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"This is Not Just My Story; It's Part of Who I Am": A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective of Battered Women's Identity Negotiations

Jessica Edel Harrelson
Western Michigan University, jc5_edele@yahoo.com

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“THIS IS NOT JUST MY STORY; IT’S PART OF WHO I AM”: A SYMBOLIC
INTERACTIONIST PERSPECTIVE OF BATTERED WOMEN’S IDENTITY
NEGOTIATIONS

by

Jessica Edel Harrelson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Western Michigan University
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Doctoral Committee:

Angie Moe, Ph.D., Chair
Zoanne Snyder, Ph.D.
Jennifer Wesely, Ph.D.
David Hartmann, Ph.D.

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Jessica Edel Harrelson, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2013

Over the past several decades, domestic violence has increasingly received more attention from both academic and local communities. Despite this attention, it persists as a significant social problem, suggesting that a full understanding of battering is still lacking. This dissertation examines women’s lived experiences with battering, what effect abuse has on how they come to define and interact with themselves, and subsequent negotiations of identity that occur within their relationships. To accomplish this, I conducted multiple in-depth qualitative interviews with fourteen women that were being served by a domestic violence agency in a rural part of the Midwest.

Within a framework of structural power connecting individual experiences to historical configurations of social inequality and patriarchy, I employ symbolic interactionism to examine how women define and interpret themselves and their experiences. Results indicate that the common characteristics of battering, particularly power and control, removal of social supports, and attenuation of opportunities for efficacious behaviors, create a unique circumstance where the self-concept became a reflexive process for the women in this study. Participants reported

changes to their self-concept in the form of reflected and self appraisal, internalization of blame, and negative body identity. This internalization and the subsequent changes to the self influence some of the choices women make within their relationships.

This study uniquely informs the literature on battered women's cognitive processes by utilizing a theoretical model that is used to explain much of our everyday behavior. This is important because battered women are not defined in terms of difference and are not seen as defective or deficient in some way. This approach, therefore, allows for a better conceptualization of battered women's cognitive processes and choices while recognizing their agency and without leading to victim blaming. Recommendations for policy and prevention efforts that arose out of this study are also discussed.

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Finally, I am humbled by the fourteen women that bravely opened up their lives to me in order to participate in this research and let their stories be told.

Jessica Edel Harrelson

DEDICATION

For the survivors that shared their stories and for MLB, who originally inspired me to work in domestic violence, and then never got a chance to become a survivor herself.

Jessica Edel Harrelson

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, domestic violence has increasingly received more attention from both academic and local communities. Despite this attention, it persists as a significant social problem in the United States. The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control states that women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner-related assaults every year (Center for Disease Control, 2003). The estimated cost of such violence in the United States exceeds \$8.3 billion annually (Max, Rice, Finkelstein, Bardwell & Leadbetter, 2004), including lost productivity, medical and mental health care, police and fire services, social services, loss of and damage to property, and reduced quality of life (Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act, 2005). Violence from an intimate partner is associated with a variety of adverse health outcomes as well, including physical, psychological, reproductive, sexual, and stress-related illnesses (Black, 2011). The need for further understanding of this exceedingly important social problem, then, is evident.

Although research into domestic violence has been relatively extensive and come from a variety of disciplines and approaches, our understandings of women's actual experiences with this type of violence, I believe, is still lacking. Domestic violence is linked to a variety of harmful effects, including physical injuries, poor mental health, depression, anxiety, suicide, and a wide range of other adverse health

outcomes. That, combined with the annual cost of domestic violence yearly, suggests that research in this area is still imperative.

Overview of Research

This dissertation examines women's lived experiences of battering with explicit attention paid to how women conceptualize and understand the abuse in their lives. Specifically, I conducted multiple in-depth interviews and used symbolic interaction theory in order to ascertain how women understand their experiences, how they make meaning within their abusive relationships, and what effect abuse has on their relationship with and sense of self. Within a framework of structural power and gender inequality, I have employed symbolic interactionism because this perspective focuses on how individuals define and interpret themselves, others, and their situations. It can therefore be used to help explain the interactional components of battering by shedding light on women's cognitive processes while in abusive relationships. Symbolic interactionists generally hold that the concept of self is a fluid and interactional process. Two concepts that are important to this process are reflected appraisal - seeing ourselves as we imagine others see us (Cooley, 1902) and role-taking - a process with high theoretical relevance to the self that consists of inferring another's feelings or anticipating his/her behavior (Turner, 1956). These concepts will therefore be central to this analysis.

In order to account for the societal-level structural forces in which these interpersonal interactions take place (for example, issues of power, dominance, and patriarchy), I have used symbolic interactionism within the framework of a feminist

driven perspective of domestic violence. This perspective recognizes the heavily gendered nature of batteringⁱ and the gender stratified social context in which it is found. It contends that gendered violence is part of a system of coercion and control through which some men maintain societal dominance over women and emphasizes that domestic violence is a result of a patriarchal social system (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo & Bograd, 1988). From this perspective, then, domestic violence is seen as a relationship defined by hierarchical power and attempts made to maintain power and control within that relationship.

Psychologically based perspectives on domestic violence have historically been critiqued for failing to account for many of the contextual factors of a woman's experience. In general, the central concern of psychological research has been one of empirically understanding unique pathologies and/or individual characteristics of battered women that would make them prone to such relationships or cause them to remain for a relatively long period of time. As Anderson and Saunders (2003) explain, prior to the 1970s, battered women were believed to have a conscious or unconscious desire for punishment. This was used to explain their provocation of abuse and their insistence on remaining in abusive relationships. Kirkwood (1993), also suggested that one the first perspectives of battering to arise from psychological studies tended to focus on masochism and psychological deviance on the part of the battered woman. These studies maintain that certain women possess a masochistic quality that increases their susceptibility to violence and causes them to become addicted to abusive relationships (Shainess, 1984). Likewise, another early theory

suggested that women consciously or unconsciously provoke violent episodes in order to release adrenaline, and then become addicted to abusive relationships because they “love too much” (Norwood, 1985).

Yet another popular theory to come out of the psychological literature on battering that has held more popular and academic attention is the battered woman syndrome (Walker, 1979/2000). This theory suggests that battered women’s unique psychological processes make them more susceptible to learned helplessness, and they become trapped in abusive relationships because they essentially give up trying to escape. Although this perspective has helped some battered women in terms of being useful for legal defense (particularly in cases in which women have been charged with crimes against their abusers), it has been heavily critiqued for failing to account for a woman’s environment, suggesting that battered women lack agency, creating a prototype of an “ideal victim”, causing harm to women who fight back, and portraying battered women as possessing unique personality traits that require therapeutic intervention (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

As is illustrated by the battered woman’s syndrome, by focusing on individual characteristics of victims, much psychologically-based research leads one to look for explanations of the causes of domestic violence in the victims themselves. This has very important consequences for women affected by abuse. First, by focusing on the individual components of domestic violence, such violence is seen as the outcome of the pathological, ill, deviant individual, rather than something that is inherent in patriarchal society. Second, when violence is attributed to characteristics found in an

individual “type” of woman, or a psychologically disturbed man, then intervention remains only at the individual level.

Ferraro (2003) asserts, “the comfortable conviction that severe battering is committed by “sick” men against women who are psychologically impaired ignores the pervasive normalized violence against women and the institutionalized barriers to escaping intimate violence” (p. 111). These stereotypes of sick perpetrators and psychologically defective victims largely come from the psychological literature on domestic violence. This does nothing to prevent domestic violence on a larger scale, nor does it address such violence within the social context in which it is produced. Third, because people are generally more comfortable in accepting violent behavior as something that is enacted by sick individuals and affecting only certain types of women (i.e., ill, deviant, or uneducated women), research of this genre may receive more public attention and support. This of course exacerbates the real problem of domestic violence for battered women. Moreover, it ignores the fact that domestic violence knows no “type” of woman. Such abuse crosses all boundaries of class, age, race, ethnicity, education, and occupation.

A symbolic interactionist approach is distinct from psychologically-based understandings of domestic violence because battered women do not need to be defined as individually defective through this approach. They are conceptualized as experiencing the same psychological processes that any person experiences. It is in the interpersonal circumstances and the societal-level context in which these processes take place where we find the defect. In other words, from this social

psychological perspective, battered women's experiences can be understood by using the same theoretical approaches that are used to understand any person's life. A specific theory does not need to be developed in order to understand battered women in particular, or to examine what is inherently "wrong" with them. The same cognitive processes are at play; they are simply occurring in a different (and maladaptive) social context, and therefore have unique effects within those contexts.

There have been other social psychological explanations commonly utilized to understand domestic violence. I contend, however, that many of these also prove inadequate in fully capturing battered women's lived experiences. One of the most popular social psychological theories that have been used to understand battering has been social learning theory (Jasinski, 2001). Based on the concept of modeling (Bandura, 1978), social learning theory suggests that men and women learn how to be violent through exposure to violence throughout their lives. During childhood, for example, if boys observe violence as an acceptable means of behavior and conflict resolution, they will imitate this learned violent behavior as an acceptable means of acting toward their partner (O'Leary, 1999). Social learning theory, however, fails to account for much of the non-violent aspects of battering (such as control, dominance, surveillance, or instilling fear). Moreover, it fails to account for men who batter, but were not abused themselves or have not witnessed abuse in their homes during childhood. Similarly, it also fails to account for women who are abused, yet did not witness such behavior during childhood.

Exchange theory could also be used as a social psychological explanation for domestic violence. Exchange approaches suggest that individuals will strive to maximize rewards within a relationship (Jasinski, 2001). In terms of domestic violence, this would imply that abusive men use violence as a means of maximizing their rewards in order to get what they want with less effort than would otherwise be needed (Jasinski, 2001). Resource theory, which is included in the framework of exchange theory, suggests that violence serves as a powerful resource when other resources are lacking. Like the theories mentioned above that hold some merit, these approaches, however, also do not account for the myriad other characteristics of battering beyond violent attacks. They also do little to *contextualize* the lived experiences of battered women.

Nonetheless, I believe social psychology still has much to offer in terms of understanding domestic violence. The theoretical approaches presented above are deficient in that they do not fully capture women's experiences with battering. For this reason, I use symbolic interaction theory and a feminist approach to domestic violence to better understand battered women's lived experiences and the choices they make while in abusive relationships. To date, few studies using this theoretical framework exist. While Stets (1988) introduced the application of symbolic interaction as an approach to domestic violence, her study was limited and she suggested that other features of violent relationships need to be explored. Primarily, she suggested an examination of identity and role-taking ability. Hence, the main questions I ask in this dissertation research are:

(1) How do battered women define, interpret, and understand their abusive situations?

(2) How do these definitions, interpretations, and understandings affect women's sense of self, their behavior and their decision-making within abusive relationships?

These two primary research questions will encompass several sub questions that deal specifically with a symbolic interactionist view of the self: (a) In what ways does battering affect women's identity, self-concept, and relationship to the self? (b) How do changes to self-concept specifically affect women's decision-making ability and/or the actual choices they make? (c) How do role-taking, reflected, and self-appraisal processes contextualize women's experiences with battering? (d) How do changes to identity, self-concept, and relationship with self affect women's relationships with their bodies?

In the following research dissertation, I present the theoretical framework for my project. This includes a discussion of feminist explanations of domestic violence and a brief overview of symbolic interactionism, including a review of literature on the self, role-taking, the reflected appraisal process, and how this is involved in relationship to the body. While presenting this overview, I include the potential relevance of applying these concepts to a study of domestic violence. I then describe my methodological approach and research parameters. Finally, at the end of this dissertation I include appendices consisting of my interview schedule, letter to shelters and participants, and informed consent documents.

Summary of Chapters

In this chapter, I provided an introduction to the problem and a brief overview of the research and its parameters. In the next chapter, I review some of the more well-known theories that have had substantial influence on our understandings of domestic violence. Primarily, I introduce some of the more influential psychological approaches, the popular idea of gender symmetry in domestic violence, and a brief overview of social psychological theories. I then describe my framework for this dissertation, which is a feminist theory of battering, and illustrate how from within this framework, I use symbolic interaction theory to create a more comprehensive understanding of battered women's lived experiences with battering.

In chapter three I detail the research procedure from inception to completion. I begin by positioning myself within the research process, and then discuss my epistemological orientation and how that led to some of the methodological choices I made during this process. Next, I discuss in detail each step of the research process, including site selection and sampling technique, demographical descriptions of my sample, how interviews were conducted, my process for data transcription and analysis, and an explanation of how I present participants' narrative. I end this chapter with a discussion of potential risks to participants and ethical concerns.

Chapter four begins the presentation of my results. In this chapter, titled "Contextualizing the External: Characteristics of Abusive Relationships," I present details of women's relationships with abusive partners, with attention paid to the types of abuse they suffered. Many of them endured similar forms of abuse,

including physical, psychological, and sexual violence, controlling behaviors, manipulation, and isolation. This presentation is important to the research questions I ask in this dissertation because it provides the framework for understanding the conditions under which the self-concept became a reflexive process for the women in this study. Particularly, the shared characteristics of power and control, and physical and psychological isolation discussed in this chapter serve as two of the three qualifying variables that increase the likelihood that women internalized abuse into their self-concepts.

The third qualifying variable for self-concept change, attenuation of opportunities for efficacious behavior, is discussed in chapter five, titled, “Agency & Efficacy: Resistance and Help-Seeking.” Self-efficacy is critical to my research questions because it is an important component of self-concept maintenance. Chapter five demonstrates how, along with the variables presented in chapter four, the external experiences of battering set the stage for the fragmentation of women’s identities and the negotiation of changes to self-concept that are presented in the subsequent chapter.

In chapter six, “Self-Concept and Self-Identity Negotiation,” I present the identity consequences of the power and control, isolation, and lack of opportunities for efficacious behavior that women experienced in abusive relationships. To remain safe amid the violence, women often engaged in role-taking behavior in order to attempt to understand or predict their abuser’s behaviors. In many cases, role-taking became a reflexive process, evidenced by the internalization of the abuser’s

standpoint into their own self-appraisal. In this chapter, I illustrate how women engaged in the construction of meaning and how they experienced changes to their self-concepts, particularly in the form of reflected and self-appraisal and to body identity.

Finally, in chapter seven, I present a conclusion to this dissertation. I provide a brief overview of the study once again and a reiteration of the primary results. Next, I discuss the strengths and limitations of the work, as well as a brief discussion of reliability, validity, and transferability. I then provide rather extensive recommendations for policy and prevention efforts that arose out of this study and provide concluding remarks as to how women's experiences with battering left many with the feeling of being caged that society in general often fails to understand.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over the past several decades a variety of approaches to understanding domestic violence have surfaced in the theoretical and empirical literature. In general, these approaches have been somewhat dichotomized into those that are more sociological in origin and focus on macro-level analysis and those that are psychological in origin and focus on micro-level analysis. The meso-level of analysis (where the realm of social psychology lies) has received less attention. I nonetheless feel that a social psychological approach can be a useful way to conceptualize the specific issue of battering, particularly when couched within the framework of structural gender inequality.

