order to understand profoundly and truly the phenomenon and what it means for women and also to better understand the essence of women so as to set their position in society.

The present study builds on the empowerment studies and maintaining that a process of 'personal empowerment' is one possible key to improving self-efficacy (Raheim and Bolden, 1995; Bandura, 1997; Rippey Massat and Landy, 1997; Sadan,
The researcher was interested in finding out whether women, according to their subjective perception, believe that they improved their self-efficacy as a result of the empowerment process, and whether according to their reports they use it in the different cycles of their life including the work world. The researcher agrees with researchers claims that the work world is a significant space where women can change their self-perceptions, advance and progress (Izraeli, Friedman and Scrib, 1982; Izraeli, 1997; Efroni, 1998; Izraeli, 1999). Progression in the world of work can contribute in some way to diminishing the gaps between men and women. Breakthrough can be either through practical actions for themselves or by setting an example for other women.

The research examined the participants' self-perceptions via their reports and did not presume to examine the practical applicability of these reports.

A review of the theories suggests the existence of a gap in a variety of studies between the various concepts which underpin the present study, and as a consequence the researcher decided to explore these directions thoroughly and reach the subjective truth from women's perspective. The justification for the use of a qualitative tradition was the ability embedded in narrative investigation for presenting the subjective truth of each participant, and the ability to sound the unique voice thus reaching profound answers in the participants' statements (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Krummer-Nevo, 2002; Shkedi, 2003), leaving room for materials and authentic issues women raise in the process of their 'personal empowerment', which women addressed during their unique learning experience.

The researcher contends that the discussion regarding the relationship between gender and science in terms of building and producing research tools specifically for this realm of knowledge is yet to be completed. The recognition that gender should be seen as a legitimate and independent realm of knowledge which gradually but firmly sets up and enquires into other realms of knowledge through the Feminist approach and/or gender-oriented standpoint is stronger now compared to the past (Thompson, 1983; Moi, 1985; Harding, 1986; Maguire, 1987; Lieblich and Josselson, 1994). Researchers hold the view that through writing about feminine aspects and about that essence of women, public awareness increases and more women are encouraged to join the process of writing thereby help produce meaningful

The researcher states that the realm of gender has gone a remarkably long way towards recognition as a separate realm of knowledge, and the evidence is the growing number of schools and universities that teach women's studies in Israel and worldwide. This trend points to the recognition of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of this realm. Equally important, these universities and academic institutions publish a considerable amount of studies on the subject.

Female researchers were interested in the implications of the recognition of gender/Feminism as a distinct realm of knowledge for the actual design of research methods and methodologies specifically for this realm (Harding, 1986; Reinhartz, 1992). Harding (1986, 1987) was mainly concerned with the research methods which are most suitable and appropriate for the Feminist agenda as a specific realm of knowledge and she was occupied with the question if there is indeed a Feminist method. She described her standpoint in the following way: "My point here is to argue against the idea of a distinctive Feminist method of research. I do so on the grounds that preoccupation with method mystifies what have been the most interesting aspects of Feminist research processes." (1987, p. 1). According to Harding (1987) there are three distinctive characteristics of Feminist analyses that go beyond the additive approaches. Her first claim was that Feminist enquiry attempt to add women to these analyses, and in doing so the researcher rectifies the androcentrism of traditional analyses. The second is "an examination of women's contributions to activities in the public world which were already the focus of social science analysis" (p. 4). The third aspect of the new focus of women's studies, claims Harding (1987), is the study of women as the victims of male dominance. Harding (1987) argues that this victimisation of women is problematic, as it falsely suggests that women are only victims. The present study accords with the new approach to Feminist studies to which Harding (1987) referred because of the focus on 'ordinary women' and their learning experience in the 'personal empowerment' process.

Because the research concentrates on 'ordinary women' and their 'personal empowerment' learning, it investigates the phenomenon from a different point of view, where women are perceived not as victims, but as pioneers in a sense, women who decided to connect their personal story to a story of power. This assumption
arises from the fact that the researcher engages in a phenomenon of women who developed a different reality and life story for themselves. The women's starting point in this research is high, as they choose to participate in their own empowerment process on a voluntary basis. During the research, women are studied via their stories, interviews and observations, thus uncovering their subjective self-perceptions.

The present study explores the 'personal empowerment' process which often takes place in a group of women. During the process, the environment might be aware of the joint learning in the group as well as of the creation of joint knowledge (Lee, 1994; Sadan, 1997; Krumer-Nevo, 2002).

Regarding the third element pointed by Harding (1987), one of the goals of the present study was to introduce the empowering story rather than the 'victimising' one, from women's point of view. At the same time, the study seeks to find whether the stories that they told indicated a growing trend of a change in their status and self-efficacy; in other words, will their stories point to a transition from a prior state of oppression towards self empowerment and emancipation.

Harding (1987) claims that Feminists would be very cautious in claiming that Feminist science or epistemology is possible, and they can only envision how Feminist science or epistemology would look. Harding (1987) quoted Donna Haraway, a science historian, who believed that Feminists must consider questions such as: "Is there a specific Feminist theory of knowledge growing today which is analogous in its implications to theories which are the heritage of Greek science and of the scientific revolution of the Seventeenth Century? Would a Feminist epistemology informing scientific inquiry be a family member to existing theories of representation and philosophical realism? Or should Feminists adopt a radical form of epistemology that denies the possibility of access to a real world and an objective standpoint? Would Feminist standards of knowledge genuinely end the dilemma of the cleavage between subject and object or between non invasive knowing and predication and control? Does Feminism offer insight into the connections between science and humanism? Do Feminists have anything new to say about the vexed relations of knowledge and power? Would Feminist authority and power to name give the world a new identity, a new story?" (in Harding, 1987; p. 136-137).

Harding (1987) claims that the questions written by Haraway (1981) indicate her scepticism regarding Feminist theories then. The present study takes place at the
time where Feminism is already acknowledged as a body of knowledge with unique characteristics and features, a time where this Feminist body of knowledge has a clear standpoint regarding the nature of the relationships between knowledge and power and between social systems and the exact place of women, and the things that affect their lives as individuals and members of a collective. The present study has dealt with what Haraway (1981) called 'a new story'. The researcher decided to use the qualitative approach, which is the most suitable for this sort of inquiry in order to reach the subjective knowledge of women and to see whether new knowledge ensues from 'women's learning' through empowerment programmes. In addition, via the stories, the research might shed light on the connections women make between the knowledge they gain in the process and 'power', which is the root of the empowerment process (Harding, 1987).

Reinharz (1992) quoted Roslyn Bologh. The latter asserted that the question regarding the methods that are most suitable for Feminist studies involves the question of identity. Reinharz wrote a book precisely on this issue (Reinharz, 1992). In her book, Feminist Methods in social Research, she examined the methods employed by Feminist researchers. She claims that the discussion evidently involves philosophical outlooks on the nature of the relationship between Feminism and research. This chapter delineates the research approach that stands at the basis of the present Feminist study. The methods selected for the present study are also recognised by Reinharz (1992) as the most suitable for a Feminist enquiry, as they allow a researcher to gain knowledge and eventually find the truth, which is the goal of every Feminist study.

The choice of a qualitative research method derives from an understanding that gender-based inquiry is essentially an inquiry into the complexity of women, and therefore, allows the researcher to understand the contexts that women make, translate the implications of these contexts for the individual woman and describe the subjective and personal experience. The goal of the present study is to listen to the voice of 'ordinary women' and their most authentic thoughts regarding the significance of knowledge for the individual woman. The researcher believes this knowledge can be just as important and significant in social and political discourse in which women are involved and which exceed the boundaries of the present study.

The researcher's decision to follow a qualitative-constructivist method derives from the contribution of the method to an ability to fully capture the complexity of the
phenomenon and understand the experience through women's authentic stories. The qualitative-constructivist method represents the paradigm that the researcher believes in and which accords with her perception of reality as consisting of various realities structured by individuals. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the question of reality of an individual person and brought a quotation from Stewart Emery's book (1978): "Our individual personal reality - the way we think life is and the part we are to play in it - is self-created. We put together our own personal reality. It is made up of our interpretation of our perceptions of the way things are and what has happened to us. We make some basic decisions about life when we are being born... We literally create a reality that reflects our view of the world and who we are in relation to it" (p. 39 in Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 73).

This paradigm accords with the perception of the researcher and also (so she believes) with the Feminist view that in order to find the subjective truth one would have to build on the knowledge of women and the ways in which this knowledge forms. On the surface, it may be claimed that the researcher's assertion that each and every woman makes her own world is incompatible with the Feminist stance. It may also be claimed that social structures and culture have a major effect on women's place in society. The researcher, however, explains that there is no contradiction; quite the opposite, precisely because the discriminative political and social perceptions regarding women's place in society are so deep and ancient, the reality of women inevitably builds on these perceptions about women which women have for so many years absorbed from society. The qualitative-constructivist method would thus enable the researcher to trace these effects that shaped women's self-perceptions and at the same time describe the 'new story' (Harding, 1987) of their self-empowerment. Women's narratives, their stories about the new process which they underwent and through which they gained an empowered status, the new experience that builds on their understanding and acceptance of their prior experience before entering the process, this narrative and the dialogue that takes place between their two stories (the transition from the daily, routine story that accompanied them prior to entering the process and that in the process of 'personal empowerment'). The research examined the meeting point of the two stories, to understand better. From this the researcher draws the evidence for the added value of the qualitative-constructivist method in relation to the present study, as it serves two goals: it is an operative method through which the researcher gains important
knowledge and equally important, this method acts as an empowering force that allows women to tell their story of empowerment from a powerful stance and a sense that they accomplished something that is very significant and important to them (Connely and Clandinin, 1990; Raccover, 1992).

The qualitative-constructivist method allows the researcher to disclose the central themes and to understand the phenomenon as a whole and its essentials. It is the researcher's view that women operate and act within interrelated, interwoven and complicated systems and that the only possible way to study the essence of women is through the exposure and disclosure of the whole and the parts of which it consists and the connections among them. Feminist researchers posit that the connection between Feminism and interpretative methodology is part of the Feminist discussion of 'a change of paradigm' in academic research and the social implications of this change, especially in terms of women's empowerment (Yannay, 1982; Raccover, 1992; Zellermayer and Peri, (Eds.), 2002). Feminist researchers welcome the transition from a positivist paradigm to an interpretative one. Furthermore, they blame the positivist research for marginalising women to a point where they became victims (Zellermayer and Peri (Eds.), 2002). Feminist researchers believe that the traditional positivist research serves as a mechanism of gaining intellectual and technical dominance and control over women.

Harding (1986) talked about the difference between the positivist approach, which emphasises a known object that is being studied and seeks to establish uniform scientific knowledge, compared to the knowledge of the subject which is the real source of the subjective and authentic knowledge to which the qualitative-constructivist method refers, is recommended and implemented by the researcher in the present study. Harding (1986) stated that in positivist epistemology the combination of an external ruling object and a lost subject result in technical rationality which subdues women's authentic experience and at the same time the disconnected male point of view rules. This point of view creates a buffer between the researcher and subjects, between facts and values and between theory and practice (Zellermayer and Peri, (Eds.), 2002). Zellermayer and Peri (2002) claimed that educational Feminist researchers strive to change the definition of knowledge. Their works give validation to a new interactive and dialogical theory of knowledge, according to which studies serve to produce new knowledge rather than discover already existing knowledge, and a source of negotiation rather than verification. This
theory of knowledge is based on an understanding that subjective meanings are the very heart of human experiences and through them we structure, in the process of transformation, experiential epistemology (Zellermayer and Peri, (Eds.), 2002, p. 22). Raccover (1992) dealt with the question of whether the Feminist criticism of science is justifiable and acceptable, and in doing so he mainly referred to the works of Harding (1986, 1987, 1991). His conclusion was that the criticism is only justified and acceptable when the arguments that they present refer directly to science in its traditional format with an intention to improve its methodology. He goes on to argue that there is no basis for the accusations that science in its present format is afflicted with sexism and the consequent need to make a revolutionary change and thereby create a new Feminist science (Raccover, 1992). Raccover (1992) challenges the fundamental Feminist claim regarding the connection between science and culture. He states that this assertion has no hold in reality. His view conflicts with that of Harding (1986) as she states that Feminism has not created a new science. The present study corresponds with Harding's view (1986). The researcher believes that the way to establish knowledge about women for other women requires a change and cannot be built on the current state to which Raccover (1992) refers. Consequently, it is the researcher's belief that a real and profound change must be built on preliminary recognition of knowledge about women for the sake of women. Feminist knowledge is formed and created through writings, enquiries and publications. The present research stems from the Feminist science (Raccover, 1992) and combines applications of Feminist research while using qualitative methods allowing the researcher to get to the relevant and significant knowledge in the framework of traditional science (Raccover, 1992). This combination results in the new science (Raccover, 1992) which recognises the connection between science and culture, and also claims that through subjectivity we gain the knowledge that the research seeks.

Rappaport's approach to using narratives in qualitative research (1995) serves to justify the use of the narrative tradition as the most suitable for the present study. He said that "we are led to help people to discover their own stories, create new ones, and develop settings that make such activities possible- all activities consistent with the goals of empowerment", (Rappaport, 1995, p. 796).
The narrative method is a powerful mechanism through which one can describe, understand and accelerate the empowerment process on a personal, community and organisational level (Rappaport, 1995). The concurrent use of several disciplines, and the narrative discipline as the most suitable method for the study of gender, focus on 'ordinary women' and 'personal empowerment' and an examination of implementation of this in the world of work, have the potential to produce valuable knowledge of and for women. A large number of researchers wrote about the suitability of the narrative method as a way of introducing women and their unique stories (Lieblich 2003, Krumer-Nevo, 2002). These researchers are also women and thus deeply committed to the idea of letting women speak out and describe their lives exactly as they live them, and these explain their choice of the narrative doctrine and the use of stories. According to Lieblich (2003) the focus derives from the fact that in this way, women present their own 'narrative truth'.

Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (2001) states that the researcher's set of beliefs and definition of questions and methods derive directly from gender and a cultural point of view. The qualitative method perceives the place of the researchers and their personal contribution as an inseparable part of the research and their involvement in the research is seen as one of its primary principles, "The researcher's own self embedded in the research" (Woods, 1996, p. 56 in Shkedi, 2003). Lieblich (2003) concentrated primarily on the researcher's place within the specific world or domain that they study and describe based on a clear and precise standpoint: "I listened, edited and interpreted all interviews, and clearly had some influence on the conversation and the story which followed the conversation, either knowingly or unintentionally... I listened to and interpreted the things that I had heard in relation to the borders of my world and prism, and my own personality and experience. There is no other way" (Lieblich, 2003, p. 14). The researcher holds a view that is similar to that of Lieblich (2003) and Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (2001) and decided to manage a personal diary, which delineates her personal journey and the experiences that she had following her exposure to materials on empowerment and gender, and also describes and interprets the new knowledge that she gained from this journey. The diary is presented in the Appendices. The researcher shares Lieblich's (2003) view that the female researcher has predispositions, attitudes and thoughts that would necessarily have some influence on the nature of the interaction between her (the researcher) and the interviewees. The researcher thinks that this interaction
and the dialogue that develops with the interviewees are significant in terms of the knowledge gained from the phenomena and the research questions arising from the interviews, as she employs a method that is highly consistent with the Feminist outlook. This mutual process can promote the researcher's understanding of the process and the knowledge that women gain. Equally important, it has the potential to promote the participants' understanding, as they tell and interpret their stories. Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (2001) claimed that the choice of a qualitative research method has in its basis a set of interpretations and material practices which make the world visible. In relation to the present study, the decision to conduct a Feminist study was made for two reasons: the first is that it studies a certain phenomenon. The phenomenon has relevant implications regarding gender and the Feminist agenda as it may increase knowledge regarding the 'personal empowerment' of 'ordinary women' and examine these subjective perspectives. The second reason is what the researcher sees as the important task of allowing women speak out any way they see fit, and talk about their own process of self empowerment. Their stories provide a glance into the intricate world of Israeli 'ordinary women' in the north of the country, who chose to take part in empowerment programmes which are part of the research.

The researcher's choice of a qualitative inquiry which aims for subjectivity builds on her intention to make the daily occupations and engagement of women the focus of this study, through an examination of empowerment, thereby extending the existing knowledge about the gap indicated by Luttrell (1989). To support this, she quotes Hootsman (1980) and Thompson (1983): "...Others have focused on the content and pedagogy of adult education courses, suggesting that women's lives and concerns are being minimised or neglected by adult education theory and practice, which further promote unequal gender relations (Hootsman 1980; Thompson 1983). But overall, the field has not provided a comprehensive approach to the understanding of power relations and resistance in 'women's learning' and knowing" (Luttrell, 1989, p. 35).

Through listening to 'ordinary women's' stories, to the said and unsaid, the researcher aimed at better understanding the knowledge resulting from the women's process of learning. This is connected directly to their place in society and the relationship they have with social settings that perpetuate inequality and
discrimination. It is the researcher's view that the method selected for this study is the most suitable for achieving that goal.

The qualitative research method has a variety of streams and trends, including ethnographic, biographic, field theory, aesthetic study and case study (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2001; Shkedi, 2003). The first stage of the present study is qualitative-constructivist, as it seeks to study people in their natural setting and without intervening in their everyday routine (Rist, 1982; Shkedi, 2003, p. 30). The qualitative research is essentially naturalistic, as the researcher has no intention of influencing the studied environment or the participants (Shkedi, 2003).

The present research subjects were Israeli women in the north of Israel who participated in empowerment programmes. Given that the study is qualitative-constructive, one can infer that it is also inductive, which means that the researcher listens to what the participants have to say and does not attempt to adjust the findings to her predispositions (Shkedi, 2003). The researcher also engaged in practical field work, with the intention of learning how Israeli 'ordinary women' who participated in empowerment programmes interpret and perceive their world. Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1994) state when qualitative-constructivist researchers begin a research, they have a certain direction in mind, but they always make changes and amendments, because of the new information that emerges (Shkedi, 2003).

The present study began with a research question concerning the individual point of view of Israeli 'ordinary women' and how they perceive their self-efficacy following participation in empowerment programmes for women which aim to diminish the gaps and enhance women's sense of self-efficacy. During the research several other questions were added to this comprehensive question, which led to additional courses of inquiry. These questions emerged from the interviews, observations, the diverse contents and the dialogue between the researcher and these contents. Further questions engaged in:

1. The process and whether its outcome is that women learn to identify factors that either advance or halt their 'personal empowerment'.
2. The issues, thoughts and feelings arising in the course of women learning 'personal empowerment'.
These questions that emerged, and the inquiry into these directions, provide the foundation for the central themes that emerged during the interviews and other themes which emerged from the observations that took place in stage 2.

A decision has been made to use the narrative trend, which is one of the directions typically undertaken in a qualitative research, to produce the central themes, based on the assumption that the narrative-constructivist method better represents rich and complex phenomena associated with life experience through stories and narratives (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998).

Several definitions of narrative have been proposed. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) said that the concepts 'narrative study' or 'narrative inquiry' are also suitable: "Inquiry into narrative" as it is "narrative inquiry"...narrative is both phenomenon and method". Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. To preserve this distinction we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon 'story' and the inquiry 'narrative' (Connely and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) claim that despite the prevalent and habitual use in qualitative studies of the concepts 'narrative' and 'narrative research', there seem to exist no clear-cut definition of these concepts. Their definition of narrative was taken from the Webster Dictionary (1966): "Discourse, or an example of it, designed to represent a connected succession of happenings" (p. 1503). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) proposed another definition, according to which a narrative study is "...any study that uses or analyses narrative materials. The data can be collected as a story...or in a different manner".

The dialogue which is part of a narrative that concentrates on women and conducted by a female researcher, in the case of the present study, takes place between the researcher, who is also a woman, the narrator woman and the Feminist outlook, which serves as the basis and the background for the point where the women, the story and the researcher meet and intersect. The product of this process is the knowledge produced through the meeting, and the use of women's knowledge and knowledge about women for the sake of women as a means of achieving social promotion. In the introduction to her book, 'Seder Nashim', Lieblich (2003) wrote: "As a woman, I felt much more comfortable discussing these issues with women
(here she refers to the focus of the book, which is women who manage family life), and as a Feminist I was interested in bringing women's voices to the forefront of the public and academic discourse" (Lieblich, 2003, p. 12).

In the introduction to the book written jointly by Lieblich and Josselson (1994), Lieblich wrote about the relationship between women and narrative inquiry: "Women have been storytellers in many cultures, yet their different voices were not heard enough in the public sphere. We do not accept the simple notion that the narrative is a feminine domain or research tool, or that women speak in the language of stories. Rather we think that the subjective-reflective nature of the narrative coincides with the Feminist ideology of compassionate, unauthoritarian understanding of the other" (p. xi-xii).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state "when both researchers and practitioners tell stories of the research relationship, they have the possibility of being stories of empowerment" (p. 4).

Because the research is Feminist and builds on the paradigm that every person builds his or her life story, women were asked about their empowerment learning and how they implement it. The personal women's stories, the story of the researcher and the story received from the research have the potential to produce another story which serves as an empowering experience for women.

Gertz, Gertz and Merav (2002 in Zellermayer and Peri (Eds.), 2002) contend that Feminist studies today speak of a feminine language and aesthetics. This view is also supported by Julia Kristeva (in Moi, 1985), and her perception of the feminine language as semiotic language, as a mother tongue, as a language of poetry and chanting, a language of the female body. Kristeva (in Moi, 1985) claims that this language preceded the male language which was imposed by the masculine symbolic order. This language tries to reach the stage where a child maintained harmonious relationships with their mother, a relationship that does not involve pain, separation or division (in; Zellermayer and Peri (Eds.), 2002, p. 39).

Zellermayer, Satter and Lorian (in Zellermayer and Peri (Eds.), 2002), who conducted an autobiographic feminine study on teachers, claimed that a growing number of Feminist researchers who strive for women's empowerment (Steedman, 1989, 1992; Stanley, 1992; Reinhartz, 1994) use autobiographic studies/life stories as a mechanism by which to strengthen women's knowledge and solidarity and
promote the development of female discourse in academic studies. The present study is not autobiographic but qualitative-constructivist with elements of narrative-interpretative inquiry and thus interested in women's stories about empowerment learning. At the same time, because of the strength and uniqueness of the qualitative-constructivist research integration of several different genres is feasible. The present study enables women who tell their own story of empowerment learning to consider how their knowledge as women who participate in empowerment programmes conceptualises and develops in the context of significant relationships. By speaking out they will be able to illuminate and shed light on their own process of learning and the way they structure reality in view of that process. The researcher believes that this knowledge would promote her understanding of the specific phenomenon with regard to the participant women, and at the same time would help the participant women understand their own learning, knowledge, and whether, according to their reports, they put into practice this knowledge and implement this learning in the different life circles.

The main goal of the research is based on the following postulations of the Feminist study indicated by Zellermayer, Satter and Lorian (2002):

- Women's knowledge is achieved and developed within the context of relationships with other women or with significant others (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1995).
- Women's knowledge is autobiographic. Their learning takes place as they relate new information to their own life story. In doing so, they break the conventional boundaries between the private and public, or between them and the family/historical/political context which confine their lives (Bateson, 1990).
- Women suffer from the non existence or inadequate representation of their voice in the academic discourse. Autobiographic studies are a means by which they can present their stories, consequently let their voice be heard (Reinharz, 1992). The main goal of the autobiographic study is to empower women.

The present study is neither autobiographical, nor does it wish to make generalisations. Rather, it tries to structure an interpretation of 'ordinary women's' stories regarding their empowerment learning through a dialogue between the researcher and the participants and with specific reference to women's
empowerment learning and the knowledge that participants require during the process – all that from the women's subjective reports.

**Stages of the Research**

Stage 1 of the research consists of in-depth, open-ended interviews with 16 women. Preceding each interview was an explicit request of the researcher from each woman to describe her own story of empowerment following her participation in the course. Clarifying and directing questions were occasionally posed to the participants.

Fontana and Frey (2000) said that "...Interviewing is one of the most common and powering ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings" (p. 645). Fontana and Frey (2000) also argue that interviews have a wide variety of forms and a multiplicity of uses. The present study used the face-to-face verbal interchange, which is the most prevalent form of interviewing. The interview was non-structured.

Fontana and Frey (2000) assert that "Increasingly, qualitative researchers are realising that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results" (p. 646). "The focus of interviews is moving to encompass the hows of people's lives (the constructive work involved in producing order in everyday life) as well as the traditional whats (the activities of everyday life)" (p. 646).

The present study embraced Fontana and Frey's (2000) perception of interviews as negotiated texts and thus negotiated with the theories, with the statements of other women, with the perception and remarks that underpin the present study, and comments and new insights which emerged from the various stages of the research. The interviews developed into something dynamic in the sense that they took place in non conventional places, as was the case with an interview that was held in the kitchen of one interviewee as she prepared the Saturday meal for her family with the wonderful smells of the cooked food. The interview that developed into a dialogue with that woman concerned the meaning of empowerment and the sort of learning that it involves. The researcher used a non structured interview which, according to Fontana and Frey (2000) "can provide a greater breadth of data than the other types, given its qualitative nature" (p. 652).
The researcher felt that because it is a Feminist research that wishes to achieve the existing knowledge and at the same time produce new knowledge, she would have to use an open and non-structured approach and allow each of the interviewed women to tell her personal story, to create her knowledge and to introduce her unique materials and contents. She deliberately used a non-structured interview and encouraged the interviewees to choose the time and place for the interview, as well as the subjects they wish to discuss. She only gave them a brief explanation of the research and asked them in general to talk about the process which they experienced. In his diary, 'Day in the field', Malinowski (1967/1989 in Fontana and Frey, 2000) elucidate the distinction between a structured and non-structured interview and claimed that the non-structured interview "...attempts to understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any a priori categorisation that may limit the field of inquiry." (P. 653).

The researcher states that the non-structured interview accords with her own perception of the complex world in which women live and act, the parallel way of thinking and the choice that she made to engage in a qualitative research while leaving aside predispositions and preliminary assumptions.

The interviews were analysed by way of integrated analysis, primarily through structural analysis, which is one of two central methods of analysis in a qualitative research developed by Shkedi (2003).

Shkedi (2003) states structural analysis concentrates on the 'how', on frequency and power and the structure of discourse. Shkedi (2003) argues that the product of the analysis is a description or a theory, which essentially provides a theoretical explanation for a unique phenomenon (that the study wishes to explore). In line with the structural method of analysis, the initial analysis consists of three stages:

**Stage 1: Primary Analysis**

The primary analysis refers to the participants' (firsthand) story. In the case of the present study it refers specifically to women's stories which were drawn from the personal interviews. In this stage the researcher collects the stories. Strauss and Corbin (1990) called this primary stage of analysis 'open coding'. Shkedi (2003) said that this stage is not completely open and is subject to the same principles
applicable to the following stages. Primary analysis is characterised by categorisation of phenomena and the naming of categories through thorough and careful examination of the data. In this stage the researcher used the protocols of the rewritten interviews and divided them to separate categories, each representing a theme. At this stage the researcher learned about the themes that derive from the data. This has marked the beginning of a process of integrating the diverse themes in order to receive a more complete picture. Strauss and Corbin (1990) compared this stage to the initial assembling of a jigsaw puzzle. According to Shkedi (2003) this primary stage marks the beginning of an enquiry. The interpretations and the categories which are built are temporary and reflect directly the words and descriptions that were given by the informants. The categories take into account the cultural context and the time and place context of the studied phenomenon.

Stage 2: Mapping Analysis

This stage is a direct continuation of the preceding stage. In a mapping analysis the researchers "try to build a connection between the various categories" (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1996). Data is organised in a different way through the establishment of connections between different categories and between categories and sub categories. The next step is comparison of the categories which are subsequently placed on two axes, horizontal and vertical. This analysis is a conceptual process, as new conceptual order is formed by changing the location and order of the categories. Shkedi (2003) states that the questions asked in this stage concern the nature of the relationship between the assorted categories. As the research progresses, the researcher returns to the categories that were built in the primary stage and reconsiders the conceptual thinking that was structured during the mapping stage and basically the conceptualisation of ideas. A 'categories tree' is built, which provides a graphic illustration of the conceptualisation of the materials and themes that emerged from the interviews following the initial stage in which the categories were built and the second stage in which the categories were organised based on the stage of analysis. This stage of analysis is still closely related to the findings. At this stage emphasis is given to frequency and salience in order to give weight to each category given the more general context of the research. The researcher is in agreement with Shkedi (2003) that as qualitative-constructivist researchers we do not place the same emphasis on quantitative aspects as positivist
researchers, especially in the case of a Feminist study, where as researchers we attempt to gain knowledge from the unsaid and from concealed information. Therefore, the present study is committed to place the same emphasis on the categories which are absent and not frequent and salience as the emphasis that is placed on the dominance and salience of other categories.

**Stage 3 – Focused Analysis**

A process by which researchers build a coherent explanation with reference to central category/ies based on pieces of information and evidence. At this stage the focus of the research begins to clarify. If the researchers' ultimate goal is to achieve focused description, the central categories of the focused analysis become the basis for a reformulation or rephrasing of the research questions (Shkedi, 2003).

The central categories emerge as the analysis progresses. Shkedi (2003) asserts that the organised process and the transition from one stage to the next allow us to gain a more complete picture and be strict and precise about maintaining validity and reliability. Every central category, otherwise known as indicative category, has several key sub-categories, which also serve as indicative categories, and these may be further divided to sub-categories. The categories we find at the bottom of the structure are content categories. The central category is an indicative category, as it reflects the overall identity of the various categories. Shkedi (2003) stated that when building the central categories, researchers are mainly interested in finding the main theme, which indicates the main problem or concern or source of interest for the informants, what the data suggest as the most relevant issue (Shkedi, 2003, p. 144). The sub-categories point to the features and characteristics of the category that is ranked higher. Researchers restrict categorisation only to those categories that are connected to the central category in a meaningful and significant way and which have the potential to constitute the basis for thick description (Geertz, 1973; Shkedi, 2003).

The present study executed all three stages of analysis. A detailed description of stages 2 and 3 of the research is provided in the discussion and analysis of findings chapter. In order to get to deep understanding and the final research categories (to be presented in the Findings chapter), the researcher conducted the second
research stage which involved additional methods. Details pertaining to the methodological approaches will be presented later on in this chapter.
The researcher added contents and materials to the structured and mapping analysis stages, based on another stage that was carried out in light of the primary analysis – from Stage 1: the interviews. Following the primary analysis stage, the researcher wrote down the central themes that emerged from the interviews. The analysis has indicated the need to make a deeper inquiry into the contents and provide a deeper and fuller explanation. The researcher decided to observe the 15 meetings of the empowerment programme. As a participant observer she was also involved in the design of the programme and the inclusion of themes and subjects drawn from the interviews. The main subject that was added to the contents of the course during the process was women's way of learning as a separate realm of knowledge in the Feminist doctrine. During the observations the researcher was present in the meetings, wrote comments and was not involved in the conversations, discussion and the exercises. At the end of each meeting the researcher analysed the materials pertaining to the specific meeting and was also involved in the writing of feedbacks at the end of each meeting in relation to the contents of the meetings. Conclusions were drawn by the researcher, the discussion leader and the Chairman of the Women's Council that initiated the course. They worked together with a specific intention to make decisions about a possible need to replace some of the tutors and perhaps some of the course contents based on the participant women's comments. The research methodologies that was used for this stage is an observation, which served as the main research tool for stage 2 of the research. The strategy of inquiry in stage 2 included principles of action research and participatory action research combined.
As mentioned earlier, the research used principles of Action Research and Participatory Action Research. Nevertheless, the researcher will introduce the perceptions connecting to these types of research and to Feminist research while focusing on the common principles to both.
Maguire (2001) engages in the question of the connection between Feminism and action-research and their mutual contribution. Maguire notes comments made by Noffke (1998) and Bowes (1996) as to their attitudes to the notion that there are rare cases of action-research and Feminist theory engaging each other. Maguire (2001) quotes Kemmis's perception of action research as "a process that opens communicative space, which 'brings people together around shared topical concerns,
problems and issues...in a way that will permit people to achieve mutual understanding and consensus about what to do" (p. 59). Maguire believes that this approach requires action researchers to engage in what she terms 'turn to action'. "This requires us to examine and change our behaviours, relationships, and the often unseen institutional and organizational structures and relations which shape the ways we live and work, love and play" (Maguire, 1996, in Maguire, 2001, p. 59). According to Maguire, "Embracing this call to transformational action, personal and structural, has always been a bedrock of Feminism and Feminist scholarship" (Maguire, 1996, in Maguire, 2001, p. 59).

The assumptions based on the above led the researcher to follow the principles of action-research. The researcher did not do a round of action-research, and a change in the manipulation and so forth, but rather introduced a change in the empowerment course programme, while emphasizing and adding contents which arose during the interviews. While the programme was in progress, the researcher conducted observations, which were followed by presenting the findings to the participants. This stage was part of the application of the action-research principles, or rather participatory action-research. The participants' opinions about the conclusions presented by the researcher were integrated into the research findings and became part of the categories presented in this work. The significant part of the connection between Feminism and participatory action-research is that of the principles at the root of the bodies of knowledge connected to this research, the main ones being "..Feminist scholars have challenged the assumption that there is a universal Feminist perspective... their work complicates any notion that feminism is fixed, monolithic, and/or predictive of women's live" (in Maguire, 2001, p. 60).

These assumptions maintaining there is no one right way of conducting Feminist research (Maguire, 2001), led the researcher to connect Feminist research with principles of and Participatory Action Research.

The wish to reach the knowledge and make it overt in the social construction and to find out how this knowledge is expressed via the subjective perspective of the 'ordinary women' who participated in the empowerment process led the researcher to implement the second phase of the research.

This integrated use of methods allowed the researcher to include in the discussion and findings, a more comprehensive perception of the main themes reinforced in the second research stage. This integration reinforced the findings with profound understanding of the process. This understanding stemmed from the cooperation of
the participants, who were presented with the results, and then participated in a
discussion of the findings.

Throughout the entire research process the researcher collected materials pertaining
to the empowerment process and the organisers of the process. She interviewed the
main tutor (the discussion leader), a senior tutor who has rich experience in the field
and had already provided tutoring services to dozens of similar groups in Israel,
especially in the northern region. She also interviewed the Chairman of the Women's
Council and heard about the goals of the Council with regard to the execution of the
programme. She held conversations with two coordinators on behalf of the Israel
Women's Network and the Israeli-Arab Association for Economic Development.

The research ended when the researcher felt that she had sufficient enough
information in order to start writing about the research questions. When she felt that
she had accumulated a sufficiently large amount of information about women she
started to work on the discussion and analysis of findings chapter. The last part of
this chapter elaborates on the second part of the study and provides explanations
about the principles of action research and participatory action research combined
and description of the observation.

Another angle that serves as a rationale for the connection between action-research
was that Rappaport (1970) described action research as "...a type of applied social
research differing from other varieties in the immediacy of the researcher's
involvement in the action process" (p. 499).

In Rappaport's view, the action research is distinguishable from the applied research
on the grounds that in action research there is a client who has a problem waiting
for solutions. In this sense, the social scientist becomes what Bennis called 'a change
agent'.

The place of the researcher in this process was significant on several levels: as a
female researcher who conducted a study that involves women, as part of a team
that had an influence on the programme and the phenomenon with the directing of
a process and her undertaking the task of changing and improving the contents of
the course based on the previous stage conducted and analysed by her. Similar to
the previous stage, the researcher listened to the contents, but contrary to the
previous stage, the researcher observed the meetings and took notes.
Quotes from Maguire's (1987) personal journal: "We were talking, as usual, about research proposals and dissertation research. The conversation got around to the obvious contradiction between our approaches to education and research. He mentioned something called participatory research where you did research "with" rather than "on" people. "I've got to find out about this" (Personal Journal, September 1983, p. 29).

The researcher had an experience that was similar to the surprising disclosure described by Maguire above, as she learned about the ideology at the basis of this type of research and the assumption that the research is the product of a reciprocal and mutual process that concentrates equally on the 'with' and 'on'. The researcher began her work with principles drawn from action research but she was aware that at the basis of this approach something else existed, which was valuable, and this was the fundamentals and ideology of the participatory research, which completed and accorded with the principles of Action Research. The connection of the two created a full and complete picture describing the second part of the research, which was a very significant and meaningful part, significant in the sense of its contribution to promoting an understanding, the knowledge that was gained about the process of learning, the joint experience and the relationship that was built in the course of the process.

Maguire (1987) states that "Participatory research offers a way to openly demonstrate solidarity with oppressed and disempowered people through our work as researchers. In addition to recognising many forms of knowledge, participatory research insists on an alternative position regarding the purpose of knowledge creation. The purpose of participatory research is not merely to describe and interpret social reality, but to radically change it. Participatory research places human self-determination, emancipation, and personal and social transformation as the central goals of social science research" (Horton, 1981; Brydon-Miller, 1984 in Maguire, 1987, p. 29).

Kemmis and McTaggart 2000 (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) named this research strategy participatory action research and said that "participatory research (often called PR) is an alternative philosophy of social research (and social life, vivencia) often associated with social transformation in the Third World. It has roots in liberation theology and neo-Marxist approaches to community development (in Latin
America, for example), but also has rather liberal origins in human rights activism (in Asia, for example). Three particular attributes are often used to distinguish PR from conventional research: shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation towards community action” (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 568).

Though the research population was not a weak or Third World population, the researcher has made an informed decision to employ these principles, as the research is committed to promote women, to raise public awareness of the subject and to concentrate on the stories of 'ordinary women' regarding how they became empowered, a story that indicates potential success, hope and feasibility. This story serves as a driving force for other women to move on and progress and to change their life and life story. Organisations can also learn from this story and embrace parts of it or amend and adjust other parts, depending on their conclusions.

The research was held in a neighbourhood club where the activity was held, in women's homes and in the classroom. The researcher maintained direct connections with the organisers of the programme and with the lecturer and considered them partners in the journey. Of similar significance was the feedback that was given by the participants, which offered a contribution to the design of the programme and the contents which were discussed and analysed. Another principle that was applied in the present study was the connection between practice and academic in the sense that the study examined how things are done in practice and concentrated on the way in which individual 'ordinary women' perceive the phenomenon, while using academic tools which, in the researcher's opinion, are most suitable for inquiry.

During stage 2 of the research, the researcher was present and observed the exact place in which women's individual knowledge was formed in the course of their empowerment. She observed the process as it occurred, in real time. She observed women as they were sitting next to each other and holding conversations. The researcher emphasised aspects in the programme relating to gender issues and also designed a separate unit dealing specifically with women's unique way of learning. The interactive process which involved a discussion with the participants and evaluation of their exact place and location and co-thinking with the tutor and the representative of the organisation that initiated the programme, the process of listening to the voices of the participants, the placing of emphases and the
introduction of changes produced a process that had a very important goal: to increase women's self-efficacy and degree of empowerment through a process of change that will eventually lead to an overall change in their personal and social life. Similarly to Maguire (1987), the Feminist view was central to the present study. The researcher's understanding and interpretation of the Feminist view has led to her decision to conduct the study with a special emphasis placed on what Maguire (1987) called the andocentric aspect of participatory studies. During stage 2 of the study great emphasis was placed on gender-related issues with the discussion that emerged regarding the differences between men and women, different ways of thinking, the diverse emphases that they place and the influence that the exact place and location of women has on their status. Maguire (1987) claims this is the initial result of every project that involves women. During this stage, the discussion expanded to encompass the way in which the Feminist view perceives the process of women's learning. The discourse that emerged improved the researcher and the participant women's understanding of the process of empowerment in terms of their learning. Women and work was another subject that was widely discussed and included relevant issues, facilitators and barriers, and conversations held with women who had made a breakthrough. Another theme that received substantial attention was the significance of a group of women to the empowerment process and to the lives of these women. The attention that was given to issues pertaining to empowerment, gender, work and 'women's learning' offered a unique and important contribution to the actual process of learning and the products of the process drawn from the study. Maguire (1987) states that "Feminist participatory research would encourage attention to the differences and similarities of perceptions of issues among women and men" (Maguire, 1987, p. 223).

A connection is built between the themes discussed in the present study – 'personal empowerment', gender and the specific learning by 'ordinary women' according to the Feminist approach – through an ideology of equality and egalitarianism as a key to a more fair and decent way of life, with learning and empowerment perceived as a key to empowerment and emancipation. As a Feminist study, the present research places great emphasis on the knowledge that women achieve and create through the process. The Feminist study is activated in situations of inequality and strives to achieve more equality. Its commitment comes from an ideology. The implementation of the two principles as research strategies represented by the research method
enabled the researcher to achieve the knowledge that she aspired to achieve while creating an atmosphere that encourages and promotes an introduction of the contents and materials.

Another method that was used in the present study in order to gain a deeper understanding of the process of empowerment learning from the researcher's point of view was a personal diary. This learning derives directly from the researcher's exposure to materials and contents that deal with empowerment, women's way of learning and gender issues and the interviews and observations that she held as a researcher. This principle coincides with the principles of the Participatory Research as perceived by Kemmis and McTaggart 2000 (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000): "Participatory action research is a form of 'insider research' in which participants move between two thought positions: on the one side, seeing themselves, their understandings, their practices, and the settings in which they practice from the perspective of insiders who see these things in an intimate, even 'natural' way that may be subject to the partiality of view characteristic of the insider perspective; and, on the other side, seeing themselves, their understandings, their practices, and the setting from the perspective of an outsider...who do not share the partiality of the inside view but who also do not have the benefit of 'inside knowledge" (p. 590).

In the present study the researcher was involved in the design of the programme, served as a member of a think tank that examined and assessed the progression of the programme, listened to the participant women's feedbacks, observed and wrote down their comments on the programme, the contents and the lecturers, and analysed the materials drawn from these. The analysis was part of the discussion and analysis of data chapter. At the end of the analysis the researcher held two sessions in which she exposed the analysis to the women who participated in the programme. The first session was with the women who were interviewed and the second with the course participants. The sessions took place in two different areas in the north of Israel. The structure of the sessions was the same. The researcher explained the research goals and questions; she briefly introduced the topic of the research and explained the analysis in detail. After her presentation she led a discussion between her and the women, and among the women. The session was fascinating for both the researcher and to the women. The researcher was excited to hear the women's reactions to her analysis. After she had finished explaining the
analysis she felt the spirit of power that was the women conveyed to her: the women's commitment to the empowerment process and the feeling that they live with it daily. The women found themselves in the categories and added more examples to re-enforce the categories. The researcher felt that she was part of group that generated knowledge, of their own and the process of personal empowerment.

The researcher wrote a personal diary that documented the knowledge that she had gained through her learning and reflected upon the similarities and differences between her and the participant women. This diary constituted a part of the research tools serving for reaching a profound understanding of the research questions.

### 3.4 Triangulation

When a researcher conducts research there are several things to consider: the researcher must possess integrity, present data in a reliable way and display the materials in a clear and precise manner. The use of sources and data and the drawing of conclusions must be done carefully and decently in line with the ethical guidelines. The researcher believes that a Feminist study requires thorough and in-depth investigation with specific reference to the contents and materials, the said and equally important the unsaid, emotions and drives. The researcher states that the complex and intricate nature of the woman who stands at the basis of the Feminist study requires an examination of the phenomenon from several points of view, in order to gain knowledge in full and introduce that knowledge in an accountable and dependable way. This explains the researcher's decision to use several methods and methodologies in order to gain a better insight into the different parts that together make the whole picture.

Patton (1990) described triangulation in the following way: "...A process by which the researcher can guard against the accusation that a study's findings are simply an artefact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's biases" (p. 470).

Patton (1990) referred to the "potential importance of using different data-collection techniques and different evaluation research strategies to study the same
programme” (p. 464). In his opinion "It is in data analysis that the strategy of triangulation really pays off".

Patton (1990) referred to four kinds of triangulation that contribute to verification and validation of qualitative analysis: 1) Methods triangulation. 2) Triangulation of sources. 3) Analyst triangulation. 4) Theory/Perspective triangulation.


The triangulation selected for the present study:

1) **Triangulation of Methods** – Triangulation of Methods was carried out through the synchronised collection of individual 'ordinary women's' stories of their learning in a qualitative-constructivist method with principles of Participatory Research and action research, which involved the changes and improvement of the contents which were taught during the programme and the researcher's observations of women in real time. The observation had two parts: the first was an observation of the individual woman who participated in the programme, particularly her behaviour, responses, comments, statements, and interaction with the other group members. The second was an observation of the group as a collective, the process that women undergo as a group and how it affects each of them as an individual woman at the centre of the present study. The triangulation of methods promoted a profound understanding of the phenomenon, an ability to understand the nuances and subtleties, to have a meaningful experience, and the researcher was able to observe the process in real time. The researcher used the following methodologies: personal interviews of women as a means by which to learn about their first-hand experience, observation, presenting the findings to the participants and discussing them and analysis of personal diary.

2) **Triangulation of sources** – At the centre of the thesis stands the individual 'ordinary woman', and through her the story of empowerment learning is revealed. The triangulation of methods led to the resource triangulation. One was the individual source, the individual woman. Following an analysis of the
stories and interviews emerged the second source – an observation of the empowerment process and the group of women with emphasis placed on the individual woman. The observation served to gain a better and more profound understanding of the experience, the influence that the experience had on the individual woman, and the individual-group interaction. Another source was the researcher’s personal diary, from which knowledge was drawn about the researcher’s learning of empowerment as she progressed with the writing of the thesis and the reading of relevant materials. The researcher used several research methods and several sources in order to understand the phenomenon at the basis of the present study.

3) **Theory/perspective triangulation** – The present study used several approaches and theories from social, educational and Feminist disciplines – in order to understand the studied phenomenon. Although the theories derive from social approaches, the integration of theories shed light on the areas in which the various theories overlap. According to Patton (1990) "the idea in triangulation of methods and data sources within the qualitative methods is to study and understand when and why there are differences. Different results from different data sources or methods most of the time means that different kinds of data have captured different things and the analyst attempts to understand the reasons for the differences".

The contribution of triangulation to the present study was a better and deeper understanding of the details and their interrelatedness, and a deeper and more comprehensive look on the phenomenon. The subject of the present study was the individual 'ordinary woman'. Existing knowledge suggested that the individual woman grows and functions through interactions and relationships. The researcher believes that triangulation was necessary in order to provide a more comprehensive outlook. The triangulation of sources, methods and methodologies and theories helped pinpoint and deepen the enquiry into the subject, and an ability to look at the whole picture, but also consider the different parts and nuances.
3.5 Ethical Considerations

According to Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (2001) and Lincoln and Guba (1989), the assumption that underpins the constructivist view is that reality is the product of social negotiation, and it is one of the goals of any qualitative research to understand the personal structures that build and shape different realities. According to Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (2001) this implies that the research in itself is the product of a negotiation taking place between the researcher and subjects (Howe and Moses, 1999). The researcher-subject dialogue yields beliefs, norms and cultures. These assertions are shared by researchers who conduct qualitative studies and they have in common the aspiration to understand our world from an individual perspective (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (2001) asserts that qualitative researchers traditionally make methodological, strategic and ethical choices. Embedded in any scientific query or issue are ethical considerations, which emerge during the data collection stage and description, interpretation of data and the written reports.

The writer of the thesis has made an informed decision to present the research question from a subjective outlook. While keeping this in mind, the researcher embraced the kinds of methodologies and strategies that would yield authentic answers and present how women perceive their empowerment learning process. The first ethical consideration emerged during this early stage regarding the representation of truth, and whether there is only one truth. The research paradigm has set the tone here. At the basis of this paradigm rests the assertion that reality is always subject to subjective interpretation. In addition, the researcher claims that the subjective reality of women develops from a given social state of affairs, in which women must abide by rules and norms which are set by society, and women live and operate within this reality and build a reality of their own. The qualitative-constructivist method has been selected as the most suitable one in order to achieve the capacity to gain and an accurate and deep understanding of how things work thereby provide an answer to the research question. It could be argued perhaps that the positivist method can also provide the scientific answer, through a questionnaire. However, following a thorough reading of relevant literature and comprehension of the concepts and materials that underpin the thesis, the researcher has made an informed decision to use in her study the qualitative-constructivist method, as she believed that this method would allow her to reach the subjective truth, build the
connections and relatedness of the various categories, grasp in full the complexity, and receive a more full and accurate picture. The researcher argues that this cannot be achieved through the positivist approach. A positivist approach will not allow the researcher to look for inner connections without searching for regularity and constancy between several aspects. In this researcher's opinion, inquiry raising issues from the field suits Feminist research, especially in studies which aim at finding women's narrative truth from a subjective point of view.

Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (2001) maintains some ethical questions emerge in the course of the research, which was also the case here. Before the researcher began her study, she informed the subjects of the goals of the study, and the research questions. The researcher assured the respondents of the confidentiality of the information and obtained their consent. Another ethical consideration that emerged in the beginning of the research was related to the Feminist nature of the research, and the researcher's awareness of the social inequality of men and women and male dominance. As she began searching for a suitable research population, the researcher contacted some of her colleagues, who still engage in the design and building of empowerment groups, and asked for their help in finding the right population for her study. One of the groups was led by an experienced community social worker in charge of a group of female community workers who implement community projects. Following a detailed description of the research goals, and the profile of the ideal research population (women who participated in the past in empowerment groups), he immediately organised a group of women and invited them for an interview. They arrived willingly and were very happy to help and talk. Before the interviews, the researcher assured the respondents of the confidentiality of the information and of course that they have the choice not to be interviewed. At the end of all interviews which had been successfully completed, the researcher wondered whether the interviewed women decided to participate in the interviews because they had been requested authoritatively by a male. The researcher felt that this issue can raise a difficult ethical question that she needs to clarify. She met the social worker and found out that the women were asked before if they wished to participate in the study, and no one had ordered them to participate. The inconvenience that the researcher felt disappeared completely during the findings disclosure session. This was indeed part of the research strategy, in which the findings were shown to the women. Being a Feminist study, the researcher is committed to share the findings and information with the respondents. This stage
was 'used' by the researcher together with the women to explore ethical issues in the research process. In this session the researcher once again raised the question of whether or not the women were forced into participating in the study. They removed all doubts and expressed their informed consent to participate in the study and explained how pivotal the whole subject was for them and for their everyday functioning as women. The respondents were at that time asked to sign a form expressing their consent to use their words and comments in the study.

The researcher felt that from this situation, which was originally meant to make sure that participation was voluntary, emerged a much stronger relationship, and their From this stage, which the researcher considered crucial, emerged three insights. The first concerned the intensity of ethical considerations which typically emerge from a qualitative method. The second concerned the specific ethical consideration embedded in a Feminist study in which the researcher is well aware of the inequality and the need to be very cautious in dealing with the situation, and the fear that the situation will increase further inequality.

Another consideration pertains to the nature of the relationship of power between the female researcher and female respondents, given that both are women. The researcher was very strict about creating an egalitarian atmosphere, such that is welcoming and encourages women to speak. The researcher was especially meticulous about respecting the space and the subjective truth of all respondents, listening to their words and expressions and writing them down as is, and avoiding any temptation to interpret their comments and responses from her own viewpoint. The interviewed and observed women all referred to the researcher's empathy and uncompromised commitment to investigate the reasons why they think in a certain way, and double-check the sources of their statements and her apprehension.

A third issue is the intimacy that is often built between the researcher and subordinates in a qualitative method in the course of time. On the one hand, the researcher must be very cautious about how she handles the materials and contents with which she is entrusted. These materials become particularly valuable, and analysis and drawing of conclusions based on these precious materials need to be handled carefully and re-examined.
The researcher needs to remain loyal to the goal of the study but at the same time attentive to the occurrences and findings drawn from the field. The researcher believes that the thin and fragile stitches between the introduction of the research questions and goals and the data and materials drawn from the field, is even more fragile in a qualitative method, thus needs to be kept very strictly.
Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis of Findings

4.1 Introduction

The researcher decided to start this introductory session which provides explanations about the course of the study and the research findings, with a story that has been told to women who participated in an empowerment workshop which she observed. The name of this short story is "Are You an Eagle or a Hen?" by James Egri. It was downloaded from the internet website of Jenick. M. The name of the website is 'The Way Up' and, according to Jenick, it is intended for women who are committed to themselves, to their lives, to personal advancement and personal growth in many fields. (http://www.haderech.co.il/nesher.html).

"Are you an Eagle or a Hen?"

A person wandered in the woods and found a small injured eagle. He took the eagle to his home, took care of him and helped him recover from his wounds. Meanwhile, he decided to leave the eagle in his backyard, together with the hens. In the course of time, the eagle has learnt to live among the hens, eat their food and behave like them, and believed that he was also a hen.

One day a researcher passed by and asked the man: "How come an eagle, the king of birds, is kept in a backyard together with the hens?" The man replied: "Because he was fed with hen food and trained to be a hen, he never learned to fly. He thinks and behaves like a hen, thus he is not an eagle".

"Nonetheless", said the researcher, "He has the heart of an eagle and will definitely learn how to fly, if only he is given a chance". The man said that this was ludicrous, however decided to experiment this. Gently, the researcher picked up the eagle, put him on the fence and said to him: "You belong in the sky, not on the ground, spread your wings and fly!" The eagle, however, was confused, and because he was not aware of his identity and place, he returned to the hens.

The next morning the researcher returned. This time, he brought the eagle to the roof of the house and urged him to fly. Once again, he said to him: "You are an eagle, spread your wings and fly". Frightened about what he might find behind the roof, the eagle returned to the backyard to play and mingle with the hens. The researcher, however, was stubborn. He returned the following day, carried the eagle
to the top of a high mountain and once again tried to convince him: "You are an eagle, spread your wings and fly".

At first, the eagle hesitated, and looked around him fearfully. Gradually he spread his wings, trembling at first, until he finally rose up, and disappeared in the sky. Ever since, the eagle has been living amidst the cliffs and flies over the clouds proudly. It may be that, every now and then, the eagle recalls with a yearning desire his life among the hens, and perhaps he even visits them in the backyard, but, at least as far as we know, he will never again live like them, as, after all – he has always been an eagle!

The present thesis explored the connection between three separate concepts: 'personal empowerment', 'gender' and 'women's learning' according to Feminist approaches, and examined them within the specific context of women empowerment groups. The conceptual framework of the present thesis builds upon the intersection of an individual process of empowerment of 'ordinary women', the basics and principles of 'women's learning' according to the Feminist approach and the subjective reported effect that they have on implementation of their life domains including the world of work. This conjunction is examined through the subjective-individual stories of women who decided to participate in an individual empowerment programme. Based on their stories the researcher learned about their perception of the process of 'personal empowerment'. The decision to write the thesis on this subject derives from the researcher's personal as well as professional interest and is based on relevant literature and the identification of gaps in the points where the various realms discussed in this study intersect. This thesis is based on a worldview according to which reality consists of personal and individual experiences, based on which women shape their individual outlook on the world. The research strategy and paradigm builds upon this outlook, in conjunction with the domains and the concepts that underpin this thesis. The qualitative-constructivist research method has been selected for this study, as it fits well into the concepts at the basis of the thesis. Equally important, it falls in line with the principles of Feminist approach. The methods employed by this approach allow women to express their authentic voices, which according to the Feminist view, is very significant on a personal and social level (Lieblich and Josselson, 1994). The qualitative-constructivist research method is compatible with the concept of empowerment and its basic ideology (Rappaport, 1995). These reasons serve as the
justification for the use of a qualitative research approach in the study. The research sought to surface the factors, feelings and issues arising during women's 'personal empowerment' processes according to their reports regarding all circles of life including work. According to the researcher, the knowledge which is gained from this thesis is significant in terms of its potential for changing the men-women interaction and relations, given the amount of energy that women often find themselves spending in order to prove their worth and value, overcome obstacles, and create a balance between their work and a variety of other domains (Jenick, 1998).

It has been decided to conduct a qualitative-constructivist-narrative research, in order to understand the empowerment programme from women's point of view and in order to pinpoint the principal issues which emerge from the process. Through the narrative approach the researcher was able to listen to the voices of 'ordinary women' who participated in 'personal empowerment' programmes. The intention was to learn more about the phenomenon, and understand both the magnitude and the factors which are most significant to 'ordinary women'. One way of achieving internal validity in a qualitative-naturalist research is triangulation of several data collection methods (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 1990; Heiman, 2001). This synchronised, concurrent use of several methods provides insights and also an observation of reality from the participants point of view (Heiman, 2001).

The preliminary stage included interviews with women who experienced 'personal empowerment'. More specifically, the researcher listened to their personal stories and also analysed principal themes that emerged from these stories. During this stage, women were invited to tell their own personal stories of empowerment. The interviewees at that point shared their authentic stories with the researcher, who wrote down the main things, and also recorded the interview. On several occasions, the researcher had asked them to explain a certain theme or point more clearly, to provide explanations on a certain phenomenon or to add more information, in order to present a more complete picture.

Initial and mapping analysis of each interview was then carried out. From this analysis emerged the principal categories of each interview, followed by a more focused analysis, in order to suggest a more coherent explanation regarding the central categories that emerged. Shkedi (2003) said that sometimes the principal categories become the basis from which the research questions are re-shaped and
rephrased. In the present study, the focused analysis has shown a necessity to include in the research another stage, in order to gain an in-depth understanding, extend and elaborate on the categories. In line with the principles of the qualitative research, the second stage increased the internal reliability of the research.

The second stage of the research is based on the principles of action research, particularly Participatory Action research. The simultaneous use of methods enables a deeper understanding of the questions that emerged during Stage 1. During this stage, the researcher played the role of an outside observer and observed the process of empowerment over a period of time. In addition, she designed the syllabus for the specific group based on the categories that were built during the first stage and the open-ended questions. During this stage, the researcher's involvement was intensive, as she was both an observer, and was responsible for the contents, the linking of the various parts of the programme and the overall progression and also held meetings with the programme coordinator and the Chairman of the organisation who participated in the design of the programme.

Towards the end of the programme each participant was asked to reflect upon her own personal and individual empowerment learning through the programme. This was the final course project assignment.

Stage 2 of the study was guided by the Action Research and Participatory Action Research principles, and enabled an examination of the categories and issues that emerged from the first research stage (Rappaport, 1970; Maguire, 1987; Brydon-Miller, 1984 in Maguire, 1987; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000 in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). It was therefore possible to look at the categories which emerged during stage 1 and enrich them, add new ones and connect them to other categories. The importance of these categories has been recognised through the analysis of interviews, reading of relevant literature and identification of the gap in literature between the three interrelated concepts: 'personal empowerment', the way women learn according to the Feminist approach and 'gender'. Sixteen women participated and were interviewed in depth. All of them accepted the challenge of participating in a group programme that concentrates primarily on 'personal empowerment' of women. The researcher observed these fifteen 3-hour meetings in which 17 women participated and identified the main themes and issues which emerged during the conversations and workshops and wrote them down. The following step was a
comparative analysis, during which the researcher compared the consistency / inconsistency with the categories which emerged during stage No. 1 and added categories. In order to validate the findings through respondent validation technique (James and McCormic, 1983, in Heiman, 2001) and as part of the Participatory Action research principles, the researcher showed the categories and sub-categories to the respondents and they were asked to express their opinions with regard to the findings.

The integration of these methods and methodologies, the conduct of the study in several stages, with a noticeable learning occurring between stage 1 and 2 of the research, the combined use of interviews, observations and discussions, enabled the researcher to produce the findings as presented in the present chapter.
4.2 Graphic Description of the Conceptual Evidence

- **Women's group**
  - Process is guided and led by a woman
  - Learning in women’s way
  - Learning promoting atmosphere

- **The women's Culture**
  - Women at Work
  - "Running home" as a source of consolation
  - The Significance of the lack of emphasis on power
  - Multiple roles

- **Feminism**
  - Action/change in side the boundaries set by the rules
  - Community active action

- **The need/desire for change**

- **Driving force**

- **Hidden Subjects**

- **Promoting force**

- **Hindering Force**

- **Learning as a lever**
  - The power from the group and from other women
  - Women's group
  - Children and parenthood
  - The women's Culture
4.3 Research Findings and Discussion

During the first stage of the qualitative analysis which followed the tradition of structural interview analysis (Shkedi, 2003) the researcher identified and wrote down statements, sentences and words which were meaningful and significant, and repeated throughout the interviews or which were implicit. Because the present study is a Feminist study which chose a qualitative constructive research method with elements of narrative, the unsaid was as important as the explicit, clear and forthright statements. Deriving from this stage are categories and sub categories representing various themes. They derive from an analysis of interviews and methods. Categories are presented in the format of discussion and include parts of the participants responses and statements (while maintaining confidentiality of data), theoretical materials from the first parts of the thesis, including theoretical perspective, and the researcher’s notes/insights. The goal of this combined use of materials is to provide a coherent explanation of the categories and how they were constructed. Furthermore, the discussion regarding the categories included quotes based on the observations, as well as the attitude of the participants with regard to each category, and the degree to which they agree/disagree with the analysis. The decision to use several strategies simultaneously derives from the researcher’s intention to learn as much as possible about the phenomenon in general and within more specific contexts.

Multiple themes emerged from the interviews conducted in the first research stage. In fact, the researcher marked almost every statement and sentence. This wealth of materials was the outcome of interviews most of which started with slight embarrassment and discomfort. The researcher believes that this was because the respondents were asked to tell their personal story of empowerment without leading questions. In those interviews, the researcher struggled with her instinct to present a handful of leading questions, but after a very short while women began to feel more comfortable and communicated with her very easily and effortlessly. Once they started to talk, they could not stop. The researcher’s first impression was that a barrier in them had ceased to exist and they were overwhelmed by an uncontrollable flood of words, sensations and thoughts. Some of the words repeated in their stories, and it seemed that they shared a strong desire to repeat these words time and again. Differences were shown in the way in which they expressed these feelings and experiences and the variety of emphasis. Embedded in their stories
were many images which they used in order to describe their feelings, sensations and personal process. Some of the images were borrowed and adapted from personal stories relating to their specific culture, while others were taken from everyday life. One of the images was selected by the researcher to be the title of this work, as it was significant and representative of the issue. In order to demonstrate the raw materials the researcher had to work with and to enable a peek into the rich world of qualitative materials which led to the analysis and conclusions, the researcher chose to present a part of an interview without analysis but with marks made by the researcher. The questions in the current interview, asked by the researcher, were part of the research interviews which were unstructured, and as such no questions were prepared in advance.

[The bold parts are those used by the researcher for the categories and sub-categories]

"Most of the courses were courses which I was able to select from a list of courses. I was the only member of the Caucasian community...This was the difference. I felt that I was the only Caucasian person studying. I have a goal and I wish to achieve it and no one can stop me. Once you are in my community, I felt that I had to keep their place. They went out of this. In women's empowerment I gave the example of myself. In some place...I have a dream...I keep asking them (the women who participate)- what is your dream? I want to tell them".

**Question: What is your dream?**

"To study social work, which also means money and money is something that makes you feel tight and pressured. Something similar to the job I am looking for, in the field of community and social work, a nursery school that we opened for the community. This means that we take infants and structure a program especially for them and then we gradually move to people who are a little older and help those who cannot afford to participate in the program."

**Question: Are there any differences between the studying of empowerment and other things that you studied before?**

"In statistics I was unable to express my dream. The teacher gives lectures and I bring with me a tape-recorder. If I do not..., I listen to this at home. In the group we sit in a circle and the instructor is sitting in front of
us. There is no table between us and her, we feel open and free to express ourselves, each of us was listening to the other women and we did not intervene in any way. When I said "I have a dream" one of the women said: "You cannot imagine what you are doing for people...you are a person who knows how to listen". You must study social work. I received feedbacks from these women. I am very popular amongst them and this gives me power and support. If only I had money."

**Question:** Is feedback important for learning?

"It helps, it gives a real push. It is just like when a person goes to a consultant. I pay money to a person who analyzes me based on my personality, what suits me, what I should be doing when they know you.

I studied in mixed groups of men and women and in some groups of Caucasian men. I do not know whether I was involved, I really do not know. It does not bother me to study in mixed groups. As a Caucasian woman, *if there are men in the group, I treat them differently. Who is he and what is he? That's all, I do not wish to start with that,* I do not want them to say that I do not belong to an ethnic group (community)...."

The researcher felt that she was a participant in a story that was very significant to the respondents; that she was part of a very significant and unique experience and that she was committed to do the right thing with these stories. A sense of responsibility in terms of choosing and classifying categories and materials received from the participants accompanied the researcher. The responsibility was to present the categories in a way that would represent their wealth and the knowledge embedded in them.

One of the main research questions was to try and identify issues, thoughts and feelings that 'ordinary women' experience in the process of their 'personal empowerment'. The categories are those milestones focusing the main issues that arose or those that were missing from the discourse in a way the researcher figured was significant to a Feminist research. Categories were constructed in the process. Sub-categories are the sub-issues, which are part of the main categories.

The researcher also felt that although the stories were personal, they reflected the voices and represented other women as well. Alongside the individual voice emerged collective voice of the other members, voice that represented the individual woman, but, at the same time, referred to the other group members. The basis, the starting
point was the experience or the feedback that these 'ordinary women' received from the other members of the group. In their stories, the presence of women who were not part of the group but who were very close to the participant was recognisable. These included for example members of the nuclear or extended family (mother, sister, mother-in-law), and women of the same social and cultural background as the respondents. This formed two circles of women. In the first circle, the individual woman's voice described the influence that the other members of the group had had on her. This story was experienced and described through their dialogue and feedbacks during the group interaction. The second circle was a description of the individual women's processes of learning seen from the eyes of her friends. From the interviews emerged one story told in three slightly different versions or from three different angles: the first time the interviewee told her own personal story, where she was the only heroine, the second time she compared her story to that of other relatives like her mother, mother-in-law, and sister, and the third time she compared her story to that of other participant women who for one reason or another played the role of significant others. Examples can be found in Aviva's story about her life and culture, the way we was raised "...a woman has to give up, to give first of all to the others..."

From this starting point, Aviva tells the process of her empowerment while making comparisons to cultural codes according to which she was educated, to other women in her family, to other women in her place of work and to the bosses she had along the way.

The learning situation of Aviva constantly involved the culture and her family members (her mother, her mother-in-law, her sister-in-law etc.).

The researcher was not sure about the best way to describe the findings and the revolving discussion. Her initial tendency was to write down things in a narrative, picturesque, unorganised, associative way, and in that way describe women's personal and individual experience using their authentic voice and outlook. However, because this is an academic work, the researcher decided to use a structured and academic language and style. The researcher felt that the most appropriate way to describe the unique voice of women and at the same time abide by academic writing
rules and practices was to present results in the form of categories and build on the respondents personal statements.

The research findings are presented through the categories that the researcher felt are most important and significant. According to the researcher and the evidence collected in this research the conversations and observations suggest a connection between the categories presented in the findings chapter.