In the following chapter, I review some of the more prominent theories that have influenced our understandings and responses to intimate partner violence. I begin by describing some of the more influential approaches from within the psychological literature on domestic violence, including historical and contemporary explanations. I then discuss the idea of gender symmetry in domestic violence and how this has changed the landscape of much of the research coming out of the family systems and psychological approaches. Next, I discuss a meso-level approach to partner violence that has come out of the social psychological theory of social learning, commonly referred to as the intergenerational transmission of violence.

I then describe the feminist theoretical framework, which I believe is the most accurate and useful theoretical framework in which to analyze battering. This particular framework has provided the impetus for the battered women's movement by integrating a thorough examination of structural power into discourse surrounding domestic violence. Finally, I end this chapter with a review of the symbolic interaction theoretical approach and discuss how this theory can be used within the frame of a socio-political framework in understanding women's experiences with battering. The primary focus here is on the integration of feminist theory and symbolic interaction to more thoroughly elucidate the experiences of battered women by accounting for many of the deficiencies of relying on singular micro or macro approaches.

The literature that follows does not necessarily follow a strict temporal timeline, as many different theoretical approaches often arose around the same time period. These often competing approaches differ in etiology, prevalence, and treatment suggestions for how to deal with the social problem of intimate partner violence and woman battering (conceptual terms generally differ depending on theoretical approach, and I match the term with the approach in this chapter). This chapter, then, follows a *rough* temporal presentation in terms of beginning with early socially and academically prominent theories and moving to a more contemporary approach. There is much overlap throughout, however, and the specific approaches presented here do not concretely represent the historical trajectory of the domestic violence movement.

Micro-Level Approaches

Psychological approaches to partner violence emphasize the role of individual psychological traits and/or disorders. This literature can be crudely divided into research focusing on batterer characteristics, research focusing on victim characteristics, and research focusing on couple characteristics. Micro-level approaches, as psychological based theories are sometimes labeled, typically consider variables such as anger dis-regulation, psychopathology or anti-social personality disorder; the role of alcohol; violence profiles; victim's personality traits, and learned helplessness.

Batterer Characteristics. Over the past several decades, a considerable body of research has surfaced within personality theory which attempts to explain psychological characteristics that distinguish batterers from non-batterers. This analytic focus examines variables that supposedly identify what it is about any specific abuser's unique psychological make-up that would cause himⁱⁱ to be abusive (Hamberger & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2000). Chief among what is examined is psychological disorder, alcohol and other substance abuse, and anger dis-regulation.

As an example of research supporting this thesis, Danielson, Moffitt, Caspi and Silva (1998) found that nearly half of the participants in their sample who had been involved in an abusive relationship had a psychiatric disorder (the importance of which will be contested in subsequent sections). Beyond the assertion that battering is related to psychological disorders, research in this genre suggests much heterogeneity in the type of disorder that would cause interpersonal violence.

Personality theory researchers tend to agree that batterers all share common personality characteristics - high anxiety and low self-esteem for example (Walker, 1979/2000). Dutton (2004) proposed that interpersonal violence is caused by what essentially is an “intimacy problem” driven by personality pathologies that surface in relating to others with emotional over-sensitivity, hostility, and avoidance.

Three typologies of abusive males have also received much attention in the past decade (Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994). The first classification is borderline-dysphoric (BD), which describes abusive males as generally violent and antisocial. Borderline-dysphorics are typically hypersensitive and commit fairly high levels of violence on their partners. Their hypersensitivity leads them to interpret their partner’s behavior as proof of their suspicions. For example, a wife’s absence from home when he returns from work is interpreted as proof of infidelity. Generally Violent Antisocial (GVA) abusers exhibit antisocial and aggressive behavior toward their partners. They are characterized as lacking in empathy and being self-centered, viewing their partners as possessions to be owned. To a potential partner, they may appear to be confident, exciting, and charming. Finally, Family Only (FO) batterers are classified as non-pathological and are not very distinguishable from non-abusive males, but exhibit low self esteem and passive dependency. Like the name implies, Family Only batterers tend to confine their violence to their interpersonal relationships and their rate of violence is lower than Borderline-dysphoric or Generally Violent Antisocial types (Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994).

Victim Characteristics. In general, the central concern of victim-centered psychological research has been to understand unique pathologies and/or individual characteristics of abused women that would make them prone to such relationships or cause them to remain for a relatively long period of time. Kirkwood (1993) has suggested that one of the first perspectives of battering to arise from psychological studies focused on female masochism and psychological deviance on the part of the battered woman. Such explanations maintain that certain women possess a masochistic quality that increases their susceptibility to violence and causes them to become addicted to abusive relationships (Shainess, 1984). Likewise, another theory that was common during this time period in the psychological literature suggested that women consciously or unconsciously provoke violent episodes in order to release adrenaline, and then become addicted to abusive relationships because they “love too much” (Norwood, 1985).

Yet another popular theory to come out of the psychological literature on victim characteristics is the battered woman syndrome (Walker, 1979/2000). This notion suggests that battered women’s unique psychological processes make them more susceptible to learned helplessness, and they become trapped in abusive relationships because they essentially give up trying to escape as a result of the intermittent violence. Battered woman syndrome was a great step forward when it was originally conceptualized in the 1980’s because it created legal defenses for many battered women. Since then, however, it has been heavily critiqued for failing to fully account for a woman’s environment, for suggesting that battered women lack

agency, and for portraying battered women as possessing unique traits that require therapeutic intervention (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

Further criticism of this syndrome comes from the fact that it paints a definitional picture of a battered woman as helpless, sympathetic, quiet, meek, timid, and subordinate. This creates a image of an “ideal victim” and the consequences are severe for women who do not meet this false ideal. For example, women who have a history of substance use or abuse, who fight back (even if in self-defense), or who contradict traditional gender norms and stereotypes about abused women have a greater risk of being arrested after reporting abuse (Martin, 1997) and/or not be seen as a “credible victim” by law enforcement officials (Ferraro, 1989; Ferraro, 2006). Because of this syndrome, then, many abused women are not seen as culturally legitimate or deserving victims (Eigenberg, 2003). It seems that people are more comfortable with a theory of battering that portrays both the batterer and the battered as different or mentally ill in some way to a theory that suggests that victims and perpetrators are indeed “normal”.

More recently, psychologically based research on domestic violence has made a departure from the aforementioned models of pathology that directly and often blatantly engage in victim-blaming and attenuation of abuser accountability. Most notably, Goodman and Epstein (2008) have made large gains in examining intrapersonal and interactional components of battering from within a larger social context that takes structural power into account. They examine the general similarities among battered women related to social context, as well as the specific

needs of individual women (for example, the importance in individual agency, ethnic, cultural, and class background of individual women, and differential needs for community).

Still others have examined individual-level factors such as emotional well-being, relationship status and the way in which women end the relationship, and found that leaving does not necessarily lead to improvements in well-being for victims. In fact, women who leave their partners may be worse off than women who stay; the way in which the relationship ends seems to be more important than the fact that the relationship has indeed ended (Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2009). Finally, Goodman and Epstein (2008) underscore the need to combine an understanding of women's individual personal experiences with a consideration of how these experiences are rooted within complex social structures.

Others have examined individual women's coping strategies and the consequences of employing those strategies (Matheson, Skomorovsky, Fiocco & Anisman, 2007) and individual choices made to end the relationship (Bell, et al., 2009; Peled, Eisikovits, Enosh & Wintok, 2000), both from a lens that acknowledges these choices are made from within structural contexts that involve power. Goodman, Dutton, Weinfurt & Cook (2003) proposed two primary coping strategies that individual women often employ: placating tactics, which are intended to alter their abusive partner's behavior without challenging his sense of control; and resistance tactics, which are intended to challenge the abuser's sense of control and rebalance the power within the relationship. Refuting the notion that women's psychological

characteristics, personal relationship skills or other personal factors contribute to women's entrapment in abusive relationships, Peled, et al. (2000) encourage a view of women who stay in abusive relationships that focuses on notions of individual empowerment and personal choice.

Relationship Characteristics: Gender Symmetry. Yet another proposition to come from research examining relationship factors in interpersonal violence is the idea of gender symmetry and the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). Since the 1980's, the notion of gender symmetry, that women are just as violent as men in intimate relationships, has been highly contentious, yet highly publicized and accepted within society. The idea of gender symmetry first began with a national survey published by Strauss, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) that concluded wife-to-husband violence was slightly higher than husband-to-wife violence. This survey used the CTS, created by Strauss and his colleagues, which was originally designed to measure the prevalence of physical and verbal aggression in intimate partnerships. For example, the scale asks, "In the past twelve months, how many times have you [slapped, kicked, shoved, pushed, or bitten] your partner", followed by a likert scale of frequency.

The CTS measures individual and situational acts of violence, rather than inequitable power, control, dominance and fear within a relationship. Responding to the sentence, "I slapped my partner" or, "I hit my partner with something that could hurt," for instance, tells little about the motive behind the act or the context in which the act took place, including whether or not the act was combined with other fear-inducing behaviors or whether they were intended to induce fear. Strauss, Hamby,

Boney-McCoy, and Sugarman (1996) later redesigned the scale and the CTS-2 includes some questions that also measure non-verbal psychological aggression and some subscales that include injury and sexual coercion. However, both the CTS and the CTS-2 have statistically low inter-partner agreement, meaning the victim recounts an incident much differently than the perpetrator. Results are often tabled into “minor” and “major” incidents of physical and verbal aggression based on frequency and even the revised scale cannot account for the cumulative context in which battering takes place within a relationship.

By focusing on individual acts of violence and psychological abuse, the CTS and the CTS-2 also fail to account for the batterer’s interpretations, motivations, intentions, and the events that led up to the violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Goetting, 1999). For example, Dobash and Dobash (1992) provide the example of a slap, one act of violence measured by the scale. The word “slap” includes both a slap on your partner’s hand when they are reaching for something as well as a tooth-loosening slap intended to punish, humiliate, and terrorize. Using the CTS and CTS-2, both of these behaviors would be operationalized and measured equally, although they are qualitatively quite different.

Meso-Level Approaches

Symbolic Interaction Theory. Originally coined by Blumer (1969) to explain the ideas George Herbert Mead (1934), symbolic interaction is a social psychological perspective that specifically focuses on perspective, interaction, and meaning, with an emphasis on how individuals interpret others, themselves, and their situations. From

this theoretical approach, we act toward things (including ourselves) based on the meanings that we have developed for those things through interaction (Burke, 1980; Cast & Burke, 2002; Charon, 1992; Gecas & Burke, 1995; Hollander & Howard, 2000; Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1980). One's definition of the situation, therefore, gives meaning to that situation and the expectations of the self and others (Stets, 1988). Individuals continuously engage in the process of interpretation as they move from one situation to another; these situations have meaning only through people's interpretations and definitions of them. Subsequent actions are then determined by the meanings they create while interpreting situations.

Mead (1934) gives high importance to the self as a fluid and dynamic process that changes over time. He denotes the self as a reflexive process, wherein individuals see themselves as both a subject and an object. In the broadest sense, the self involves the process of observing and conversing with oneself, then responding to oneself as we imagine others would. The nature of the self is therefore fundamentally social in origin, and heavily impacted by our interactions with others (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). He suggested, for example, that an individual "becomes a self in so far as he can take the attitude of another and act towards himself as others act" (p. 171). One's self-concept, then, is rooted in his or her interaction interactions with others (Kinch, 1963).

Because the self is viewed as a social entity, many symbolic interactionists speak of it in terms of an internalization of something that was once, in essence, external (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2006). This process of internalization begins

with the social patterns of interaction, interpersonal communication for example. The social pattern of communication involves one person talking while the other listens, and then there is a role reversal, where the listener becomes the talker and responds to the other. This pattern repeats itself to form a conversation. This external pattern becomes internalized, such that we talk and listen to ourselves in much the same way that we talk and listen to other people. This interaction between our talker and listener, what Mead (1934) refers to as our “I” and “Me,” helps to form the basis of our self. This is a way in which we come to know ourselves and how we interact with ourselves.

An important element in the internalization of communication is that we may also internalize the manner in which others talk and relate to us, specifically those that we have much contact with and whose opinions matter. We may internalize another person’s perspective of us and then begin to talk to ourselves as that person does. For example, the patterns of communication between husband and wife may be internalized so that the wife then begins to talk and interact with herself as her husband would talk and interact with her. His voice and perception may become part of how she views herself (Cast, 2003). This ability of the self to take itself as an object, to interact with itself as others would interact with it, is a central element of the self from an interactionist perspective (Burke, 1980).

Kuhn and Blumer both advanced Mead’s original conception of the self. Kuhn (1964) interpreted Mead’s ideas to have some kind of static element. He explained the self in terms of the answer to the question, who am I? He suggested

that elements of this answer remained constant; that this element stayed the same across interactions as a static conception of the self. Blumer (1969), on the other hand, interpreted the fluidity of Mead's self literally, and suggested that it lacks a constant and is therefore completely a product of interaction. It is most likely some combination of the two; a very fluid product of social interaction, yet with some core to it that remains static across interaction. This idea is also supported by Zurcher's (1977) conception of a mutable self, which is viewed as a fluid process with a critical constant in its core.

Social Learning Theory. One of the most popular social psychological theories that have been used to understand domestic violence has been social learning theory (Jasinski, 2001). When used in the context of domestic violence, it is commonly referred to as intergenerational transmission of violence and has received much social exposure and support (O' Leary, 1999; Strauss et al., 1980). Based on the concept of modeling (Bandura, 1978), social learning theory suggests that men and women learn how to be violent through exposure to violence throughout their lives. During childhood, for example, if boys observe violence as an acceptable means of behavior and conflict resolution, they will imitate this learned violent behavior as an acceptable means of acting toward their partner (O'Leary, 1999). It may also account for men and women who experienced child abuse (Ehrensaft, Cohen, Brown, Smailes, Chen, & Johnson, 2003). Likewise for women, the theory suggests that when young girls are exposed to violence in the home as children, the violence becomes normalized and they begin to define intimacy in those terms.

Along with modeling, social learning theory encompasses the principles of classical and operant conditioning. Classical conditioning suggests that learning is the result of a subconscious association of a stimulus with a response (Pavlov, 1927). Operant conditioning (Skinner, 1953) suggests that behavior is strengthened and more apt to be exhibited in the future if it is reinforced. Applied to domestic violence then, operant conditioning would increase future incidents if violent behavior achieved the abuser's goals.

Social learning theory, however, fails to account for much of the non-violent aspects of battering (such as control, dominance, surveillance, or instilling fear). Moreover, it fails to account for adult perpetrators or victims who were not abused as children or have not witnessed abuse in their homes during childhood.