The evidence collected in this research reveals that process of 'personal empowerment' of 'ordinary women' starts with an informed decision and a choice by women to lead a process of change. The beginning of this decision is personal and it is later validated by the group consisting of other women. The atmosphere of the process reflects openness, familiarity, intimacy and a 'team spirit'. The entire process takes place in an environment that is accessible to women. As explained in the description of the process, the course includes formal and informal components. The former include structured curriculum and schedule. The latter include the informal aspects which cannot take place in academic settings. For example, women are sitting in a circle; every week another woman is responsible for light refreshments, strong emphasis is placed on the interrelationship between the course organisers/supervisor and participants. Emphasis is placed on knowledge and the previous experience of the women. This basically means that women bring with them their personal experiences as a source of learning. During the course women are asked to introduce their personal knowledge and their life experiences, and are encouraged to do so. Examples borrowed from other social interactions which are part of women's life are not deemed irrelevant, on the contrary: they are acknowledged by the discussion leader and the group members as relevant materials which should be taken in consideration when making a change. Another aspect the researcher feels is relevant to the way women learn is the inclusion of and concentration on gender-based materials, addressing these materials and discussing their significance to the participants. Women start to see or give examples pertaining to the fact that they are women; Women discuss the fact that being women, places them in the centre of home but in many cases not outside their homes. They talk about the tremendous work and effort they have to make in order to be able to cope with all their tasks.

Nati (fictitious name) understands much better why she is in her current situation. Each time she went to look for a job, she was relieved to get a positive answer for a
job with minimum pay. In retrospect, she understands that she was there for employers who used the fact that she had never negotiated, her wish to realise her dreams and develop a career along with taking care of her children. One of the steps she took after her empowerment process was to realise her worth and seek the right remuneration.

These discussions and stories were part of the empowerment process. The discussions connect the fact that they are women and the effect of being women on their lives.

Through the integration of these materials women are able to administer and manage their own learning style (Belenky et. al., 1986), which exists on a continuum ranging from unresponsiveness and/or acknowledging one's learning style as such, through to the building of new knowledge for oneself. Women according to the research findings obtained from their stories, make decisions about implementing the new knowledge required at the different life cycles – at home and in the world of work.

It is the women's choice where to implement this new knowledge. The stories of 'ordinary women' who participated in the process more than once show implementation of the process in several integrated environments: at home and in the workplace. In general, the 'ordinary women' who participated in this study made changes in the personal domain, but did not to made changes in the structural, political and social change in women's overall status. The changes which they made relate to their home, family and work environment.

4.4 Category No. 1- The Power Category

Introduction

Maguire (2001) discussed the things that Action Research and Feminism have in common:

"Feminism and Action Researchers seek to unsettle and change the power relations, structures and mechanisms of social work and social science." (Maguire, 2001, p. 65).

The researcher decided to use these words as an introduction to the gap in the women's reaction to power between Maguire's (2001) words and what she discovered in the present study. Friedman (1999) stated that women have considerable power in terms of functioning, influence, perseverance, and survival,
only that power is not translated into public power which serves women in general. She goes on to argue that it is difficult for them to undertake that action because of their fears that they might be seen as warriors, as anti-male figures, unfeminine, militant and cantankerous.

The researcher believes that Heilbrun's (1988) definition of power as: ".. The ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter" (p. 18), is still relevant for the 'ordinary women' in this study. According to the research findings, women still have much to do in coping with the term 'power' and its meaning as well as with the steps they have to make. The term 'power' does not come naturally to women in this research. If they referred to it they used synonyms, and used the actual term when referring to their relationships with their colleagues and children. Heilbrun (1988) believes that power and control are extremely important for promoting women in all circles of life: "Although Feminists early discovered that the private is the public, women's exercise of power and control, and the admission and expression of anger necessary to that exercise, has until recently been declared unacceptable. …Women need to learn how publicly to declare their right to public power" (p. 17-18).

The relationship between the women in the research and Heilbrun's statement (1988) is relevant for them.

The search for the term 'power' as a term in its own right has failed. Most women (90 per cent) did not use it on their own initiative. The term was missing from the interviews, and instead, women talked about 'self-confidence' and 'being stronger'. Even clarifying questions did not yield better results: For instance,

'I want to believe in myself more'

**Question: 'What will you do then?'**

Answer: 'I will do what I want to do and cannot'.

**Question: What is stopping you?**

Answer: 'I am not assertive enough, not decisive enough.'

This example is one of the cases where women in the interviews and the observations did not use the term 'power'. Synonyms were assertiveness, knowing how to say 'no', getting what one wants, but the word 'power' as such was heard in one observation that will be described later on, when in the end of the session, one participant said, 'I want more power'. No words such as 'control' or its synonyms were found.
This picture led to construction of a category, which was not part of the discourse, but rather pertained to women's custom of talking about power in synonyms. The term 'power' was specifically mentioned regarding the children or the group by 90 per cent of the women. In those cases the word 'power' became dominant and was freely used by the women. They did not use the word about themselves, and the term was not heard in either the interviews or the observations when connected to group or community activism.

Most of the 'ordinary women' who participated in this study had never tried to demand for public power that would promote them as a team. The translation of 'power' into public power, the kind of power that would change their status-quo, was not part of the female discourse in the present study. The only woman in this research who told of a political experience that was not gender-related told of the heavy price she had to pay, and her learning was it was better to stay away from situations which require collective power.

The researcher divided the references to power which derive from the interviews and observations into three levels:

**Level 1:** The perception of the researcher and what she felt about the women that she interviewed and observed with regard to power.

**Level 2:** Women's personal experiences and their voices which reflect their own power and that of other group members.

**Level 3:** The lack of power, or reduced levels of power emerging from the discourse with regard to participants expectations and personal goals.

**With regard to the first level,** the researcher's personal feelings, her impression was that during the interviews and observations women demonstrated great power and strength. She felt that a pile of personal, female power is gradually built in the course of the interviews and observations. She also felt that that power grows at the same time that women's personal story unfolds and builds, and as the puzzle is gradually completed in the course of the interview and observations. She felt that she sees women coping with a variety of roles, women with a rich and complex life story, 'ordinary women' who stress their ability to give and quality as givers. In their eyes, the nuclear family is the highest priority and where they make the most remarkable efforts, willing to give unconditionally, and to provide an endless support. Their self-positioning within this framework is such that they serve as the mainstay and those who produce the power that ensures the vitality and functioning
of the entire family cell. On top of their multiple and complex roles these women decide to voluntarily join a group of women who discuss and cope with the theme of empowerment. They make a decision that comes from within, that they wish to engage in the kind of learning that is associated with some sort of change. They indicated several reasons that underpinned their decision to participate in the process including, for example, a desire to become more powerful and develop personally, or to develop within the framework of home and family. They still consider home a close and intimate setting. Work and the workplace represent their expectations to increase and extend their power to domains other than the personal and family. However, the women who participated in the present study had no expectations to increase their power in the public and political spheres, as a means of changing the overall status of women in society and establishing a different social and public agenda. It is very clear that these women lack such ambitions and expectations because they are yet to complete their work on the personal and family levels. The researcher felt that these women were very far from making a public change or organising a lobby of women with a view to improving their position in society.

Statements such as "I came here to get some confidence, to make a change, to advance at work" were written as the expectations of the course or were told to the researcher as part of the expectations. However, the renewed statement in front of the group, or the desire to discuss how one gets to make the move and change was not made naturally. This personal agenda was allegedly hidden from the group, beneath the general extensive goal of 'personal empowerment'.

Aviva, whose story appears in the appendix, reflects to a great extent reference to three levels of power as the researcher chose to present. Sitting with Aviva, one cannot help noticing the atmosphere of power when she speaks in an invigorated manner, and thus the feeling is of sitting in the presence of intense dynamics and intensity; one who has coped a good deal. Often the researcher asked herself where Aviva took the strength to go on and cope, not to give in to the voices telling her to surrender and give up. It did not happen to her. Each time she spoke, the researcher felt the power flowing from Aviva, sweeping her to continue her journey.

**On the second level:** If on the first level there was hardly any use of the term 'power' the group and the relationships in it changed the picture and made the term sound natural. The "sisterhood" in the women's group, the fact that they undergo
that unique experience together, as a group, serves as a source of power. An aggregate of women that, on the one hand, build the group and provide strength and on the other empowers and strengthens women as individuals. The female voice addressing the issue of power has emphasised the ability of women to give something to the group as a whole and to each of the members. The word 'power' in the context of the present study referred to an external force which encompasses all participants and allows women to support and encourage one another. Yael, who participates in an empowerment course, describes herself as a person who has made huge progress in terms of her place on the empowerment scale (continuum), which is now much higher than in the past. She said: "I am today in a position where I can give to other people. I can give them advice, support and power. I am in a position where I come first and the rest come after." Yael's ability to give that power builds upon her own empowered position. The idea is that after having received I can now give back, and this ability to give back makes me feel powerful in return".

The source of power described by Yael is a place of double giving: first to herself, and then as a result, she can give unto others and the environment. This notion connects to the ideas presented by Sadan (1997) and Gal and Frisent (2003) that empowerment is the instance where the individual and the group gain control of their lives and act to reach goals which they consider important; a state whereby the group empowers each of the members and each, in return, gives power to other members.

Yael's state was extreme in terms of its place on the empowerment continuum and her connection to the process of her commitment to herself and her environment. In her personal story, Yael made a giant leap both on the personal and the professional levels and she intends to keep it up. This was Yael's second empowerment workshop.

Ayelet, on the other hand, chose to join the process because she wanted to take some time off from her routine and to be in a place where she could first give to herself so as to recharge her batteries and come out stronger and able to make professional decisions and perhaps change her home agenda.

The mutual learning in a group strengthened Ayelet as she was exposed to the examples provided by others. Ayelet's situation is different from Yael's, and is what theoreticians refer to as acquisition and internalisation of 'personal empowerment' rather than the product of the process, which is what may describe Yael's situation.
Ayelet's is the active state discussed by Saleebey (2002), maintaining power is what people discover within, and it is not reflected via others. Ayelet allows herself the space, the time and the 'time-out' from the environment so as to reach the new revelations.

Yael, who was on a more advanced place on the continuum may represent Sadan's claim (1997) that power is something we have plenty of and does not come at the expense of other things. This situation enables Yael to be generous with herself and her friends in the process.

It seems the distinction made by Yoder and Kahn (1992) is relevant to the findings of this research. Their research related to power at different levels. When power had the sense of 'giving' meaning 'power to' rather than 'power on' it created difficulties with the women. The use of 'power to' occurred in cases where the group felt the dialogues were fertile and strengthening. Thus the use of 'power' seemed right and natural.

Aviva's story reflects the power she gives to her environment, to her sons and her husband, pushing him to succeed, not to give up, to advance knowing that it will be good for the entire family. Aviva knows her investment will be fruitful for her and her children in the future. In the group, Aviva always tried to encourage a deeper dialogue with the women, so as to promote change. She tried to give as much as she could to the participants so as to encounter as many women's opinions and a variety of thinking processes. Aviva motivated the group members to the creation of a significant change and kept sharing her experience and knowledge with the women. She made a point that it was important for her to get from the group, and she made it very clear when describing her expectations.

The third level emerged from the interviews and referred to by the researcher as a lack of power or weakened power. This level emerged from a personal discourse regarding women's expectations and goals. Most participants had never talked about their desire to gain power in order to improve their public and/or workplace status. They addressed this issue only after it was raised by the researcher, who wanted to find out where they stand on this issue. In other words: the word power is still not embedded and deeply rooted in a female discourse. This is linked to what Friedman (1999) claimed about the two factors that give an explanation for women's feeling of impotence and lack of power. The first is the lack of tangible and concrete resources which constitute the basis of influence (such as official roles, formal expertise, money and possessions). The second is that over the years women
adopted a stereotypic outlook on women, according to which a contradiction exists between being a woman and expressing power directly, which explains their inhibition. A woman is not supposed to be very powerful, otherwise she is perceived as threatening, aggressive and lacking feminine qualities. Friedman (1999) said that this is exactly the reason that women learn to express their power indirectly, in a way that is not threatening to the environment or challenging the status-quo. To support her claims, she quotes Baker-Miller, who said that very often, women would rather be seen as incompetent than powerful and aggressive (Friedman, 1999, p. 38). Based on the interviews and observation, the researcher believes that even though the word power is not yet embedded in the female discourse, the very exposure to materials pertaining to 'personal empowerment' and leadership, together with how women integrate these materials, gradually give rise to a voice which concentrates on power and the meaning of power to each participant. Even though this voice might be frail, the process of empowerment amplifies that voice and makes it clearer and sounder, through focused discussions and guidance. One example is an exercise during which women were asked to change the sitting order and to find a new place to sit where they think they could feel comfortable. One of the participants asked to sit in the discussion leader’s chair. The leader refused. The participant gave up at first, and then, in the discussion spoke of her wish to be in a leading position, and the chair was a manifestation of that position. The participant wanted to use the workshop to express her desire to be in a leading position, to manage, to exercise power, but it took her a while before she felt she was ready to make that step. The group discussion that followed this exercise referred both to the inconvenience caused by the change and the difficulty in asking to sit in another place where I think I would feel more comfortable or that suggests a more powerful position. The discussion was significant in that it placed power as a discussion topic. Conversely, Avigayil sensed that the power the group gave her in the process made her uncomfortable as she kept asking herself "Do I deserve it?" "What have I done to earn it?" and engage in a process of self-examination.

Aviva, a dynamic woman whom the researcher considers closest to expressing her wish for power, tells a story which also demonstrates the dilemma of lack of readiness to go all the way with power. Aviva begins to understand the meaning of using power and the fact that a woman who uses power is considered unwomanly and aggressive. Aviva, as other participants, also tells the difference between
assertiveness and aggressiveness. Yet, she does not break through the barrier of power all the way. At work she reaches states where she demands what she deserves to get, but in the end, in most cases she leaves her job due to disappointments. In her last role she is helped by the group and gets the strength that helps her go through a crisis in her job, does not give up and it can be said that she starts a process of a far-reaching change. It is the researcher's belief that Aviva is one of the women that will discuss positive power and transfer it from the home arena to that of work and reach a state of responsibility or management.

The researcher believes based on the interviews and observations that the women-power dialogue is still in the beginning. This subject and its significance for women in general and for each of the women individually are not fully internalised. There is still a lot to be done regarding the understanding of the term 'power' and its contexts with 'ordinary women'. Moreover, women have yet to learn the difference between 'power to' and 'power on' as defined by Yoder and Kahn (1992). They have to examine how it work for 'ordinary women' in terms of advancement, meaning, what do they believe is required of them in the status they are, and what is required so as they can advance. This type of in-depth investigation might lead to better understanding of the relationships between women and power, thus helping women in the 'Post Feminist' era to develop their own agenda combining their perception of power and advancement.

Another issue that the researcher thinks is associated with power is the undertaking of an assertive approach. It is related to the power category and manifested in two situations: one is the inability to express anger and/or give a feedback that contains criticism or negative assessment. The second is the difficulty of some women to introduce the hardship and less pleasant parts into a group discourse.

Heilbrun (1988) in her book, "Writing a Women's Life", discusses the story that is actually written by a woman or the story that she wants to write or needs to write in a Feminist way. Heilbrun (1988) relates expression of anger to power and control. She said that "if one is not permitted to express anger or even to recognise it within oneself, one is, by simple extension, refused both power and control" (p. 15). It is possible to draw a connection between Heilbrun's descriptions and the argument raised by Baker and Miller in Friedman (1999) that women would rather be seen as incompetent than powerful, aggressive and egocentric. The absence of power and
the inability to include this component in the female discourse highlighted its importance. Heilbrun's words were written in 1988 referring to the connection between expression of anger, control and power. However, the researcher feels that based on her observations in this study, much is still to be done to build this connection in women and also build their assertiveness in terms of their ability to define their limits to themselves and to the environment, find the things that are good and suitable for them and others which are not, and, most important, to feel comfortable with that and not to be in a position where women feel uncomfortable, which is aggressiveness. The participants in the present research believe that aggressiveness is characteristic of women who always say what they think and therefore feel uncomfortable. The following example demonstrates how far the participants are from reaching the point of connecting expressions of anger, control and power (Heilbrun, 1988). During the observation, there was an incident between one of the discussion leaders and several women. The discussion leader was not the chief instructor. She was invited to participate in four group sessions where discuss the following issues were discussed: leadership and multiple roles and how they affect women. The researcher believes that some of the participants disagreed with the process-oriented attitude of the discussion leader, and she thought that these women were threatened by what they might reveal about themselves as a result of the process (self-reflections) and because they felt that they were not ready yet to commence the process of empowerment. They wanted to participate in the process but without engaging in a genuine process of introspection. The researcher observed the programme and at the end of every meeting handed-in to the participants a feedback questionnaire in which they were asked to write comments on the meeting. The feedback questionnaire is part of the course policy to ask for feedback after each session. This questionnaire is not part of the research, and it is discussed here so as to demonstrate the specific event. Their answers show that they were highly satisfied (on a 1 to 5 scale, the weighted average for the first two meetings with the discussion leader was 86 and 74 for the third). This shows that their lack of satisfaction with the discussion leader was something that they kept to themselves and discussed among themselves during the breaks. The decline in weighted average after the third meeting can be attributed to the fact that many women approached the course leader during the break and said they were dissatisfied. She asked them to write this down on the feedback forms or tell this directly to the discussion leader. When the chief discussion leader returned, some
women tried to tell her that they were dissatisfied. She was already aware of their feelings and they started to talk about the reason why they could not write their women replied that it was not easy for them to give negative feedback and that they feel much more comfortable giving positive ones. One of the participants said that she was afraid that negative feedback would threaten the discussion leader's job, and they used a variety of humanitarian considerations. The concepts 'constructive feedback' or 'effective feedback' which implies assertiveness is not automatically included in women's coping methods. For women, assertiveness is not readily available. It requires practice, and this was also seen in the above example, when it was difficult for them to communicate an assertive message and therefore had to practice in order to make it a useful coping technique and be able to say what they really thought in a straightforward manner. One participant defined assertiveness as "the ability to set limits, to express feelings and outlet emotions, to set personal limits, when it is appropriate to set limits, recognise that sometimes it is alright to respond in anger, to try and open up".

The difficulty in saying "This does not suit me" and "the limits of my space are..." caused difficulties for some of the women in this research, and it was clear that this skill had to be strengthened with them. Another example was that of group painting, to which each participant was asked to contribute. The women approached one after the other and used pastel colours. The leader asked if they wanted to add anything, which led to a discussion where one of the participants took a black crayon and painted the bottom and added a frame. The discussion that followed included the leader sharing her opinions about what had been going on in the group. The inner contradiction between the "desire to work and make a change" and the desire to "display only the 'beautiful' and the 'pleasant' was manifested. These examples reinforce the claims made by Heilbrun (1988) and Baker-Miller (in Friedman, 1999) with regards to the connection between anger or dissatisfaction, control and power. The fact that the 'ordinary women' in this research did sufficiently not express enough their anger or their discomfort which is part of being feminine, is connected to the feeling of women as lack of power or their non-confrontation with what power means to them. The findings of this research reveal that further work has to be done with most women regarding these issues.
One of the goals of those in charge of the implementation of empowerment programmes is to develop a female leadership that would act to change the male-female balance of power in society and demand a more active and uncompromised power in order to change the gender status. Based on the present study and the response of individual 'ordinary women' through observations and interviews, the researcher identified fears, uncertainty and an overall feeling that women are not ready enough to deal with power. The researcher believes the term 'power' has to be divided into sub-terms and the connections between women and different perceptions of power have to be examined so as to cope or avoid coping with the concept of power. These findings relate to the claims made by Izraeli (1999) regarding the fact that women prefer to act on a more individual level and to avoid a public struggle. The findings correspond to Izraeli's findings (1999). The researcher connects these findings to the women's lack of willingness to relate to the issue of power and demand a change in the balance of power. An additional reason might derive from the approach presented by Irigaray (2004), according to which the comparative direction harms women and does not lead them to the right place; it might be that the fact that women are in a position of "empowering" others is more appropriate for them, and therefore they remain in this position. The researcher suggests that this point of view should be examined since the discomfort caused by this situation was very significant and they in fact act in order to change it.

Those 'ordinary women' who felt secure enough to cope with power concentrate on personal change, change within the family and employment status (job and the workplace), were nonetheless very careful about direct use of their power in other life cycles. The participants exposure to materials pertaining to empowerment, and the discourse, which emerges from the interviews, began a discussion on power and femininity. The connection made by the women in this study throughout the discourse concerning power and femininity, is reflected in an example given by one of the participants, Amit. Amit says that every time she wants to adhere to her opinion or take a stance of power she recalls a previous female boss whose uncompromising intonation she perceived as manly, and that was weird to her. She did not want to be perceived this way. This is such an indicative example, so simple and real. It suggests the dilemma and the unresolved conflict between femininity and power. This is the explanation, according to Friedman (1982) for the
fact that women are caught in a trap. Expressing power, according to Friedman (1982) drastically contradicts the feminine image, but at the same time it is a central component in emotional adjustment and positive self-image. The catch is that if a woman develops her power and directly expresses it, she is perceived as unwomanly. However, if she denies and conceals her power, she is expected to have low social and self-esteem.

Nonetheless, the observations revealed examples of women dealing with this issue. It revealed women’s stories about their coping at work, something that requires them to use power, according to their perceptions, in order to change the balance of power at work, state their own attitude and protect it. Another trend which the researcher identified during the observations was ‘fighting for what I deserve’. Yael, who participated in an empowerment course in the past, said that she had followed an advice of one lecturer from the present course. The lecturer, the CEO of the Israel Women's Network, has been invited to the course in order to tell the story of a woman who made a real breakthrough. Among other things, she said to the participants: ‘Never go by yourselves if you really want to achieve something, always make sure that there is another person with you’. Yael and a friend of hers, who also participated in the course, participated in a training course which was organised by their workplace. They were treated in an unjust way. Following the advice that was given to them by the CEO of the Israel Women's Network in the present course, they organised a group of women who participated in the training course in order to do something about the ill treatment which they had received. They understood that as a group they have more power than as individuals. This example illustrates a change deriving from the very exposure to an empowering discourse. One could see that following exposure to materials pertaining to empowerment and leadership, it was easier for women to express themselves and to talk about power, even if the word power was not explicitly stated. The researcher thinks that there is still a very long way, but drawing on the concepts which Heilbrun (1988) used, the story about women and power in this study is a story of hope but, at least so far, is not a story of success. The researcher believes work has to be invested in order to understand and interpret the different meanings of 'power', the skills it requires and finding an interim formula for shifting from the prevailing situation of power to one of avoiding power.
4.4.1 Structure of Category No. 1:

- Feeling/desire for power
  - The Power embedded in a group in terms of its contribution to individuals
    - The price of power and the cost efficiency the ambivalence
  - The power of giving and promoting another woman
    - 'Women' Power
  - The power of learning
    - The need and/or the feeling of impotency as women's primary motivation to participate in the process
  - The power embedded in a group of women and how it affects the individual women
    - Difficulties expressing anger
  - The power of a group of women of the same culture and experience and how it affects the individual woman
The researcher learned from the interviews and observation about the difficulty for women to use the word power. Women did not use that word to describe themselves, and if they did, they immediately tried to relate it to another topic. Statements about power were very often made in relation to people and groups in the women's near environment. It was very difficult for women to explicitly say 'I want to achieve more power'. To the same degree, it was extremely easy for them to use the concept to refer to external groups, for example: "The group shall improve my self-efficacy". Yifat (fictitious name) said during an interview: "I felt that I was leading the group towards a point where they could feel that they are able to move forward from their present place or position". Women become empowered through the process of leading and undertaking a new direction together with a group of women and/or taking part in the fate of somebody else. Women are often motivated to participate in an empowerment process because they feel that they lack power. The power they achieve from the process is implemented in two ways: the first and more feasible direction is the introduction of change at home and in the near environment. The second takes place in the course of the process and this is also the direction Yifat referred to when she talked about the best way to use the empowering atmosphere that prevailed during most of the course and implement it by motivating and encouraging other members of the group to make a change. This power is mutual in the sense that this is a give-and-take process, and most women who take an active or passive role in the process, receive power in return from the members of the group. The power to encourage other women to make a change often leads to women's coping with the question of leadership and their ability to become leaders. As women cope with the question of power and the ability to see a change in another member of the group, they address the question of leadership. Inbar's (fictitious name) words demonstrate the power of the group on the individual woman and the question of leadership: "...We (the group members) chose people. They chose me and I was thinking: have I changed that much? It was difficult for me, when I talk to them I am strict and critical". The question of leadership emerged very strongly in one of the observations, which developed from one of the themes that were studied during the course: 'women's circles' (circles in the sense of a group of women with shared interests, or acquaintances). This circle enabled women to reflect on their leadership skills and to clarify queries such as: what does leadership mean for women? Who is a leader? Is there a difference between being a
leader in your home, where most women believe that they are indeed the leaders and implement their power, and being a leader at work, or in the political sphere?

Women tend to relate power to what they consider as the final outcome, which is higher levels of self-confidence, belief in one's abilities, a strong belief that one is actually capable of doing better, belief in oneself. Women tend to establish a relationship between self-confidence and power, and feel that power is the result, the product of self-confidence.

A part of the women's empowerment process was getting to know the concept of 'personal empowerment' and the way it is related to the operative concepts being used by the women, such as "self confidence" and "to acquire more power". The connection between the personal power and its meaning as a product of 'personal empowerment' process is part of the empowerment process. The source of the power, according to the 'ordinary women' in this study, derives from several sources: one is the power of learning and the recognition that learning is a very powerful tool. Women expressed this idea in their words: "I participated in a variety of courses. Each course builds my confidence and decision to carry on and move forward..." "As a person gradually opens up, they receive more from others, and what I received was gratefulness...". Women believe that learning requires openness, and that women possess this attribute. From the interviews, observations and conversations emerged a common characteristic of all participant women: besides the fact that all of them participated in the course, they were really motivated to learn. This strong desire was manifested through the variety of courses that they took, courses from a variety of areas and fields. In this way, they became exposed to diverse materials. Many of them proudly declared that they were courses consumers. Yifat, who would probably be considered the erudite in the group, even studied abroad in a nursing school, and also took several courses in Israel in Enterprise, Personal Communication, Certified Therapist, as well as courses in the Open University, such as Sociology, Psychology, Statistics, Environment Quality, etc. The observation revealed that 'women's learning' is a constant, ongoing phenomenon, which covers many areas and fields. Learning appears also in another category: the category of "Learning as a lever". The reason that learning is part of two categories- learning as a lever and power- is that women believe that learning equals power, that learning gives them a sense of confidence. Furthermore, they feel that they need to empower themselves in every realm and field. They need not
only to learn, but to receive legitimisation. The power embedded in learning, according to women, and learning itself make stronger the connection between the category of power and the category of learning as a lever. In this connection, the way women use their learning to gain knowledge about their 'personal empowerment' process and the gradual building of that learning into power is salient. The researcher claims that the connection between the two categories strengthens women's gender characteristic, which is context-oriented learning. It also points out the things which women use as a lever. Another thing that can be learnt from the interviews and observation is that learning occurs not only in the settings and frameworks specially designed for that purpose. Learning is also used in order to gain power, cope with obstacles and pinpoint difficulties. One statement that illustrates this is: "...I learn and take something from everything that I hear...". Women believe that the environment of the group is such that promotes and enables learning, and that one can constantly operate within it, thus become a better and stronger person. Learning is seen as something that gives power to women.

The researcher suggests that according to the observations and the interviews the connection that women make between learning and power may integrate with Baker-Miller's (1987) approach, maintaining that in regard to 'ordinary women', power can be defined as "the ability to actualise". They fulfil it by realising their existing capabilities and developing new skills. Baker-Miller emphasises self actualisation as expressing power and not control over others, as commonly perceived. Namely, in order to leave the periphery and feel greater self confidence, women should develop their inner power. According to the researcher, this approach is fully integrated with the manner in which women become almost obsessive consumers of learning. Knowledge and familiarity become necessary assets in their long way for self enhancement. The next example illustrates the distinction made by Lee between men and women regarding this matter. Lee (fictitious name) said: "Men don't like to change, while women can very easily take things, learn and teach...It is important that men study too (she referred mainly to men with the same ethnicity as hers), they do not realise that they miss something. Men complain that this is a world for women, a domain to which only women should have an access. They feel humiliated, if they embark upon (the process of 'personal empowerment') they would realise that they (meaning, men with the same national and cultural tradition as hers) have more rights". Lee, using learning as a source of power and
development and also understanding the balance of power between men and women, perceives the occurrences from her point of view; men do not need proof or connection between power and learning, they rely on the patriarchal structure providing them with power by the mere fact that they are men.

**Another source of power is the group.** The following example illustrates the importance of being part of a group of women: "The group has given me so much. Things are much more interesting, I smile, I feel power, strength, optimism, coming here is fun and enjoyable". Because the group has such a significant place in the process of empowerment, it also received a separate category. Equally important is the understanding of the role of the group in empowering individual women. The group is seen as a safe haven. Women expressed their feelings about the group during the interviews and observation: "Coming here- this is my freedom", "I was very happy to return to the group (after the summer vacation during which there were no sessions)", "I missed the group". The group of women is a huge source of power for the individual woman, an essential component that, by the end of the process, makes women much more powerful than when they first came. This is the place where women feel most comfortable to 'spread the cards on the table’, to introduce the things in their lives that strengthen them, as well as those that hinder them and hold them back. This is the place where they feel, as one of the participants said: "That no one would ever try to use the things that I say as a weapon against me". They see the group as a place where they can meet once a week, and decide whether to share others with personal information and feelings, or not. The group gives women the power and the space that they need in order to behave naturally, and they do not need to make excuses. Sometimes understanding can also be built through silences, and in this sense the unsaid is very significant. The connection between the categories constructed in this study – learning as a learner, the feeling/desire for power, and the group – are built on power, the desire to be empowered. Learning exists in these three categories and is demonstrated through and strongly related to power, the power embedded in learning and the place of the group within that process of learning, as well as the power that women receive from the group in their transition from one state of efficacy to another state, of higher self-efficacy.

The sub-category of the group, within the categories of power, is a part of the understanding created in the group and in interviews regarding "women power".
This concept was suggested by the participant women to describe how each woman copes with the various groups and social circles to which she belongs and within which she must function, the ability of women to undertake so many tasks concurrently. The same 'women power' often leads to feelings such as fatigue, exhaustion, weakness, and desire to rest. Also, this is the exact reason that they decided to come to the course: to renew their energies. This is done through their participation in a group consisting of other women who are also familiar with the concept of 'women power'. Because all participants are aware of that power, they can discuss it in a group, recognise its importance, and very often the similar stories, the humour, the support they get from other women with similar stories- allow women to enjoy this time of rest and recharge their batteries and energy. During one of the sessions, the discussion leader had asked the participants to use one colour to describe how they felt about themselves and about the other members of the group. The range of colours was placed on a Bristol board in the middle of the circle. Although the participants picked different colours, the colours that they picked signified similar meanings. They said, for instance: "I chose the red colour, because the group has power, I give something to the girls and each of them gives something back, the group builds my confidence". Another participant picked the blue colour: "Blue signifies power, I am getting stronger and I have goals to achieve. The blue is what the group has given me, which is power". From some interviews emerged the importance for women of being with other women of the same national or cultural tradition. In this case, it seems that they have much more in common, as they understand and share the same social codes and their implications for the state of women in Israel. They appreciate the very ability to sit in a group with other women who encounter the same barriers and restrictions in everyday life, and discuss these with the other women. This was raised during interviews with women who participated in a programme with other women of the same ethnic group. The researcher asked them specifically about this topic, and they replied that it made the entire process more powerful and meaningful. The only restriction was that because the participants live in the same geographical region, they are familiar with each other, and because, on top of that, they have a common national and cultural tradition, they were not sure whether they could open up to the other members of the group and discuss personal issues with them. However, once they overcame this obstacle, they began to tell their personal stories in a very powerful way, and the fact that sometimes there were several generations of women in the same room at
the same time has made the entire process even more powerful, and it was possible to consider things from various points of view. During one of the group observations, in which there was only one new immigrant participant, the power derived from the fact that all group members were women. They had nothing else in common, as they had different cultural and ethnic background; they resided in different areas and were of different ages. The only thing that connected this aggregate of women was their gender.

4.5 Category No. 2 - Learning as a Lever

4.5.1 Structure of Category No. 2

Selection of the name of the category, "Learning as a lever", stemmed from the intensity, the enormous space and the women's discussion in this study on the issue of learning. Perceiving education and mutual learning as a means for feeling confident, to progress to a place of power, led the researcher to note this subject as
a separate category. The researcher feels that it is related to a strong inner connection, to the process of 'personal empowerment' as perceived by the women in the study.

If in the previous category the word 'power' was hardly heard from the women, in this category all but two women used the terms 'learning' and 'education', gave examples of education, examples of their learning both on the academic, formal level and on the informal one – learning from experience. The terms 'learning' and 'I will learn' are connected to 'I will advance'. The term 'education' or 'educated woman' connected to a wider capability span. Statements such as 'If I had studied when I was younger, I would be in a different situation'...or statements connecting to the motivation they push unto their immediate environment 'It is most important to learn' and 'you should have a certificate'. These sentences easily arose in the interviews and observations as they were connected to their statements and examples. These led to the construction of the present category.

**Contextual learning** serves as a sub-category and is indicated by Hayes (2000) as one of the characteristics of women's learning. The process of empowerment in its present format reflects widely one characteristic of 'women's learning'— 'contextual learning', more specifically: the ability of women to express contents and thoughts resulting from their personal process of learning. This sort of learning is closely related to the various systems to which a woman is connected and through which she builds her individual learning. This emerged very clearly from the interviews, in the way women talked freely about their personal experiences and the contents which they learned and how each of them integrated the various aspects, and also in the group observation. The empowerment process allows women to talk about their personal experience alongside more general experiences and the various theories which are studied during the course. The personal experience of each woman is equally legitimate and important as any other theory or academic materials. The things that these women say are based on experiences which are shared by the other members of the group thus embraced by them and relates to the learning of each of them in similar contexts. The discussion leader supports their views and also legitimises their personal expressions, private thoughts, examples taken from their personal life and work. She also listens to each woman's individual way of coping. This state is unique in the sense that there are few similar programmes in formal education settings or in the variety of vocational courses. There are very few opportunities for women to be allowed to freely interact within a group in which the
expression of personal experiences and stories is not only legitimate but encouraged as well. This unique situation promotes contents for individual learning by each member of the group. Equally important, the group members learn from the contents and personal experiences of the other participants. At this point, the researcher noticed an interesting thing about the learning process. It was termed by the researcher as "The Two Hats Learner", meaning the state noticed by the researcher that women wear two hats: one is the hat of the individual learner and the other and equally important is the hat of a representative of a particular culture or a different person close to the woman. She called this the 'two hats' of the learner. This was mainly seen in new immigrants and women who were interviewed after participating in the empowerment activities. It seemed to the researcher that these women, unlike their Israeli counterparts, were more strongly connected to their original culture and were unable to make a clear separation between their original and new culture in the classroom. The feeling that the culture which they left behind sometimes prevented them from doing certain activities or behaving in a certain way, or encouraged them to undertake a certain course of action, was always there, throughout the entire process of learning. The interviewed women talked about their feelings with regard to their current place in society or personal life. Their process of learning has concentrated on their transition from one place to another and the dialogue between them and the place from which they came. According to the interviewed women, this was possible because they studied the programme with a group of women having a common national or cultural tradition. In the case of Inbar, for example, her sitting with other women from the same community and background has strengthened this feeling: "I am torn between two worlds". She referred to the fact that she arrived in Israel as a new immigrant and had to adapt to the Israeli society. "Before I got married, I behaved like an Israeli and felt that I was part of the Israeli society. This came to an end when I got married, as all of a sudden I had to adapt myself to my new condition as a married woman, and because the man that I married comes from the same ethnic and cultural background as mine, the meaning was that I was no longer responsible for the conduct of my life. My home and family come before anything else and I no longer have the freedom that I used to have in the past. What I gained from the empowerment process was that I became fully aware of the gap and even the contradiction between the things that I wish to do and the things that I do in practice, the gap between my ideal way of life and my actual life. In the past I was
able to do things for society, to contribute to others, to do things that made me feel good. Today, on the other hand, priorities had changed profoundly, and before I think about what is good for me. I must think about my home and the needs of my husband and daughter. I am today in a situation where I am the last person on my list of priorities”. Inbar points to her learning about the gaps in her life between concentration on self, integration in society and self progress on the one hand, which indicates her life in the past, and her current position of marching on the spot without moving forward.

Inbar’s example illustrates the learning accompanying the empowerment process; it can be related to developing "a critical approach" (Cohen, 2004; Solomon, 1976; Kieffer, 1984; Gutierrez, 1990). A realistic view of the current situation compared to the past, identification with the group members, and the missing part of Inbar's needs is the future solution for the problem. A part of the future solution to the problem might be, according to the researcher, the mere participation in the empowerment course as part of a process leading towards a different solution.

Inbar's description is also relates to Freire (1972), who perceives reality from a critical point of view which does not accept things for granted. The above process is part of identifying the factors hindering the oppressed and enabling it to advance towards 'emancipation'. Inbar presents the process she goes through while describing the way she identified the hindering factors delaying and obstructing her. This is a part of her learning process.

As a parallel process to her learning, Inbar describes the differences between her mother and mother-in-law. Although these two women come from the same background, they are very much different. Inbar's mother is an active person. She participates in a variety of courses and says exactly what she thinks. On the opposite side of the scale is her mother-in-law, who behaves more passively way and is not even aware that it is possible to do all these things. Because of this gap Inbar feels torn between the two worlds. The researcher believes that Inbar is afraid that because of her present compromises and concessions, she will end up being what Belenky et. al. (1986) called 'a silent learner'. Inbar knows that she is ranked high on the empowerment scale in terms of her abilities and desire, but her concessions and the price of learning, which will be discussed later on, prevent her from implementing these, and she is afraid to become the silent woman who thinks of herself as mute and deaf (Belenky et. al., 1986). A state highly characteristic of women of her own background and ethnic origin, a pattern of behaviour that she
identifies also in her mother-in-law. Inbar said: "In order that my mother-in-law won't say anything, I am silent as a fish. It is useless, it is better not to say anything". The researcher believes that Inbar actually lives in two worlds. One is the empowering world of the group in which she sees herself from the point of view of her friends as a leader, and the other is home, where she is stuck between her mother, who is just starting to study for herself and to be released from past constraints, and her demanding husband, family and mother-in-law on the other side. By sitting with other women from a similar background and origin, Inbar can learn and share with other women the dilemmas encountered by other women with a common national or cultural tradition.

According to the researcher, the ‘two hats of learning’ are necessary for the women’s process of ‘personal empowerment’; in the group observed, Aliza described her and her sister's learning facing her perceptions of their mother's life and learning. "My mother suffices with what she had, and my sister and I always had a need to progress, to go on... we are different". The foundation for the distinction in the learning process is meaningful for the learner and it becomes a central part of the route towards self-empowerment and more self-efficacy.

The integration of personal learning, and the earlier discussed 'dual learning' denoting the 'two hats' of the learner, with culture in between, is most typical of the new immigrants who participated in the present study (some of whom arrived in Israel 10 to 15 years ago). However, it was also noticeable, carrying a different nature among the women observed, who most of them were senior Israeli citizens. They feel that they represent their original culture, regardless of how they feel about it and how it is seen by other people. The researcher felt that she observed and interviewed many women, much more than their actual number, as during the observations and interviews emerged from women's stories other people who were very significant to the participants and affected their process of learning. The learners who wore two hats were primarily new immigrants, but also 'veteran immigrants'. In their stories, they used examples to illustrate the impact of this duality and discussed the things that they called barriers, for instance: "We were raised in old-fashioned and boringly conventional houses...not to do anything that might harm society, not to talk...This (meaning the voice) does not always come out...The goal is not to hurt others, to think twice, we are also women, and coping is difficult for us". These words repeatedly take these women back in time and make
their past experience an inseparable part of their individual process of empowerment.

According to the researcher, the example of Inbar, characterises the new immigrant women more significantly (arriving in Israel 19 to 15 years ago) than the Israeli women (nevertheless, the phenomenon could also be observed there, but not in such an emphasised manner).

Brooks (2000) presents a similar example of Nicole, a woman from Taiwan, who participated in a course of "My Feminist Theory Class". During the course she discusses the inner connection between her life and the social context. She writes: "I believe that there are some women [who], like me, cannot concretely distinguish what [they]/I really want to be from what my own culture wants me to be, because I have grown up under cultural expectations and internalised the cultural values as parts of my self-image. I believe... sharing personal experience is a good way to redicalise consciousness. Listening to the experience of others, I feel that I am not the only one who suffers [this] anxiety and threat when I am trying to confront myself and reconstruct myself. I spend more time looking inward in order to figure out [my] real inner voice" (p. 177). The parallel feelings caused the researcher to visualize what could have happened in an encounter between Inbar and Nicole, and other women in the group who describe the "two hats learning situation". The similar experiences and sharing it, strengthen the acknowledgement of learning from the connections and the understanding that the mutual discourse and recognition might be a vehicle for progress and change. Hochberg (2003) refers to the Schwarz-Bart's novel and the ambivalence of the female discourse, which presents it one time as an empowering element and another time as a story that reconstructs and rebuilds an autobiographic experience, which is, in fact, a biography of previous generations, mothers and grandmothers.

"Schawarz-Bart's novel seems to be more sceptical than most of its critics, in evaluating the capacity of the imaginative (female) discourse to present women with the ability to successfully overcome the alienation of the master narrative and become master of their own text" (p. 1).

Hochberg (2003) presents mothers as the source of a memory, a collective/cultural memory, or a memory that is part of genealogy. The researcher revealed in the participant women's stories reflections of their desire to find their personal story. The researcher goes on to argue that in order to write that story, women must undergo the process that was indicated earlier, of the 'two hats' that women wear as
learners. Based on their past experience, women will write their present and future story. Part of the process of empowerment is increasing awareness of what Hochberg (2003) called: "Positioning women/mothers as primary sites of (personal and social) memory, which is set in opposition to (official and written) history, national and anti-colonial discourses limit the role of women, as Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval suggest, to "biological producers" and "transmitters of culture" (p. 1).

First, women increase their awareness. Afterwards, they choose to undertake a course of action. The researcher asserts that part of the decision to participate in the process of an empowerment group is their desire to tell their personal story as distinguished from their collective/cultural-oriented story, and also to tell a story of success and self-satisfaction.

Hochberg (2003) perceived the female memory in the following way: "...female memory is considered a source of women's self-empowerment for which the heroic mother plays a central role. It is also considered by some to be more authentic and faithful to tradition".

Hochberg (2003) quotes A.J. Arnold, who talked about transmission: "Transmitted from a grandmother or other elderly female figure to a granddaughter or other young female who will carry on the tradition".

The words of Hochberg et. al. (2003) describe a faith, imposed on women both consciously and unconsciously. Their words imply that women's desires and wants are insignificant. Their words are important because of their potential ability to explain, at least in part, the barriers that women encounter in life and the fact that in order to be able to tell their own story, they must undergo a long process thereby being released from the barriers. The question that is most important here is the degree to which the process of 'personal empowerment' allows these women to break the barriers, and what this memory that passes from one generation to the next consists of. These questions are worthy of a separate research examining the difference between immigrants and seniors. This research will characterise and expand the literature regarding this matter (Hochberg, 2003; Brooks, 2000; Hayes, 2000) and will conduct a more profound examination of the personal story versus the collective-group-cultural one, the place and the extent to which culture affects the stories of women's learning and empowerment. How influential is the discourse related to it and does it release and enable construction of a personal and independent story? The research should examine and compare different ethnic groups, and seniors and immigrants. The researcher believes that differences
between immigrants and senior citizens may lie in their connection to the original culture. The Israelis are influenced by Israel's multi-cultural orientation. But this is a serious subject that needs deeper understanding, and further research needs to be conducted.

The researcher had many doubts about the sub-category of 'the price of learning'. She was not sure whether this should be a separate category or instead constitute part of the learning category. However, because the price women must pay in order to learn was repeated in the interviews and observations, and emerged as a particularly noticeable issue connected to learning, the researcher has eventually decided to make it a sub-category which also relates to the choice to participate in the empowerment programme. Participation in the process of empowerment and other processes of learning has its price. The price that women had to pay emerged from the interviews and observations, through questions such as: what did I have to give up on? Who must I please in order to be able to keep studying? Who is going to 'pay' for this learning (emotionally, though sometimes this question did refer to financial cost)? What am I coping with?

The discussion about the price has objective as well as emotional, cultural and family sources, and consists of complicated questions manifested through the words of Inbar: "I have given up mediation course for him. I have a friend who participated in women empowerment courses, she even drove all the way to Tel-Aviv (a two-hour drive from the Northern region of Israel) and her husband knew. At a certain point, people who belong to the same ethnic group as her husband's told him that she was cheating on him... They divorced... She told me that no one knew how much she loved her husband but they nonetheless denounced and condemned her, and this is a terrible thing in our society. Everybody knows what is happening with other people, the family is very important". Inbar encountered a very difficult dilemma. On the one hand, she has this tremendous desire to learn and to advance, as she is well aware of the price and consequences of not learning, lagging behind and being unable to move forward. Inbar arrived in Israel as a new immigrant at a young age and felt part of the Israeli culture and society. On the other hand, she and her husband have a common national and cultural tradition, and because of that she was drawn to a state where she is obliged to follow norms which do not fall in line with her preferences and plans. For instance, in order to participate in the programme she would have to make some sort of compromise in order not to be away from home for more than one evening. She is aware of the heavy personal and
cultural price her friend had paid for going too far with the process of empowerment. This incident that she described indicates a warning not only to her friend, but to all women who belong to the specific community, to make sure not to go too far with the process. The important point here is that women are seemingly free to do what they want and satisfy their needs and ambitions, but in reality they are still very much limited by the codes of behaviour and social norms which are set by and strictly endorsed by the community.

Another example of the price that women have to pay is the story of Yifat. She pays a very heavy price, as in order to achieve personal independence and autonomy as a divorcee, she has given up her right for alimony. Another compromise she made was her decision to give up on her dream to study in order to receive unemployment benefits: "In order to learn, I must invest a great deal in my studies, and I therefore discontinued my studies (societal-community studies) in order to receive unemployment benefit. The first thing I intend to do when I start working again is to continue with my studies". These were the words of Yifat, a woman who has this enormous need to study, to broaden her horizons, who is thirsty for knowledge, who has been studying a huge variety of subjects, whose passion to increase her knowledge is almost an existential need. Yifat has a high-school diploma; she is a professional and engaged in a variety of courses and studies. Nili (fictitious name) represents another case. Her decision not to study comes from a much more confident place (her socioeconomic status is higher, compared to Inbar's, and she is also married, while Inbar is a single-parent). During the observation, she said that she decided to postpone her studies and concentrate more on the needs of her son and the rest of the family, but she is confident that her time will come. She said that no one had forced her to make this choice, this is her choice. Inbar's choice, on the other hand, is not a free choice but a compulsion.

Lee (fictitious name) had to pay a very high and painful price for her participation in the empowerment course. Lee has a strong belief in empowerment. She is devoted to the concept and recognises its significance and contribution to increasing women's awareness of the need to gain more power. She also said that empowerment has made her much stronger. She believes that empowerment can make a change, but not for many women. Her sister, for example, a well-known and prominent figure in her community, participated in a variety of workshops, including the empowerment workshop. She was unfortunately murdered by her husband. Lee believes that her sister's husband disapproved of her desire to move forward. She
claims that "...men do not like to change, while women are able to absorb much more, to learn new things and teach them...simple things make us happy and also sadden us..."". Lee believes that "empowerment is a powerful and helpful tool, but some women think that it can also become a destructive tool. Women are thus scared and some even leave and discontinue their learning. They are afraid that if they continue to learn new things, their husbands might disapprove and even act against them, and this leaves them behind".

Aviva's story reflects the price she had to pay for her advancement because of her unique way of acting for every one, especially her sons and her husband. The way she negotiates with the world is with a lot of giving but knowing that her turn will come. The researcher analyses it also from the perspective that giving is the price for getting. Getting for her comes only after completing giving for everyone and deserving it.

'The price of learning' is a significant issue for women's empowerment. It could be explained through the social 'codes' determining the woman's space for development, mainly in small, close and religious societies (Malach Pines, 1997; Tamir and Ben-Parat, 2002; Elior, 2001; Helpern, 2001). The economic possibilities limit the woman and she naturally renounces in order to enable others; this is the way she was brought up. There is vast renunciation within their homes. This space is characterised by renunciation. This is the woman's space and yet it is limiting (Izraeli, 1999; Bourdie, 1993, p. 12 in Izraeli, 1999).

Despite the progress of women and development in gender related issues, among some of the 'ordinary women' who participated in this study, learning is still related to a price, even in the 'Post Feminist' era.
4.6 Category No. 3 - The Atmosphere that Prevails in the Empowerment Programme and How it Promotes Women’s Learning

4.6.1 Structure of Category No. 3

The atmosphere that prevailed in the programme can be described as unique, suitable for women and defined by Belenky et. al. (1997) as 'the women’s way'. Belenky et. al. (1997) referred to the informal way that enabled female researchers to achieve a significant product. In the introduction to their book they wrote: "When one of us referred to that very first meeting as "the best pyjama party I’ve attended since the sixth grade," we made an unwritten agreement to work "in the women's way" all the while we were trying to name what that might be" (p. xii).
"The women's way", as they called it, is manifested through an empowerment group that meets once a week. The atmosphere is different and unique, and exists only in this group meeting. Even though the members of the group are unfamiliar with one another in the beginning, they will make sure to get to know each other better. These women arrive once a week, dress nicely, talk about themselves, their personal experience, give advice, express their opinions, support, argue, and very often find things that they have in common with the other members. Light refreshment is usually served. The group which the researcher observed was not pleased with the light refreshment that was served by the course organisers, and one of the women immediately volunteered to organise light refreshments just like in the previous course. The recess became a culinary experience, something worth waiting for.

The atmosphere was a necessary three-hour timeout in order to recharge energies. Belenky et. al. (1997) said that this atmosphere promotes creativity. "We sat around living rooms and kitchen tables as we worked. Dogs barked in the background; Children wandered through. We took long walks, talking, always talking, sometimes our husbands cooked for us".

Belenky et. al. (1997) described something that is similar to empowerment activities taking place in an informal setting which builds a dialogue, a series of conversations, an atmosphere that allows women to create and husbands to undertake other liabilities and become responsible for carrying out additional tasks. A similar atmosphere exists in empowerment courses, which does not exist in formal learning settings, an environment in which women work together and build a sense of togetherness; one may even say sisterhood, women who participate in activities that make a change in them and also in the environments with which they interact.

This is an encouraging and supporting atmosphere, an atmosphere that legitimises the participant women's individual choices and their right to take time for themselves, not to be occupied with how to please others all the time, to take care of their promotion and advancement in society, to build a dynamics which would help women make different choices and perhaps support existing ones, learn something about themselves and, based on that learning, make their own choices. This learning is powerful because women whose everyday routine is so busy maintain this momentum, this drive, to move forward.

In an atmosphere enabling learning, the researcher includes the non-formal atmosphere in which there are no grades, no papers to be submitted, the materials are personal, not easier but on a different level.
The atmosphere is open and there is no right or wrong. The materials are derived from the women themselves and they are the focus for learning. Similar to the principles of adult learning (Linderman, 1926; Knowles, 1996) the trial becomes a rich source for learning and the motivation for learning stems from an inner source. The women's group emphasises the familiarity and creates a comfortable and appropriate environment in which process of 'personal empowerment' can develop.

4.7 Category No. 4 - Women's Choice to Manage and Administer Personal Change

4.7.1 Structure of Category No. 4

According to the researcher, there are several reasons for the participant women's decision to participate in the course. These include, for instance, the desire to make a change, to move from one place to another in terms of the tasks and roles which are undertaken, to achieve self-fulfilment, and to have a desire and willingness to assume leading positions. Before they make this decision, women need to decide...
first if they are willing to pay the personal price associated with their participation in the course, namely - the conscious decision to negotiate with the near environment about the fact that they have decided to take time off in order to participate in the process. This is the place where women negotiate with their husbands, children and workplace over their desire to participate in the process. The implications of this decision are that women would have to make several adjustments and compromises, for instance: women who must leave early, before the meeting is over, because of a variety of constraints such as workplace constraints (in the case that there is no other person who can substitute and serve in place of the participant woman), or family constraints. In order to make this serious decision easier for women, there is a stage in which the women meet the group members in order to allow themselves to find out if this is the right group for them. Do the women feel safe with the other women? How they feel about the general atmosphere? Adela (fictitious name) expressed her fears and uncertainty, and even doubts regarding the right choice following an introduction exercise during the first meeting: "Since the cards exercise (an acquaintance exercise organised by the discussion leader) I feel much more connected to the other members, I kept thinking: who is she? How many children does she have? Do I belong in here? Is this the right place for me? I now feel that I got closer to the other women, and became part of the group, that something was done here..."

They measure themselves against the group on two levels: the first is getting to know the other group members, the women who share their journey. The other is, trying to find out whether we can build, as a group, openness and personal as well as group work. Cain (1998 in Hayes et. al., 2000) said that 'women's learning' in a group format does not necessarily guarantee success. To support his claim he showed evidence that women had left groups because of a competitive atmosphere that was built between women and group-mate men. In empowerment groups, on the other hand, the group consists only of women, and based on the interviewees' reports, promote an effective learning in the sense that the participants can share their experiences and identify the significance of social structures. Inbar, for instance (fictitious name) referred to differences between men and women but also said: "Women wanted to talk, but this was not always possible, due to time constraints or because the things they wanted to say were not directly related to the subject, or it wasn't the right place...They are emotionally charged and they want to bring out these feelings which they keep inside ...women who experienced something but had
no one to talk to...It is difficult for men. Men of our national and cultural tradition think that the actual meaning of the process is that they are no longer in control, and they feel that they must be the ones to have the last say...Not all of them are ready to know...They are locked, unwilling to change...". What Inbar says here demonstrates the empowering aspect of learning that prevails in self-support groups which concentrate on creation of knowledge and sharing that knowledge with others as Zimmerman (1987) said. According to Inbar, the empowerment group is a good starting point from which women can share their knowledge, experiences and life stories with other women, and elucidate the codes and behaviours of a particular ethnic group. Inbar’s example is an illustration of the "feminine story" (Hochberg, 2003) characterised by its own space in which he could get out. Inbar’s story suggests a 'masculine' and a 'feminine' story, a story also carrying traditions, norms, social codes and therefore can be understood in the best way possible, according to Inbar, in front of other women from the same community and culture. This example relates to the category of women's responsibility for managing the process of change and to the sub-categories pertaining to the places where the change occurs. At the same time, this example fits into the categories of learning as a lever and the sub-category of contextual learning, and the significance of the atmosphere, as the informal atmosphere and group consolidation by a female group leader strengthens and supports the words of Inbar. The most significant sub-category which, according to the researcher is also a significant part of the participants' choice to participate in a process that yields a change, is the desire to move from oppression to emancipation (Freire, 1972). The name of this sub-category is adapted from Freire (1972) who talked about the desire of the oppressed man to move on a scale or continuum towards emancipation. The researcher, however, wants to update the continuum by adding another rubric: choice. When women feel good about their choices, they are placed on a certain point on the continuum and remain there. Conversely, women who are not making most of their choices on their own wish to move on the scale from oppression towards emancipation, which is the point on the opposite edge of the scale.
Ziva's (fictitious name) example might demonstrate the transition from a state of depression to one of emancipation. Ziva’s chose to manage the personal change and take responsibility for her life (Sadon, 1997) and become a human agency (Findley, 2005). Ziva participated in two ‘personal empowerment’ courses and each time felt she was in a different state. From a depressed, controlled woman feeling like a 'small woman', and according to her 'trodden upon' she became a strong, independent woman breaking her way through obstacles. As a mother of two children who had to do everything alone – take care of the children, clean the house and cook, directing all the action inward, she is now not willing to be told what to do or be controlled. Some of her choices mark the long and significant way she has made. She is a branch manager at her place of work, and her computer monitor presents her picture as witness of how she loves herself and cares for herself, knows where she is heading and what she has left behind.

The concept denotes women's perception of their personal stories and points where they feel good about themselves. The point where women make a decision that the choices they make are the right choices for them and they acknowledge the price and willing to pay it. The price is that they consciously and willingly decide to continue to be women, mothers, sisters, friends, and member of a women's groups, but they also accept that they may have to give up on part or all that in order to advance, to move forward, or they make a decision that their place is one of choice. They recognise that somehow they will have to pay the price. Sometimes that price is their recognition that despite their improved status and upwards mobility, they still assume responsibility for their home and family and some women decide to give up on all that and concentrate solely on their home or the family, again, based on a conscious decision that this is the place they would rather be at that moment. The issue of choice and price is a very critical issue which emerged from 'ordinary women' stories. Mrs. Rina Bartal, the Chairman of the Israel Women's Network, was the guest of honour during one of the meetings. She was both the spokesman of the Israel Women's Network and an example of a story of success, of one woman who 'did it'. Her story concentrated on her choices and the prices she was willing to make in her transition from the private to the public sphere. The participants' response was very strong. The message that she conveyed was that every woman is responsible for conducting her life and the price that she is willing to pay. Another equally important point that she made during her speech was that even women who
'made it' and achieved high position and status still have other roles and tasks to undertake, and that it is their own decision how to live and how to make their way in this world, and which weight should be given to each of their tasks and roles. The general feeling during this particular stage in the discourse was that maybe there is no chance; maybe this is too much, too big. The discourse that developed following her words concerned Israeli women's complexity and their necessity to make a choice about being completely devoted to their family and home, thus assume a more traditional role and basically make what society expects of them, or alternatively move to the next point on the continuum, which is to make the change in their home and within their families as they see fit. The higher level is that of moving to the next point, which is what Rina Bartel called the two spheres (private and public) combined, or move ahead to the last point, the final stop, which is to concentrate only on the public sphere at the expense of the private realm, again, voluntarily.

Hadar (fictitious name), who renounced her studies in favour of her son's driving licence, admits that she feels wonderful with this renunciation since it was her own choice. Idit noted that her choice let her children live a good life, different than her own. She personally chose the familial framework and today, when the circumstances have changed and her children grew up and left the house, she can move to a more independent and enabling position in her sequence of empowerment.

Another source of complexity which was not included in the scale or continuum is the place and significance of the group, and the desire to do something for women, to commit to promoting women socially, politically and publicly, and to build mutual responsibility. All these emerged from the discussions but will not be discussed here. The interviewed women have placed great emphasis on personal choice and how to set the right balance between their home, children and the workplace. Regarding the contribution of the process to the promotion of women's status and the placing of women's rights on the public agenda, women were uncertain about their commitment to join or lead a collective struggle, even for a cause that will assist other women and will make it easier for themselves. One of the participants even said that when she got a job, she had to sign a form in which she committed that she would not get pregnant for three years. She did not think to fight the injustice and the prohibition to sign this form, but she signed it because she wanted the job and did not plan to have additional children anyway. She did not feel committed to
fight it so that other women would not have to sign such a form. Regarding this matter, the opinions in the group were divided. Most of the women understood her position but realised the meaning of not leading a struggle.

4.8 Category No. 5 - The Women Group Category

One of the most important elements in the process of empowerment studied in this research, which separates it from other processes, is that it takes place in a group setting exclusively for 'ordinary women'. The rationale is the contribution of a group consisting of 'ordinary women', led by women who together undergo a process of 'personal empowerment' to successful conduct of the empowerment process. The present study has reaffirmed the power of women's groups and its unique contribution to the success of the process of 'personal empowerment' programmes, which basically means a 'personal empowerment' process where each participant felt stronger in terms of self-efficacy.

This category builds upon issues that emerged from the interviews and observations and which account for the success of the programme. The following are factors that were identified, whose significance and contribution is equal, and hence are not described in a diagram but rather in a list.

- **Similar experiences** – cultural restrictions, similar blocks and hindrances, the experience of parenthood, birth, stages in life, etc.

- **A sense of equality**: While in a variety of settings women often experience inequality and discrimination, the empowerment programmes provide an opportunity for them to be treated as equals.

- **Legitimisation of learning and women's way of knowing**: the group allows women to express themselves in their own unique way without having to adapt a different style or other people's needs. The group legitimises rich personal experience, uses it for the benefit of the group members; The women, their stories and experience become the focus of the group.

- **Mutual learning (co-learning)**: From the peer group evolves the ability to learn from other women, to lean on the accumulated experience of each and to try and see how each woman can use it for herself and for her own benefit.
- **Private and collective combined** – Women can introduce to the other women their private issues which they confront, encounter and struggle with on a daily basis. They learn, by means of transition from the private to the collective, that other women in the group encounter similar issues.

- **Women's fraternity/sisterhood:** The ability of the group to give a sense of belonging to each participant and to express emotions such as love, caring and closeness to the right degree. This sub-category is part of a wider category which also emerged, and considered how the concept of sisterhood is judged from inside the group and from the outside. This will be discussed in more details later.

- **The ability to see the humoristic aspect of the shared experiences:** The ability of women to see themselves reflected through the group mirror and to share a laugh on difficult or complicated situations, to find the good things together.

- **Reinforcement by others:** Only women who encounter similar situations can imagine the amount of energy that women must invest in order to take significant measures in life. This place of knowledge and sympathy builds power and support for each participant.

- **Empathy:** The ability to identify and understand women's place from a non-judgmental point of view. This place of understanding and knowledge allows women to understand the complexity and depth of other women's stories.

- **Formal and informal elements combined:** The group allows the introduction of informal elements which serve to create a good atmosphere, such as a birthday cake, a list of all participants' names, addresses and phone numbers in order to maintain contacts, food and beverage during breaks etc.

- **The group as a framework in which one is allowed to build expectations and fulfil them through the other group members:** Women first arrive as individuals with a clear purpose to make personal change. Some of these changes relate to personal behaviour, some in the pattern of housekeeping task distribution, in work status etc. The group is a means by which all members try to accomplish their initial goals and fulfil their expectations.
- **Feedback from the other group members:** The ability to receive feedback in a way that is both structured and constructive provides another meaningful perspective to women who are interested in making a change.

### 4.9 Category No. 6 - The Auxiliary Category - A Process Guided by a Woman

The auxiliary category encompasses the element identified by the researcher as promoting empowerment but does not serve as sub-categories. The researcher decided to include this element in order to emphasise its contribution to the success of the 'personal empowerment' process.

- **The process is guided and led by a woman:** The fact that the course leader and instructor is a woman is very significant and important to the participant women. They see her as someone who had 'made it', as a story of success, thus she becomes their role model, the proof that this can be achievable. Other women are affected by the group leader's warmth and affection and her emotionality helps them throughout the process. Furthermore, according to the participants, because she is a woman, she understands other women and does not need to be explained about many things, she is "one of us". These emotions and additional emotions such as the ability to undertake transference process, to help and promote the process.

### 4.10 Category No. 7 - The Process of Empowerment

The category of 'The Process of Empowerment' is described in a form of a scale; a continuum that shifts the 'ordinary women' from one place towards a more empowering position on that scale. The researcher has decided to describe the process that 'ordinary women' had undergone. This category starts with an explanation and continues with a graphic description of the process.

The decision to become a participant in an empowerment programme is made in order to experience something which is dynamic. Women arrive with an expectation for some change in their condition and/or life. Activity is accessible, as it mainly takes place in the communities where the women live. The activity takes place during the evening, which enables working women to take part in the activity. In
addition, there are no minimal admission requirements, which mean that any woman is allowed to participate. The empowerment course is perceived as a means by which to fulfill their expectations and introduce a change in life.

The women's decision to participate in the programme comes, according to the findings, from two directions: the need to learn and/or the need to make a change by engaging in activities and materials which pertain to empowerment or leadership. These two realms combined, and each of these alone, led the 'ordinary women' into the journey. The contents and structure of the standard course concentrate more on empowerment and to a much lesser degree on women's learning. It was already noted in the introduction and in the method, that the present study had another stage. In order to get a deeper understanding the researcher initiated another stage with principles deriving from an Action Research and a Participatory Action Research.

The uniqueness of this stage was the special reference and emphasis of the way women learn and the inclusion of these contents in the standard curriculum. The decision to add this section was based on the findings of analysis of women's 'personal empowerment' stories and interview analysis carried out during the study. These findings draw attention to the significance of learning. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) described their sense of revelation when creating of a shared book and reading the material. They described the way women learn as follows: "Women don't just learn in classrooms, they learn in relationships, by juggling life demands, by dealing with crises in families and communities." (p. xi).

Belenky et. al., (1986) define education for women as education for women's development.

For some women, the process of empowerment is essentially a process of individual learning, as a means of legitimating the way which they had chosen or making a change in life. In the beginning of the empowerment process women express explicit expectations. The researcher differentiates between the explicit expectations and the implicit ones, those which are said and pronounced after a while, as women start to build trust and intimacy with the other group members. The explicit expectations were:

- "Gain self-confidence and enjoy an enriching experience".
- "Be able to say 'no' without feeling guilty".
- "Gain the necessary power to continue and to keep following the way which I had chosen".
- "Highlight and foster qualities in me".
"Have the tools and techniques which would help me get stronger and continue with this ongoing race of life, dwell upon the experience of other women who 'did it' ".

"Help and be helped, feel that I am indispensable and crucial, that I contribute to others and that they contribute back".

"Personal empowerment', increase my inner power".

"Receive self-promotion tools, exposure to themes such as female leadership and promoting the status of women, the state of women in the labour market in terms of employability, conditions at work etc".

"Before I get back to work, I would really like to receive positive reinforcements and perhaps some misunderstandings will disappear during the course and my inner struggles and hesitations will ease".

The 'ordinary women' desire to fulfil these expectations. Their motto is to gain strength, to become empowered through the introduction of the need for change. It happens during the beginning of the process in the decision-making stage. These expectations are the target orientation of the learner as stated by Houle (1961), women's identification and recognition of their private interests. Registration to the course, then, is the starting point, indicating the exact point where problems and pressures are serious and severe enough to make an informed decision to take actions, to do something in order to solve the problems or pressures.

Houle (1961) called this stage the 'action orientation'. Regarding the definition of expectations, the researcher claims that both learning orientations referred to by Houle (1961) exist: The 'goal orientation' and 'action orientation' (Houle, 1961). Women choose to fulfil these goals in a framework which they perceive as supportive, which communicates a sense of comfort and openness. Besides the contents and conditions related to the framework, other common denominators are the opportunities to realise interests and individual expectations. Expectations are converted into the goal orientation and action orientation which Houle (1961) spoke of. The course framework is wide enough to encompass emotions and dilemmas, and connect to this knowledge or, as Houle (1961) terms it, 'learning orientation'. This 'learning orientation' strives to achieve knowledge. The means by which women achieve these interests, goals and knowledge is the empowerment programmes. The research findings show that the empowerment groups in which the research respondents participated, and the observed group enable the women to reach actualisation of their needs. Through the way it is handled, the specific
empowerment groups in this study acknowledge the need of adult learners for a
distinct learning orientation adjusted to their needs. Also, as opposed to other adult
learning programmes, this programme is specifically built for women, in order to
allow them to create knowledge in their own way. The Feminist theory criticised
adult education programmes and claimed that they failed to incorporate the unique
characteristics of women's way of learning, and on top of that the entire field of
'Andragogy' is predominated by men. Nonetheless, according to the researcher, the
empowerment course offers the 'ideal conditions' in terms of the Feminist approach.
The course provides an opportunity for 'ordinary women' to introduce their desires,
their preferences in times and places which are compatible for them and a
supportive atmosphere. At the end of the process the participants are able to
integrate these new materials in their own unique way of learning as women. The
researcher argues that the 'ordinary women' ability to integrate these materials
result stronger self-efficacy or, in other words, empowerment.