Exchange theory could also be used as a social psychological explanation for domestic violence. Exchange approaches basically suggest that individuals will strive to maximize rewards within a relationship (Jasinski, 2001). In terms of domestic violence, this would imply that abusive men use violence as a means of maximizing their rewards in order to get what they want with less effort than would otherwise be needed (Jasinski, 2001). Resource theory, which is included in the framework of exchange theory, suggests that violence serves as a powerful resource when other resources are lacking. However, these approaches also do not account for the myriad other characteristics of battering beyond violent attacks. Although they are certainly useful in explaining some aspects of an abusive dyad, they do not fully contextualize the lived experiences of battered women.

Macro-Level Approach

Feminist theories, found within a macro-level sociological approach, have generally maintained that gender inequality is a pivotal organizing feature within societies historically constructed as patriarchal, such as the United States. In the United States, men have historically been in a dominant position and women in a more subordinate position - legally, economically, educationally, and socially. Because of this legacy of inequitable gender status, our society remains rather complicit about violence against women, specifically about violence that occurs within the private sphere. Feminist researchers generally see violence against women as a result of the combination of a cultural ideology of male dominance and socio-political constraints that limit women's access to resources (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Ferraro, 2003).

According to this perspective, battering refers to the systematic and tactical abuse of one partner by another within a patriarchal culture, with the ultimate goal of creating a generalized climate of fear and total control over a woman's life (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Romito, 2008). Such a definition reflects the predominant feminist literature on battering that contends domestic violence is about the batterer *controlling* his partner (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2001; Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Dobash, Dobash, Cavanaugh & Lewis, 1998; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson & Daly, 1992; Goetting, 1999; Felson & Messner, 2000; Ferraro, 2003; 2006; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Moe, 2007; Kirkwood, 1993; Kimmel, 2002; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Stanko, 1988), and not about uncontrollable rage,

alcoholism, typical relationship spats, or other reasons that are commonly assumed to “cause” men to abuse.

Within this framework, this definition of domestic violence is more aptly called “woman battering” because of the attention paid to the control motive and the overt gendered context of such control. The notion of “battering” reflects a more comprehensive illustration of this type of violence against women than the typical conception of “domestic violence,” “spouse abuse,” or “interpersonal violence/abuse” would suggest. It also reflects the fact that battered women may be married or single, cohabitating or non-domestic.

Indeed, it is important to note that battering encompasses much more than physical attacks. Perpetrators use various other tactics of intimidation and control that are often intertwined with and reinforced by physical attacks. Felson and Messner (1998), for instance, found that various behaviors involving a control motive and/or threats of violence preceded about half of physically violent incidents. Likewise, Lloyd and Emery (2000) present four main ways that violence is linked to control in abusive relationships: domination of an argument or specific interaction, control over the woman or over the relationship as a whole, preventing the woman from leaving, and ownership and control over a woman’s body.

In a similar vein, Johnson and Ferraro (2000) suggest that abusers’ exertion of control over *their women* is a common occurrence in abusive relationships, and that there are several types of control or ways in which abusers utilize this technique (see also Kirkwood, 1993). Similar to what was proposed by Lloyd and Emery (2000),

these also range from very broad forms that attempt to establish or maintain control over one's partner and the relationship in general, to more specific instances of winning a particular argument. As illustrated by Ferraro (2006), the "power and control that violent men exert over their partners is reinforced by physical violence. However, it is the psychological abuse, isolation and surveillance that instill men as ubiquitous tormentors in women's minds" (p. 188).

When women resist their partner's efforts at control or psychological disparagement, they may be brutally punished or reminded of the violence that their partners are capable of enacting. Ferraro (2006), for instance, described how men's use of violence towards other people or women's pets reinforced their control over their partners. For example, she described how one abuser maintained control over his partner and ignited fear in her by beating several men in front of her and threatening to kill her, as well as torturing her pets while she was forced to watch, pleading with him to stop. Acts such as these serve as reminders to women of what can and will happen if they disobey or resist their partner's authority. These are also the acts that some women later recall as having the most impact on them and are the most influential in developing a sense that escape would be impossible.

Prior research indicates that psychological (Chang, 1996; Walker, 1984), emotional (Kirkwood, 1993), and interpersonal (Ferraro and Johnson, 1983) abuse are important factors to consider in terms of why women remain in unhealthy relationships. In a study by Baker (1997), for example, verbal and emotional abuse contributed to the reason why women stayed with their abusers much of the time.

Abusive men use various other tactics of intimidation and control in addition to verbal abuse. They often use mind games on their partners, such as making them believe that no one will believe their allegations of abuse, that they will lose custody of their children, that they are to blame for the abuse, or that they are not deserving of better treatment (Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Ferraro, 2006).

Accordingly, women become trapped in abusive relationships at many different levels: physical, emotional, social, psychological, and financial (Ferraro, 2006). This adds to the multitude of reasons that they so often ignore ‘social scripts’ (socially prescribed actions one is expected to take) to leave their abusers or exit the relationship in a timely manner (Baker, 1997). While battered women regularly show great strength and agency within their abusive relationships, oftentimes they are unable to leave because of structural and interpersonal barriers put in place by their abusers. Indeed, these barriers create a psychological and physical prison that may entrap women and subjugate their ability to leave. Many of the techniques utilized by perpetrators involve routine psychological terrorism that is reinforced with physical abuse or threats of abuse. It is the psychological terrorism that proves most effective for perpetrators incarceration of women. Abusers use many tactics to control and psychologically manipulate their partners, creating an atmosphere of limited mobility and freedom.

Feminist approaches to researching battering have been especially instrumental in addressing popularly held myths about domestic violence that come out of much of the research in psychology and in family violence literature. As

already mentioned, feminist understandings of domestic violence have largely delegitimized battered woman syndrome. Yet another fashionable claim to come out of psychological and family violence literature, and has also been discounted by feminist research, is the idea that intimate partner violence is actually symmetrical, and in some cases, women are *more* violent than men (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998; Dobash et al., 1998; Kimmel, 2002; Lloyd & Emery, 2000; Morse, 1995). These claims primarily come from two sources: surveys employing the conflict tactics scale (Strauss et al., 1980) and U.S. homicidal data (Dobash et al, 1992; 1998; Goetting, 1999).

With respect to the conflict tactics scale, feminist-based scholarship has readily identified numerous methodological problems with the scale itself, as well as how it has been used in much social research. As mentioned earlier, the conflict tactics scale focuses on individual acts and ignores the actor's motivations and intentions, dismisses the context in which the act occurred, fails to acknowledge the events that precipitated the act, the seriousness of injury, and the reason the act was committed (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998; Dutton, 2004; Dobash et al, 1992; Dobash et al, 1998; Goetting, 1999; Kimmel, 2002). In terms of homicidal data that supports gender symmetry in family violence, many studies overlook the contextual fact that spousal or partner killings perpetrated by wives/female partners are almost always acts of self defense against a perpetrator (Kimmel, 2002).

Symbolic Interaction and Battering

Despite the many advances feminist studies on domestic violence have made, the literature is still lacking in terms of understanding how abuse affects a woman's cognitive processes and decision making that does not find fault in the individual woman herself. I believe such an understanding can be reached by adapting and applying ideas from social psychological theory within the framework of a feminist analysis of battering. Such an approach would be helpful in elucidating battered women's experiences and behaviors during abusive relationships without blaming them or denying agency, for which prior theories have been critiqued (Allard, 2007; Dobash & Dobash, 1992). For this reason, a feminist social psychological approach is distinct from previous attempts to understand woman battering from a psychological perspective because battered women do not need to be defined as individually defective in this approach. They are conceptualized as experiencing the same psychological processes that any person experiences. It is in the circumstances and the context in which these processes take place where we find the defect. In other words, from a social psychological perspective, battered women's experiences can be understood by using the same theoretical approaches that are used to understand any person's life. A specific theory does not need to be developed or used to understand battered women in particular, or to examine what is inherently "wrong" with them. The same cognitive processes are at play, they are simply occurring in a different (and maladaptive) social context, and therefore have unique effects within those contexts.

In order to account for the societal-level structural forces in which these interpersonal interactions take place (for example, issues of power, dominance, and patriarchy), I utilize the previously discussed feminist driven perspective of domestic violence. This approach contends that violence is part of a system of coercion and control through which men maintain societal dominance over women and emphasizes that domestic violence is a result of a patriarchal social system (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo & Bograd, 1988). From this perspective, then, domestic violence is seen as a relationship defined by hierarchical power and attempts made to maintain control. Feminist-driven social psychological analyses of intimate partner violence that bridge the macro and the micro by taking into account interactional and intrapersonal relations, yet also account for power and social context can add much to the literature on this form of victimization.

An interactionist perspective can be helpful in understanding how battered women come to understand their abusive situations. Especially important, such an understanding may be essential for conceptualizing how battering affects women's sense of self. This becomes such a significant contribution because the self acts as a source of behavior regulation (Charon, 1992). A better conceptualization of battered women's behavior therefore necessitates an understanding of how the interaction within an abusive relationship modifies the self. This further requires a discussion of role taking and reflected appraisal, as these are the two processes through which symbolic interactionists conceptualize the self as a social product.

Role-Taking. Symbolic interactionists place high theoretical importance on role-taking, as it plays a crucial role in the development of the self (Turner, 1969). Role-taking is the backbone of interaction (Mead; 1934; Scully, 1988). It is the process of imaginatively adopting the perspectives of another during interaction (Turner, 1969). In general, it involves the process of being able to anticipate the expected behavior of another and to understand the world as they see it. When people “speak of ‘making sense’ of someone’s behavior or to understand its meaning, they are typically attempting to define the role of which the observed actions are a part” (Turner, p. 317). Sandstrom et. al (2006) further suggests,

Through taking the role of others, we learn to define and respond to ourselves in terms of social outlooks and standards... Self concepts, then, are fundamentally social products, consisting of the roles, perspectives, and identities we internalize through our social experience and interactions... (p. 97).

Accordingly, role-taking involves being able to anticipate the behavior of another individual, as well as being able to identify the other’s feelings.

Mead (1934) described role-taking as the most basic point of beginning for the self and insisted that social interaction (and society in general) would not be possible if we were not able to understand and anticipate the actions of others. For example, he stated that an individual must be able to,

...call out in himself the response his gesture calls out in the other, and then utilize this imagined response of the other for the control of his own further conduct. The ability to call out the same response in both self and other gives the content necessary for a community of meaning (p. xxi).

We become objects to ourselves (i.e., develop a self) through being able to see others' perspectives, hence the importance of role-taking in the development of the self.

This process may be essential to understanding battering, as Stets (1988) suggests that an inability to role take may contribute to conflict and violence. Role-taking can also be interpreted as empathic ability (Turner, 1956), because one will be able to more readily infer the other's feelings if they are able to take the other's role. If an abuser cannot take the role of the other, he will be less likely to feel empathy toward his partner or feel his partner's emotions. Scully (1988) tested this proposition with a sample of convicted rapists and found that men who did not define their behavior as rape had little role-taking ability. Many of them did not feel role-taking emotions, such as guilt, shame, remorse, or empathy – emotions that symbolic interactionists suggest control behavior. Similar role-taking conditions that allow rapists to not feel empathy towards their victims may also be relevant to understanding the lack of empathy in other forms of violence against women (Scully, 1988), such as in the case of battering.

Role-taking may also be central to battering because this process is related to power, which is a primary organizing feature of feminist theories of domestic violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Ferraro, 2006), and yet another reason why I bridge the two approaches in this dissertation. The general position of interactionists is that individuals in higher social status positions or those who possess more power have no need to understand the position of the other (Franks, 1985; Scully, 1988; Thomas, 1972). Specifically in oppressive situations (e.g., battering relationships),

role taking is asymmetrical (Franks, 1976; 1985; 1989; Schwalbe, 1988). In other words, power makes it unnecessary for a person to understand the position of the other in order to make his needs met; power does not need empathy.

This idea of the influence of power in role-taking has received empirical support. Thomas (1972) found that fathers in a traditional patriarchal family were less skilled at role-taking than mothers in the same family. Similarly, Thomas, Franks, and Calonico (1972) found that it was only important for the individual with less power to be able to apprehend the attitudes and anticipate the behavior of others. Finally, Franks (1985) argued that because of extreme power differentials, rapists do not need to role-take and can therefore inflict great humiliation on their victims without the aftermath of remorse. The inverse of this consequently suggests that individuals within the dyad who are put in the subordinate power position have a greater need to role-take in order to predict the future actions of the other person. The role-taking process then becomes the sole burden of only that person. For example, in Thomas's (1972) study of patriarchal families mentioned above, mothers became especially good at role-taking as a necessary tactic to keep the dyad intact because patriarchal fathers were not skilled at this task. Dramatic power differences within a dyad, therefore, greatly influence the role-taking process. I believe the structural aspect of power in domestic violence produces a similar account of role-taking ability, allowing batterers to be able to engage in controlling, degrading, and violent behavior with little remorse or understanding of the effect their actions have on their

partners and simultaneously causing battered women to become very adept at role-taking as a survival mechanism to predict their partner's behavior.

In trying to understand the perspective of another, role-taking may or may not include adopting the standpoint of that other; it may or may not be a reflexive process (Turner, 1956). The perspective of the other, then, may be understood in order to help facilitate the interaction by predicting the other's actions. However, it may just remain an object to that individual without becoming one's own point of view. Continued participation in asymmetrical role-taking, however, may be detrimental to the person with less power in the interaction if the views of the other are adopted as one's own.

Franks (1985) suggested that the less powerful person may use role-taking as a defensive strategy. Battered women, as briefly mentioned above, for example, may use this strategy of role-taking as a powerful survival technique in order to attempt to predict the actions and emotions of their partners. The critical issue to understand with this survival technique is how likely it will be that, in trying to understand the perspective of her abuser, a woman will adopt the standpoint of that person and begin to see herself in a similar light. In this dissertation, I examine the factors that may be at play in determining the extent to which women engage in role-taking as a survival technique and what factors are involved in adopting or rejecting the standpoint of the abuser. A better conceptualization of this process, which is really the reflected appraisal process, is necessary in order to understand the factors that make

individuals more or less receptive to internalizing the other's standpoint while role-taking.

Reflected and Self-Appraisal. The process of reflected appraisal can be seen as the consequence of adopting the standpoint of the other while role-taking. The other's standpoint then becomes part of one's self-appraisal and thusly, part of their self-concept (Burke & Asencio, 2007; Cook & Douglas, 1998). As mentioned earlier, reflected appraisal (what Cooley termed the "looking-glass self") is described as,

the imagination of our appearance to the other person, the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling- such as pride or mortification... The thing that moves us to pride or shame, [then], is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but in imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another mind (p. 152).