At the end of the course the participants were asked to describe in different manners
their learning of empowerment. The instruction was that it could be expressed in a
painting, a story, reading a desired paragraph or any other way they wish. The
projects were presented along two sessions in different manners: a video clip, a
painting, reading a selected paragraph, presentations; impressive projects that
according to the researcher illustrated the meaning of the process and its products
for the women. The material presented integration to the learning materials which
were learnt in the course.

Betty (fictitious name) hands to the group members a well-known Israeli song. To
this song she added words of her own referring to the women participating in the
group. The song's chorus is:

"Assertiveness, all of a sudden I know it
Assertiveness, I want to make a sound...
Assertiveness, all of a sudden I know it
Assertiveness, without aggression, only confidence...
Assertiveness, I call you today
Assertiveness, the power is here, within you..."
Aviva (fictitious name) exhibited a presentation titled: "Girls, the future is in our hands". The woman's starting point is: Economical independence and learning. 'personal empowerment' for Aviva is: "Whatever makes me feel good Whatever makes me happy Whatever makes me feel proud for the things I am proud of Whatever I am grateful for Whatever warms my heart Whatever gives me strength and power"

Nehama (fictitious name) chose to read a poem "Self Respect – Angela's World". The song was written by Barbara Basset and for Nehama it presented a message regarding the empowerment process. The song begins with: "When Angela was little Two or three years old, Her mother and father Had taught her to never say 'no' They taught her that she has to agree To everything anyone said to her And if not, she was beaten And was sent to her room"

The song ends with: "Today Angela is first of all a woman And only then a mother and a wife... She has ambitions and talents She has money in the bank... She says to her children - It is nice to agree, But if we do not know how to say 'no' We will not be what we need to be..."
This is only a small part of a wonderful collection of stories, a presentation, a painting illustrating the process of 'personal empowerment'.

The first part of the research question deals with the subjective voice of the 'ordinary women' which goes through a 'personal empowerment' process. The researcher can certainly claim that the woman's subjective voice going through a 'personal empowerment' process mentions a change, possessing more confidence, a sense of direction, and shows meaningful learning about themselves and their surrounding; with regard to implementation in the workplace, it received a unique category.

The researcher goes on to argue that in order to feel that strong sense of empowerment at the end of the process, the most significant integration takes place in the connection between the diverse contents of the categories. There are multiple combinations and variations, depending on women's character and their location on the empowerment scale. The researcher believes that one such significant and powerful integration includes two categories: the 'learning as a lever' category and the sub-categories 'learning as a lever to change and progression' and the sub-category 'learning as an empowering and emancipating power' according to Freire (1972) and between the category, 'the choice to manage personal change', with special emphasis placed on the sub-category of 'claim responsibility for change'. By that the researcher means the responsibility to move on the oppression-emancipation continuum (a concept adapted from Freire, 1972).

The operative meaning of women's 'emancipation' as perceived by the researcher is individual and has various expressions. Shahaf (fictitious name) says: "I had power to deal with daily problems I already thought what I was going to do tomorrow". Aviva (fictitious name) "wants to be an eagle – power, vision, a little bit of wickedness". Amit (fictitious name) "I took the leadership that came naturally... that goes with you all the way within yourself. A spark, an idea, power... I took the thing in me that attracts the people... the way that people connect to me...". Each one of the women during the empowerment process in this study marked the destination she aspires to reach; the objective that will cause her to feel better, the place she chose to be.

The weight on the oppression-emancipation continuum is called by the researcher 'choice'. The 'choice' is the point of balance that each individual woman seeks. This point is part of the personal decision of each woman. The 'point of balance' which is
the result of women's conscious and informed choice fits what Belenky et. al. (1997) said about women's way of learning- that it takes place outside the classroom as well. The writer of this thesis believes that 'women's learning' occurs through the variety of relationships which women establish over the years, their desire and decision to lead a process of change, together with the actual process of empowering programme and by learning. It also occurs through the conversion of this process into a liberating and empowering element, and the women use it as a lever for progression and advancement. The researcher also believes that the transition from one place to another on the oppression-emancipation continuum depends first and foremost on individual women's willingness to claim personal responsibility, but grows stronger during the empowerment process, simultaneously with the group process which is experienced by every member of the group. In this process, individual woman is ready and willing to cope with personal and individual materials, discuss these, share with others details about these materials, receive reinforcement from other women, as well as encouragement and feedback. This process can take place only when each individual woman's are ready for it and the group must be supportive and sympathetic towards the individual woman. The group should be able to listen to her voice, the same voice that conveys to the other women her experiences, the hindering factors, her agreement and desire to be there. The 'voice' which tells the other group members about the route which she has eventually chosen.

The process of 'personal empowerment' described in the present study is part of the scale of individual woman, the woman in the group and the specific group in a particular point in time, part of an infinite scale. This is why some women choose to participate in the programme over and over again. They need to hear new things, to learn about views of other members of the group, to meet a different group of women which leads the individual woman to make a different sort of integration. That integration is right for her in that point in time. This integration is supported by two categories: the 'learning as a lever' and the 'women group category'. Combined together, these two categories constitute a basis for an actual learning and for making learning an empowering experience for each. Empowerment means that women make their own choices by finding the right balance between self-development, personal space, family, home and career. The ability to find that balance is the contribution of the empowerment process to women in a specific point in their life. Rina (fictitious name) says: "My mother decided not to move from the
private to the public sphere. My sister and I are different from her. One must continuously set goals, otherwise it is impossible to move forward”.

Based on the present study, women’s empowerment is manifested and reflected in several ways: through a sense of self-efficacy, women know that they can do and achieve more. They can make a decision about the direction of change; they receive feedbacks and reinforcements from other women that they have the right intuitions, and they learn something new about their own way of learning.

Hadas's words: "All my education was to be silent, to renounce. I did not know nor feel what I want. I got married, I had two girls and all the time I did everything quietly, without complaining; to go to the second floor with a baby carriage, to get down again, to bring the shopping up again. I divorced, I felt that I lost my voice... After the first empowerment group I started to become myself again, and first of all to examine what I want, who am I? Today I am in a totally different place. I know perfectly well what I want and I certainly do not want to go back to being who I was before...”.

The researcher claims that more than anything else, Hadas's words reflect the operative expression of empowerment and its significance for women. She said these words during a meeting in which each participant was asked to tell about her individual project and progression. Hadas talked about what she did so far and conclusions she arrived at. She talked about what she was taught to believe is correct and good for her and what she believes is best for her. Another operative expression of self-efficacy is her transition from a state of what Belenky et. al. (1986) called 'silence' towards constructed knowledge. At this stage, women realise that there is no such thing as one correct answer to questions and that the answer depends on the context as well as the point of reference and attitude of the person who poses the question. Riki describes, in a heartbreaking story, how she was suppressed by her husband’s family and especially her mother-in-law, and that she can now see that she also played a part in this and. She is now in an altogether different place. She does not resent them but she wants to talk about it, not to be embarrassed to talk about it. She said: "All these workshops and conversations make us stronger and impervious".

The process of empowerment, based on the findings of the present study, makes it possible to reach that point through a process that occurs simultaneously in individual women and in the group. Limor (fictitious name) talked about the great experience of talking about things, getting things out of your stomach: "My
experience with this group is different from my experience with the previous one. I
did not pour my heart out as I did with the previous group, which eventually helped
everyone. I miss that. We only just began to develop a ‘personal discourse (in the
last few meetings). I feel released, I gained new insights, I feel that I opened up”.
The learning that Limor refers to describes a process of ventilation, a process
whereby women tell their own story, and share personal thought and emotions with
others, something that was not done so far or said only to a very close friend. The
‘voice’ that wants to be heard and talks about personal experiences and obstructions
is basically the ‘voice’ of someone who is in the middle of a process. At a certain
point the group encourages women to express this personal and authentic voice.
The atmosphere of openness, sympathy and companionship that is built during the
course allows women to introduce their voices and inner thoughts into the situation.
Hence, the narrative ‘voice’ is one time expressed through ventilation and the other
time through feedbacks, support and reinforcement by other members of the group;
a different point of view demonstrated by the other women through their responses
to the contents and words of the individual woman. An example is the response of
Limor who accessed an online women forum. Following this reading she said: "I find
it difficult to share personal experiences and thoughts with other women. I identified
with the things that were right for me, I am not on my own...". In a feedback on one
of the meetings Limor said that she is "feeling great, everyone needs a psychologist
and this is basically what this group is to me. Something got unblocked, I completely
opened up and I am very happy to share my thoughts and feelings with my
psychologists". Her words demonstrate the process that she and the group
underwent together and simultaneously, more specifically: learning enabled through
the integration of individual and group work. This learning eventually enables her to
make a choice to move from one point of efficacy on the continuum to another
point, which reflects higher levels of self-efficacy, up to a point where she feels good
about herself. This point is part of the empowerment process where women identify
their choices, express them in words to themselves and to the surrounding
environment, and implement their choice. The researcher believes that this point
where a choice is made is the result of a critical approach which Feminist
researchers (Maher, 1985; Culley, 1985 in Culley and Portuges, 1985) believe to be
important in relation to how society shows to women what is right for them, to
challenge and undermine the frameworks and what they represent as right and start
to build the things that are right for them. Developing a critical outlook is not the
end of the process, it is the associated work, and is not always practical and active. The choice is an inner process whereby women decide what they wish to do. Cohen (2004) refers to the change that occurs following the empowerment process which she claims consists of at least four secondary moves or steps (Cohen, 2004; Gutierrez, 1990).

1) Improved self-efficacy. This is what Bandura (1997) called beliefs about an individual's ability to create and organise life events and occurrences.

2) Develop critical awareness which is demonstrated through increased awareness of the influence that political structures have on the experience of individuals and groups. Critical awareness consists of three cognitive components: identification with similar others, a reduced tendency to blame oneself for past occurrences and personal responsibility for future problem-solving (Freire, 1973; Solomon, 1976; Kieffer, 1983; Gutierrez, 1990).

The empowerment group consists only of women. Consequently, the group members become aware of a variety of issues through the development of a critical outlook on the environment. As shown in the conversations, some women demonstrated lower levels of satisfaction with the direct supervisor at work. The responses to this issue were: "Today I realise that they [the workplace] used me and took advantage of me", or "I know that I must be more assertive". The act of taking responsibility is demonstrated in the present study through the following two sub-categories in the 'Women's choice to manage and administer personal change' category between the sub-category 'personal decision to embark upon the process' and the sub-category of 'claim responsibility for change'.

3) Develop skills that enable individuals to develop more powerful personal, interpersonal and political resources. One of the goals of empowerment programmes is to provide women with techniques and skills. One such tool, which can motivate women to move forward on the oppression-emancipation continuum, is assertiveness, the ability to express their desire for more space, for independence, liberation and promotion in such a way that allows them to achieve personal and individual space in the various realms of their life.

4) Cohen (2004) states that involvement with similar others, connections with other people who share status or encounter similar problematic situations, can take place in a formal as well as informal context. This step is very
significant and addressed by the present study, which found out that the
category of 'the women group' and the category of 'learning promoting
atmosphere' serve as the basis for a significant 'personal empowerment'
process and grounds for personal learning for each woman. The power of the
group and its unconditional support, the power that was so strongly felt
throughout the process – all these are the basis. Without this basis the
process of empowerment could never achieve the same results, and primarily
the ability of women to sit together in a group, observe and learn about
themselves through other women and from other women's point of view.
Listen to other women's stories and become motivated and powerful enough
to move along the oppression-emancipation continuum.

According to the findings of the present study, the final outcome of the
empowerment process is the integration that each woman makes for herself. This is
the integration which Freire (1973) referred to, the connection between 'learner-
oriented learning' and clear goals for change, in the case of this research, personal
change. Some of the expectations of women in the beginning of the course involve
change in self or, as Freire (1973) called it, a 'learner-oriented change'. However,
the outcome of learning encompasses several other circles, such as the family,
friends, work and inevitably concerns social change as well. For the participant
women, implementation of their choice means that they are well aware that every
place and point on the continuum will necessarily involve more tasks and duties.
Each choice inevitably consists of a variety of systems and complex situations, and
women must find their path, their own way in this tangled forest. The tracks and
routes each of them chooses to walk in, change the texture, or, as Freire (1973) put
this, lead to a social change. Shahar (fictitious name) described her process of
learning as follows: "I was in the process of getting a divorce. This course helped me
socially, I spent time outside my house and I forgot all my problems. It helped me
as a person, I became stronger, I gained wisdom, I learned to look at things from a
different point of view, I realised that it was possible to behave in a different way,
not like I used to behave. I used to get offended by anything that my husband had
said to me. He was mad, he saw my success and felt bad and hurt… My decision to
find a workplace is part of the process that I went through following the meetings. I
was taught how to cope with job interviews, how to dress properly, how to write my
resume in an appealing manner, I can learn from others". Shahar's active learning
resulted in her transition on the continuum from a previous state of powerlessness
towards an empowered person, and she has taken some major steps towards her emancipation. Shahar criticised the 'silent women', as Belenky et. al. (1997) called them. Her example of a 'silent woman' was: "There was one woman who just listened and kept saying 'yes, yes'...but never actually implemented what she had been taught. She failed to assemble the different parts of the puzzle. Any person who receives information is obliged to do something with it, use it in one way or another". Her image of the 'silent women' builds upon her success in assembling the parts of the puzzle, her ability to identify her own points of connection and achieve them. Shahar is an example of the difference in women's learning, how it is perceived by women, and also what people gain from the empowerment process and what they decide to do with that. In order to describe the process of making a decision to become empowered, Shahar used a famous Russian folk tale that 'a stone lying down is never covered with water'. Shahar explained this metaphor to the researcher and said "one must move the stone in order to let water pass through. This is basically what the empowerment course did for me: it helped me remove the stone". This is exactly what Shahar's significant saying did for the researcher. The metaphor illustrated the meaning of the 'personal empowerment' process for the participants. The name of the research "Moving the Stone..." derived from Shahar's example and the researcher thanked her and the other women who granted the researcher knowledge - "Moving the stone" in order to enable the women to bring more light to their lives, promotion, meaning, objectives, love, assertiveness... each woman chooses her 'colour' and 'content' of this flow.
4.10.1 Graphic Description of the Empowerment Process Experienced by the Participants in the present study:

The choice to participate in a personal empowerment process

The choice is reinforced after the woman becomes acquainted with the other members of the group

Acquaintanceship, conversation, learning, personal elucidation by women, gender, personal and social systems

Discussion of the price that a woman is willing to pay to become empowered

Group exposure and/or active attention to personal stories (personal experiences, an event or occurrence related to home and the family, etc)

Acknowledging one’s choices and the decision to follow these choices

Reach the right balance for the woman

This model is an illustration of the steps on the empowerment process continuum where women develop and move forward, and the level on which it occurs (personal or group). The uniqueness of this process, according to the researcher, is that it takes place among a group of women, which also enables personal learning from the outlook of the group members. Learning may be active or passive. The individual
woman determines the way that is most appropriate and suitable for her. The present study revealed that each participant is much stronger and empowered at the end of the process, although there are individual differences between women in terms of their location on the continuum at the end of the process. This is why some women repeat the process and participate in additional activities, in order to become strong enough to move to the next stage. The findings show that although women's location on the continuum and actual implementation related mainly to the workplace, some related to other realms, such as the personal and family domains. Women, then, move on the continuum (scale) and each woman exits at a different point, a different place on the continuum. Each layer requires higher self-efficacy and reaching that level requires both individual efforts and assistance and support by the other women. The interviewed and observed women are located on different parts of the scale and for some this is the second time they have participated in the course, with a purpose to move forward and to accomplish something which they have not accomplished the first time. Limor, for instance, participated in the course for the second time in order to be equipped with the tools that she needed to be able to cope with everyday activities and tasks beyond the ones that she received from her participation in the previous course, including new lecturers and basically "anything that can be useful and informative".

According to the research findings, the 'personal empowerment' process strengthens and enables the feminine learning to become established among the women. There is mutual feedback between 'personal empowerment' and feminine learning. Women become aware of their abilities through the assimilation and thorough explanations of the materials which are taught and introduced during the course. The atmosphere and group feedback promote significant learning. The atmosphere denotes the ability to communicate ideas and thoughts to other women and while exposing women's voice to differing degrees and volumes, and still experience the course in a different and individual way.
4.11 Category No. 8 – The Non-Existent Concept of Feminism in Women's Discourse

This category emerged from the unsaid. We would expect women to sympathise with the Feminist agenda because of their desire to fulfil themselves, to reach places and realms to which they have no access and are not allowed to penetrate because of society restrictions and limitations and the price that they have to pay for being women, mothers and daughters. However, according to the findings of this study, things are quite the other way around. In fact, the word Feminism and the Feminist agenda are not included in women's discourse. Women disapprove of the word and what it implies for them, for their husbands and their family. It seems that there is something in that word that intimidates women, that makes them feel uncomfortable, as if the word involves an immediate sanction or stigma that makes them feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, the researcher believes that the tendency of these women to ignore the word Feminism or to feel strange and uncomfortable with using that word may be attributable to the fact that Feminism is very often used to describe women who are not connected to their feminine side, who made an informed decision to live alone. In the introduction to the course and during the first couple of sessions when women discussed the course, its primary goals and the centrality of women, the lecturer said: "Do not worry, girls, we have no intention whatsoever to burn bras". What she meant was: let us all calm down, be sure that we are not going to do anything that would affect your femininity or your identity as the wives of.

The word Feminism and the meanings of that word are not familiar to women, and are thus rejected by them. Furthermore, gender issues and the fact that these women understand and experience gender inequalities and their inferior status as women are not connected in their minds to Feminism. In one of the interviews, Anat said to me: "Our society has an aversion to the Feminist approach, because it undermines everything, it undermines my confidence. I want to change things, but not everyone is going to let me do that, my family, my husband, they think of me as a non functioning woman, a woman who got divorced, they think: perhaps something went wrong in the relationships between her and her husband because of these courses which she took...You only talk like that because of those courses, otherwise I am trying to be silent, it eats me from within...". Anat could pay a heavy price for using the word Feminism because of society's outlook on and attitude to
that concept, and she is not yet ready to pay that price. She said that she is already paying a price for her learning, because her husband and mother immediately relate to the fact that she participates in these courses when she anything that she says that reflects her personal thoughts and liberal view, of which they disapprove. For that reason, she does not use the word Feminism. She realises that this is a radical step. She is not yet willing to make change, as she is very well aware that any use of the word involves an immediate sanction by society. With reference to the proverb at the beginning of the chapter, Feminism is still the inner voice in women; the voice which is described in the story in the beginning of this chapter; the voice of the researcher (the one of the story) who says to the eagle: "you belong in the sky", and stays with him until the eagle learns to fly. What encourages and motivates women to express their opinions and voice is the empowerment group. They wish to join those groups in the first place because of that inner voice that seduces them to become participants in a process of change. The purpose is to be in the places they choose or dream to fly to. 'Ordinary women' perceive Feminism as it was in the second wave, a collective agenda which does not allow women to undertake an individual direction or to engage in self-development. Friedman (1999, in Izraeli et. al., 1999) investigated women's aversion to the concept of Feminist in a similar way to the interviews in the present study. A new and modern course, 'Feminist family care', has been offered to female students of social work. Only two students enrolled in the course. The name of the course was consequently changed to 'Family care in an Era of Change'. This time 30 students enrolled and gained knowledge in an interesting and fun way about Feminist family care, the same content, only under a different title. Friedman (1999) talked about the gap between women's identification with contents pertaining to the field of women's psychology and the empowering effect of these contents on the one hand, and the need of women to say "But I assure you that I am not a Feminist", on the other. Studies held by Shemesh-Kurtz (1997) and Weinstein (1998, in Friedman, 1999) support this finding which emerges from the present study. One of the explanations which they provide is the image of the Feminists as aggressive and belligerent.

The act of the lecturer in the studied course declaring "we are not going to burn brasses", was her need to alleviate women's fears associated with the aggressive and militant image of Feminism. This is especially the case with Israeli women, claims Friedman (1999). A similar effect can be seen in the present study in relation to the power category, when even the few women who said that they were
interested in gaining more power said this in a low and feeble tone and they almost apologized for their desire to gain power. They usually referred to their desire to gain self-power and sometimes used a different concept which is similar to power. The researcher states that because of the militant image of the Feminist Movement, and women's fear to be seen as aggressive persons, women participate in empowerment programmes, agree and identify with the contents which are studied during the course and even reveal that they have many things in common in the educational, social and work realms. And yet, they refuse to be associated in any way to Feminism.

The term 'Gender' is used widely in empowerment programmes. Izraeli et. al. 1999 said that this concept denotes the change in the Feminist discourse and the perception according to which sex differentiation is the result of social structuring based on hierarchic dichotomy of the power relationship between men and women, and therefore presented as something that is 'natural' and obvious. The researcher believes that the use of the word 'gender' leads to women's identification with and understanding of the realm without behaving defensively or refusing to listen, which would be the case if we used the word Feminist instead. It is the researcher's opinion that the fact that many empowerment programmes and activities are organised by parties and organisations which are not necessarily Feminist increase women's awareness of the connection between their female identity and the restrictions imposed on them by social structures. Even though at this point there is still no reference to Feminism, women do start to act and take steps to resist the current state of affairs and start to make a change. Although this change is on a personal and individual level, it does create changes in women's near environment.

A different outlook on the relationship between Feminist approaches and women can be learnt from Rachel. Rachel was one of the participants of the observed empowerment groups. To a bystander, Rachel seems to constantly connect things and doing an inner work with herself. All the time she internalized the materials and her note and comments advanced the group. In a session conducted by the researcher as a part of the research, the research findings were presented. The researcher related to the issue of lack of references in the discourse to the term of Feminist agenda, and in many cases the lack of identification with it. Rachel addressed the researcher and presented an issue that bothered her: "I know that my problem with Feminism is where we are stuck. Feminism is stuck in our throats. Look what happened to us (the women). Following Feminism we left our homes and
our remuneration became necessary on one hand, but on the other hand, the other tasks remained. We want to go back, but we can't. We are immediately said - no way. You can't. But on the other hand, there is no solution. In fact, Feminism does not give us (the women) a solution”.

According to the researcher, Rachel represents a social and public voice asking: Where is the Feminist agenda headed? Where does it lead women in the 21st century? What kind of order does it present to the women? This voice is the one heard among women who were termed in the current study 'ordinary women'. A voice of an ordinary person who feels the burden of numerous tasks of living, it feels that it is unclear where to continue. Rachel's claims correspond to a criticism made by Irigaray (2004), who notes that a careful analysis of the aspirations for equality between men and women is justified from a level of superficial cultural criticism, but as a means for emancipating women, it is only utopian. Irigaray (2004) predicts that "If Feminism does not pass this stage, it might find itself working on the ruin of women, and moreover, the ruin of values. In fact, the struggle for equality dedicates vast energy to rejecting certain values and pursuing nothing" (p.11). "This situation", according to Irigaray (2004), "is the reason for lies, loss of motivation and periodic withdrawals among the movements for women's liberation. This is also the reason that they left their mark on the pages of history" (p.11). Irigaray (2004) suggest a different form of thinking which is not based on semantic and in which 'she' becomes 'not-he'. The formula, according to Irigaray (2004) is " ..social justice based on the uniqueness of each one of the sexes, maintaining the uniqueness and understanding that it is a part of the human race and has a purpose to reach social and cultural changes that should be conducted on the foundation of mutual respect and social justice. Social justice in the sense of a restored balance of powers that one of the sexes possess over the other, through giving (or re-giving) subjective and objective rights for women – rights adjusted to their gender" (p. 79). Irigaray's (2004) approach relates to the debate conducted in the group, according to Rachel, following the discourse regarding the idea that empowerment groups might need to be involved in order to make the feminine discourse understood by men and therefore create the real required change. The idea to integrate men in the 'circle of empowerment' is combined with Irigaray's (2004) approach regarding the need for a document defining the rights and duties of both sides while maintaining and respecting the difference along with striving for social justice.
The connection that the researcher finds between Rachel and Irigaray's (2004) approach might be the key for one of the discrepancies between Theory and Practice. Occasionally, it feels as if the academy is detached from the real world. It is the inquiry of the local phenomenon which illustrates, according to the researcher, the relations between the thoughts and needs of the 'ordinary women' and the academy.

It is important, according to the researcher, to examine the issue of 'women empowerment' and promotion in front of promoting thinking about formulating a document of mutual rights and duties among men and women in the spirit of Irigaray's (2004) approach.

4.12 Category No. 9 - Action/Change inside the Bounds Set by the Rules

It was already said in the introduction to this chapter, that being Feminist research, it has also undertaken the responsibility to identify the unsaid, the voices which are not included in the discourse. The researcher asserts that women in this research tend not to use the concept Feminist and do not identify with it even though they are familiar with it and during the empowerment process they are aware of the importance of promoting the agenda. Nonetheless, the term Feminism and identifying with it to an overt claim 'I am a feminist' does not take place. According to the researcher, equally important is women's lack of desire or they fear to 'break' or change the rules in terms of fighting for what then want in taking a surprising acts or changing the rules they use to. They do not dare to make anything that is unusual. More specifically, the researcher refers here to the courageous acts involved in making a personal statement that is different from the standard and usual statements which are typically made by women and to which the environment is accustomed, or set a new agenda that is based on women's various domains and realms. The researcher claims that in order to lead a change in the environment women must take individual measures or assume non conformist stances. The sort of change that women wish to administer in self, home or work requires that they confront resistance, through creativity and daring. The interviews and observation made it clear to the researcher that women's awareness of their desire to make a change is insufficient, and that they participate in the course in order to legitimise their desire, to become stronger and implement the change. Something was missing,
and it was difficult for the researcher in the beginning to find exactly what it was. However, following a review of the materials that she gained and an examination of how women confront and deal with conflicts, she discovered that the participant women had basically used acts and ways which were conventional and agreed upon by society. Therefore, the category of action/change inside the bounds set by the rules denotes women's way of acting in order to solve problems they face. Their feeling that they are responsible for everything and that they must keep things precisely as they are, prevents them from making a breakthrough in the sense of changing the conventional rules and building new ones. 'Ordinary Women' in this research felt obliged to make changes within the existing settings while 'playing with the standard and conventional rules' and fear of any extreme or unusual act. They search for harmony, thus prefer to be extra cautious and careful, and take small steps at a time. The causes of this behaviour are individual, but also have a structural and cultural origin. The researcher believes that women's strong sense of responsibility and their culture prevents them from taking courageous, creative and unusual measures, changing the rules of the game or behaving in a way that would eventually lead to the desirable change. The researcher is in agreement with the somewhat pessimist attitude of the Feminist philosopher Irigaray (2004) who said: "I believe that this means that the goals of the fight for emancipation and liberation are still very strongly connected to a culture which has no room for female subjectivity and also that because women lack their own identity, they keep searching for a place of their own in a technological era in which their energies are a necessary accommodation, in order to build for themselves an illusion of a better future. This process contains a saddening repetition, and it is bothersome and somewhat depressing, even though on the surface this diversion of attention is actually a convenient solution for many women" (p. 129-130). Although these words were said in the specific context of motherhood and femininity, and in the direction of implementing different understandings among men and women, but it maintains the difference while keeping mutual respect and equal rights. A step in this direction requires, according to the researcher, various steps, which do not combine with the mainstream; steps towards an organization and reading within women’s organizations for constructing and creating a different agenda. With a new agenda, or alternatively an embracement of the existing feminist thinking should create a course of action in order to generate a change (Izraeli, 1999; Sadan, 1997). On the one hand, women have a strong desire to move forward, but at the same time
choose the conventional and usual way of making this gradual movement towards the preferred state. The realisation that courage and daring are required is demonstrated through the words of Aviva during one of the meetings. Aviva was surfing the internet, looking for materials about women, empowerment and women's stories, in order to use them for her final course project. Through this process of surfing she gained new insights and understood things even better than during the course. "Reading everything that was ever written by women has made me think about dreams, fulfilment, and where we stand as women. Especially the last part is something that I want to know more about, women for women. When I read the materials on the internet I often felt that someone else was talking for me and said exactly what I was thinking, as if someone had put my words in another woman's mouth. Sometimes I preferred to remain silent and not say those things...it's amazing what women write about...I would not dare...".

It is the researcher's opinion that some of the reasons for acting within the rules relate to the categories of the 'Non-Existent Concept of Feminism on Women's Discourse', and the 'The Power Category', and are therefore interrelated. In order to achieve a change, appropriateness and integration of the various categories and sub-categories presented in the findings are required. In the researcher's view, a real breakthrough towards change cannot be fully implemented unless it is also backed by women's collective actions and the women's embracing acts and doings which are suitable for them and can help them be in a place they will feel that their personal and individual choices are fulfilled. But they cannot be separated from collective action. Some of the actions should be according to the researcher surprising and outside the rules. Creativity can facilitate an operative embracement of Irigaray's (2004) approach. She claims that "the simple and pure social justice requires that we balance the power relations between men and women through the attribution (or reattribution) of cultural values to female sexuality..." (p. 10). The researcher claims that this process of attribution requires an integration of power among women as individuals and as a group to embrace a new way of thinking that is different from the one they are used to, and also requires them to behave in a way that is not consistent with the conventional way of thinking to which women and the society as a whole are used.

The researcher does not have enough information to suggest or claim an unequivocal statement. Nonetheless, the researcher thinks that a profound thinking should be conducted regarding this category, which considers a change and a break-
through. However, first, the researcher suggests that a profound debate should be conducted regarding the direction headed by Feminism and its various trends. Later, it should be discussed, if faith required, an active action, or an integration of both. In order for this conceptual or practical breakthrough to occur, and since the researcher does not have enough information, there is a need for deep thinking about expanding this category as well as to engage in the question arising from the research regarding the direction of Feminism. Moreover, the research intended to identify issues that arise from the learning of women in their personal empowerment process. This category according to the researcher needs in-depth inquiry to understand.

4.13 Implementation of Empowerment Process at Work

One of the questions in the present study was whether women who undergo an empowerment process based on 'women's learning' succeed according to their stories in transferring the newly studied self-efficacy skills to the workplace. The choice of work is not incidental, as this is one central field which perpetuates gender-based inequality. An introduction of change at work could help in changing the gap between men and women. Fischer (2004) states women have a natural talent for web thinking. They are mentally flexible, they have a broad and context-based intuition and standpoint. Fischer (2004) claims that these innate rights and talents could change the face of the business world. However, it may take a while before the business world in particular and world of work in general embraces it. Fischer’s argument is based on recognition of biological differences between men and women, their different ways of thinking and how these contribute to the promotion and advancement of women, and their relevance to the changes taking place in the 21st century. Women still struggle to pave their way in the world of work which is dominated by male rules and values (Kopka and Korb, 1996; Swirski, 2002; Rosin, 2000). Women still must fight to achieve a balance between several domains, mainly their family, their house and promotion at work. Most of the participants were working women. Few of them had only recently left work and few others were unemployed. With this in mind, the main decision of women to participate in an empowerment programme is not to acquire tools and techniques that would make their access to the world of work easier and simpler. They were interested in acquiring the tools that would allow them to keep their work and to get a promotion,
to find the right balance between their personal life and work, to learn about the price they are willing to pay and the things they are willing to give up on, in order to advance and achieve promotion. One of the findings of the present study was that women's place in the world of work, their ability to integrate in that world properly and to succeed- are very significant for them. As they see it, access to the world of work improves their self-confidence, promotes their success and independence. Equally important, achieving the right position at work facilitates women's positioning at home and in society. The majority of women in the research feel that the world of work requires them to give their absolutely maximum and for them, the way to achieve equality is still very long, given their present position. It seems that access to the world of work means extra burden and extra duties. They still believe that they must be equipped with many tools in order to gain promotion at work. Things are not obvious. Women do not take for granted their conduct within the world of work.

The researcher wishes to elaborate on the significance of the location of that category in the Research Findings and Discussion chapter. During the stage of analysis the researcher suddenly felt that the various categories emerged easily from the discussion and were very easily built from the theories and the materials which the participant women addressed. However, things were quite different with the present category. Although it seemed that the empowerment process was also implemented at work, it seemed much less important for the women, powerful and central compared to the other categories. The researcher believes that this is because in the beginning of the process, women concentrate mainly on themselves and embrace an introspective outlook. Then they start to concentrate on their home and close family, which is second priority, and only then they start thinking about the significance of empowerment in the world of work. The connection between women and this domain, of work, is too complicated and perceived as the 'extra something', something secondary in importance and not the main thing. According to the researcher, the highest priority of the 'ordinary women' is their children. This is where most of the energy is concentrated: their children, homes, and families. More than once the researcher listened to women who said: "My personal project is the children" or "My project is my family". Women are committed to their children, home and family, and work comes much later. The participant women said that both realms have their price and that they have made a decision to give the highest priority to their children and home. They said that eventually, this is the best and
safest investment in the long-run, because your children and family stay with you for life. They are yours and they are the ones who stay. This was the general atmosphere in the room and loyalty to the family and house was felt very strongly. Home is the place you go when you are disappointed with your work. Examples of disappointments from work include sentences such as "it does not matter... the most important thing is that I have my family, children and home..." or "why do I invest so much effort if I am not appreciated. At least at home...". These sentences reflect the perception that home is a secure place along with the fact that home is a haven and supply the explanation and occasionally the excuse for not coping in the workplace.