In other words, reflected appraisals pertain to what individuals think others think of their abilities and attributes (Bouchey & Harter, 2005), while self-appraisals refer to what the individual him or herself rate their own abilities and attributes (Bouchey & Harter, 2005; Hergovich, Sirsch & Felinger, 2002). Interactionists suggest that this process can be viewed as one of the ways in which we form the self (Ichiyama, 1993; Kinch, 1963). Results from research on the reflected appraisal process in adults, however, have been mixed. Several studies have found support for this process and suggested that reflected appraisal does influence the construction of self-concept (Felson, 1985; Gecas, 1982; McNulty & Swann, 1994; Quarentelli & Cooper, 1966; Rosenberg, 1973). However, Kenny and DePaulo (1993) concluded that the reflected

appraisal process is only salient during childhood, and adults are not receptive to this effect.

Other research has concluded that the reflected appraisal process is relevant in adults and does in fact occur over the course of a lifetime; however there are certain social contexts in which it is more salient, and some individuals may be more susceptible than others (Yeung & Martin, 2003). Reflected appraisal may therefore work differently in different settings (Felson, 1985; Franks, 1989; Turner, 1956). The contextual variables that have been proposed in this literature include: an ascendant status organization within a dyad (Cooley, 1902; Franks, 1989; Turner, 1956); a time in one's life that may make one particularly vulnerable to change (Yeung & Martin, 2003); structural and personal dependence by one person on resources provided by another (Franks, 1989; Turner, 1956); when one is less able to engage in efficacious action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983); and finally, lack of access to supportive others or alternative perspectives (Turner, 1956) or when one is relatively socially isolated (Reeder, Donogue & Biblarz, 1960).

In short, the reflected appraisal process may not be relevant for adults unless the above conditions are met, which the literature suggests rarely happens in most adults' lives. Considering what we know about battering, however, it seems that this is one social context in which all of these conditions are met. In terms of battering, the process of reflected appraisal could be qualified by three interpersonal conditions within the dyad that are related to the social context of battering itself: a) ascendancy

and status (e.g., power and dominance), b) weakening of self-efficacy, and c) social or psychological isolation.

Cooley (1902) originally talked about the importance of ascendancy– the suggestion that our self-concept is more heavily influenced by those who are ascendant (i.e., dominant) over us. More contemporary research has also found that this process is more salient for those in a subordinate status (Gecas and Schwalbe, 1983) and that individuals in this subordinate role may be more sensitive to another dyad member – one that holds more power in the relationship (Snodgrass, 1985). As previously mentioned, the predominant feminist theory of battering is that domestic violence is about the batterer controlling his partner and exerting power *over* her (Dobash, Dobash, Cavanaugh & Lewis, 1998; Ferraro, 2006), thus creating ascendancy and a disparate interpersonal status relation. Power and dominance within battered women’s relationships is indeed often established in very overt, unmistakable ways. Perpetrators often reinforce their power and control through physical violence or threats of physical violence. Such descriptions have been substantiated by previous findings on the use of physical violence in abusive relationships (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Ferraro, 2006; Goetting, 1999; Hirsch, 2001). Accordingly, the power that is maintained within battering relationships may strengthen the reflected appraisal process for battered women, such that they may experience marked changes in their self-concept and self-feelings (i.e., self-esteem).

The second condition that may strengthen the reflected appraisal process in adults refers to a weakening of self-efficacy. It has been suggested that the reflected

appraisal process is but one essential element in self-concept formation (Cooley, 1902; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). Efficacious action – the extent to which individuals see themselves as being causal agents of their actions - is also important (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). A sense of efficacy plays an important role in self-concept and especially for efficacy-based self-esteem, which is an integral part of self-concept. This idea that there is more than one process at play in the development and maintenance of the self-concept is also why contemporary symbolic interaction scholars suggest the reflected appraisal process is weakened in adults (see Kenny and DePaulo, 1993).

Gecas and Schwalbe (1983), however, contend that individuals must have the opportunity in which to engage in such efficacious action, and there are certain social structural conditions that either enable or constrain these opportunities. I suggest that the social context of battering creates this constrained social structural condition. While this does not mean that battered women do not have agency or act in an agentic manner (quite the opposite is actually true), the nature of an abusive relationship often decreases battered women's *opportunities* to engage in efficacious action. In turn, this may strengthen the reflected appraisal process and weaken an efficacy-based process in the maintenance of self-concept.

For battered women then, self-concept may be highly susceptible to changes due to this reflected appraisal process simply because their opportunities for efficacy are attenuated. Behaviors that limit a woman's freedom may effectively reduce her beliefs that she is the causal agent of her actions, without actually reducing her

agency. In other words, abusive behaviors may reduce feelings of efficacy. For example, being successful in seeking help or ending an abusive relationship may be the ultimate form of efficacious action an abused woman could engage in. In many instances, however, when women attempt to leave, their efforts are impeded (Ferraro, 2006; Goetting, 1999; Moe, 2007). Batterers use many tactics to control and manipulate their partners' physical freedom, and this seems to occur most often when women are attempting to assert their autonomy.

Finally, social isolation has also been found to be an important contextual factor in reflected appraisal being an active process for adults. Reeder, Donogue, and Biblarz (1960) originally reported that adults living in rural areas are more isolated and therefore have a smaller reference group from which to derive their self-conceptions. They concluded that relatively isolated individuals are more susceptible to the reflected appraisal process throughout adulthood. Isolation from friends and family is also a somewhat typical part of a battering relationship (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Ferraro, 2006).

Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, Bethea, and Davis (2002) similarly found that disclosure of abuse to supportive others functioned as a protective role in reducing the risk of adopting the standpoint of the abuser. Unfortunately, many battered women may find themselves cut-off from these supportive outlets, either by their abusers or because of self-isolation. There are many reasons for which a battered woman may self-isolate, pull away from friends and family or not disclose abuse (Coker et. al., 2002; Rose, Campbell, & Kub, 2000; Smith, Tessari, Earp,

1995). Some of these reasons include the fear of stigmatization, because they see the violence as a private matter within the relationship, because they feel high levels of shame and embarrassment, or because they have depleted the emotional resources of outside supporters if the abuse is chronic. Batterers often cut women off from their friends and family, incite a feeling of psychological remoteness, or even geographically isolate them from others. Therefore, because the self is a social product and involves interaction with significant others, battered women may be particularly susceptible to the appraisals of their abuser and may experience changes in their self-concept as a result of this.

Relationship between the Self and Body. Feminist literature has suggested that within patriarchal societies, there is a hierarchical mind/body split within the cultural construction of gender, whereby the mind is often delegated to men and the body to women (Olsen, 1996). Women have thus been socially constructed to be more “embodied” than men and have a different relationship with their bodies than men may have with their bodies. To some extent then, within our society, women are defined by and learn how to negotiate the world through their bodies (Davis, 1996; Wesely, Allison, & Schneider, 2000). It is not simply a superficial vehicle for social interaction then, as it may be for men, but a powerful source from which she comes to understand who she is based on how others interact with and define her body. As Olsen (1996) suggests, in our society, “if men *have* bodies, women *are* bodies” (p. 212, italics added). A woman’s relationship to her body may therefore be especially

important with respect to her self-concept and may have unique implications for how battering may affect a woman's self-concept.

This notion of female embodiment becomes especially problematic for battered women due to the fact that such abuse often takes the dual form of violations to the mind *and* to the body. Because of the nature of battering, a great deal of tension arises between "female subject as embodied agent and the female body as object" (Davis, p.427). Batterers often use a victim's body as a vehicle to exercise their control and domination over the victim's self. The abusers' attacks on the body can be interpreted as an intention to fragment and assault a woman's sense of self. Wesely et al. (2000), for instance, suggest that "the systematic breakdown of the survivor's female identity, rooted in her body, [begins] with the abuser's techniques of power and control" over that body (p. 215).

One consequence of this assault on self-concept through abuse is bodily dissociation. As several researchers of violence against women have suggested, victims of various forms of abuse often dissociate from their bodies as a survival technique to preserve their identity (Lempert, 1994; Wesely et al., 2000). Hochschild (1983), for example, uses the term "emotion work" to describe how victims of abuse often psychologically distance themselves from violent experiences. They create a split between body and mind (Hochschild, 1983; Lempert, 1994; Wesely et. al., 2000) to protect against a violation of their self-concept, even as they have reduced control over the violation of their bodies (see Lempert, 1994 for empirical support of his notion in women's narratives).

As Wesely et al. (2000) have suggested, “extreme separation from the body, ‘dissociation,’ is used to describe a victim’s experience of ‘watching’ the abuse from another location, literally stepping outside her own body and observing” the abusive act (p. 212). Similar accounts can also be found in literature on domestic violence, rape and child abuse. This separation is common among victims of various abusive traumas and it is here that the self-concept may become problematic. Because the self is understood in reference to a woman’s relationship with her body, an alienation from the body may contribute to an alienation from the self (Lempert, 1994; Wesely et. al., 2000).

Furthermore, since the female body carries a unique meaning for women in our society, repeated physical, sexual, or emotional attacks of that body may have measurable effects on the socially constructed self-concept. From this perspective, if a woman’s self-concept is at least somewhat related to the relationship she has with her body and the meanings she creates interacting with and inhabiting that body, it seems plausible that these attacks may have unique effects on how she defines herself. That is, the self-concept is likely to undergo marked changes due to repeated attacks and women may come to have a different relationship with their bodies or at least attach different meanings to them. Indeed, changes in various aspects of self-concept have been shown with other victims of abuse, such as rape victims (Wesely et al., 2000), and efforts such as movement therapy (yoga, hiking, dance) have proven useful in healing the relationship between body and self-concept. An in-depth examination into the possible relationship between physical and emotional attacks on

a woman's body and resulting effects on her self-concept is therefore necessary to better understand women's experiences with battering. In order to examine this and other possible consequences of battering, a meso- and macro-level analysis using symbolic interaction and feminist theories of domestic violence is used in this dissertation.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I reviewed a few of the more well-known theories of domestic violence that have helped to shape both popular and academic understandings of this social problem. These include some of the more influential psychological theories, the idea of gender symmetry, and an introduction to symbolic interaction theory. I spent the majority of this chapter discussing the theoretical framework that I used in this research, a feminist symbolic interactionist approach to conceptualizing battering. In the next chapter, I detail my methodology and the entire research process. Each methodological choice that I made, from the inception to the completion of this project, was guided by the epistemological and theoretical framework discussed in chapters two and three.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Within this project I employ a feminist methodology, which refers to one's theory on how research should proceed, through the process of conception through eventual dissemination. There are a number of distinguishing features that set feminist research apart from other avenues of scientific inquiry. Such methodologies represent a fundamental shift away from traditional research in terms of where research begins, as well as the purpose of the research itself (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Nielson, 1990). Beginning with the fact that conventional methods of science have historically excluded and/or neglected women as capable of knowledge, feminist approaches have created new pathways towards learning more about the world in which women live, as individuals and cultures, and therefore about society as a whole. This begins with acknowledging that much traditional positivistic social research has been accomplished from an androcentric viewpoint (DeVault, 1999; Duran, 1991). This has largely resulted in women, women's issues, and women's needs being ignored by the scientific community (Reinhartz, 1992) and has created a perverse and partial understanding of reality (Alcoff & Potter, 1993). Additionally, feminist research typically has a strong pragmatic angle. As Mies (1982) has pointed out, research for the sake of research alone is not sufficient from this perspective; changing the system by addressing the status quo must be the starting point for any feminist project.

In this chapter on methodology, I will address in the most transparent way possible my entire research process, from inception to write-up. I am mindful of purposefully including as much detail as possible, so as to achieve the standards expected when one employs a feminist methodological approach to social research. Namely, I discuss the potential effect of my own presence within the research project, how my privileged status may have affected the process of knowledge production, and the presumed importance of value neutrality. I then discuss the assumptions of my epistemological orientation and how this led me to choose multiple in-depth interviews as a method for data collection. Next, I provide a detailed account of every step of the research process, including site selection, sampling technique, specific research and interviewing procedures, handling and transcription of data, and the data analysis method and technique I have used. Finally, I end this chapter with a discussion of ethical concerns that are specific to a feminist methodology.

Positioning of Self

In spite of claims that the creation of knowledge is a value-free endeavor, this process has never been void of politics; social reality is not static and social inquiry does not occur within a vacuum (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). It is necessary to accept the fact that there is no absolute elsewhere (Harding, 1987); there is no such thing as “dislocated truth” (Code, 1993) that exists outside of culture and politics. Likewise, there are no vantage points anyone could find that are not themselves constructed within power relations. Considering the fact that the researcher always inevitably affects the research process simply by their presence within the project and

interpretations of the data (McCorkel & Myers, 2003), feminist methodologies posit a challenge to the alleged value neutrality of positivistic science (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). By allowing oneself to be reflexive and positioning oneself within the research process, the presence of self within the project may actually be seen as a resource rather than a contaminant and the scholar is in fact achieving a more robust form of objectivity (Harding, 1987).

Accordingly, in the face of the myth of neutrality, I concur that the logical solution is to accept the fact that we cannot remove science from the social or cultural world from which it emerges, and instead use it to our advantage to enhance objectivity and increase the quality of our research. Hence, objectivity is achieved by examining ones own position within the research, including any biases or assumptions that may be part of the study, such as their race, class, culture, assumptions, or beliefs (Harding, 1987). The feminist researcher becomes transparent and offers him/herself up as data (Harding, 1993). This implies that the researcher is made visible and examined from the same critical lens as the data in question (DeVault, 1999; Harding, 1987).

This accomplishment of strong objectivity through subjective reflexivity is one of the things that distinguish the methodology I have chosen from others. Likewise, the concept of situated knowledge (Haraway, 2001) is closely related to reflexivity in that it acknowledges that the way in which we analyze data is constructed from our own life experiences. It also acknowledges that all knowledge

is partial, and that the processes of knowledge production should be made transparent so that individuals can see the context in which the analysis exists.

Recognizing that all research is political, I also acknowledge that this research project is political. I openly acknowledge that, as an activist, advocate, and researcher on the issue of domestic violence, this research is in fact value-laden (Longino, 1990). The ultimate objective of using a feminist approach to such research is to expose the workings of a patriarchal system that allows for violence against women in order to overcome oppression and exploitation and expose and address inequality, all from within the framework of cultural, social, and historical factors have shaped women's lives (Kirsch, 1999; Naples, 2003). I believe that battering is still so prevalent today because it is a logical consequence of a patriarchal social structure that perpetuates and condones masculine control and violence, particularly when it is enacted against women. Norms of male dominance are widely accepted within our society, and in fact, are seen as a "natural" part of masculinity. Such an essentialist societal viewpoint is reflected in the historical support of male dominance by powerful social institutions and reinforced by legal structures.