Similar to the process occurring in the "two hats learning", the discourse regarding work, as it appears in the observation or the interviews, involves additional characters, mainly home, the children and the husband. The women's perception of, the workplace interferes with other important elements, such as: home, family, children and husband. Promotion in the workplace is immediately connected to the familial cost and therefore generates a dilemma.

Nonetheless, the 'personal empowerment' process and sharing it with other women raises the dilemma and something happens in the room and in the workplace after sharing a similar fate and dilemmas. Izraeli (1999), Swirski (1999) and Jenik (1998) refer to the limitation of women in the workplace and their consideration of home as the centre of the feminine being is still valid. Even though the researchers referred to a general description of women, their status, the dilemmas and the factors inhibiting them, their individual consideration of women was appropriate to the description provided by the above mentioned researchers.

The researcher identified two ways through which women were helped in the 'personal empowerment' process in coping with situations arising in the world of work. These two ways correspond to the model proposed by Belenky et. al., (1977).

1. Mutual, co-learning of conflictual situations at work. Through describing conflictual situations at work and consulting to the group members. Women found that their group mates listened and were a source of sharing in conflictual and other situations. Besides, the women in the group were sources of ideas as to how to cope, and described similar and different cases. Since the process is relatively long, some women updated others in the development of the situations and their resolution. This mutual support
helped the women cope with everyday situations. Work-related issues arise in such questions as "How do I behave every day?", "What is my relationship with my bosses and my colleagues?" "How many times do I say that I cannot take on projects?" Another significant point was whether women admit they do not understand certain instructions when that happens, or do they try to get to the information in other ways. Vered was one example. She is a hard working, thorough woman, and it is important for her to perform all tasks the best way possible. She talked about a project she was assigned, which kept her busy day and night. There was a stage where she did not understand one of the instructions. She tried to resolve the problem on her own, which took up a good deal of energy until she gathered the courage to call her superior and tell him the instruction was unclear. He returned to her confirming the instruction had not been clearly phrased. The problem was taken care of and all went well, except Vered had spent a great deal of energy.

2. The second way was of learning from the personal stories of women who had success stories. These stories of success were stories of women from the group or examples of women who mentioned women who succeeded. These examples were discussed in the group. Not once did women say they had learnt a lot from the experiences of others, including of women who 'made it' and became a success. Professional materials or situations described by the women or the process leader became a source for implementation at work. Significant discussions of obstacles on the way to applying what they had learnt were parts of the process.

The interviews and observations revealed a strong desire to prove one's worth and quality at work, and to move forward, to progress. It was also found that women made constant and continual efforts to show their talents and skills and be acknowledged and accredited for these.

Women feel there are great expectations of them. The feeling was that they had to prove they are worthy. The efforts they invest are great and they feel this investment is greater at work as well as due to the fact that they have other responsibilities to excel at home.

Differences were revealed between women who worked with public or a certain community and women who worked in an office. The former emphasised the
importance of receiving an empowering feedback from the population or public. The importance of doing things for the benefit of the community and other people improved their self-efficacy and they could judge themselves as better, higher-quality workers.

A central question in the observed group's discussion of work was: What is career and what is the difference between career and work? It was mentioned earlier that the research population consisted mainly of working women. They referred to themselves as such, and discussed situations which they encounter, related to work, and also the question whether work is for them a source of satisfaction. They are still very far from seeing themselves as career women. They think that work is an important and even essential aspect of their life for themselves and for their household, but only few of them regard themselves as career women. When investment in the workplace turns out to be futile, or, even worse, when their performance is subject to the criticism of the direct supervisor, some of the women say things like: "I intend to channel all my energies and efforts to my home and it will be my first priority, and only then comes work". The researcher believes this is some kind of escape to a safer place for recharging energies.

The career women are seen as women who assume high positions and equal to men in terms of salary, job and other parameters. Nevertheless, part of the picture conveyed to the women in the empowerment group was that career women also make less money than their male colleagues.

In the beginning of the Findings chapter it was stated that women used many images for their expressions of feelings and thoughts. The references to the work world were also accompanied by a variety of images.

The course setting was seen by the participants as a 'tool-box' which they carry with them each and every day, and with every meeting this toolbox is refilled with another tool that helps cope with unpleasant experiences at work and continue with the daily routine and everyday chores and overcome stress and burden thanks to this magical 'tool-box'. The fact that women need a 'tool-box' in the course of work is significant. They need to have a 'First-Aid' kit for different situations they encounter. Some placed advice they heard in lectures into the toolbox, while others – the advice that they took from the discussions, articles and books they read after the course and more. The tool-boxes contained things the women felt provided them with confidence in their daily lives. The question is what is the extent of using the toolbox? Is it something one carries for a long time, or is it just there for short
periods in different situations? What replaces the toolbox for women who are not part of the empowerment process, and what helps them?

For most interviewed women, work is still not seen as a haven, as a place of safety and protection. They still maintain with their work what the researcher called 'a wave-shaped dialogue' in the sense that every retraction, every withdrawal, returns women to their haven, to the place of safety and protection, which is their home. Success, though highly rated, is still seen as involving a very high price, a price that, according to the researcher, women in this research do not want to pay the price at the moment, because there is no consent and/or systems that support women in achieving a high position and remaining there. The researcher claims that these waves sometimes reflect women's inner unrest, turmoil and struggles associated with work, investment and efforts which are many times futile. Women feel that they are not appreciated; they are always struggling to please other people, to manage to carry out their multiple tasks, to meet the variety of requirements and duties imposed on them by work, home and family. This is seen in the images women used, for instance: "Time is running out", "24 hours a day are simply not enough".

Women often feel obliged to say 'No' or 'No more' to work. The workplace is where they often draw the line, but it is still difficult for them to say "No" in the workplace knowing there is a price attached to it. One of the participants said: "I can say no, but the market is saturated and someone else is always available".

The feeling that there is still a very long way is especially strong in this category compared to others. The empowerment course is a tool, but is still precious and highly useful in the workplace as well. Judith described this in her own words: "You (meaning the organisers) must organise a similar course at work". Implementation of the materials which are studied in the course at work is still quite difficult, and the participant women believe that a course that provides them with the necessary tools to increase efficacy would help reshape and redefine the women-workplace relationship.

The present thesis has been conducted through an observation of a phenomenon-empowerment groups. This was done through the employment of several integrated methods, and the picture received based on the observation was complex and intriguing, with the various factors linked to the phenomenon. Power, place and level
- all these are individuals. The researcher concludes that what the phenomenon, the initiating organisations and the women who decide to participate in the programme have in common is the clear and, according to McNiff (2000), commendable way, which the researcher believes is suitable for describing the common denominator in this work, and the researcher thinks apply to this thesis as well: "...The need of individuals for intellectual and personal-social independence; their needs and rights to live with dignity, to have their contributions valued, to create their own identities and live in a way that they consider worthwhile in company with others who are trying to do the same." (p. 21).

Before going on to the conclusions, the researcher integrated a significant topic that arose in the women's stories about work into the work categories. Analysis of the stories, discussions and interviews yielded the gap between the women's perceptions of sisterhood in the group and the perceptions of women – colleagues at work. This issue was enhanced after the two presentations of findings to the women. During the research, the researcher identified the notable gap between the significant and strong sense of sisterhood which the women felt, and their stories and descriptions of the relationships between them and other women, work-colleagues or women in supervising positions. There is an often unsolvable gap between the jovial and affable descriptions these women used to describe the other group members, and their favourable opinion of them on the one hand; the power that is built on this strong sense of 'togetherness' and its contribution to the process, and the descriptions used by the women to depict women colleagues at work, often involving statements like "woman is a wolf to woman" or "for some reason, it is hard for women to feel happy for and have a favourable opinion of other women"; or descriptions of other women at work, at a higher rank, who often delay and interfere with their promotion on the other. When introduced to the participants, this issue raised commotion. The participants referred to queries like: how was this sense of sisterhood lost? or: what causes this strong and marked differences between this ability of a group of unfamiliar women to build such close relations in a group and at the same time behave as foreigners and even rivals at work? One of the respondents, Sarah (fictitious name) said: "This place (empowerment group) is homogeneous, all group members share the same goal, but things are different at work, and there is no one uniform goal..." Other women suggested that "Perhaps because women cannot contend men they challenge and contend with women
instead". The gap between the atmosphere of 'sisterhood' in the group and the relationship among women at work was a category by itself in the researcher diary. The researcher was part of the women managers who had a working relationship among them. They were all part of one organisation, spread to regional branches. The sense of gap was between the feelings she had after the interviews and after the observation of the group. The women reports and stories, the atmosphere of togetherness were in contrast to the researcher's sense of being part of women's group working together. She felt in her daily life the atmosphere of competition, a sense of lack of equanimity. This gap was very problematic to her, it caused a sense of non-empowerment, and was harder for the feminist researcher conducting a research on women's empowerment. When the researcher analysed the evidence, she also identified this gap. In the session of presenting the results, this evidence received emotional reactions from the women. They were riled and felt that was a very important situation for them.

This gap, according to the researcher corresponds to the model that has been developed in this thesis in its conflictual form. That means, the strength that the group of women give to each other and the strength given by the group to an individual woman is part of the Driving Force: the force which helps women to move on, a force with a lot of energy in it. The women at work according to research evidence are part of the Hindering Force. The researcher makes a claim that if women want to move forward and she think they do, they have to shift the emphasis from the Hindering Force to the Driving Force.

Since the research examined a subjective approach, the researcher believes there has to be a change regarding the gap between the atmosphere of togetherness in the group and the atmosphere which they describe in their experiences of encounters with women at work.

Although these issues and queries were not at the focus of the present study, a thorough investigation of this gap may well be one of its implications. Based on women's responses, this gap seems to be very emotional, and a source of unrest and turmoil for both sides. In part, the researcher claims that this gap is attributable to the transition from a collective Feminist agenda to 'Post-Feminist' agenda with much greater emphasis placed on individuality. Due to the imbalance between these views, much more work needs to be done. 'Ordinary women' needs to take actions as a collective, while paying attention and considering the emphasis placed on
women's individuality. 'Ordinary women' according to the researcher, are harmed by the inability to translate this general sisterhood climate into practical measures. Examples are establishing social networks to promote other women, encourage and treat favourably women who made a successful breakthrough, and understand that when women enjoy high status and reach self-fulfilment they increase the chances of other women to achieve the same. At the same time commitment is created with breakthrough women to advance their women in their environment.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The focus of this thesis was the phenomenon of empowerment groups for women in present day Israel. This thesis was built upon the researcher's wide reading, knowledge and first hand experience with women's empowerment programmes which take place in the northern region of Israel. The thesis ensues from the researcher's exposure, in the framework of her professional work, to the phenomenon of empowerment groups for women that has become largely widespread during the last decade. The focus of this thesis was the phenomenon of Empowerment groups for 'ordinary women' in present day Israel.

In observing the phenomenon, the researcher concentrated on the Feminist approach, and built a connection between two equally important concepts: the 'personal empowerment' of 'ordinary women' and 'women's learning' according to the Feminist approach.

The empowerment group is a phenomenon which can neither be considered part of the traditional education system, nor as an enrichment activity. Empowerment groups are an empowerment tool developed in the 1960s so as to advance women into a state of self-efficacy. Empowerment groups are considered a process initiated by social organisations or socially-oriented institutions, some of which are underpinned by a Feminist agenda. Empowerment groups are interesting and unique in the sense that they are not considered part of institutionalised educational or academic activity, but also not classified as leisure activities or enrichment programmes. The empowerment phenomenon according to the researcher suggests the relatedness of two concepts: 'personal empowerment', and women's way of learning according to a Feminist outlook.

The research paradigm that underpins the present study is Freire's perception of education as a source of emancipation and liberation (Freire, 1972) and education as empowering people. The other paradigm is Weber's 'social mobility' theories (1930) and their implications on moving up an exiting hierarchy. Freire's perceptions (1972) are related in the researcher's view to the Feminist ideology, and the empowerment theories and therefore serve as the basis of the present thesis. The perception that forms the basis for the present thesis is that women's empowerment group as a phenomenon needs to be considered and also investigated through its potential to help women move up an exiting hierarchy. A special emphasis in this thesis is placed
on the need of 'ordinary women' to move from one place in society to a better place, or, as Freire (1972) called this, the transition from oppression to liberation. This serves as one of the main themes that the researcher investigated. These paradigms were the result of the gap in knowledge in the way the researcher captured and investigated the phenomenon of 'Ordinary Women's Empowerment'. This thesis was built upon the researcher's wide reading, knowledge and first hand experience with women's empowerment programmes which take place in the northern region of Israel.

Another way of examining the phenomenon which this thesis presents is observation of the phenomenon from the perspective of the research population consisting of 'ordinary women'. The term 'ordinary women' used to describe the research population, was used by the researcher while being aware of its problems. Yet, this term best represents the research population – a population that constitutes the majority of women between 'helpless' women and 'breakthrough' women in key positions.

The current research examined 'ordinary women' in the 'Post Feminist' era, who find empowerment, a process developed in the 1960s, to be a relevant process for coping with issues that are still unresolved for them. This inquiry is based on observations of 'ordinary women' who are not usually in the focus of empowerment researchers.

According to the researcher, the integration of women's process of 'personal empowerment' and 'women's learning' that takes place in this process has the potential of accumulation of knowledge for advancing women, leading them to feel more self-efficacy.

This serves as one of the main themes that the researcher investigated. These paradigms were the result of the gap in knowledge in the way the researcher captured and investigated the phenomenon of 'Ordinary Women's Empowerment'. The conceptual framework is built on the connection that the researcher made between two factors: 'personal empowerment' and 'women's learning' based on the Feminist approach.

The researcher's beliefs that underpins the thesis, and the conceptual framework, were shaped and built with the intention of understanding the place of 'women's learning' in the 'personal empowerment' process of 'ordinary woman' and its contribution to the advancement of women according to their perceptions. The conceptual framework and the concentration of the two integrated concepts receive
their legitimacy from the theories of female researchers who emphasised the need for a special place for women's studies in adult learning, the need to make this a separate realm of knowledge (Thompson, 1983; Hughes and Kennedy, 1985; Hart-Mechthild, 1992; Messer-Davidow, 2002). The gap in knowledge which the researcher identified in theory and practice serves as another source of legitimacy. The researcher identified a need to study 'ordinary women's' 'personal empowerment' from the perspective of 'women's learning' based on the Feminist agenda, and the individual point of view of the participant woman. The researcher recognises the need to embrace a broad perspective on 'women's learning' and 'personal empowerment', a perspective that would promote an understanding of what brings 'ordinary women' to participate in empowerment programmes nowadays. The researcher states that in order to truly explore and capture in full the roots of this knowledge, she needs to learn and understand women's subjective views. The researcher posits that the best way to achieve this desirable goal is to listen to 'ordinary women's' stories, and observe them as they make their unique journey of 'personal empowerment'.

The research question concentrated on women’s voices, reflecting their personal stories of empowerment from their subjective point of view. The research question is set out to investigate the subjective issues, feelings and thoughts arising in the 'personal empowerment' process as well as whether the process of empowerment leads to the narrowing gaps between men and women in different life domains according to their subjective perspectives. During the building and constructing of the paradigm and the concept of the research, several other research questions arose. All of these questions were concerned with extending the knowledge and understanding of the various themes that 'ordinary women' addressed/discussed/concealed during their 'personal empowerment' journey.

The researcher believes, as do other Feminist researchers (Thompson, 1983; Moi, 1985; Harding, 1986; Maguire, 1987; Lieblich and Josselson, 1994) that an inquiry into gender issues is essential, as explorations and writings related to gender issues strengthen its legitimacy and acknowledgment as a separate realm of knowledge. In order to get to the authentic knowledge of 'ordinary women' who participated in empowerment process, the research follows the qualitative-constructivist method with a Feminist approach.
The research methodology is post positivist and is based on interpretation of data derived from inductive, qualitative research methods. The researcher is well aware of the discussion of the need to provide Feminist research with separate scientific and enquiry tools.

The researcher adopted Harding's (1986) view according to which although a Feminist study represents an independent body of knowledge, it can still use the traditional research tools in order to get the knowledge it seeks.

A critical discussion of the research could argue in favour of the positivist approach. The researcher decided that the inductive method will best serve her need to acquire and gain the knowledge that she seeks.

The qualitative method was the most appropriate method for the researcher to learn about the explicit as well as implicit subjective outlooks of the subjects. The qualitative constructivist method is the most suitable method for this Feminist enquiry, a method that according to Reinharz (1992) allows a researcher to gain knowledge. In the case of this research a subjective knowledge of 'ordinary women' in the 'Post Feminist' era in the north of Israel.

A central element in Feminist ideology is the creation of knowledge on women by women. One of the conclusions of the present study is that through the phenomenon of empowerment groups for women, 'ordinary women' produce knowledge in a supportive and cooperative atmosphere. The unique atmosphere that develops within the group promotes this creation of knowledge, through the expression of emotions, thoughts, ideas, life experience and desires. This opportunity for women to develop within the group and achieve insights and an empowered position is not common in the daily environment, as the majority of formal frameworks and institutions do not provide a similar opportunity, and this is certainly not something that women encounter in their everyday life.

The research consists of two stages. The first stage was an in-depth, open ended interview with sixteen women. The women were asked to tell their own story of empowerment through their participation in the course. Interviews were analysed in three stages: Primary analysis, Mapping analysis, and focused analysis. From the analysis emerged the central themes and the one that required a deeper inquiry.

The second stage was an observation of the empowerment programme during 15 sessions. Each meeting lasted for three hours. Seventeen women were present during these sessions. In addition to her role as an observer the researcher was also involved in the design of the programme. She introduced inclusive themes and
subjects which were drawn from the interviews. During the sessions the researcher wrote notes and made several amendments to the programme following the discussion with the participant women. The researcher also discussed the programme and its contents with the programme tutor and the Chairman of the organisation that initiated the programme. Because the research followed the Feminist approach, the researcher felt encouraged as a researcher and a woman who explores women's empowerment process to reflect on her personal process and the influence of the materials on her own self efficacy and implementation in the different life domains.

The researcher recognises the special place that female researchers have in the process of research. As a woman conducting a research and investigating women through a Feminist approach based on a qualitative enquiry the researcher builds on her own views and outlook. Moreover, the basic assumption of the researcher is that being a woman and a researcher who is exposed to Feminist materials and materials pertaining to empowerment, she is committed to write a personal diary, because the diary can shed light on the entire process and its meaning for her (The researcher's diary is presented in the appendix).

The research focus is on 'ordinary women' who participated in a course which belongs in the category of empowerment programmes. The participants reside in the Northern region of Israel.

The phenomenon that the researcher investigated could have been researched from several directions. The research focused on the subjective point of view of women about their engagement in the programme. The researcher has made a decision not to focus on the organisations that design and implement the empowerment activity. Despite the importance of this point of view to the Feminist agenda and the relatedness to social structures and the influence of women, the researcher decided to focus on women's point of view. The decision was made based on the need according to the researcher to understand and extend this empowerment knowledge.

The focus of the research was women's subjective point of view. The belief of the researcher was that the real importance is to be found in the way women do the interpretation and translation. The reason behind this focus is the adoption of the research paradigm regarding the nature of the world. The qualitative constructivist researchers recognise the uniqueness of the research participants and the role that is played by the context in building the reality of the investigated events (shkedi,
2003). For this reason the programme and its evaluation were not the centre of the research.

Stage 2 of the research included a manipulation by the researcher, as she intervened with the contents of the course and inserted various subjects which to the best of her knowledge are not included in other syllabuses, following the analysis of stage 1 and the findings that emerged from it. This stage derived from the analysis that was carried out during stage 1, and the need to better understand the themes that typically emerge in the course of 'women's learning' and participation in the programme, based on the reflections of 'ordinary women' on the process. Implementation of the second stage enabled profound learning and the reaffirming categories. It does not assess the programme, as this stage was designed particularly for this research to meet the need of profoundly understanding the research questions and the knowledge generated in the empowerment process.

Two questions were asked in this research. The first focused on the voices of 'ordinary women' expressing their personal empowerment stories through their own outlook. The research sought to reach profound understanding of learning and the issues raised in the empowerment process as well as whether this learning leads to a sense of more self efficacy. The second research question engaged in the issues arising in the process of 'personal empowerment' and whether it helps to detect factors that halt or advance women in a direction of narrowing the educational and economic gaps between them and men.

The presentation of the conclusion is divided into three parts. The first part pertains to the products of learning, the issues that 'ordinary women' raised in the process. The second part pertains to the women identifying the factors that advance or halt them in the process of their empowerment and the third part pertains to conclusions regarding implementation cycles according to the women's subjective perceptions.
5.2 Conclusions Pertaining to Learning Products, Issues, and Thoughts

The research found that in the centre of the responsiveness of women to partake in the activity of empowerment group was the need and the desire for change. The need to make a change in their lives motivated women to participate in the activity.

This motive coincides with the words of Weber (1930) and Freire (1972) and was demonstrated in various manners and expressed differently by the various women, but all strived to make a change in their life. The fact that 'ordinary women' were in the centre of this research, women who were located higher on the scale of 'personal empowerment' led the researcher to the following conclusions: the theories of Weber (1930) and Freire (1972) are very much relevant for the acts of the 'ordinary women' who participated in the present study, women who share the will to move from one point in the existing hierarchy to a better place and to make a transition from a certain point on the empowerment continuum towards a higher position and status, regardless of their location on the scale of empowerment. This description led the researcher to the conclusion about the fighting spirit of 'ordinary women' in the time of joining the process. As mentioned earlier, even in the interim place where the 'ordinary women' are, there is motivation for moving to a better place. The researcher interpreted the 'ordinary women's' responsiveness to the programme as a statement of power towards themselves, their families, society, culture etc.

Another conclusion regards the fact that 'ordinary women' choose to participate in the programme derives from the fact that they are still coping with unresolved issues within the 'Post Feminist' era. The research findings indicate that empowerment groups are still relevant to 'ordinary women' in the 'Post Feminist' era, a period that is about individuality and seeks to introduce a different agenda than collectivism. The current research suggests that the empowerment process in a group of women provides grounds for individual women to develop and get closer to their place of choice. In other words, 'ordinary women' today need the women's group, the sisterhood and collectivity to resolve issues and to connect with factors that will advance them and avoid those that halt their progress.
This finding points to the current dilemma, whereby despite living in the 'Post Feminist' era, the individual woman's need to be empowered is emphasized via the women's group and the process developed during the second wave of Feminism. The empowerment group is relevant to the process of resolving the problems 'ordinary women' encounter in this era.

According to the research findings, 'ordinary women' in the 'Post Feminist' era still struggle with obstacles that are the result of the second wave of feminism. These findings led the researcher to maintaining that Feminism and 'Post-Feminist' agenda has not been complete yet. Moreover, in order to be relevant, Feminist researchers and organisations still has to sound a clear voice, present ways and directions so as to help 'ordinary women' cope with unresolved situations. The main one is the situation whereby on the one hand the 'ordinary women' assume new roles but have not given up on their traditional roles, thus they get to thinking that progress and advancement are the problem, and perhaps it is best to go back to the previous situation. Prior to the Feminist struggle, women had a clear role: to take care of the house and the children. According to the participants of this research, the addition of taking a job, the outcome of the above struggle, led to a problematic situation. 'Ordinary women' had to take on an additional role without making any changes in the family. In other words, the Feminist struggle is far from its end. There is still the struggle for making changes in the division of roles in the family. Furthermore, Due to the fact that 'ordinary women' are dissatisfied in this 'Post-Feminist' era they find time to engage in the 'personal empowerment' programme. They arrive in the 'personal empowerment' group to make a statement of power, and they are willing to invest energy, to cope with the environment and lead a change.

An additional conclusion pertains to a situation where there is a statement of power stemming from a sense of powerlessness of the 'ordinary women' in the empowerment group. This ambivalent situation raises issues which serve as grounds for the discussion of emotions, thoughts and dilemmas of 'ordinary women' in the 'Post Feminist' era.

A sense of disempowerment is not only the feeling of what women on the lower end of empowerment continuum experience, but the 'ordinary women', active women who engage in a variety of activities, often feel un-empowered, and as a result, decide to participate in the empowerment programme. This tendency of the 'ordinary women' suggests the relevance of the 'personal empowerment' process to
a wider population experiencing lack of capability. In the present study, we find the process is relevant to a population of women who are not helpless but women who were defined as 'ordinary women'.

The women who decide to participate in empowerment groups perceive this, from the very beginning, as an opportunity to make a transition, to 'upgrade' in a way their status and position in society.

The current research observe the phenomenon of 'personal empowerment' through a prism of 'women's learning' and the way in which it integrates into the learning products from the subjective perspectives of the 'ordinary women'.

The findings reveal that the 'ordinary women' participating in the programme are organized around learning products pertaining to the woman herself, her life, her life story, her coping and the relationships that are crucial for her.

The 'personal empowerment' process is an opportunity for 'ordinary women' to learn about themselves and their being part of the female sex. Learning in the empowerment process sheds a new light on the woman's life. The process enables her to tell the story of her life, hear her life story in a different way by sharing it with the other women in the group, getting feedback, advice and encouragement. The process becomes a source of learning, generating knowledge from the self as well as from learnt materials. Eventually, new knowledge is created which is an accumulation of all the participants personal experiences, as well as those of the mentor and the knowledge imparted in the course. This knowledge becomes a mean of empowering the individual 'ordinary woman'.

The research raises the notion of the need for preliminary conditions and or conditions that constitute factors that help learning take place. Such conditions relate to conducting the process within the community, being accessible to women in terms of time and place and a woman guiding the course. This process makes room for the accumulated experiences of 'ordinary women' as the grounds for their learning while integrating academic and personal learning. The researcher believes researcher, requires those engaging in gender issues to face the challenge of enhancing the above mentioned preliminary conditions as factors which enhance the process of learning the empowerment of 'ordinary women' in other learning and empowerment frameworks involving 'ordinary women'.

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The empowerment process significantly derived from its informal, voluntary and accessible nature, as well as from the existence of a structured programme, an organised schedule and the presence of a leader instructor. As mentioned earlier all the instructors in this process are professionals in the field of leading dynamic processes. All instructors and tutors are professionals. In addition, the organisations that design the programme take full responsibility for the programme, for its contents, and provide backup and support. This activity integrates the desire of individuals, 'ordinary women' in this specific study, to make a change in their life. The conduct of this process in a way that allows women to talk, feel and experience a situation which, according to the researcher, is of value and includes ideal conditions for the development of personal empowerment. This ideal experience transforms the empowerment group into a type of laboratory that provides a supportive climate, similar to a springboard. 'Ordinary women' can use to embark upon a process that promotes their knowledge, provides an opportunity for them to try new things, listen in an uncritical manner, and in an empowering, supportive and egalitarian climate.

The researcher's conclusion, based on the findings that emerge from the discussion and analysis chapter, is that the empowerment process entails energies, possibilities, and a personal and interpersonal dynamics. This is an emotionally complicated process, which involves a variety of thoughts, hopes and aspirations. Integrating these factors facilitates in turning it to an empowering process for the 'Ordinary women' who participate in the process.

The empowerment group serves as a crossbreed, as it combines the ideal state of 'women's learning' as part of an institutionalised process, and unstructured learning. Integrating a constructed process to formal and non-formal learning turns the empowerment process to a crossbreed since it is located in between. It is located between the formal and non-formal, conventional learning and participatory learning; Between women's learning and transmitting knowledge for creating new knowledge; between a voluntary and a dynamic process and a clear and organised one. This view is supported by Hughes and Kennedy (1985), who referred to the necessity of these courses for English women as part of women's learning, as they help women not only survive in society, but develop and grow within it as well. The researcher is not aware of such courses in Israel which are part of a formal institutional programme. The researcher is however aware of such groups, which are
held in colleges and initiated by the Dean. These programmes aim at constructing women leadership but are not considered part of the structured curriculum. One of the research conclusions is that the empowerment process, even though it is a non-formal phenomenon which occurs outside the organisations operating it, by a structured content it constitute a facilitating tool for integrating and reinforcing women within the formal system; in other words, work, academic institutions, family and any other place in which women act.

This conclusion clarifies the internal connections between formal and informal learning of 'ordinary women'. Each type of learning enhances the accumulated knowledge in the benefit of their 'personal empowerment'. The group structure, its proximity to the neighbourhood, and the fact that the courses are held in the evening, increase availability of the programme, and promote women's ability to implement their desire to make a change. The availability of the process to women, and the variables mentioned, facilitates the women to take part in it. Identifying the process in the community is significant both for the availability of the process and the closeness created among the women and the opportunity for women from the same community to experience this process together.

Empowerment groups serve as a means by which women are able to realise a dream, a dream of how they can grow and move from one given state to another, much better one. As regards in the present study, the majority of women stated that the group served as a source of strength and support that promote change. Exactly what kind of change will be considered in the following section. The important conclusion related to the present section is that the group constitutes a critical component of leading the process of 'personal empowerment'. Its mutuality assists for the individual and group level.

The researcher states that the success of the empowerment groups, based on the observations and interviews, is demonstrated through its ability to develop an alternative model to an acquisition of surviving and development skills (Hughes and Kennedy, 1985). As such, it is important, according to the researcher, to acknowledge the importance of this process and phenomenon and to examine its contribution within the various life systems in order to strengthen the women in these systems. The empowerment groups can be a platform for taking another necessary action according to the researcher, an action which relate to Irigaray's
view (2004); integrating men and women into a mutual debate regarding empowering women and maybe even constructing a mutual contract containing principles of equality while maintaining uniqueness.

The research conclusions call for the advancement constructing a dialogue between men and women, thinking together as about the mutual ways to change the situation of 'ordinary women'. This joint thinking can help 'ordinary women' out of the trap in which they feel they are in; an uncomfortable feeling, leading them to participate in empowerment groups. In the group framework, these 'ordinary women' find that they, like other women, are tired of the race in which they have to prove themselves in order to advance and not always being able to reach high on the empowerment scale. Often they do not want to go there so as not to pay the price this advancement might entail. One of their main points is the feeling that they have to engage in a dialogue that crosses gender frameworks, requiring them to engage in partnership with men. The empowerment experience enables 'ordinary women' to reach the place where they want to negotiate a different contract of relationships with men, a term in the spirit of Irigaray (2004), a dialogue stemming from a position of understanding that something has to change in the situation so as to enable 'ordinary women' to be in a personal and social situation that is better for them.

The research findings present an opportunity for women's organisations in the 'Post Feminist' era to promote this type of 'contract' in a dialogue. The process includes men in the women's empowerment process so as to reach other understandings, which are lacking and can enable women to be in the stance of their choice: enabling 'ordinary women' to choose among the different collectivist and individual approaches rather than be forced to accept them. In order to establish such a dialogue, the researcher believes, it is important to invest in further investigating the 'introduction of men into the women's empowerment circle' while maintaining the circle's uniqueness and starting a dialogue. One example can be in establishing empowerment groups composed of women and men, sitting together talking about the obstacles 'ordinary women' face and the ways that men and women can use to resolve the situation together. This process is possible on the macro, on the organisational level. Such action cannot be part of the individual level, as according to the findings of this research, individual 'ordinary women' do not choose to lead change on the organisational level. Women's organisations should help 'ordinary women' to accomplish this task.
An additional conclusion pertains to the issue of 'ordinary women' and power. The findings reveal that 'ordinary women' still have to cope with the concept of power. The researcher believes that the issue of women and power relates to 'ordinary women' in this research as they have made a clear distinction between 'power to' and 'power on' (Yoder and Kahn, 1992). While 'ordinary women' naturally adopt the 'power to' approach, and the concept is a natural part of their femininity, the concept 'power on' requires further engagement. The researcher believes the issue of power is complex, and thus it is recommended that profound understanding is enhanced, as well as reference to the concept of 'women's power'. It is recommended to define the latter concept and find out how it is possible for 'ordinary women' to make progress without feeling they have lost some of their femininity.

The 'Post Feminist' era, has introduced a different management style and it seems women have the required management style (Fischer, 2004). An examination of management styles may offer legitimacy for women to choose the ways and styles that are suitable for them, understand the concept of power better as well as the emotions it arouses with 'ordinary women'.
5.3 Conclusions Pertaining to the Empowerment Process which Helps Identify Driving and Hindering Forces

Another question concerned the ability to identify through the process driving and hindering forces. The findings support this. The 'personal empowerment' process in fact assists identifying the factors hindering or driving women but nonetheless complexity still exists. The categories presented as significant in the women's referral or the identification of the materials from the researcher's analysis were organised under four forces operating partially or together. Most of them were mentioned in the women's 'personal empowerment' process.

The researcher organised the various categories in light of their relatedness to the existence of hindering factors and the degree to which they affect women's life based on the findings. Each category has been described according to its significance for the participant women, and some categories were relevant in more than one respect, and therefore belonged to more than one group. The concept 'force' was used to depict a pressure and transition from one point to another, towards a better place on existing hierarchy.

According to the findings, the 'personal empowerment' process raises in 'ordinary women' several forces, which play a part in their everyday life. The 'personal empowerment' process and the subsequent learning sharpen and make clear the power relations that women encounter. The process itself is driven by this huge mass of energy and a strong desire to change something in the woman's life. This process entails strong feelings, thoughts and unique experiences. This personal empowering and enabling process makes women susceptible to the driving as well as hindering forces.

The findings support this. The expression 'force' is best reflected through women's statements, for example, the words of Vered (fictitious name): "Women are making these huge efforts to work and to study at the same time, it depends where you come from...they still try to integrate in society, they keep thinking: how will other people accept me? How will I make a breakthrough? It still very much acts as a hindering force..." These sorts of statements belong to 'women's culture' as a hindering force'. The women's culture was set as a sub-category of 'learning as a lever' named 'two hats of the learner'. This concept was used to describe how very
often women learn for themselves, and represent their own desire for growth, knowledge, self-fulfilment and an empowered position, and at the same time represent their culture, that either encourages women to expend their horizons, learn and thereby become self-motivated and empowered, or serves as a depressive force that perpetuates women's state of discrimination and inequality. In this way the researcher built a structured model which consists of four rubrics, indicating meaningful powers (The graphic description of the conceptual evidence on p. 143).