Positioning myself within this research project is one way to begin to reach the goal of producing reliable and valid results. Reflexivity refers to the process of taking a critical look inward, of seeing self as data (Hesse-Biber, 2007). This is what makes my re-telling of women's narratives valid, empirical, and legitimate. In this way, the boundaries between the everyday and the 'scientific' worlds (Smith, 1987) within this research can be dissolved as I acknowledge my own unique position and

political struggles. In keeping with a feminist approach to research (Bograd, 1988; DeVault, 1999; Harding, 1987; Maynard, 1994), then, it is important that I critically place myself within this particular project and examine how my knowledge, and perhaps my ignorance, has shaped my interactions with participants and the research process as a whole. My own social position and identity of a white, middle-class, highly educated female, my epistemological and theoretical framework, my views on domestic violence, my training and involvement in the domestic violence community, and my personal experience with intimate abuse have shaped my research agenda and my research process (DeVault, 1999; Kirsch, 1999).

Epistemological Framework

One's epistemological stance is even more encompassing than methodology. Generally, this refers to issues of knowledge at large, such as which persons can be producers of scientific knowledge ("knowers"), who can legitimate this knowledge, and how this is done. For example, can battered women be "knowers," can they produce legitimate knowledge about their lives? Can they give the scientific world useful and valid insight in the experience of battering as experts within their own experiences?

Feminist Standpoint Framework. I approach this research from the auspices of a feminist standpoint framework (Harding, 1987; Hartstock, 1987; Smith, 1974) which privileges battered women as legitimate narrators of their life stories and legitimate creators of knowledge. As privileged knowers (Mies, 1982; Reinhartz, 1992; Bat-Ami, 1993), I recognize participants' agency and I regard these participants

as the expert and authority of their own experience. In this way, I see them as legitimate and credible producers of knowledge, whose lived realities are the starting point from which knowledge is built. Such a view is central to epistemic privilege as well, which holds that marginalized populations are better positioned to understand their own lives and experiences than are more socially dominant groups (Bat-Ami, 1993; Hill-Collins, 1991; Smith, 1987)

Dorothy Smith (1987) illustrates the problem of knowledge created from a history and society that includes only the standpoints of men, and only those located within certain privileged positions in the social system. There are tangible consequences for the exclusion of women's experiences from the creation of history, culture, and science. These affect not only women themselves, but also knowledge production as a whole, as a great resource is left untapped. Women often exist in a cultural, historical, and scientific world that excludes and silences them in many forms of traditional research. In events where they are included it is often only partially, as their experiences may be marginalized or considered negligible. This exclusion has permeated the social system through the many structural avenues of education, employment, family, daily conversational exchanges, and even scientific theory in regards to domestic violence.

A standpoint framework is very complimentary to my use of symbolic interaction theory because of both approaches' emphasis on understanding a person or phenomenon via individualized experiences. As already stated, symbolic interactionists hold that the role of individual perspective is very powerful in our

interpretations of reality (Charon, 1992). Shibutani (1987), for example, explained, “in studying the behavior of human beings it is necessary to get ‘inside’ the actor, to see the situation from his point of view” (p. 257). It is therefore necessary to value each participant's reality equally and see each as an expert of her own world and her own narrative. In beginning from a feminist standpoint framework, my intentions are to allow battered women themselves to teach us about the phenomenon of domestic violence; for the building blocks of scientific knowledge to begin with their lived realities.

Phenomenological Framework. A second framework that I have used for this research is that of phenomenology. This approach is concerned with understanding a given phenomenon from the person’s own frame of reference (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975) and posits that individual’s experiences make sense to them, prior to any interpretations or theorizing (Creswell, 2003). Phenomenology seeks to achieve a deep understanding of the meanings in everyday experiences and how those meanings shape people’s interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Husserl, 1960; Moustakas, 1999). It involves entering the participant’s field of perception in order to see how they experience, live, and display the phenomenon of interest. Phenomenology is therefore a way of trying to understand how individuals create meaning from their experiences.

From a phenomenological standpoint, human behavior is viewed as a product of how people interpret their realities, how they view their world (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Creswell, 1998). The phenomenological perspective has influenced the way in

which I chose to study the phenomenon of battering. Considering the fact that I am concerned with how battered women make meaning within their abusive relationships, I am interested in capturing this process of meaning-making or interpretation through analysis of their narratives. As suggested by Creswell (2003) and Psathas (1973), I have attempted to understand the essential underlying and invariant structure or “essence” of how women create meaning and understand the various forms of violence in their lives (Moustakas, 1999). In analyzing their personal narratives, I have attempted to enter into the field of their perception, to examine the constituents of their daily life, and try and understand how they experience and understand domestic violence.

In order to do this, it is essential that I “bracket out” my own preconceived notions or interpretations of participants’ experiences so that I may be able to engage the narratives in a similar manner as they have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). This idea of “bracketing,” or suspending judgment about what has occurred, is what Husserl referred to as *epoche*. *Epoche* involves setting aside all prejudgments in order to focus exclusively on, in this case, how women themselves make sense of their own relationships and their own lived realities.

In conjunction with beginning from battered women’s standpoint, I will be utilizing this epistemological framework because I believe that battered women are capable of creating an accurate understanding of how one experiences an abusive relationship. In this way, phenomenology and a feminist standpoint framework are logically constituted as analogous, as both represent an epistemological perspective

privileging women as knowers. A phenomenological approach is also very complimentary to a model of symbolic interaction. Phenomenologists and symbolic interactionists both view what people do as a product of how they interpret their world. For the phenomenologist, the goal is to capture this process of interpretation and see things from the other person's point of view, to understand how individuals develop meaning within social interaction. Indeed, Psathas (1973) went so far as to describe symbolic interaction theory as phenomenological in spirit, because the interactionist attempts to describe aspects of the social world as they are understood and known to those who experience it. The goals of both are one in the same. Because I privilege my participants' understanding of those experiences and see them as capable of producing valid knowledge, I see my theoretical framework and epistemological orientation as invariably related and complimentary.

Method

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as a multi-method procedure that involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the subject matter. They suggest that qualitative researchers, "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 2). Qualitative research in general is time consuming and rigorous, yet it allows the researcher to uniquely discover and explore social phenomena that are a richly detailed and textured (Babbie, 1998). This often produces a depth of information that would otherwise be unavailable through quantitative methods alone. In qualitative research, the aim is to "engage in research that probes for deeper

understanding rather than examining surface features” (Johnson, 1997, p. 4). For that reason, it is often used for studying populations or subject matter that is particularly sensitive. Hence, I have chosen to take a qualitative approach to this particular exploration of battered women’s lived experiences.

Within this qualitative framework, I used the method of multiple, semi-structured in-depth interviews. Using an in-depth approach to interviewing has allowed me to inquire into participants’ stories on a deeper level and has helped me to understand their attitudes and feelings about their experiences beyond a simple documentation of the events. It has also allowed the participants to share their experiences in their own words and provide as much or as little detail as they chose. I also chose this method because it afforded the participants a great deal of agency and voice (DeVault, 1999). They were able to choose whether or not they wanted to talk with me, what they wanted to say and how they wished to express it, as well as what to leave out.

I believe this multiple interviewing technique also enhanced the likelihood that I was able to build strong rapport with the participants and allowed them to discuss further or elaborate on parts of their story if they so chose (Reinhartz, 1992). In addition to developing a deeper level of trust, this method also allowed me to share my initial notes that I took during and after individual interviews with participants and to invite dialogue about what I was finding in their narratives. Moreover, multiple interviews have the potential to give more accurate information than one-shot interviews because I was able to ask questions that didn’t come up during the

initial meeting, was able to follow up on specific topics, and more importantly, allowed me to obtain corrective feedback when necessary (Laslet & Rapaport, 1975; Reinhartz, 1992).

My ultimate goal was to gain insight into the private, recessed world of the participants; to allow access to a particular group of marginalized voices (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Using multiple interviews is methodologically appropriate for this research specifically because of the private and intimate nature of my inquiry. The subject matter that was discussed required women to share their stories on a very deep level (often visiting painful and very personal memories) and more than the typical hour-long interview was needed for this level of introspection. As suggested by Reinhartz (1992), “interviewing offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than the words of the researcher. This asset is particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women’s ideas altogether or having men speak for women” (p. 19).

This technique also encouraged a more collaborative approach to the research project (Laslet & Rapaport, 1975) because I shared my hand-written interview notes regarding my thoughts about the content of the previous interview with participants at our second meeting and invited their comments. This collaboration fit well with my feminist epistemology of viewing participants as experts of domestic violence; encouraging corrective feedback on my interpretations of their narratives during the second interview fostered this notion of collaboration.

I also chose this particular method in order to understand the phenomenon of interest because it fits well, both with my epistemological orientations and my theoretical model. Coming from both a phenomenological and feminist framework, I am interested in understanding the phenomenon of battering as it is experienced and voiced by individual women (Creswell, 2003; DeVault, 1999). Given that phenomenology suggests that situations make sense to individuals before interpretation, and symbolic interaction theory suggests that individuals act in relation to how they define a given situation, I believe the use of interviews was a logical method in understanding how battered women perceive their realities and act the way they do while in abusive relationships. As Psathas (1973) attests, “methodologically, the implication of the symbolic interactionist perspective is that the actor’s view of action, objects, and society has to be studied seriously. The situation must be seen as the actor sees it, the meanings of objects and acts must be determined in terms of the actor’s meanings, and the organization of a course of action must be understood as the actor organizes it” (p. 6). Accordingly, I was focused on ascertaining what these women were experiencing, how they interpreted those experiences, and how they structured their lived reality and daily existence around these interpretations. This attempt was best approximated by the use of multi-stage in-depth interviewing.

Research Process

Site Selection and Sampling Procedure. I chose to conduct these interviews in four rural counties located in the Midwest. Battered women living in rural areas face unique challenges and barriers that have been relatively under-represented in the

battering literature (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2009). Interviews were conducted with women that were currently being served by an agency called, “Lakewood Shelter” (pseudonym), a domestic violence and homeless shelter for women and children. This shelter can house up to 22 women and their children and offers a variety of resources and services. In addition, Lakewood also serves non-shelter women living in the surrounding four counties. Staff travel to each county on a specific day of the week and meet with women that are seeking services or referrals. Due to the fact that the shelter serves four geographically different counties and women in different stages of leaving, I had originally hoped that there would be a chance my sample may have been more diversified than had I chose a shelter that only serves women in one area. As it turned out, the four counties were fairly demographically homogenous, at least in terms of race and class.

The sampling procedure I used was both a purposeful and convenience technique. As is suggested by a phenomenological approach, the researcher typically collects data from individuals that have experience with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2003). I intentionally selected a population of women to study that allowed me to answer my research questions, as I knew ahead of time that my sampling population had likely experienced battering at some point in their lives (due to the nature of the services offered by the shelter). Accordingly, I invited women receiving services from Lakewood to participate in interviews. Participation was voluntary and not subject to any specific inclusion or exclusion criteria beyond having experienced domestic violence, being a shelter client during the time of data

collection (either residential or non-residential), and being at least 18 years of age.

Although my conception of battering is generally a gendered one, as discussed earlier, at this point in the research I did not limit my sample to battering that occurred in heterosexual dyads alone, as phenomenology would suggest that battering would employ an invariant underlying structure that would be similar for all participants.

Although Patton (2002) suggests there are no hard and fast rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry, for phenomenological research, Creswell (2003) recommends conducting interviews with very small samples, often ranging from N=5 to N=25. Similarly, the multiple-interview technique generally requires researchers to interview fewer people in total, but spend more time with each person in order to know a lot about a relatively small number of individuals (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007). My original goal was to interview 10-15 battered women, however, I planned on including cases until I felt that sufficient depth (i.e. saturation) had been achieved to adequately describe the phenomenon of women's experiences with battering (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007).

I invited the women being served by Lakewood to participate in two separate interviews, approximately 3-7 days apart and approximately 1-3 hours each in duration. I chose to allow 3-7 days in between interviews for both methodological and pragmatic reasons. Methodologically speaking, I was looking for the cognitive processes that are involved in the way these battered women construct meaning in their experiences. Accordingly, it was necessary for them to have some time after our initial meeting for reflection on their experiences and how they felt about those

experiences. Because the conversations we had during the initial interview would have been salient in the days following the interview, I supposed that they may have continued to reflect on that interaction (and indeed, all participants informed me that they had spent some time thinking about our first interview prior to our next meeting). During reflection is often when individuals engage in meaning-making and comprehension, so I believe this time would be critical to the analysis. The time in between interviews, however, could not be so long that the interview began to lose saliency. Pragmatically speaking, the time in between also could not be so long that participants would have dropped out at a high rate because they were no longer seeking the services of the shelter (and in fact, one participant did leave the shelter before our second interview). Moreover, clients receiving services from the shelter, yet not residing at the shelter, generally meet with staff on a weekly basis. For those reasons I decided to allow no less than three days and no more than seven days in between interviews in order to allow for reflection, yet retain participation.

Sample. The participants in this study were fairly diverse in many ways, but also very similar in others. Three women were between the ages of 21 and 25, two were between the ages of 26 and 30, three between 31 and 35, one between 36 and 40, three between 41 and 45, and two were over 50 years of age (please refer to Appendix A, “Profile of Participants”). Four of the fourteen women had attained a general equivalency diploma, two had graduated high school, seven had finished some college, and one held an advanced degree. In terms of socio-economic status,

seven could be classified as working class and seven as middle class (ranging from lower- to upper-middle class). Finally, four of the women were disabled.

The sample also showed heterogeneity in terms of the level of services that women were receiving from the agency and where the interviews took place. Nine of the women were receiving residential services and were recruited from the shelter. The interviews for all nine of these women took place at the shelter. The remaining five were receiving various levels of non-residential services and were recruited from an “Alternatives to Abuse” program, where they had been court mandated after being arrested for domestic violenceⁱⁱⁱ. Of the five non-residential clients, I interviewed one woman on a bench in a county park, one outside a community center, and two inside their private homes. I interviewed the fifth woman at a county park for her first interview and in her private home for the second interview.

Women differed in other ways as well. As mentioned previously, five of the fourteen came to the agency because they were court-mandated to take classes after being arrested for domestic violence, four were seeking shelter due to a primary presentation of homelessness (although in each case the homelessness was related to domestic violence). Finally, five arrived at the shelter because they were actively fleeing an abusive relationship. Of the fourteen women, seven of them have had multiple stays at a domestic violence shelter.

Women also differed in terms of sexual orientation and relationship status. Eleven identified as heterosexual, two as bisexual, and one as bi-curious. In terms of relationship status, four women were still involved with their abusive partners at the

time of the interviews and ten were either separated, divorced, or working on getting a divorce. Eight had experienced multiple abusive partners over their lifetime.

While the sample was diverse in some ways, it was homogenous in terms of motherhood, race/ethnicity, and forms of abuse that women experienced. All but one of the participants had children, and the majority of these children were minors (age 6 months to 15 years old). The sample was also very homogenous in terms of race and ethnic make-up, with thirteen women identifying as White and one identifying as White/Native American.