The hindering powers consisted of five sub-elements: The women's culture, Women at work, "Running home" as a source of consolation, the significance of the lack of emphasis on power and multiple roles. In the term women's culture the researcher refers to the culture in light of which participant women were taught and raised, and the messages communicated to them, the culture that serves as an indication of what women are allowed to do and to the same degree what they are not. A good example of this is the statement of Sagit (fictitious name): "For generations, Caucasian women were used to being maltreated and expected to accept this attitude and did not say a word. Today they know how to say 'No, we are not willing to suffer anymore'...".

The 'personal empowerment' process is a rich source of significant and insightful learning of the elements that helps women learn the driving and hindering factors in women's lives. This is made possible by the unique structuring of the process, and the way in which the programme is taught, through the existence factors referred to as a promoting force. These included an open and supportive climate of sisterhood, where the group serves as a 'female incubator', and women are encouraged to take a time out for themselves, and to enjoy a supportive and empathetic atmosphere, and firsthand guidance from women, the empowerment process as a place where every assertion, every statement and complaint is legitimate, where women can dwell upon their life experience and make it relevant for theoretical learning, an opportunity for them to learn from the experience of other women and at the same time undergo an individual process of becoming aware of the forces that motivate, drive and empower women, and the forces that serve as hindrances. The present study is an enquiry into a seemingly simple and one-dimensional phenomenon: an empowerment course for 'ordinary women'. However, as the enquiry progressed, a whole spectrum of emotions, insights, knowledge and reflections emerged. The phenomenon leads to three conclusions.
1. One conclusion refers to the inner connection between formal and non-formal learning; the connection which makes both of them more significant and leads to a supplementary issue.

2. The second conclusion is that the 'ordinary women's learning' is an integral part of the 'personal empowerment' process. Learning in the manner, acknowledging personal resilience, repeating empowering stories and stories that weakened women, expressing contents that manifest the knowledge they have gained and turning this knowledge into a lever for growth while understanding the factors that aided or halted it are part of the growing feeling of self efficacy characterising women at the end of the process.

3. The third conclusion is that part of the learning of 'ordinary women' in the 'personal empowerment' process constitutes a significant component on their way to empowerment and advancement in society. Learning serves as a lever on the continuum discussed by Freire (1972). Learning is perceived as a means of moving on the empowerment continuum and constitutes a kind of insurance policy for the women. Nevertheless, the empowerment group becomes a place where 'ordinary women' gain strength that helps them become integrated into frameworks where the sense of sisterhood is lacking. The learning category was named in this thesis as learning as a lever.

The participant women are involved in a variety of activities as women, mothers, wives, career persons etc., and are faced with many constraints and hindrances. During that process they learn much about themselves and their own 'personal empowerment', examine the process from a personal outlook, namely: what it means for them, they relate empowerment and learning, and reflect upon how this interrelatedness can lead women to personal decisions and perhaps how to become more self-aware and equally important how they can immediately implement these new insights which they gained in the course of the process. The present study found that 'ordinary women's' learning is indeed 'context learning'. Women learn through the multiple contexts in their lives which are interconnected. It appears learning in one circle connects to learning in another circle and so on.
5.4 Conclusions Pertaining to Circles of change

An additional conclusion of this study is that the 'personal empowerment' process, as derived from the evidences revealed in this research is that the 'personal empowerment' process does not lead to a change in the willingness of the women to act and change in the political level, or in the recruitment to community goals and/or to participating in a political lobby.

The result of 'personal empowerment' remains pretty much an individual experience commensurate with an improvement in circles such as the personal one, at home and at work. It seems that the organisations that build and organise these programmes need to take a closer and deeper look at their expectations and where they stand in regard to the empowerment groups. The findings of the present study indicate that 'personal empowerment' does not lead to social activism or to a collective action. If the purpose of the organisers is this, then they have to make a second thought. It also applies to Feminist views, or the absence of Feminism in the female discourse, which is described in details in the last chapter of the research.

The researcher claims that generally, women are well aware of the achievements attributable to the second wave Feminism in the 1970 and 1980 and the ones that are currently achieved through legislation following an assertive lobbying by women's organisations, but they recognise as well that they are still insufficient and they do not have a spine that is strong enough to support and sustain a Feminist agenda. It is felt that the female voice was somehow lost, between the desire to establish a collective voice and act according to the Feminist views from the second wave of Feminism to the 'Post Feminist' era. The 'ordinary women' have lost direction. The desire to do everything at once has made life unbearably exhausting for women. The researcher holds the view that a discussion on the course of Feminist agenda is imperative. This is a very important issue since it projects on the individual level. The findings of this study suggest that the 'personal empowerment' process is relevant to 'ordinary women'. The 'personal empowerment' process serves as means for 'ordinary women' to determine their personal decisions. The 'personal empowerment' process makes up for the loss of the Feminist agenda in the 'Post Feminist' era. The present study engaged in women who on the one hand wish to grow and make a progress, but soon find out that the Feminist agenda is an illusion in this respect, as it cannot offer them a solution to this difficult situation of being unable to move forward and they are reluctant to return to a former state.
The significant issue is that at this weak 'Post Feminist' point, empowerment is often seen as a trap to 'ordinary women'. When they deliberate regarding their empowerment, they sense that 'personal empowerment' adds tasks and thus enhances their difficulties. The conclusion 'ordinary women' reach is that empowerment becomes a problem, and there is no turning back. The researcher believes that an agenda promoting 'ordinary women' has to take priority, thus helping 'ordinary women' deliberate without feeling they have additional obstacles in their attempt to move forward.

These conclusions forces 'ordinary women' find advancement to be problematic as a result of changes in their personal circles. The problem lies in the fact that a change in their status has to come from above, in other words, from a collective action similar to that which took place in the second wave of Feminism. Without an active response, it will not be possible to create a significant change so as to help 'ordinary women' be released from the feeling of a maze. Hence, the researcher reaffirms her conclusions that Feminist organisations have to resume their collective activities and try to recruit the women so as to lever an additional required change.

An additional research question referred to the 'voice' of women. The question whether that voice as well is empowered as a result of the process; Whether the voice that Gilligan (1982) refers to becomes empowered in relation to the environment or women themselves; This question, in the researcher's opinion and in light of the research findings, is also connected to the circles of change. The question if the voice becomes louder in the areas and places where 'ordinary women' introduce and lead the change. The research findings reveal that the voice of 'ordinary women' which expresses their strong desires is clearly evident in the 'personal empowerment' and is clear and loud. This loud voice also exists in the group, where women can express their voice. This voice, according to the findings based on women's reports, is also implemented at work, and the present study provides many examples of a change in women's status, demand for a more responsible job, more authority and/or willingness to draw a line between what women are willing to tolerate at work and what they are not, and make sure that this is clear to the employer. The women's voice in the interviews and the groups expresses a desire to advance, explains women's decision to participate in the course, to use formal as well as informal knowledge and to legitimise general knowledge as well, and not only the type of knowledge that is acknowledged by
institutions. This is the type of knowledge that serves as a means by which one can advance in life. The voice of 'ordinary women', which emerged from the interviews and observations, and became more present as the study progressed, is in alignment with the 'Post-Feminist' view, and women's individuality, which is strongly associated with realisation of desires and an undertaking of individually desired courses of action. Nonetheless, the phenomenon under investigation presented the dilemma that women often encounter, and was indicated by Ada and widely supported by other participants, the 'catch-22' dilemma. Although the individual voice of 'ordinary women' becomes stronger and empowered, and leads to women's 'personal empowerment' and advancement, the same voice leads women to this marathon and into a state in which the jobs and tasks which are typically undertaken by men and women are no longer clear, the balance of power has been broken and not replaced by another. Women feel that much more than in the past, they help support their families, as they go to work and serve as another breadwinner, but they feel that this contribution of them is not remunerated properly, as women are still unfortunately neither paid significantly less than men for the same job, nor appreciated as they are still committed to the exact same chores and household responsibilities. The researcher states that the balance that once existed between the desire of Feminist agenda to struggle for women's rights and improved status as a group and the new 'Post-Feminist' agenda that places great emphasis on the need to exhibit and fulfil their feminine nature has been broken. The 'Post-Feminist' aims for women should find what makes them unique as women, identify their individuality and use it as a basis for growth, instead of struggling to become equal to men, offers an alternative for continuation of the gap between men and women in society. At the same time, the same situation produces a major dilemma for women who are already deeply involved in this race to keep up with men and to constantly prove that they are as good as men in many areas.

Women who struggle to achieve equal status and rights, and are at the same time involved in their everyday, routine tasks and activities, need assistance. They also need to feel part of a Feminist outlook that struggles for and maintains their rights. The individuality of women is strengthened in part through an environment that is both aware of and involved in the structuring of the infrastructure necessary for such growth and development. The evidence of this research shows that so far, this has not been achieved, and thus Feminist view still has much to achieve. According to the researcher, the struggle to achieve that desirable change must be a collective
effort, to which the entire community needs to be committed, a group struggle. This is exactly where the problem lies, the lack of a clear agenda that would serve as a basis on which women will reach the balance between the personal and collective and identification or women’s sense of individuality that the existing Feminist agenda does not serve them well in trying to reach a situation in which women feel that their progress is part of the Feminist agenda and we will not hear sentences such as: "I am for equality, but I am not a Feminist". This state, according to the researcher, in which the work of the Feminist agenda is still far from completion, and many issues remain unsolved and need clarification, a situation in which the evidence, of the women's needs, wants and desire, are demonstrated in the present study by the tendency of the majority of women in this research to use phrases and words such as 'trap', 'overload', 'pressure' and an overall dissatisfaction, which clearly has considerable implications for many areas and realms. It is extremely difficult for women to cope with this state, in which many of them feel caught in the middle, unable to move forward and unwilling to take a step backwards or even to sustain their present position and status, to the degree that some of them seriously consider to give up. The feeling that a gap clearly exists, and women simply lack the alternatives or the means by which they can act towards diminishing this gap, create in some women the feeling that perhaps it would have been easier to take one step back, into a world where the division of gender-based roles was clear to both sides, and even if it was not profitable for women, at least they knew where they stand and what was expected of them, and it certainly was not a source of frustration, from not being adequately rewarded for good performance and accomplishments.

An in-depth inquiry into the studied phenomenon highlights the dilemma and critical outlook presented in the beginning of the study, namely, the researcher’s decision to explore the phenomenon of empowerment groups for women that has become largely widespread during the last decade. The fundamental intention of the organisations running women’s empowerment groups and programmes is to promote women through the programme. On their part, women have shown themselves to be responsive and very enthusiastic to partake in the activities these programmes involve. These mutual efforts, however, are nothing more than a drop in the ocean of recent economic and social trends on a local as well as global scale which influences women. From the beginning of the research, the researcher believed that an inquiry into local phenomena may well illuminate the faults and
problems on a national scale, and this belief grew stronger as the research progressed. The request that is posed by the 'ordinary women' to help them achieve the change they so desirably want, despite the difficulties and task overload, needs to be embedded in a new version of a Feminist agenda. Whatever terminology is used, these women feel that the Feminist struggle may have led them into a position where they feel trapped precisely because of the 'personal empowerment' process. They are repeatedly asked and expected to participate equally in the economic and social burden without being adequately rewarded. They had undertaken new tasks but no discounts were made for their traditional roles, and thus they feel that they simply live one day at a time, but they are not sure about the direction. The researcher states that because the present study was a field study, and because of her proximity to the participants, the close observation of participants, attention to their personal stories, thoughts, reflections, body language, gestures, and her discussion of the findings with the participants, should serve as a basis for a more general and comprehensive enquiry, on an organisational level, with regard to the policy and agenda of Feminist organisations. The categories that emerged, and the contexts which were built during the study, can serve as a foundation for a more thorough and detailed discussion. During the stage of presentation of the findings, to the women who participate in the study, women often raised thoughts of 'personal empowerment' not only from a feminine perspective, but from a joint male and female perspective. They proposed that empowerment needs to be equally discussed by both males and females, that both have a clear interest in understanding the concept and the practice, and that males need to show concern for, and a better understanding of the language women use, and awareness of women's individualism, and the way to achieve this is to hold a discussion with the participation of males and females. As a result, a new contract may be 'signed' under the framework of the various life circles.

While motherhood served clearly as a promoting and driving force, the family served also as a hindering force. Precisely because the family circle was the place in which women have shown highest levels of difficulties to implement whatever they had gained from the 'personal empowerment' process, a shared discourse may promote an understanding and the striving for a 'new contract' that helps women and men to
reach a more equal place and for the women, completing the circle of 'personal empowerment'.

The idea of a shared discourse that builds upon women's power is closely related to several of the concepts that underpin the study including, for example, the private-collective encounter. One key problem which served as the mainstay of Feminist agenda was the separation between the private and collective, and the resulting disconnection and isolation of the private and the inability of people to perceive the relatedness of their personal life and experiences to community life and work (Sadan, 1997). One of the products and outcomes of 'personal empowerment' groups is a critical outlook from which one can evaluate this relatedness, and recognition of personal power as the drive for changes, recognition of women's ability to make a transition from one place to another. Women's desire for a shared discourse on empowerment can also be judged from a political outlook, in that case it would mean that following a personal change, 'personal empowerment', women recognise that the next stage to come requires a political act, a shared discourse or discussion that goes beyond the group level, in order to implement the desirable change.

Most of the women in this study were not willing to participate and take part in such a move at the time and specific situation in which the study was carried out.

The 'personal empowerment' phenomenon researched in this study is a local phenomenon. Even though it is, it can mirror the hindering and the advancing points for women in society. Through this phenomenon, in the case of the present study, central issues could be identified, such as: the central place of learning in the lives of women and perception of learning as empowering. Identifying these issues and examining it in additional studies could constitute a platform for a mutual discussion of women and organisations regarding the contents and issues of 'personal empowerment'.

Regarding the practical implications of the research, it may be argued that the structuring and leading of the programme, and the emphasis that was placed on various issues, may build a relationship between the individual and political. The organisations which organise this activity can plan the programme in such a way that concentrates on 'social mobility' that aims at diminishing gaps between men and women. The organisations that plan and initiate these programmes have in their power the ability to transform the process from a local and personal process to a
driving force that would start a more general change from personal to social and political change. The potential exists, but it is essential to incorporate into the process other currently unavailable directions and stresses. To achieve this, organisations need to engage in a discourse regarding the future nature of personal and collective empowerment, and the possible existence of a Feminist agenda and what it would mean for the individual women and for the women as a group and collective as well on the all society.

The present thesis findings reveal the factors and elements in women's lives which serve as inhibitory factors and slow down the introduction of change or a more balanced life. The researcher believes that these issues, strongly embedded in the 'personal empowerment' process, are the direct consequence of women's learning. The type of learning that allows women to present their knowledge in full and that makes legitimate the individual voice of women, as well as the collective one, and allows the coexistence of both. One can draw on the cooperative learning of women in a supportive climate to conclude about the nature of empowerment on a collective level. Because the present study is limited in the sense that it cannot make such conclusions and generalisations, one recommendation for further studies is to examine issues of Feminist policy and how it may be possible to implement it. Another is future attempts to build a relationship and connection between the individual and collective voice and introduce these concepts, thoughts, and the 'lost voice of women' and find the connections and shifts between the individual and the collective and reinforce them. Another equally important direction which may be undertaken in future research is examining the possibilities of 'women's learning' and 'personal empowerment' programmes as manifested in this study in additional frameworks, such as in the workplace, management programmes or academic frameworks.

The conclusions drawn from the present study may have implications for aspects pertaining to the place of the group, intimacy, and the locality of women's 'personal empowerment' processes. One element that was repeated several times was the unique place and role of the group in reinforcing, assisting and eventually promoting force for the individual women towards a more empowered position. The voice of these women, the nature and intensity of which the researcher tried to determine, was very sound, confident, clear, knowledgeable and approving, and this was clearly shown in reference to the other group members. As regards the place and role of
the group in 'personal empowerment' and learning processes, both the women themselves and the researcher were aware of it. The researcher considered as well the importance of intimacy and local groups for women in the modern era, which is governed by computers, the internet, and when knowledge is faster and more easily available than ever before. This modern era provides many opportunities for all of us, and yet there are people who claim that this technological era undermines or perhaps challenges the social justice system as we know it, in the sense of possessing the technological ability to empower groups and weak and unprivileged populations of various status, race and gender, including women (Ebo, 1998). Accessibility of information and the ability to establish large and even international reference groups may illuminate the local empowerment group and its necessity in the present era.

Ebo (1998) stated that "social and professional relationships are being redefined as loyalties to reference groups move from the domain of close-knit family groups, physical communal neighbourhoods, and schools and professional environments to virtual communities and online relationships" (Negroponte, 1995; Schuler, 1996; Rheingold, 1993 in Ebo, 1998, p. 2).

The present non-generalising study has shown, based on the findings and discoveries, that women were both supported by and felt more personally empowered through the intimacy climate that was formed between women of various origins and background of the same community who share an experience. The power of the group, and its intimacy, reinforced the researcher's findings regarding the relevance still and importance of the power of actions and programmes on a local level as a mainstay for gradual development towards the political and collective levels. Local activities and programmes are still very much relevant in the internet era, and in a rapidly developing world. According to the researcher, and based on the evidence in this research, local initiatives are a significant stage in a future development and 'personal empowerment' of women. Also the unique way of learning should be seen as such by anyone who agrees with the researcher's argument that with the right guidance, 'personal empowerment' may be closely related to the political and collective, towards diminishing the gaps between men and women.
The researcher suggests that organisations should not treat lightly or dismiss as unimportant local initiatives and perhaps they need to consider instead how to guide these initiatives in a way that would meet both the needs of the Feminist and 'Post Feminist' agendas, and of women themselves.

One of the questions in the thesis concerned the circles of change, more specifically, through which circles, according to their perceptions, do women execute their learning outcomes? To what extent, according to women's perceptions, are women able to exert influence in the various life cycles, including at work? One question that needs to be asked according the researcher is whether implementation of the empowerment groups on the part of the organisations is advisable and appropriate. The researcher recognises its importance and believes that it should be considered by other studies.

The researcher has repeatedly claimed that in order to bring about a sustainable change in women’s place in society, two processes must take place simultaneously. First, there needs to be a personal change, manifested through women's recognition of the severity and magnitude of the problem, and belief that they have the power, ability and readiness to achieve this. The other is a group struggle to change women's place and position in society. The findings have shown that 'ordinary women' who participate in empowerment programmes are soon charged with the energies that drive them to introduce a change. The group itself serves as a source of power and reinforcement, and women recognise that a durable change for them involves three circles or levels: personal, family and work. For the majority of 'ordinary women' the most fundamental change is attributable to the individual sphere. Women listened to the stories of other women, shared their experiences, were exposed to Feminist perceptions and learned about how structures contribute to their place and position in society as a group. The drive for change or the sense of self-efficacy was seen first and foremost on the individual level, through their recognition of the very existence of a problem, and an operative implementation of their strong desire for change. For these 'ordinary women', the process served as a battery that converts these energies into a source of power through which they realised their desires, dreams and expectations, which were for many years concealed, waiting for the right conditions to emerge.

The 'personal empowerment' process raises thoughts pertaining to such significant issues as learning and change in the direction of the energy 'ordinary women' take
so as to emphasise the personal circle, of giving to themselves as opposed to giving unto others discussed earlier. The 'personal empowerment' process enables women to shift to a situation of accepting rather than only giving to others and empowering them.

The conclusion drawn from these findings is the current need of women in 'Post Feminist' times encouraging individuality to choose the group way to become empowered. The women's group constitutes the genuine grounds that are relevant to the needs of women and focuses energy on individuals and their choices. In other words, the personal 'I' and the group 'I' are intertwined where the voice of the group legitimises the voice of the individual expressing clearly what the woman wants for herself.

One of the most significant things that women gain in the process is learning about themselves via the group, and hence some transfer to formal studies (five of the course graduates did so immediately upon completing the course) as a lever for self-realisation so as to advance in society.

Work serves as another circle of change. In relation to this realm, women raised several thoughts but also undertook operative measures, for example: they held conversations with their employers, they applied for certain jobs, and on several occasions they were willing to struggle for what they believed was their legitimate right for improvement or a bonus. Although peripheral to the personal change circle, this circle was also present. It was peripheral to the personal change cycle in the sense of the strength and vitality required for a sustainable change, and although women did refer specifically to their desire to make a career breakthrough and to be promoted, they primarily concentrated on a personal change, on how to become more self-secured, how to implement their decisions, desires, and to feel good about oneself. Once again, the researcher would like to emphasise that women had made a significant breakthrough in recognising their desire and need to change their status at work or to be rewarded for good performance, but the most prominent change was in their ability to feel good about themselves, to realise their wants and dreams, and to find some time for themselves, perhaps to get to know themselves better and to do the things that they really want to do. They wanted to realise their choices.

The third circle which, according to the researcher, entails serious complications, is family. This is the most demanding sphere for women, where they give the most, where relationships are ambivalent and emotions are displayed most intensively.
For women, family, and mainly motherhood, is an immense source of power. In the stories of all women this aspect is described by far as the most rewarding and strengthening, the justification for being a woman and paying the prices for it. In part, the price that these women pay is their inability to fulfil their personal and individual desires, or, which is very often the case, the need to sacrifice a good, interesting or rewarding job in order to be a good parent, as being a good mother and holding a good, profitable or enjoyable position are often incongruent. Nonetheless, over and over again, the participant women had constantly referred to the painful price of the concessions and compromises they have made over the years, the price that they pay for trying to be at the same time a mother, a career woman, and a self-fulfilling person.

The researcher has made a conscious decision to willingly undertake the present study to explore a specific issue which concerns her as a woman, mother, wife and supervisor. She gradually discovered that she began a journey to a place unfamiliar to her, a place where she has never been before. The question that underpins the present study, and that the researcher had repeatedly asked herself, concerned the influence of women's participation in various empowerment programmes, and the learning and insights which they gain, and the contribution they offer to women. Now that the study is complete the researcher feels that the influence was obvious and conspicuous, and she can say with a degree of confidence that the contents of these courses and programmes have had a remarkable influence on her and the participant women, and produced a change in both. The change was not necessarily positive. For example, the researcher felt that it aroused a wide range of dilemmas, a strong sense of imbalance, and discussion of concepts such as fair, fairness, equality, equity and justice. Because the answers to these questions are not that simple, and suggest ambivalence, on several occasions the researcher felt frustrated. This frustration resulted in the posing of questions such as 'why 'personal empowerment' and 'where can we go from here'. It also raised occasionally sceptic and heretical questions regarding the necessity of 'personal empowerment' and whether it would not be much simpler and easier to take one step backwards, as many participants suggested when they expressed their genuine feelings. On the pro side of the list of gains from the study was the opportunity of the writer of the thesis to belong at least temporarily to the researchers community and to enjoy the reading of fascinating materials and contents and what she described already in the
introduction to the thesis as the experience of working with the participants, and the
say that knowledge is created in groups based on the relationships and connections
(Jordan, Kaplan, Baker, Miller, Stiver, Surrey, 1991; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger,
and Tarule, 1986). This relatedness to other female researchers, who referred as
well to the meaning of creating a shared knowledge, became part of the researcher’s
experience, and she learned to appreciate the rare opportunity to look into the
fascinating world of these women, their knowledge and thoughts. Observing how
these women create knowledge and share it with other women was for the
researcher an interesting and significant experience. The insights that she gained,
and the conclusions she arrived at, are part of the dialogue between her and the
participants, and something that they created together.

The writing of the female researchers is based on a critical outlook. Because
Feminist agenda originated from a critical stance towards the establishment and
society, female Feminist researchers demonstrate in all their writing a critical
approach. They invite the readers to question the truth of their statements and
evaluate critically their way of thinking. In much the same way, the writer of the
present thesis draws conclusions about the particular group of participants and yet
challenges the readers to evaluate the implications of these and their consequences
for the scientific world and reality.

The contribution to the researcher of the conduct of a Feminist research was a much
better understanding of women’s knowledge, and its relevance to women’s lives.
From an academic research approach the researcher could understand more clearly
the meaning and significance of life experience, a shared discourse, and in what way
they contribute to the structuring of knowledge of and for women. The most
significant part of the researcher’s ‘personal empowerment’ process, and that of the
participant women, according to the researcher, was the creation of knowledge by
women, the discourse that expanded through occasional conversations regarding the
subject of the study and the consequential discussion, and request by the women to
be included in it. Many times, the positive feedbacks and reinforcements from the
participant women regarding the relevance of the questions and issues, served as a
lever, and gave the researcher that impetus to carry on in much the same way that
‘women’s learning’ served as a driving force for them, their knowledge served as an
impetus for the researcher to continue with her study despite whatever difficulties
that arise. The researcher evaluates that conclusions of a similar magnitude and
wealth would not be possible to achieve in a positivist study. The shared discourse, the one-on-one conversations, the honesty, attentiveness and comprehensive questions, have made possible the researcher's close encounter of the world of the 'personal empowerment' process in women, and their consequential learning.

5.5. The Research Limitations

The current study is a piece of Feminist research. It is based on a constructivist approach according to which there is no one objective reality. Other people might find that the processes and results inform their own research but in itself this study is not generalisable.

The goal of the study was to describe and understand a phenomenon, in the present case, the process of women's learning 'personal empowerment' under the framework of women's empowerment groups. The research process as based on learning conducted in the grouping of the context in which the phenomenon exists. In order to achieve these goals and in accordance with the conceptual framework of the research, the qualitative approach was selected as the most appropriate way to answer the research question and obtain the knowledge it seeks (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990).

This way of conducting the study enabled the examination of the phenomenon through the constructivist approach and in accordance with its tools. What this means, in effect, is that it has been possible to research the experience of these women in the empowerment group, with them as subjects not objects, and to report on their experience, using their own comments about this experience. In effect then the research has provided valuable original, first hand evidence and testimony from women involved in the empowerment groups of the ways in which this involvement has changed their perspectives and lives.

Since the study sought to examine this complex social phenomenon and according to the research declaration, there was an attempt to reach maximum knowledge and information regarding the phenomenon from the subjective point of view of the women who experienced this process; a method integrating a constructivist and a positivist approach could also be selected.

Savaya and Waysman (1999) present the importance of integrating the qualitative and quantitative approaches when evaluating programmes. Implementing the
integration of approaches in their study was designed to evaluate programmes. They claim that this integration contributed to five domains: expansion, development, initiation, elaboration and verification.

For the purposes of the present study it might be that an integration of research tools deriving from the quantitative approach, such as a constructed and closed self-esteem questionnaire (Cohen, 2004), that would have been administered to the women at the end of the empowerment process, might have given us additional information which could have been comparative and measurable.

Conducting an integrative study could have maintained, on one hand, the identification of knowledge and vast information from the interviews in the most comprehensive and authentic manner possible while preserving the research reliability conducted in a qualitative-constructivist study, namely: personal responsibility, ethics of concern, multiple voices in the text, dialogue with the participants, etc. On the other hand, it might have revealed additional and measurable information, conclusions based on a quantitative examination, and among others, generalisation ability. In this case, the price might have been fewer in-depth interviews and administering questionnaires among a greater amount of participants.

The present study, which is based on a Feminist approach, integrates the social, educational and structural paradigms. A different way to conduct the study was to embrace the cultural paradigm and examine the place of culture in the process of 'personal empowerment' and women's learning.

The findings of the current study reveal the significance assigned by women to culture along the learning and empowerment process.

This finding was part of the present study which identified various factors in the learning and 'personal empowerment' process. A study emphasising culture might have granted a profound understanding of the issue and revealed different styles and highlights.

One possibility for conducting such a study might have been to conduct a qualitative-constructivist research similar to this one. The sample should have included women from diverse cultures, and the focus of the interviews should have been the specific culture and its significance for each one of the women.

Conducting a research in such a manner would have required a comparative cultural examination. An additional possibility would have been to observe women's empowerment coursed based on women from a certain culture, such as Caucasian
women, Ethiopian women, etc. Such courses exist and some of the women participating in the interviews were also a part of these programmes. However, the focus of the work would have been different. One question that should have been asked would regard mixed groups of Israeli women and what is the place of 'ordinary women', as the study aspires to reveal. The present study chose to shed light on 'personal empowerment' and learning as experienced by 'ordinary women'. A comparative cultural examination would have presented a different picture than the one conducted in this study.

An additional possibility for conducting the study in this spirit could have been to interview women from the Arab sector (this study was conducted only among Jewish women), in a way that would have allowed to deepen the issues examined in this study to a cultural point to view. This possibility enables a profound perception of the categories from a comparative cultural point of view and its place in the process of women's empowerment. Such a comparative study between Jewish and Arab Israeli women and/or between women from diverse Israeli cultures other than the Arab Israeli women should have been conducted. This type of study should have also dealt with issues such as cultural and personal identity. The focus of such a study would have also turned to a different direction from the one investigated in the present study. However, it is hoped that such a study can form the research in the future for this researcher, or other researchers.

The current study was conducted among women who participated in empowerment groups in the Northern district of Israel. The Northern, as well as the Southern district of Israel are considered to be peripheral. The study could have been conducted through a different angle, viewing 'personal empowerment' and women's learning from an angle of national resources allocation, characterised by an Economic or Political Science approach. In order to examine the current research question through these paradigms, it could have been conducted using a sample of women from various regions in Israel, namely women from the Central and Southern districts. The picture received from such a study would have been different, since it would have focused on issues or resources allocation, regional priorities and regional characteristics related to women.

The current study examined a subjective point of view regarding the 'personal empowerment' process and 'women's learning'. One of the post-modern criticisms concerning Feminist agenda is the generalisation made by Feminist agenda to include all the women; namely, diagnoses that might lead to conclusions referring to
a unified behaviour among women. This study, despite its declaration and implementation, namely to listen to the subjective voice, conducted a certain generalisation manifested in the categories obtained from the women's subjective perceptions.

Another possibility is a study intensively accompanying a personal story of one woman participating in the empowerment process in various points in her life, including in-depth interviews with materials gathered during her life at work and home. Gathering this type of data might describe her life-story during the period of the empowerment process. Such a study would have provided authentic information.

The present study provides insight and subjective responses from 'ordinary' Israeli Jewish women involved in empowerment groups. The outcome of the subjects of this study, indicating ways in which such involvement has enabled the 'ordinary women' to develop self realisation, self esteem and to move on in their lives and careers. As such, then it provides original and unique information about 'ordinary women' and the effects of involvement in empowerment groups and contributes conceptually to our understanding about the effects of involvement in such groups on specific types and groups of women, 'ordinary' women's development, where the goals sought are not the breaking of glass ceilings or the movement on from abuse but self realisation and self development.

The current research could have been conducted in a variety of ways, some of which were mentioned earlier. This has been a pioneer study of the subjective narratives of 'ordinary women'. Its significance lies in uncovering the issues, dilemmas and the knowledge it provides about these women in the 'Post Feminist' era. The present research method led to these findings. The researcher invites other researchers to expand the research and take other directions. Every addition to this research will help to reach more knowledge about 'ordinary women', generated by them. This knowledge might offer more possibilities for these women to advance in society and improve their personal well being.
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Appendix 1: Personal Diary

This chapter provides a detailed description of 'my journey while writing the thesis. This chapter describes 'my unique experience through my exposure to Feminist approaches to personal empowerment, gender and women's learning – empowerment courses, and the knowledge that I gained from the contents of the course, the interviews and observations.

The present chapter is built on my analysis of the texts of my personal stories written by me in a diary. These materials are, with specific reference to the categories that emerged from the diary, followed by discussion of the similarities and differences between the categories drawn from the diary and the categories that emerge from the personal interviews and group observations (adapted from the 'discussion and analysis of findings' chapter). The relevance of the discussion to the conceptual framework will be shown.

I decided to write a personal diary in the preliminary stages of the thesis, when I decided about the scientific methods, to provide an answer to the research question. The decision to write this diary was based on 'my intuition and on my familiarity with writings and literature on empowerment and gender. The writing started in the beginning of the journey. My belief was that a personal diary that provides a detailed description of my journey and experience is a powerful and valuable methodology for three reasons: first, this is a qualitative study and is also based on a Feminist tradition and outlook, which suggests the unique place of the researcher (Patton, 1990). The documentation and analysis of the materials and contents can promote an understanding of the research process. Second, the diary is included in the triangulation of research methodologies and tools. Triangulation provides a more complete and comprehensive outlook on the studied phenomenon from various points and therefore promotes an understanding of the phenomenon (See also the sub chapter on triangulation).

Third reason stems from the fact that Feminist research conducted by a woman investigating other women entails the researcher's involvement in situations that are created during the research, and hence the writing of a personal diary might help in identifying points of influence or bias if any, and help achieve research credibility (Shkedi, 2003).
The writing of the diary and the writing of the Doctoral thesis occurred simultaneously. In her book 'Writing a Woman's Life' Heilbrun (1988) asserts that 'There are four ways to write a woman's life: the woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction; a biographer, woman or man, may write the woman's life in what is called a biography; or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously, and without recognising or naming the process." (p. 11).

I believe that the diary can serve as a methodologically suitable research tool which elaborates on and elucidates the research question. Heilbrun (1988) indicated the writing of a diary as the first way to write a woman's life. In the present study I decided to write a diary at the same time that I was studying women, and while I was learning about empowerment, gender and women's learning, and during conversations that I held with women who participated in personal empowerment programs.

I encountered the following words of Aschroft (1987): "Empower, empowered, empowering, empowerment"….say the words and watch the barriers fly up” (p. 142). After I had already read a variety of studies and books, and because I was already in the process, these words seemed magical to me, and I felt as if Aschroft's words were directed to me, and to the meaningful and significant experience that I had. The experience implies potential for a major change and the creation of something new and unfamiliar. The last part of Aschroft's words '...the barriers fly up' (1987, p. 42) remained an unanswerable question for me, on a philosophical level, as I was unable to tell exactly which barriers the writer referred to, and whether by breaking these barriers we would reach our freedom? 'Ordinary women' who participate in an empowerment process discuss this question on a practical level, and also I. The question of 'barriers' and 'freedom' is a subjective question that is open to interpretation. As we remove one barrier others might appear, and we are faced with new barriers and dilemmas.

I understood by intuition, that grew stronger as I began to read studies and theories on gender and empowerment, that I will not be able to engage in the study without being involved in some way. It seems unrealistic to me as a researcher who conducts a research on other women and writes about them, investigates, describes and analyses women's individual outlook on empowerment from a feminist point of view to be neutral, unbiased and impartial.
Patton (1990) referred to the place and role of the researcher in a qualitative research and said that “the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry” (p. 472). In addition, Patton (1990) holds the view that “…a qualitative report must include information about the researcher. What experience, training, and perspective does the researcher bring to the field? What personal connections does the researcher have to the people, program, or topic studied?....The principle is to report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation- either negatively or positively- in the minds of users of the findings.” (p. 472).

I agree with Patton’s (1990) words with regard to the need to maintain the researcher’s credibility. In my view, these words correspond to my perception not only on credibility, but also the inability of a researcher to overlook personal perceptions and thoughts and knowledge that develop in the course of the study. In fact, this description took place, especially sharing the experiences and creating the knowledge in the present study.

The diary was written following a long process during which I was constantly exposed to studies and literature on empowerment from a feminist outlook, which believes that women’s learning should be recognised as a unique branch of Andragogy. I agree with Patton (1990) that the researcher in a study is another informant. My claim is that the emphasis is even stronger in a feminist study. I also convinced that my identity, experience and story, and the use of it in the present study in a feminist outlook, cause a changes in my personal life and the way I see things in these days.

Through the introduction and analysis of the contents, and the decision about the materials which are most relevant and should be included in the study- I basically presents and includes in the diary, my own thoughts and beliefs, the knowledge that was created during the research. Furthermore, these dispositions, thoughts and ideas are part of the underlying assumptions and clearly have some influence on the presentation of findings.

The data and discussion represent the individual women who participated in the study and the research presented their authentic thoughts and beliefs through observations and interviews, however, my belief is that because I am a woman who
investigated other women in the process, there were instances where I felt closely connected to those women in the process. Surly, I was all the period interacting with the materials I was exposed to and the events in my life.

I understand and sympathises with Lieblich’s (2003) answer to the question regarding the place of the researcher in relation to the world that she investigates. As a feminist researcher conducting studies on gender, this was her answer: "I listened, edited and interpreted all interviews, and clearly had some influence on the conversation and the story which followed the conversation, either knowingly or unintentionally... I listened to and interpreted the things that I had heard in relation to the borders of my world and prism, and my own personality and experience. There is no other way” (2003, p. 14). The reason for writing the diary is not only to show credibility. Further and beyond, my belief is that the contents of the diary, the way in which the contents are analysed, and compared to the categories, provide another dimension to women's learning of 'personal empowerment'.

This writing promotes an understanding of the knowledge that is formed between the researcher and the interviewed women, or the women she observed, and also of the research question.

It all began when I decided that I wanted to study for Ph.D. I am married with three children. I live in Israel. My first-degree is in Social Work and M.A. in Organisational Sociology. I worked for 13 years as a Community Social Worker and the Head of Welfare department for two years. As a Community Social Worker I was in charge of activities for the community and development of a local leadership. The basis of knowledge, ideology and tools for implementation – all derived from the field of community social work and concerned the relationship between working with weak and underprivileged groups, communities and promoting "these individuals. From this professional ideology emerged the belief that empowerment processes are a principal key to changing the state of inequality of groups and individuals in the community. Leading groups towards self efficacy by helping them to strengthen the parts in them, which are strong and in this way help themselves to advance from their misery and distress and move to a better place. In the beginning of my career, I worked with weak and underprivileged communities and helped in creating and empowering leaders to take informed decisions. This ideology, together with practical actions, led me to the understanding that empowerment is a powerful and valuable process. The connection to feminism was in a later stage. I couldn't say precisely when this connection was built, however, the feminist outlook coincided
with my beliefs and attitudes. I also developed empathy to empowerment groups for women. I learned about the connection between women and empowerment groups when I worked as the manager of one of the training units of the Ministry of Interior, which provides training and organisational development services to local authorities in the Western Galilee (in the north of Israel).

I learned about conducting qualitative studies during my M.A. studies, when I wrote a thesis on 'the ideology of personal trade unions and their effect on methods of negotiation'. My tutor was a lecture who specialised in trade unions. I used a qualitative research method, and the writing of my M.A. thesis was a long and exhausting process which lasted for several years. In my study, I used a research tool that was developed by my tutor, a questionnaire which recognises and identifies methods of negotiation. The goal of the dissertation was to investigate the ideology of the union and how it affects the selection of the method of negotiation by the organisation. Following the interviews and the questionnaire, the researcher enlarged the questionnaire through open interview, but I did not use this in the study. After the interviews and questionnaires, I discussed and described in details different states of negotiation. These materials were not included in the dissertation and only years later did I try to find out why. I felt that something important was missing and that my dissertation was lacking a valuable and authentic part which was included in the interviews.

Based on the reading of literature on gender and the conduct of the current study, I understood that my own 'voice' was not present in the dissertation. For many years, I was not involved in academic writing, because of my feeling that I have missed an opportunity and my inability to identify with my 'piece of work'. This dissertation, which deals with the individual woman and her choice to embark upon a journey that at the end of, she hopes to become more powerful, empowered, and capable of making a change, this is sort of personal saying to me and to other women. Following a qualitative tradition, both the individual woman and I, as the researcher perceived it, were able to talk in our voice. For me, this study is a personal journey for me and for other women, a journey whereby the individual voice will be heard. Because I followed a qualitative method, I learned about the variety of things that I could do in a research in consideration of academic rules and conventions. As indicated by Patton (1990), 'my choice to use a qualitative approach and the subject of my thesis is based on all these. This motive, and the concentration on the feminist
outlook and qualitative method, led to a decision to use women's narrative, and to sustain the authenticity of the materials which they presented.

The present thesis was written from respect and appreciation for the many women who decided to participate in empowerment groups, and derives from my desire to understand this phenomenon and its various components from personal outlooks. I was fascinated with this, and so I began my individual process. My desire to introduce women who make an informed decision to engage in an action that makes them stronger, and although they encounter in the process a variety of difficulties, they become aware much more than in the past of their opportunities and chances to achieve empowerment and to advance. The research aspires to introduce women's voice in an academic discourse and support their views through relevant literature and materials, and at the same time convey a clear and empowering message to all female researchers, in a variety of fields and encourage them to engage in a process of writing, and embark upon a long and complex journey that involves a variety of difficulties, for themselves but also for other women.

During my professional career and my work with communities and individuals, especially in recent years, I observed with great interest at empowerment groups for women. These groups were organised by various organisations, including welfare organisations, the purpose being the desire to empower a weak group and equip the members of the group with the empowerment process to allow them to advance in society.

Empowerment groups are similarly organised by women's organisations and councils. In this case, the empowerment process was built on an ideology that supports the changing of power-relations between men and women.

I was fascinated by the process that these women experienced and through furthered reading of relevant materials. In my study, I began to consider things with reference to the gap in knowledge. I was also interested in women's learning because of my present involvement in adult training. The understanding of the importance of 'Andragogy', and its existence as a separate discipline, have driven me to contemplate on women's place in 'Andragogy' and how their place is related to Feminist outlooks regarding women's way of learning and knowing. At this point, I began to relate theory and practice, identified gaps and was motivated by my strong desire to deeply understand these gaps and how this magnificent process works.
'My journey into the empowerment process was very deep and introversive. I was interested about my motives to select that topic, because I initially thought of various topics which may serve as the subject of my thesis. I understood that I selected that subject because of my personal and professional interest. There was something in the process that aroused my curiosity about the forces that drive these women to participate in the process. The meeting that I held every time in with the participants at the end of the empowerment process, and their satisfaction with the process, the atmosphere of power that prevailed in the room during the session, together with the reading of materials, produced the research question, and the desire to identify the factor that had the highest and most recognisable influence on the change in these women (if it can be attributable to one dominant factor).

The writing of the diary derives as well from the 'my emotions. It was accelerated during the interviews, the way I felt about my personal process of empowerment. Many thoughts and feelings raised in me pertaining to the prices that women pay, the significance of these prices, their implications, and a thorough understanding of their words and contents.

Following the long process at the end of which I had to make a decision whether to engage in the writing of a Ph.D. and commit myself fully to this task. The process that I began to think about those subjects and what it mean to me, to share my thoughts and intentions with my husband. To lighten the prices that the family would have to pay for my decision, it became clear to me that in order to be able to make an informed and reasoned decision I need to discuss it with the other members of my family. Already at this initial point I realised that my husband and family would have to acknowledge the prices that I expected to pay following my decision to write a Ph.D. and asked their blessing and support.

The principal category that I identified from the moment I decided to engage in the process was the **increased awareness category**. From the reading of materials, the interviews and the conversations the participants increase their awareness of the relationship between men and women.
Category No. 1: Increased awareness

The reading of theories, exposure to the views of various theoreticians, a variety of materials and interviews, increase awareness, more specifically: awareness of the differences, of the gap and how the various structures work. I became more aware of these. As the thesis progressed, and I read more relevant materials, I became more sensitive to articles in the newspaper and/or publications on gender, empowerment, and work with weak and disempowered groups. When my study was in the initial stages, I listened to a conversation between a barber's mother and his best friend. They talked about the contribution of the mother to her son's success, and the prices that she had to pay for his success. As I listened to the conversation, I began to wonder about certain things, for example if I'm more sensitive now than in the past to these materials, or perhaps the public was always aware of these issues but I wasn't. Another example is a conversation that I held with one of my friends, who participated in an empowerment group. My friend enrolled in a vocational course and during one session she argued with her male lecturer. His response was: "You argue like my wife". My friend of course replied immediately, as she participated in an empowerment course and was therefore much more sensitive to these kinds of insults remarks. She decided to tell this story to me, because I realised that she would gain her sympathy and understanding, as both of us had a similar experience and therefore recognise the far-reaching implications of such statements and attitudes. Another aspect is the urgent need to take active courses of action to promote the gender issue.

I began consider every article in the newspaper from another point of view, and began to collect articles and stories. An example is an article published on the appointment of a new Police Commissioner and his decision to appoint for the
various positions people who were recruited to the police at the same time as he was, and following his appointment they were promoted to higher ranks and positions. The article described the appointments from the outlook of young people who pave their way to success. I immediately thought of the dominance of young people who pave their way to success. I immediately thought of the dominance of males in the Israeli culture, and their tendency to sustain relationships over many years. These relationships begin sometimes in the joint service in the I.D.F or the Police Force and the care for one another. When one of them is promoted he takes care of his old friends from the army or police organisation. To the best of the 'my knowledge, there was no reference to the appointment of women. I expected that women organisations would protest and oppose, but they did not. This example illustrates and supports the words of Izraeli (1997) regarding the armed forces as a primary source of social networking which is more beneficial to men. Because men serve longer time than women and in a variety of positions and jobs, they have more opportunities to develop social relationships and mutual responsibility networks outside the military. The increased awareness made me more sensitive to these stories. This awareness as I interpreted it can be part of the development of 'critical awareness' that researchers and theorists point to as the result of the empowerment process (Kieffer, 1984; Gutierrez, 1990; Freire, 1973).

According to Cohen (2004), critical awareness is demonstrated through increased awareness of how political structures affect the experiences of individuals and groups (p. 24).

Another example is outdoor advertising which places emphasis on gender and sexism, for instance the ice-cream firm that used sexual messages to sell ice creams. Besides increasing her awareness, the researcher began to develop a critical attitude towards these behaviours, something that she was not aware of before she began her study. Because of my sensitivity to the materials that I read, I became much more aware of these social structures and the effect they have on our lives. All of a sudden, the theories that I have been reading become relevant (De Beauvoir, 1949; Izraeli et. al., 1999; Azmon, 2001). The increased awareness promotes an understanding of the protests of Feminist researchers and they too suddenly become relevant.

Because of this increased awareness the researcher became sensitive to gender differences and gaps. I believe that increased awareness together with the second category, sensitivity to gender differences, can work together and create and
development of critical awareness (Cohen, 2004). For me, critical awareness was demonstrated through the reading of materials on gender and empowerment and the interviews with women. Through these I became alert to the existence of a gap and began to wonder about my own place within this gap.

Category number 2, sensitivity to the gender gap, presents the central sub-categories on which the researcher concentrated.

**Category No. 2: Sensitivity to gender gaps**

This stage marked a complex process of how I views myself in relation to the environment, and other members of my peer group. I began to ponder about how I’m treated by others, about my performance and whether I’m appreciated. I began for instance to wonder whether I earns the same as males for an identical job, or the same as other women; Whether I makes the same effort and invests similarly in my job as other men or even her husband at home; Do I receive an adequate appreciation for my performance or perhaps my voice too is unheard. During this stage I identified many gaps and it was difficult for me to cope with them. Because I learned that the gaps between Israeli men and women in wage and incentives are high, I began to wonder where I stand in this statistics, and whether I’m another victim of this unacceptable system whereby people are paid and rewarded based on their sex rather than their performance. I also tried to find out where I was standing in relation to my workmates and colleagues. The answers to these questions were difficult for me for two reasons: when I identified a gap between my place and that of men in comparable positions and ranks, I was able to understand the causes of these gaps based on the literature, but when I identified gaps between myself and other women my first response was frustration, how come they succeeded and I did
not? I was afflicted with self-flagellation, and this was in a sharp contrast to one of the cognitive components of critical awareness which Cohen (2004) indicated, which is decline in self guilt and self-flagellation for past occurrences. This feeling changed later in the process to self-criticism, as I realised that I feels more strongly the gap between myself and the other women compared to men, and accused myself of being unable as a researcher who studies gender issues to perceive the success of other women as challenging and promoting a change. From this moment emerged what Cohen (2004) named another cognitive element of critical awareness- claiming responsibility for problem solving. I understood that I had to claim responsibility for my life, and to change gaps where they exist. At this point I connected to another category, which was also seen in the participants, during the interviews and observations: women's choice to manage and administer personal change. Before I explains about my relatedness to this category, I wish to address the emotions which pertain to category number 2 – sensitivity to gender gaps. Women feel anger, real anger, which sometimes becomes an uncontrollable anger, because of the gender gaps and differences between men and women the source of which is often concealed. In addition to anger, women often feel that they cannot trust the various systems and institutions. I think of myself as a person of high socioeconomic and professional status, and I feel that because I myself feel that way, it is easier for me to identify and sympathise with weak and underpowered groups. I began to feel that I want to re-practice social work thereby lead a social change. From what seemed to be the 'my strong position, but following a comparative analysis appeared as a relatively weak position, emerged my desire to lead a process of change. From this place emerged the acknowledgement and identification with the words of Freire (1972) regarding the need to move from oppression towards liberation or emancipation. I argue, based on the interviews and observations, and my personal experience, that regardless of a woman's position on the oppression-emancipation continuum, people have always shown a tendency to move towards efficacy and/or to increase their capabilities, especially when they are encouraged to do so. I was encouraged to move towards efficacy based on the reading of materials, the interviews, conversations, observation and involvement.

The desire to lead a change and claim responsibility for other women, in the spirit of sisterhood, is demonstrated through the words of one of the interviewed participants who said to her friends to move towards a better place and position, to join her in
the process that she experiences, and she is able to lead because of her improved self-awareness, which empowers her and encourages her to lead a social change.

The researcher’s personal change management category consists of the following sub categories:

As opposed to the women who made a decision to participate in the empowerment process and lead a personal change, I did not imagine when I began my study that the writing of a thesis on gender would lead to a very meaningful process for myself. The writing of the diary was an intuitive decision. A decision that got a support from the reading feministic researchers and I expected that something meaningful might emerge from my exposure to materials on empowerment, gender and women’s learning. The category of managing personal change indicates through its schematic structure, the significance of each sub-category for change, and the contribution of contents pertaining to empowerment and gender on me. The sub-category of the willingness to pay a personal price in order to embark upon the process, which appeared as one of the sub-categories that women addressed, was demonstrated through ‘my feeling that each of the steps indicated in the category of personal change management has its price. The operative expression of this is a series of verifications of a professional stance which the researcher undertook during the development of a course that I accompanied. As a training expert I developed this together with several experts, the majority of them were men. Because of my
involvement in the process, I learned to observe things differently, and was therefore able to identify elements embedded in the process that otherwise might have been left unnoticed and unanswered. On the other hand, the many disagreements and resistance were attributed to gender. The recognition that the source of these disagreements is gender enabled me to move forward with the process despite the many difficulties that emerged, to understand the dominant 'masculine' rules but at the same time to insist on my professional advice and experience. During this two-years process I learned a lot about myself, and that despite the advancement of women, the world is still dominated by males and masculine codes. The process exposed to me the use of a military jargon unknown to my, the building of relationships between men and male networking, and I sometimes felt like an outsider. I also felt that the males tried to minimise my achievements and actions. These experiences in a state of 'increased awareness', served as another toolbox, name given by one of the observed women. It encouraged the researcher to persist and not to give up for professional reasons but also and equally important as a representative of the Feminist mission. Many times I felt that I'm committed to a social mission to show that it is possible to continue by finding the right balance between the adoption of masculine codes and assertiveness, the source of which was my female identity and natural behaviour. This however did not always work, and on several occasions I encountered an inner conflict between the adoption of masculine codes and my desire and need to behave in a natural manner and to be myself. Another example of the price is a conversation between me and my daughter during dinner. My daughter claimed that there is a noticeable change in 'my profile as a mother and my image since the beginning of my academic work. I said that the change is demonstrated at home through the emphasis that I now place on my rights, on what I believes I deserve, and by setting my demands. I encountered a dilemma between my functioning as a mother and the experience from the standpoint of my family. I realised that both me and my family will eventually pay a certain price. The unwritten contract with my family, and the sort of change that I anticipated included support and help on the part of my family. This meant among other things that 'my available time would diminish greatly, that I would need a time for herself to write the thesis, and the money that I would have to pay for the Ph.D. program. However, my contract ignored the personal and individual change, which was an inseparable part of the process. This change, which was not included in the researcher' expectations in the beginning of the process,
emerged as a significant factor for my family, as all of a sudden gender issues became part of the agenda and were frequently discussed at home, and the overall awareness of my family increased. This does not mean that they sympathise with the feminist outlook, but it did emerge on the surface. A central category that repeatedly emerged from the study and, in my view, needs to be considered in future studies, is the marked difference between the dominance of sisterhood and a good and welcoming atmosphere that prevails in the empowerment programs and the competitive and alienated atmosphere that prevails at work between women.

This category evolved from the differences between the significant experience of sisterhood, the warm atmosphere in the group and favour, which emerged from the observations and interviews, and what women experience at work. This difference resulted in an examination of women's perception of work, which coincide with my perception of work, and how women interact different at work, and the sisterhood and warm relationships that build between the group members during the process. These differences and gaps, experienced as well by me, led to profound questions regarding the reasons that women behave at work in a way that according to the researcher is not consistent with their nature.
Appendix 2: Interview with Yifat

Blue Print – Researcher's notes

(Yifat was interviewed as a woman who participated in an empowerment process. In her job career as a project coordinator she helps to organise an empowerment process for other women. She also participated in them and was a participant in a process.

Name: Yifat.

Interview date: 10/03/04.

Interview place: A local cultural centre in a city in the northern region of Israel.

Age: 38.

Children's ages: a 14 year old girl and a 13 year old son.

Job: Used to work in a public institution in the city, coordinated the social activities for 3 years. During the last 2 years she has been working as a projects coordinator in charge of job and occupation projects, unemployed in the last six months because of inevitable downsizing and the laying off of workers. Her job was to build connections between various occupational factors and received her salary from a governmental office. She has been living in Israel for 30 years, 25 of them in a city in the northern region of Israel. Fluently masters the following languages: Hebrew, Russian and Caucasian.

Note: Yifat started the interview with a description of her job career in Israel and it's relevance to empowerment activity.

When she began to work she was first in charge of the placement and allocation of jobs, then came the budgets for introduction to computers courses, an Ulpan (intensive Hebrew school) for immigrants and she began to check if it was possible to gradually open and launch small businesses. Empowerment courses, first there was only one group but none of the women really knew what to do and they all felt awkward. From this group of women 15 eventually graduated the course and each of them found a better job. Osnat (who worked as a liaison officer in a public institution) who worked with Guy participated in women's empowerment programs and later in a job club. She said that she had changed. Yifat said about her that she was "as silent as a fish".

Researcher notes: A learning style, an awareness of Yifat about Osnat learning style. Yifat tells her experience from the empowerment process:
During the first sessions the instructor, Galit, talked to us about our needs, to begin with who we are and then share others with our thoughts. At first we were too shy and introvert. (Researcher note: proximity and de-freezing technique of the process leader to introduce and establish expectation; a sense of sharing in very intimate willings of each one)... During session the women slowly began to open up and each talked about her own dream. "This is my dream..."Osnat said: "I am a divorcee and have a child and I want to work". After that Osnat got an invitation to work. Yifat continued, I am happy for her. I also participated in empowerment course, a course that is similar to empowerment- communication, empowerment for women of my own ethnic group and community. Not only...single mothers, and I felt that I was taking the group and leading it towards a new direction, and tried to convince them to stop thinking that they are alone and keep going. (Researchers notes: take responsibility for the change, move towards a better point, to give power to the group, the power to give power)

Our life does not stand still, it does not stop, it continues. (Researchers notes: the need to move, to help yourself, to take responsibility for moving). She established contacts with a forum of single mothers, they opened a branch in the city...a club for single mothers opened... in my own free time and after my work. I know what it means to be a single mother. Everyone looks at me and says it does not show at all that you are a single mother. I worked at 3 jobs, volunteered and helped my mother. (Researcher notes: the power of giving, the energy it brings to life, the responsibility to help other women to move on. Being a leader, they enjoy being in a place of power but they do not name the word power.).

We do not have time, it is all about priorities (Researcher notes: personal responsibilities to lead change, to take responsibility for yourself..). I felt that I had to do something for the other women, I felt that they were stuck, (Researcher notes: being in a place of awareness and from this point to help other women be in a better place) that there is a block that the divorce women experience. I have a child and I must devote my life to him (Researcher note: the responsibility, the price). I dedicate myself. What about me? I will end up alone, if I do not organize my life (The personal thinking for future "not being in depended). They will do a favor if they come to mother. It is necessary to break the barrier (the process as helping identify the barrier; the fact that the responsibility on children is on the
mother), not to open the eyes (the importance of being aware. The development of critical awareness).

**Question: Tell me something about feeling and communication.**

The contents she communicated, first acquaintance, even though I was sitting with the instructor, I was afraid to say something about myself, me as a person who organizes and initiates things, my own resources, you do not participate, perhaps to learn to take things, (The fear to take leadership) I should have been helpful, accompany the group, I developed, I had a barrier associated with the decision whether to study or not, monetary restraints. I gave up my right for alimony in exchange for my freedom (The personal price). I must invest in my studies if I wish to learn (The will to learn). I did not complete my community and social studies in a seminar in the central region of Israel. During the time that I was working it was not...I now had to call this off for reasons of unemployment. The first thing I intend to do when I start get back to work is to go back to study. I did this for one year.

**Question: Tell me more about your education.**

Graduate of Nursing School, with a qualified nursemaid certificate, a hairdresser, a pedicurist, personal and interpersonal communication workshop entrepreneur (secondary), worked for the Open University: Sociology, Introduction to Psychology, Statistics 1, a course in environmental studies, senior leadership in X (The place she live). We brought with us knowledge and introduced this knowledge to the young population.

**Question: Are there differences in learning between courses in the university and in the community?**

Most of the courses were courses which I was able to select from a list of courses. I was the only member of the Caucasian community...This was the difference. I felt that I was the only Caucasian person studying. I have a goal and I wish to achieve it and no one can stop me (Researcher note: learning in relation to the community). Once you are in my community, I felt that I had to keep their place (researcher note: feeling she represent her community). They went out of this. In women's empowerment I gave the example of myself. In some place...I have a dream- what is my dream? I want to tell them (Researcher note: the close and intimate
surrounding in the empowerment group which lead to the ability to share with others). What is your dream? To study social work, which also means money and money is something that makes you feel tight and pressured. Something similar to the job I am looking for, in the field of community and social work, a nursery school that we opened for the community. This means that we take infants and structure a program especially for them and then we gradually move to people who are a little older and help those who cannot afford to participate in the program.

Question: Are there any differences between the studying of empowerment and other things that you studied before?

In statistics I was unable to express my dream. The teacher gives lectures and I bring with me a tape-recorder. If I do not, I listen to this at home. In the group we sit in a circle and the instructor is sitting in front of us. There is no table between us and her, we feel open and free to express ourselves, each of us was listening to the other women and we did not intervene in any way. When I said "I have a dream" (The researcher note: the atmosphere of the empowerment group, the sharing atmosphere). One of the women said: "You cannot imagine what you are doing for people...you are a person who knows how to listen". You must study social work. I received feedbacks from these women. I am very popular amongst them and this gives me power and support. If only I had money. (The researcher note: The power from the group, the ability to give and to get, the good feeling it does to women).

Question: Is feedback important for learning?

It helps, it gives a real push. It is just like when a person goes to a consultant. I pay money to a person who analyzes me based on my personality, what suits me, what I should be doing when they know you.

I studied in mixed groups of men and women and in some groups of Caucasian men. I do not know whether I was involved, I really do not know. It does not bother me to study in mixed groups. As Caucasian woman, if there are men in the group, I treat them differently. Who is he and what is he? That's all, I do not wish to start with that, I do not want them to say that I do not belong to an ethnic group (community).
Primary analysis

I have a dream
Break a barrier
Be part of an ethnic group or community
The need to contribute
Money
Feedback
Support and encouragement by the participants
The difference between the sort and nature of learning and the influence of the structural framework
See myself through their eyes
Listen to them talking about me
The strong desire to study
Each of them has found a job or something better to do
To do for others, to contribute

Mapping analysis

(Researcher's note: repeating motives, the strong desire to study in order to break the barrier.
Culture: learning within the cultural cycle, the advantages and the directions we constantly undertake because of our culture on the one hand: our commitment to culture and the part that the specific culture plays in our lives, the aspect of culture as something that creates barriers.
The difference between formal and normal (as in regular, standard) learning, in which it is impossible to communicate one's dreams).
The power embedded in making contributions for the sake of other people.
How I am empowered through the promotion and advancement of other people.
The power of learning and possessing knowledge.
How the group contributes to the individual.
Breaking the barriers.
To see, to voice an opinion and to do.
The many facets of culture: understanding and the sense of togetherness on the one hand and the barriers it sets on the other hand.)
Even without being paid for my work, I feel that I am really connected to the workplace. Make the necessary manoeuvres in the group of which I am part. I am trying to make a separation and be different.

The outcomes of the mapping analysis and consequently structuring of a 'categories tree' based on the interview that was held with Yifat.
Appendix 3: Aviva's Story

Blue Print – Researcher's notes

Aviva is married and has three children. She works as a director's assistant in the local authority. She is also the workers' committee chairperson. Aviva has had many jobs in the course of her life.

If the researcher had to give a title to Aviva's story, she would choose "Never Give-up...follow Your Ambitions".

The interview with Aviva takes place in her very nice, well taken care of house. Aviva is busy cooking for the Sabbath. The warm home atmosphere and family framework is very important to her.

In the beginning of the interview, Aviva starts with a sentence that becomes her motif: "I always have the ambition to learn...to advance. There were things that got in the way...the family. With me it is always the family first, me second....the same is true for work...first the others, then I...first people, then my needs...People who have worked with me said, 'Why don't you study', 'shame' I used to be a leader...I did not have enough confidence and courage to take a step..."

Researcher's note: Definition of goals, a great desire to learn, identification of halting factors, the need to give to the environment first, and then to the personal.

"In my youth," continues Aviva, "I had great potential, but I did not develop or use it. There was no one to exert pressure on me...I invested in the Scouts, and not in learning. I was in the Fashion design route. I did well, but did not want to invest, so I joined the army. I have art and aesthetics inclinations, which were never realised....I did what I was told, like a parrot..."

Researcher's note: Aviva is aware of the nature of learning, halting factors; she is led by external dictations rather than personal ones.

"In the army I moved from one place to another. I was more interested in the people than in developing my artistic side. I knew someone whose father had an accounting business. I was interested in working with people. Then I was referred to an accounting and secretarial course. I was not interested in accounting. Nor in secretaries' work. What interested me was the other aspects of the work...at a
certain point I got a job as the secretary of a factory manager...He showed me around...this was a chance of a lifetime...I discovered what I could give...initiating...not waiting to be told what to do...I did that in all departments...I had a tough boss, she was not easy...but I had a chance, the culture, workers' well being...I did it...700 workers... approached me...I never said no...I never refused to work...I did say not say no even once...at a certain point the factory closed down for reconstruction..."

Researcher's note: Inability to set boundaries. Using the word "No" as a motif.

"The whole factory went on leave...the manager called me and asked if I could handle the contacts with other countries. I did what was necessary in the domain of marketing as well...I was praised...I held it together...I was trusted...I showed them I could...I had the abilities. The learning thing disturbed me all the time."

Researcher's note: A desire for self realisation via studies; learning as a type of insurance; Ambition, the desire to advance...).

"Private places know how to use that...they reward you, but they use you....because I knew I could not say 'no', it was an obstacle...they used my weakness...It is also expressed at home and with friends...Friends used this ability of mine to give...at work I did not dare say no...so as to maintain my job..."

Researcher's note: Inability to say 'no'. Desire to maintain job.

"It all crashed when I got out...the secretary's certificate was not enough. I felt that I did and could do far more... (Researcher's note: The desire to prove, to do things beyond personal ability). The first opportunity...a big place that opened a window from me...but still I did not have the confidence to insist...

"when I asked for the job of personnel secretary, the director said, 'you do not have a certificate. This knocked me...everything I had done was no good. Although they offered me a raise, I decided to quit..."

Aviva started work in another factory where her pay was low. She was asked to work overtime and decided to quit. She started volunteering in a local organization and at the same time she took a vocational training course, which suited her needs to spend vacations with her children and back up her husband who had started a new business.

As the course ended she started working, first on a voluntary basis and then part-time, and finally two part-time jobs in two different organisations. She felt her employer was unreliable...he got all the credit and the workers never did. She
quit...She says, "My stigma as someone who works hard was against me...when I wanted to leave they were angry...how come...I did wrong...I felt hurt."
A director in the local authority told me, "Aviva, you cannot be the magician's helper...I was hurt. I fought for a job I wanted...I felt I was being blocked..."
Researcher's note: She notices the obstacles, encounters them time and again, and identifies the problems and the fact that she did not have any formal education as a critical problem.

**Question: Why did you come to the empowerment course?**

Aviva found out about the course, "I thought I would get tools that would reinforce me and help me solve the problems. I come across as a confident person. I am, but there is a big question mark...I have always been a leader, but that was in the greenhouse...I have always invested, wasted energy and expected feedback. I did not always get it. I sometimes felt used...I would cover it up by telling myself to go on, and that it was all learning...I said, I would go forward...invest they keep using me and I cannot insist...I am not assertive where I ought to be...When I saw I could cope, that is when I got up and a workplace. I always told myself things would be OK, be patient, but patience ran out...people do not appreciate...I thought about doing something independently...I also motivated my husbands to become independent. My push advanced my husband. It was hard for me to implement this drive...

Researcher's note: The ability to empower others, but not herself; the wish to have tools. Under the self-confidence hides the will to be accepted, strengthened and more self-conscious about her feelings, obstacles, wishes, abilities – her ambition and responsibility for a change.

"After my husband completed his vocational studies, he developed. I have to have his financial backing. Our men are the breadwinners, and we are secondary. That is how we were taught. If he understands how my help and cooperation enhanced his success, I will get the same. If I invest in work it will help me...the same is true in the family. I saved my credit with him for the right time..."

Researcher's note: embedded culture regarding differences between men and women, the husband's support and empowerment, mutuality and expectation of receiving after giving.

"...I faced the challenge of making changes, changing patterns and things...people tell me I live in an illusion. I had a family project – empowering him hoping that in
need he would do the same for me...he (my husband) got me a dishwasher, a cleaning woman...this is obvious to men...I was with the children. I stayed overtime. He said what he was willing to do...and said, "OK, get a cleaning woman" and I wanted to prove myself as a wife, the mother image, the little woman. I fought that...On the other hand, there are results I am proud of. We love each other. My husband says, "You gave us a home and invested in us. I really appreciate it more than I used to...it used to be taken for granted...today he will do things for us...he cleans, helps set the table or clear it, hang the laundry, all in his free time. He has supported me at work and in my studies; no one can touch him when it comes to the family."

"I spend a lot of energy. I have changed a lot. I am changing my attitude. I used to be more aggressive, today I face my boss boldly. I am not afraid. I reach things differently. I present issues not from a personal point of view, but rather as part of my role. I have changed my way of negotiating and acting..."

Researcher's note: mutuality, supporting others so as to be supported by them. Feeling clear results of the empowerment process. Feeling personal change. It started at home but it is still the hard part.

After the course, Aviv registered for academic studies. She made a decision, started with preparatory courses and then college. She gets good grades and feels she has taken a significant route.