Each woman in the sample had similarly horrendous accounts of abuse, which were physical, emotional, sexual, and financial. All but one woman reported that they had been physically assaulted; eleven had been both emotionally and sexually assaulted. Twelve mentioned accounts of financial and/or property abuse. Finally, twelve women reported that they had experienced isolation and had lived in fear.

Specific Research Procedures

Gaining Access. In order to gain access to Lakewood Shelter, I originally sent a letter to the staff coordinator, whom I was referred to by a Victim's Advocate working in the office of the Prosecuting Attorney in a neighboring town. This letter described who I was, what I was working on and why, and asked to consult with her regarding possible participation opportunities (see Appendix C: "Letter to Shelter"). After the staff supervisor expressed interest in my project, I spoke with her on the phone and then set up a meeting at Lakewood Shelter to discuss the project parameters in more detail. At this meeting, I met with the staff supervisor as well as

the shelter director and negotiated access to the site. During this meeting, the supervisor and director suggested several changes to my research protocol based on their experience at the shelter.

These suggestions included a having me present my research to the entire staff at an in-service that was scheduled for the following month in order to get them interested and excited about the project, removing the payment for participation (discussed later), and finally, they suggested that I become a volunteer advocate at the shelter so as to gain trust among residents. At the in-service, the supervisor and director encouraged shelter staff to support my research and help with participant recruitment. During this meeting, the shelter staff actually designed the participant recruitment procedures that I ended up using for the data collection portion of the project. I graciously accepted their advice and suggestions, and in the spirit of collaboration that often coincides with feminist methodologies, I amended my protocol to reflect their constructive ideas.

As a volunteer, I spent anywhere from fifteen to thirty hours per week at the shelter, usually spread out over three or four days and lasting from May to September of 2010. For the first month and a half, I had some difficulty setting up interviews and did not have anything scheduled during this time. During this period, I primarily acted as a shelter volunteer and volunteer advocate. The activities I performed varied widely and included such things as meeting with clients and helping them with various tasks; watching resident's children for them while they were attending group, working, or at an appointment; cleaning the shelter and sanitizing the toy room;

running a children's craft group and helping residents with cooking meals; helping staff and advocates with various tasks, answering phones and taking crisis calls, attending staff meetings and in-services; landscaping the shelter and helping with outside maintenance; and spending time with shelter advocates talking in the office, learning various aspects about the domestic violence community in the area and talking about domestic violence in general.

I had less contact with non-residential clients, but would offer to assist them with anything I could. I met with one non-residential client on two occasions, for example, to help her with legal paperwork and help her draft a letter to the court fighting a custody battle with her son. As I approached the second month volunteering at the shelter, the clients were becoming more comfortable with my presence there and I began to schedule interviews. Once I scheduled the first interview, I noticed that all of a sudden my time was mostly consumed with data collection, as more and more women approached me with interest in the study. As this occurred, I found myself spending more time in actual interviews with participants collecting data and less time engaged in the previously mentioned volunteer activities.

Participant Recruitment. I recruited women who were currently living in the shelter in a variety of ways, all of which were suggested by shelter staff during the initial "brainstorming" meeting when they assisted in the design of my research protocol. I posted a flyer on the bulletin board that was hung in a well-traveled area of the shelter and is used to post information for clients about community services

and events (See Appendix D: “Letter to Participants”). This letter outlined the purpose of the study, the type of involvement that I requested of participants, how to contact me to schedule an interview, and guarantees of confidentiality. Below the letter I hung a sign indicating the hours that I would be at the shelter that week, as well as space for them to anonymously write in a time and date that fit their schedule so I could make myself available when it was convenient for them. I also hung the same two pieces of information outside the staff advocate office, near the communal phone, and left copies of the letter of invitation on the multi-purpose table in the dining room area of the shelter.

With the help of the director and staff coordinator, shelter staff also assisted in recruitment by disseminating my letter of invitation to new clients and also discussed it at regularly held meetings within the facility. They publicly supported me, my presence there, and my research agenda in order to help clients become comfortable with the idea of participation (although, for confidentiality reasons, staff were unaware of which clients actually participated). Finally, I would regularly attend weekly meetings involving all staff and residents, where they would allot time for me to discuss my purpose there and again invite clients to talk with me to learn more about my research. Residents who were interested in participation would approach me randomly at the shelter while I was volunteering, express interest, and we would set up an interview. I had originally proposed to offer participants modest monetary compensation for their time. While collaborating with staff, however, the staff supervisor and director felt that any monetary compensation would be coercive, given

the financial resources of their clientele. No compensation was therefore offered, although, as addressed earlier, I attempted to do small favors for clients as a way of offering some kind of compensation for their time.

As mentioned previously, the shelter also serves women in the surrounding four counties who are not residing in the shelter. One service they offer is weekly classes held at various places within the community, such as community mental health buildings and a meeting room in the local community center. I recruited non-residential participants in two ways. I began by giving the advocates who ran these groups my letter of invitation. They reported back to me that the women in their groups expressed interest, yet no one contacted me for an interview or for more information. Eventually, two advocates invited me to accompany them to these other counties to sit in on their classes, one on “Healthy Relationships,” the other a court-mandated “Alternative to Abuse Program” (ATAP).

I ended up attending these classes twice with them, once to introduce myself and discuss my research project, then again to schedule interviews. In each case, the advocates gave me about ten minutes in the beginning of the class in which I explained my project and why I was doing it. I basically explained that I was a researcher who was volunteering at Lakewood Shelter and also a domestic violence advocate and volunteer crisis counselor. I explained my personal motive behind wanting to document their stories, empathized with their situations, and described the basic research procedures. After class had ended, I hung around the group and simply made myself available for conversation or questions. Of these two classes, I was only

successful in recruiting participants from the ATAP class. I returned to this class on two other occasions with the advocate who ran the group, sitting in on the class and again making myself available to clients after group had ended. Regardless of my method of recruitment, participation was always voluntary and always confidential, such that staff did not know which clients chose to participate and which declined.

Interviews. The interviewing procedure was the same for residential and non-residential clients, besides the location where the interview took place. Interviews for residential clients were scheduled and conducted in a confidential meeting room at the shelter, whereas interviews for non-residential clients were scheduled and took place within the confidential meeting room the advocate had set up for me within a community building. For all interviews, upon first entering the room I began by reiterating very generally why I was there and what I wished to learn from them. I then spent a small amount of time giving each an overview of how the interview process typically works and loosely what they could expect to happen. I then gave them the digital recorder, explained how to operate it, explained its purpose and invited them to hold on to the recorder during the interview so they could stop it at any time. Once they appeared to be comfortable with the recorder, I informed them that they could turn it on whenever they were ready.

Next, I went over the informed consent document with each participant (See Appendix E: “Statement of Informed Consent”). This consent document ensures the participant’s safety to the best of my ability throughout the entire research process and also explains that I will be using their confidential data for my dissertation,

related research reports, academic publication and presentation, and community education. I then asked each participant if they had any questions or confusion regarding the purpose of the project or the informed consent document. If no questions or concerns were voiced, I then obtained either verbal or written consent, whichever they were more comfortable giving. All participants willingly gave consent to continue with the interview, so none of the sample was lost during this process.

At this point, I described with greater specificity my overall purpose of the study and discussed in detail how the interview process works. I then explained to each woman that she has the right to decline to answer any question that I ask, may change the subject at any time, and has the freedom to end the interview and leave at any time if she so chooses, regardless of how long the interview had lasted. I then ensured confidentiality by explaining that I will be the only person that has access to the raw data (their audio or transcribed narrative) and whatever they choose to share with me will be kept under the strictest of confidentiality at all times. Next, I explained the use of pseudonyms, encouraged participants to choose their own, and briefly discussed my dual role as a volunteer at the shelter and also a researcher. Primarily, I made sure they understood that what they discussed with me while in the role of researcher would not be shared with other shelter staff and advocates and how this differentiates from what they discuss with me during other times under my role as a volunteer. Finally, I explained to each that, although I will uphold confidentially

under most conditions, I am duty-bound to report a situation in which participants disclose the intent to hurt themselves or their children.

Data collection took place in multiple stages. In total, I conducted three separate interviews with four of the participants, two interviews each with nine of the participants, and only one interview with two of the participants. The topics discussed during these interviews included general background and demographic information, conceptual questions about women's past and current involvement in abusive relationships, how they interpret, understand and make meaning within these relationships, and in general, how they feel about these interactions or how they have changed the way they feel about and relate to themselves and others (See Appendix B: "Interview Schedule). We focused on slightly different topics in each interview. The first meeting tended towards descriptive telling of the events and *what* happened. During subsequent interviews, we typically concentrated on more psychological and interpretive aspects of these events, how participants felt, how events changed the way they felt about themselves or about their bodies, or how it may have changed the way they now interact with people and significant others, for example. Towards the end of the last interview, I exercised a little more control over the directionality of the conversation in order to ask a few specific questions regarding social and public policy and prevention of domestic violence.

I had originally intended for interviews to be semi-structured, and had a rather extensive list of questions to ask and possible probes for each questions. In reality, the interviews ended up being much more unstructured than I had intended, and I

amended my interview schedule to reflect only a brief outline of what I would like to ask. As is the case with most semi- to un-structured interviews, no two interviews were alike. The primary objective of this technique was to honor each participant's unique narrative and allow them freedom in what they chose to tell, as well as the manner in which it was told. Thus, while all major questions were ultimately addressed in each interview, many were not directly asked, and the order in which they were covered varied depending on when and how each participant spoke about specific aspects of her life (Hesse-Biber 2007; Kvale 1996).

Interviews were unstructured in the sense that I had some specific ideas of what I wanted to know, but I kept my questioning to a minimum and tended to "go with the flow" of the interview (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Although I had an overall goal in mind, I took the lead from each participant and let each primarily guide the interview in the direction they wished it to take. In several instances, the only question I asked (other than demographic and specific policy questions) was the initial, "What brought you to seek out services from Lakewood Shelter?" Following that question, many participants inadvertently answered everything I wished to know just in telling their story, without me having to ask individual questions.

While participants were telling their stories, I often used verbal and nonverbal prompts to encourage them to continue on a particular topic, indicate that I would like to hear more about something, or ask for clarification or feedback. For example, I used silent probes, where I stayed mute but gestured with a nod; echo probes, where I paraphrased back what I had just heard and encouraged them to continue; "uh-huh"

probes, encouraging the participant to continue along the same line; and leading probes, where I was more specific about the nature of the probe (Hesse-Biber, 2007). For leading probes I may have said, for example, “When this happened to you, did it make you feel differently about your body? If so, in what sense?”

During each of the interviews, I engaged in empathetic listening by repeating feeling statements back to participants using the same words they used to express their emotion. I also employed a commonly used counseling technique of mimicking the participants’ body language, speech patterns, choice of words, and to some extent, dialectical choices. For example, I when I would repeat back what they had just said in order to ensure understanding, I would use any slang, abbreviations, and even curse words they used (e.g., Participant: “He made me feel like shit.” My response: “What do you mean he make you feel like shit?” Finally, I tried to listen for phrases in women’s speech that typically seem inconsequential or “fillers,” but may in fact signify that they were trying to make sure I really understood what they were trying to illustrate. For example, I tried to understand the intention behind frequently used phrases such as “you know” or “know what I mean” and see these as a request for understanding. When women used these speech fillers, I tried to take a moment and see if I really did understand what they were saying, and if not, to say so and ask for elaboration or clarity.

I also took field notes during the interviews. The interviews were tape recorded because they were open-ended and the direction they took was heavily guided by the participants. Recording them allowed me to focus my attention on the

direction and flow of the conversation and areas that need to be probed for further explanation (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006) rather than trying to frantically write down everything that was said. This technique also allowed me to keep a hand-written record of “dialogue accessories” (DeVault, 1999), which included other forms of data such as voice intonation, eye contact, gesturing, facial expression and body language, and outward signs of emotion that were important data to aid in my analysis, such as nervous laughter or crying (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

Following with my goal of transparency within the research process, I also recorded my own feelings and emotional state before, during, and after each interview so that I could later analyze the narratives within the context of my own presence (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Reinhartz, 1992). Because I recorded each interview, I was able to maintain eye contact and continue engaging in the conversation while taking quick notes on a legal pad of the dialogue accessories mentioned above. I also made quick notes regarding my own feeling states and emotive displays during the interview. During some of the interviews, for example, we may both have been laughing, and on a few occasions there were also moments when I became emotive while a participant was crying. I also used this note-taking technique to make quick notes of “markers” (Hesse-Biber, 2007) - important pieces of information that a participant may have offered while discussing something else, but that I may have wanted to come back to at a later time in the interview. Finally, immediately following each interview and after the participant had left the room, I took a few moments to elaborate on my hand-written notes in order to capture as much of the

non-recorded interview as possible while it is still fresh in my mind, and also digitally recorded my audio feedback and initial impressions before leaving the interview room.

Each interview was, to varying degrees, often painful, shame-ridden, and highly emotional. Despite having little hands-on training in qualitative interviewing techniques, I have been trained in crisis counseling and crisis management, and often engaged in these techniques during interviews. Most importantly, before ending each interview, I made every attempt to bring the conversation back around to benign or positive topics to ensure that participants were not leaving the interview room in an emotionally distraught state of mind. This was frequently the only time that I was controlling the direction of the interview. I also provided women with a referral list of local resources that may have been able to provide additional counseling or other needed help. I placed the referral list inside of an empty chapstick tube so that participants could keep them in their bag or pocket and they would not be detected. Each referral list included the national help lines for domestic and sexual assault, as well as the local help lines that were specific to each participant's area of temporary or permanent residence. Due to the fact many of these women were either in hiding or still living with their abusers, I have decided to not publish these help lines in this dissertation, so their locations remain confidential. Because all of the women interviewed were also clients of Lakewood, they also had access to all of the support and referrals offered by the shelter and their individual advocate.

It is important to note here that while every interview was very personal and all participants exhibited a range of emotions (sadness, guilt, shame, intense anger, and even joyfulness), no woman ended an interview early. Even in one specific case, where a participant was intensely upset and could barely talk, she persevered despite the fact that I suggested we stop the process in an effort to protect her from further emotional upset. In this specific case and others, women chose to continue because they felt the need to tell their story and hoped that, by engaging in this project, they may help someone else in a similar position or may help raise public awareness about domestic violence.

Field Notes. In addition to the field notes described above that I took during each actual interview, I also took extensive written and audio field notes each day I volunteered at the shelter. As part as the goal of becoming transparent and acknowledging my own privileged status within the research project, I also wanted to gauge how I may have altered participant recruitment or data collection with my mere presence. Therefore, in addition to notes I collected during the interview, I also collected data on myself on other days, such as physical and emotional states or reactions before, during, or after interacting with shelter clients in a volunteer capacity (Stanley & Wise, 1990).

I spent considerable time documenting my personal state each day before entering the shelter, while on lunch break, and again on my way home. I tried to focus on my emotional state, how I was feeling about the research process, how that particular day was going, my initial thoughts about an interview, and things that were

going on in my life at the time that I may have been bringing with me to the data collection site. I also documented my thoughts, fears, and expectations about how the research process was going at any given point. In addition to these “self-check” forms of field notes, I also documented in detail exactly what I did at the shelter that day, who I interacted with, where I went, how I engaged with clients and staff and descriptions of participants on that given day. Finally, any time I had an idea for a potential follow-up study, or something academically interesting would arise during this process that was beyond the scope of this particular project, I would take extensive written notes or take a moment to make an audio recording for future directions of this line of research.

Data Transcription. In order to transcribe women’s audio narratives, I utilized Sony Voice Editor Software and a transcription pedal so that I could slow down the rate of speech to facilitate typing. I decided to transcribe audio interviews myself in order to minimize errors, gain a “closeness” to the data, and maintain as much authenticity in participants’ voices as possible. When data collection was complete I had close to fifty hours of audio recordings, which took almost two hundred hours to fully transcribe. For each participant, I transcribed their narratives as soon as possible following each interview in order to preserve their original content and character (DeVault, 1999). I tried to preserve as much as the original content of the interview as possible, since these transcripts became the raw data for analysis.

I transcribed each narrative verbatim and did not correct for errors, grammatical inaccuracies, or pauses. The technique I used was an attempt to preserve

some of the “messiness” of everyday speech (DeVault, 1999). For example, I inserted ungrammatically correct commas to indicate a hesitation or a pause while in the middle of a sentence. I included all “um’s,” “ah’s”, and “you know’s” as were present in the original audio recording. I also included all of the false starts and self-corrections that are common to informal speech. Finally, I used the audio recordings along with my hand written field notes to indicate emotive displays, such as laughter, nervous outbursts, choking up, or outright sobbing. At times I felt worried that some readers may be distracted or even outright prejudiced by the preservation of this “messiness” that may reveal a certain background, lack of education or class bias among some of the participants (Blauner, 1987). I felt compelled, however, to represent women’s voices with as much authenticity and accuracy as possible. During this transcription process, I also included my own speech (also in its raw, uncorrected format) in order to place myself within the meaning-making process of interviewing, and not present myself as a disembodied data-gatherer.

Data Analysis Method and Procedure. A symbolic interactionist perspective and phenomenological approach were used to guide me in the analysis of the data. These approaches are very complementary to an epistemological perspective privileging women as knowers. Furthermore, phenomenologists and symbolic interactionists both view what people do as a product of how they interpret their world. As discussed at length in the conceptual framework, symbolic interaction is particularly relevant when examining issues such as individuals’ interpretations of self, others, and situations. Consequently, at later phases in the analysis procedure, I

used an investigative process to continuously move back and forth between the data and symbolic interactionist principles to better interpret the dynamics of woman battering (Stets, 1988).

Phenomenology was also helpful, as this project focuses on the specific phenomena of battering and seeks to understand the meaning of experiences for individuals. This approach to analysis seeks to achieve a deep understanding of the meanings in everyday experiences and how those meanings shape people's interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Husserl, 1960; Moustakas, 1999). It involves entering the participant's field of perception in order to see how they experience, live, and display the phenomenon of interest. Phenomenology is therefore a way of trying to understand how participants create meaning in their experiences, the goal being to capture this process of interpretation and see things from the other person's point of view.

In order to capture the individual's interpretation before introducing my own analysis and/or understanding narratives from a theoretical perspective, I engaged in bracketing. Social scientists must be as true as possible to the individual experiences that are being studied. To facilitate this, I attempted to suspend my presuppositions about what my participants were describing, to bracket out my own assumptions and beliefs about the phenomenon at hand (Psathas, 1973). This involved taking the role of the disinterested observer and trying to adopt the point of reference of the other, to see the world through their eyes and interpretations of events. This process is what Husserl described as eliciting a break from the "natural attitude" (Psathas, 1973), and

what Moustakas (1999) termed, the epoche stage. Granted, I did not deny the existence of the world of domestic violence as I know it (as this is likely to be unrealistic in practice), I simply tried to set aside my own preconceived notions of what I believe I ‘know’ about these women’s experiences and adopted a stance of the naïve student, trying to learn as much as was possible from the perspectives of my teachers- the women who produced the narrative data.

After bracketing out my own presuppositions and taking on the role of the naïve student, I started the actual process of data analysis, which followed the general inductive data analysis format of coding, categorizing, and thematizing. During each phase of analysis (which were often not mutually exclusive phases), I also kept field notes documenting my own experience and inner states. I first began by reading through each narrative, very slowly and word-by-word, making notes or codes beside each line. These marks included flags indicating the topic of discussion, summary of events, or the passage of time in one’s story. I viewed each aspect of women’s narratives with equal value at this point, and tried not to consider one part or story as being more important or relevant than another. During this stage, I also included preliminary codes, consisting of participant’s own words and also theoretically based constructs. At this stage, all markings and codes were made with a pencil notation system of underlining and making notes in the margin of the page. As I was engaged in this phase, I also jotted down notes on a separate piece of paper indicating preliminary ideas about a possible connection to my theoretical framework or a

passage that I had “gut feeling” about, but had not yet fully grasped the invariant structure or underlying essence of that what the participant was communicating.

Second, I engaged in what phenomenologists would refer to as horizontilization of data (Moustakas, 1999), where I listed out all of my original codes (again, each having equal value at this point). Next, I clustered these themes into common categories, or primary level themes, and then went back through each transcript, again looking for emerging themes. These clusters of themes were then used to develop a story that constituted the textural description (*what* stories were bring told) of women’s experiences. I then went through these textural descriptions and documented the structural description of *how* women had chosen to tell their stories. Here, I paid attention to *how* the phenomenon was experienced, namely, how women chose to position themselves within their narratives (for example, use of the personal “I” pronoun versus the more general and subject-less form of “you” to speak about their experiences), and whether their emotional descriptors were expressed in the past or present tense.

While I was horizontilizing the data in this manner, I was also looking for the essence of each primary level coding, and collapsing these into secondary level themes. Once I had a rather exhaustive list of secondary level themes, I once again read through each transcript, this time also color-coding the text according to themes. Once the process of color-coding was finished, I used a Word document to cut and past each part of the transcript that seemed to fit under the respective theme. At this point, no category was really mutually exclusive, as many areas fit under several

themes and there was considerable overlap (most likely due to the interconnected nature of battering). From here I kept horizontilizing, collapsing, and renaming until I felt confident that I had acknowledged the invariant structure of each coding theme and identified the underlying essence of what women were saying and how they were constructing meaning (Creswell, 2003).

As I clustered these themes I continually consulted the literature, my other transcripts, and my colleagues within the domestic violence community (DeVault, 1999). I moved back and forth between the data (including revisiting the raw audio tapes), my analysis, and the literature as I kept revising my codes and looking for additional emergent themes (DeVault, 1999). As I did this, I looked both for commonalities within and between women's narratives as well as differences among and within those narratives. In searching for these negative cases (Hesse-Biber, 2007), I purposely sought out any case or experience which did not fit cohesively into my emergent themes or which had the potential to cause problems for my research questions. In other words, I looked for experiences that did not seem to fit with my interpretations or that were counter to my theoretical propositions.

The data are presented verbatim and the natural occurring features of women's speech have been preserved, such as hesitation, false starts, and grammatical errors (DeVault, 1999). In trying to maintain the structural importance of how women told their stories, I refrained from "cleaning up" their speech as much as possible, and presented my analysis as data had been transcribed. Punctuation has been placed within the excerpts to encourage them to be read as they were spoken.

For example, I often use grammatically inappropriately placed commas to encourage the reader to pause slightly when reading, as the speaker paused slightly when speaking. Sentences are also often broken up by periods to reflect the way the speech was heard. I tried to see aspects of women's speech that, on the surface, appear to be incidental or taken-for-granted (such as the frequent use of "you know"), as a signifier that ordinary vocabulary is simply lacking when it comes to really sharing what an experience was like for them. I also viewed these moments as a request for me to engage in joint construction of meaning. As DeVault (1999) suggested, such instances seems to mean something like, "OK this next bit is going to be a little tricky, I can't say it quite right, but help me out a little: meet me halfway and you'll understand what I mean" (p. 69). Rather than disregard this inarticulate speech as meaningless, I paid special attention to these as areas of great meaning construction in a symbolic interactionist sense of trying to trying to understand one's reality.

Axiological Assumptions. A distinguishing feature of feminist methodologies is the unique axiological assumptions that are pertinent to this form of research. The manner in which one handles issues of power is forefront in this discussion. I attempted to minimize power differentials and create the most non-exploitive research situation possible (discussed in detail below under "Research Process"). In traditional research, the goal of this relationship is to maintain distance between oneself and one's "subjects". I was specifically concerned with hierarchical distance, as this is one way a researcher maintains a position of power within traditional science. As with other feminist methodologies, I struggled for the opposite. I struggled to

minimize the hierarchical distance between myself and the women who participated in this study.

There are additional ethical concerns that are unique to feminist driven methodologies. The first concern involves the issue of transparency. As mentioned earlier, I felt an obligation in my efforts of transparency to make my goals and motives for research clear and to represent the community I study as accurately as possible. To do this, I needed to define my ethical guidelines, and to continue to seek critical feedback from colleagues and from the participants themselves throughout the research process (Kirsch, 1999). Equally important in collaborative efforts is affording participants the opportunity to review the initial interpretations in order to increase the accuracy of their representation. Fortunately, I did not run into any major discrepancies between my interpretation of what a given participant was saying, and what she intended to say. Any minor discrepancies were cleared up in the second interview when I asked for clarity or elaboration.

Disclosure can also become an ethical issue. I struggled with issues of power, representation, reciprocity, and collaboration. I strived for openness and engagement in the research process (Reinhartz, 1992), and as a result, I sometimes struggled with issues of self-disclosure and reciprocity. To what extent does one disclose personal information or answer questions asked of them by their participants? Traditional research processes that value distance and traditional forms of “objectivity” encourage researchers to avoid such contact with their subjects. Along with other feminist researchers, however, I agree with Oakley (1981) with respect to the idea

that there is no “intimacy without reciprocity.” She contends that personal involvement is the way that people come to know each other. During her research with pregnant women, for example, Oakley (1981) answered participants’ direct questions about their pregnancy and also offered information about her own experiences to assure them that their fears were not uncommon. During my own interviewing process, I also often engaged in personal discussion with participants, answering their questions openly and honestly, even if they were about my personal understanding of domestic violence or impetus for this study.

The ethical struggle to help participants is also a potential problem (Reinhartz, 1992), especially when one has worked so hard at establishing a personal, “true” relationship with a relatively powerless woman whose problematic is a symptom of a patriarchal system to which both parties are subject. Part of the difficulty that may arise is that the friendship that often develops between researcher and participant has the potential to become more exploitive than it would in the traditional detached techniques of other approaches. This is exacerbated by the fact that pragmatism and a desire to help the interviewee, or otherwise alleviate forms of oppression, are part and parcel of feminist research. As Gorelick (1991) suggests, “the relationship is exploitive when a researcher studies people for the benefit of the researcher’s career or the sponsors of research, without regard to any positive or negative effect on the people studied” (p. 460). Exploitation may occur in other hidden ways as well, due to the fact that the participant may come to develop a lot of trust in the researcher. This can introduce an ethical dilemma when the process of data collection is complete

because friendships may have been developed over the course of the project.

Deciding whether or not to maintain relationships with participants after completion of the study may be an important element in the quest to reduce exploitation and power differences.

I engaged in constant monitoring of my relationships with participants. I felt that I was developing friendships with some of the participants and had to be very conscious that I was not using this relationship as an influencing agent in their decision to participate. In fact, I ended up not interviewing one woman in particular because I felt that she may have finally agreed to the interview precisely because we had developed a friendship, and she I feared that she felt obligated to help me out in the form of participation. I often did favors for participants as well and have maintained on-going relationships with four of the fifteen women whom I interviewed. I believe that these types of issues are perhaps unique to researchers who employ this type of methodology, as traditional research techniques would not have allowed for such personal interaction with participants.

Another potential ethical dilemma that distinguishes feminist research methodologies from other types of research, and also involves power, issues deals with the often collaborative nature of such research. I regularly asked participants and shelter advocates to provide feedback on my initial feelings and interpretations to ensure that what I was 'seeing' did indeed represent women's experiences. Even though I attempted to reduce a hierarchical relationship, I was still aware of my interpretive power; the fact that I am nevertheless the one that ultimately decides

which data to include, which to leave out, and how data will be coded and analyzed (DeVault, 1999).

Potential Risk to Participants. This research was approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at Western Michigan University (See Appendix I: “HSIRB Approval Letter”). Because of the nature of the research topic, participants were at risk of emotional pain while revisiting many of these memories. I had originally planned that if I detected an unreasonable amount of emotional distress or anxiety, I would end the interview, provide debriefing as necessary and then dismiss the participant from the study. If and when this occurred, I would then remind the participant of the referral list (see Appendix F: “List of Referrals”) so that they could receive the appropriate help. As already stated, although the majority of participants did show signs of emotional distress during their interviews (many in the form of outright sobbing), all of them chose to continue the interview.

Participants that were not currently residing at the shelter were at particular risk because some of them were still living with their batterers. I accounted for this additional risk by taking extra safety precautions. First, participants had the option of providing verbal rather than written informed consent to help increase their safety within the project (and to ensure that their name was in no way connected to this project). Additionally, only myself and the director of the research review board had access to the actual name and location of my data collection site. Although I stated earlier (see “Data Analysis Method & Procedure”) that I refrained from cleaning up women’s speech and purposely preserved women’s words as much as possible, there

were a few instances where I had to change minor details of one's story in order to protect participant safety, especially if a participant had a particularly public job or highly publicized story. For example, I may have changed the sex of a child, the year an event occurred, or the occupation of an abuser in order to maintain confidentiality. All names and places have also been altered throughout this dissertation. Finally, all electronic copies of the transcripts, data, thematic listings, final reports, and anything related to this project were stored on my personal laptop, which is protected by both encrypted password and requires scanning my fingerprint in order to be operable. Back-up copies of everything on my computer were stored securely using an encryption program that is set-up by the security division of *Thinkfish Design, Inc.*

Finally, participants were also at risk because they were sharing what was ostensibly the most personal of information with me. Although I am not a licensed therapist, I do have training in crisis counseling and intervention. I worked in community mental health for five years and also volunteer within the domestic violence community, and so I have had much experience with people in crisis. I have had extensive training on empathetic listening and identifying and interacting with individuals in crisis. Through these experiences, I have learned to engage in active listening and have learned to identify language and voice intonation that suggests distress. During interviews I was careful to monitor participants for signs of extreme distress and regularly engaged in crisis counseling while interviewing. Although I knew that participating in this research would undoubtedly cause some level of

discomfort, I made every attempt possible to reduce the amount of risk participants experienced.

Chapter Summary

The primary objective of this chapter was to delineate the procedures and specific steps I took in carrying out this research project. The depth and specificity with which I have explained these procedures has been done in the hopes to communicate the degree of significance and value I place on my epistemological and methodological decisions. Likewise, the detail in the research procedures and data analysis techniques was included as an attempt to reach my goal of transparency.

In this chapter, I have therefore addressed my entire research procedure, from the time I began requesting permission to enter the research field, to how I have chosen to present the data in this dissertation. I began by addressing the potential effect of my own presence within the project as well as my personal privileged status and the somewhat polemical idea of value neutrality. I then discussed my epistemological orientation and how that led me to the choices I made with regards to method employed. Next, I described in detail each step of the research process, including site selection and sampling technique, demographical descriptions of my sample, how interviews were constructed and carried out, the process of data transcription and analysis, and finally, my choices in data presentation. I ended this chapter with a discussion of ethical concerns and potential risks of participants. The details in this chapter, then, lay the foundation for the presentation of the next several chapters that will present the results and discussion of this study.

CHAPTER IV

CONTEXTUALIZING THE EXTERNAL: CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

This chapter illustrates women's experiences with battering within their intimate relationships. While every woman's experience is unique and noteworthy in many ways, overall experiences of battering are not unique to individual women. Rather, they are influenced by larger societal themes of patriarchy and gendered power and control (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo & Bograd, 1988). Although battering is often understood as a private event, it is part of a larger social discourse on power relations and gender role assumptions.

Contextualizing the dynamics of domestic violence and forms of abuse women endured is important to this dissertation because it provides the framework for understanding the conditions under which the self-concept became a reflexive process or the women in this study (discussed in chapter six). In chapter two I proposed that the variables leading to reflected appraisal identified in the literature could be qualified by three characteristics of domestic violence. In this chapter, I discuss two of the three variables: the shared characteristics of power and control, and physical and psychological isolation.

Although there are many forms of abuse batterers use to maintain power and control, physical abuse was the most commonly reported form of abuse in this study, with thirteen of the fourteen participants reporting various degrees of physical

violence. This was followed by mental/emotional abuse, sexual abuse, isolation, control through threats and intimidation, and financial/property abuse. Despite the fact that three of the women identified as bisexual/bi-curious and reported having been involved in relationships with other women in the past, they reported their abusers had been male^{iv}. Consequently, all of the excerpts below describe male-on-female abuse.

Although there were no significant differences in experiences with abuse identified in terms of number of abusive partners, educational attainment, experience of motherhood, or any other descriptive factor of the sample, disparities were found between women of different social classes. Although their descriptions and experiences of abuse were similar, the middle-class women in the sample reported that their partners used their social standing as an added tool for battering (for example, the abuser coercing the children to live with him because of the material items he could provide for them or women having a more difficult time leaving everything behind to live in a domestic violence shelter). Racial and/or ethnic differences in experiences with abuse could not be discerned from this sample, as thirteen of the fourteen participants identified as White (which is not surprising, considering the racially homogenous demographics of the geographic area). One woman identified as White/Native American, but did not indicate that this impacted her particular experiences with abuse or help-seeking.

Power and Control

As indicated above, participants in this study endured many forms of abuse, including physical, mental/emotional, sexual, isolation, financial/property, various tactics of manipulation and control (including manipulation of children, the police, and other systems), as well as instilling fear through threats and intimidation.

Battering, however, is better understood as an overall means to create and maintain power and control. Within this framework, these various forms of abuse are simply tools that abusers use to gain control over their partners (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Stark, 1994). Other tools that are commonly seen in abusive relationships include withholding resources (such as transportation or medication), abuse of pets, and manipulation of the criminal justice system, protective services, or other traditional help-providing systems. Regardless of the combination used, each of these tools also allowed women's abusers to maintain their ascendant status in the relationship, creating the interpersonal context for a reflexive self-concept.

Although women's descriptions of abuse are presented here in separate subsections, it should be noted that this presentation is really for organizational purposes. Such separations of "types" of abuse do not accurately represent women's experiences, which are not characterized by separate acts, and therefore should not be conceptualized in that manner. When telling the story, however, women often separated the acts into physical, emotional, or sexual, but indicated that on most occasions, these tools for abuse occurred together. Once incident, for example, may

include acts of physical violence, verbal abuse, emotional manipulation, control, or threatening behaviors. Consider the following excerpt, for example, that encompasses many forms of abuse into singular abusive episode:

He went off, I was sittin on the couch, he dumped me, off on the floor, came over and started kicking me, calling me a “pathetic slut, whore.” He knew it bothered me going to bed with him, not being married. He knew that. He was kicking me in the stomach, calling all these names, the dog tried to get on top of me, wouldn’t bite him, but the dog tried. Then he threw me over by the door and the fire place, kicking me there with his boots on, drug me outside to where all the uh, where he cuts wood and bring it in, threw me on the slab out there, started kicking me. He took that piece of chicken he had wrapped up, started hitting me with that. “You pathetic bitch!” He’s got a, a hill like this <motions a steep incline>, and it goes down to his garage. At one point he stops and says, “Do you notice that I shoveled for you?” <She quotes him in a mockingly sweet voice>. (DeeDee)

DeeDee’s story represents a typical abusive incident for many battered woman, and is certainly typical of the experiences of the women in this study. It is intertwined with physical violence, verbal assaults, and emotional abuse and manipulation.

Nonetheless, for ease of organization and because the women often delineated different forms of abuse in their story-telling, I have presented them as separate in this chapter.

Physical Violence. Thirteen of the fourteen women reported being physically abused by their boyfriends or husbands. Power and control within the relationship was reinforced through physical violence, a finding that has been substantiated in previous findings on the role of violence in abusive relationships (Dobash & Dobash, 1992/1998; Ferraro, 2006; Goetting, 1999; Hirsch, 2001). The excerpts presented here are representative of what many of the women in the sample expressed, which

were often brutal and fairly spontaneous. As such, they illustrate the prominent power imbalance in abusive relationships:

I don't know how it happened. It kind of knocked me unconscious. I don't exactly know, <pause> I do remember his fist coming at my face and then I was out. So when I came to, there was blood all over the house. I don't know how that happened. I was crouched in a corner when the ambulance got there and, and they took me to the hospital and then things went from there to, to here. (Rose)

I end up my nose was broke. I had fractured -- he had fractured my nose in two different places. He fractured my jaw. Two black eyes. Another time I was making lunch, and he wanted to have eggs so I was making him eggs and bacon. And you know how the juice would come off the eggs sometimes? Well, his eggs weren't right so he threw the whole fucking pan of grease on me. It burnt my whole fricken face. (Amy)

Similarly, Arizona's story below is also typical of the other women in that, although she did not sustain severe injuries from this incident, she was clearly terrorized and fearful. It is also fairly typical in that she reported that she screamed for her daughter to wake up because she knew that would stop the attack.

He pushed me, he hid the phones, he sat on me. Um, that type of stuff. And then he barricaded me in the bedroom, and I don't do well in like, close circumstances. And so you know I tried to use whatever I could to get out, and I eventually you know, I screamed for my daughter. Cuz I knew once she woke up he would stop, like, abusing me. So um, she woke up, she came running, and then he made us lay in bed, all together, and I remember holding her and laying there in bed next to him thinking, "oh my god, I could have been killed".

Several other women indicated that they would wake their children up during the attack because they knew their partners would not continue to abuse them in front of the children.

At one point in their interviews, Deborah and Kay both indicated that their husbands were *not* physically abusive when I directly asked them. However, later in the interview, they told the following stories of brutal injuries sustained from their husbands. It isn't entirely clear whether they actually did not define their partner's behaviors as physically abusive or did not want to admit to me that they had been physically abused.

I had cracked ribs. Broken foot, uh, dislocated shoulder, um, I had cuts, a lot of cuts on me, um, I'm trying to think. Oh, I had a head injury, um, I think that was about it. But I was bleeding, the head injury was what got me, I was bleeding from my arms and I was bleeding from my head. And I couldn't breathe cuz when he broke my rib it, um, punctured my lung. So my lung collapsed, and um, yeah it was bad. But, yeah that was once and then the other time, he threw me through a window. And I got all cut up. But that was the only time he hit me in my face was that second time I went to the hospital. (Deborah)

After telling this particular story, Deborah then said, "I guess there was physical abuse, if that's what you'd call it. I mean, that *was* the only time he hit me in the face though." It was interesting that Deborah delineated the rather severe injuries she sustained in the description above from being "hit in the face." It's difficult to tell whether Deborah held a definition of physical abuse that specifically included fists to the face (which would be consistent with media portrayals of domestic violence) or whether she originally did not want to admit such severe violence took place. Similarly, Kay also originally denied physical abuse and then later, in the following excerpt describing physical abuse, seemed to draw a distinction between being hit with his fists or with some other object:

Um, he would, like take a snowmobile helmet and, you know, like tie me to a tree and just smash my head against the tree. Or, if dinner wasn't um, done on time he'd, one day I went to pull the, I had made some pies cuz he had some company coming over and it was like, ten minutes later or whatever. It wasn't much and he ah, stuck my arm down on the hot oven and burned my arms. Um, I'd sit in the living room and didn't answer him right away and he threw a wrench and hit me in the head with the wrench. So, um, he um, never hit me with his fists, but he'd always hit me with some object. You know, whether it was a frying pan, a wrench, or something like that.

Again, it is unclear whether Kay defined physical abuse as direct contact, and therefore didn't believe her husband was abusive because he didn't use his hands, or if Kay's denial was a coping strategy.

As described above, the women's abusers exercised power and dominance in order to maintain ascendancy within their relationships in overt, unmistakable ways. Often the situation became more complicated when women directly and aggressively fought back, as many of the women in this study did (resistance strategies are described in more detail in chapter six). Amanda, for example, described fighting back rather aggressively in the following excerpt:

And then, he called me and he's like, "I'm on my way over there. I'm gonna fuckin' kill you," and all this and that. Then he get out of the car and like, and drug me in the car by my hair. And threw me in the back seat. And then, when we got back to his house he drug me out of the car and took me in and beat my ass. And then left. <pause> So I had a hammer, and I put the hammer between the box spring and the mattress, because when he came back I was gonna like, if he hit me again I was gonna hit him with it. And he grabbed the top of the bed when he got back in and threw it off of the box spring. And like, picked up the hammer and whipped and at me. And then grabbed me by my hair in pull me out in the living room and was like, "You better fuckin' clean this mess up." And he was hittin' me, like with one hand and he had me by my hair with the other hand. <pause> I went, after I got away from him, in his mom's room and grabbed this two by four and I came out and I hit him across the back of his legs and he fell. And then I went to him again and he grabbed it. And then he hit me with it, and, I was on the

ground screaming. And my head was like, out to here (motioning a swollen head). And he just kept hittin' me with it.

When women did aggressively fight back, it often complicated matters if and when police later arrived. In this particular incident, the police did not make an arrest since both Amanda and her boyfriend had injuries when they arrived, so they deemed it mutual violence and asked her to leave.

Physical Violence after Leaving. Several women reported a continuation of the abuse after leaving the relationship. As part of the societal social script for relationships, it is assumed that women should end their abusive relationships in order to keep themselves and their children safe. The link between ending a relationship and violence, however, is complex, and in many cases ending the relationship does not end the abuse (Ferraro, 2006; Fleury, Sullivan & Bybee, 2000; Wilson & Daly, 1993). Abigail illustrated this complexity when she reported that her ex-boyfriend not only followed her home and assaulted her in her apartment, but that she was reluctant to name him to the police, a complexity that is common, yet not widely understood:

And oh my god, Jessica, he whooped my ass all through my apartment. And, I mean, there was no help. No anything. And um, anyways, I never said who did it or anything. I just told everybody that I got beat up and I didn't know who did it. And the police came and talked to me or whatever, and I'm like, well, you know, I don't know who did it. Somebody just broke in and did it. Cuz it looked like somebody kicked the door in or whatever. Like, well, I don't know who did it.

Leaving represents a threat to the batterers control; violence is a way for them to regain that control in a very clear, unmistakable way. In the following excerpt,

DeeDee demonstrated the control her ex-boyfriend had over her. This was not the only time he broke into her apartment (which was attached to her business) to enact violence in a way in which he could be certain that she would know it was him, yet would be unable to prove to police:

Well the one time when I got knocked out in here, I was closing up early because it was a Sunday, and I got right to the store here where there's an edge, a little stop there, just as he- you know how you can sense someone behind you, and he held those bells when he came in [she had placed bells on the doors so she could hear when it's opened] so I couldn't hear him. Hands went on my head, I *knew* they were his hands, I *know* his hands, they're very long, very long hands. Boom! He hit me from behind, I went down. I came to; my teeth were laying on the floor. I got up, I locked the door and I called the police. I said I know it's him but they told me I can't identify the person that, honestly, because I did not see his face.

[But you knew it was him?]

Yeah, you know, when you're with someone that long, you know when it's them. Yeah but how can I say it was him when I didn't see his face? And that's what they would bring up in a court of law, "Oh, you know his hands?" <says sarcastically>

DeeDee's ex-partner tormented her on a regular basis by breaking into her apartment or her business (of which he was also a co-owner before the separation). During these break-ins he would usually leave items of his around for her to find to ensure she knew he was there. On a couple of occasions he broke in while she was there and physically or sexually assaulted her, none of which she was able to prove to the police (described in more detail below).

Despite the widespread misconception that leaving increases a women's safety, in many instances leaving will dramatically escalate the violence and actually threaten a woman's life (Mahoney, 1991). Teresa's story provides a horrifying

example of this. Teresa had left her boyfriend several times after he was physically abusive toward her, was overly controlling, or verbally disrespectful to her. Several days prior to the incident described below, she informed him she was leaving for good, asked him to move out and to not to contact her anymore, and changed the locks on her doors. Around midnight, he broke in through a window and over the course of the following three hours the most violent and terrifying abusive incident in her relationship occurred:

He broke in through the window at midnight when we were all sleeping. He gets the kids and he puts them into the closet, and he's just hitting me around. And the kids <pause> were on the bed for a while with the blood, and there was blood getting everywhere. He was barricading all the doors. He made me stay in a certain spot, and he would go and put knives <pause> he was putting knives by all the windows. And then he hid me in the closet for a while with the boys, and we were all crying. We were afraid, and we prayed. I was trying to tell them it's going to be okay. I knew I didn't think we weren't going to make it that night, and I didn't know how long it was going to take for somebody to find us, and who was going to find us dead. I know when I was in the closet with the boys, that's when he beat up the dog. I could hear him hitting her because she yelped <long pause>.

<sobbing> And then when he had me come out of the closet, he just kept telling me his plan that he was going to kill us and kill himself. And then, then he brought the knife out, and he said he was going to kill me. So all I could do was just <pause> stand there because he has already beating me up so bad. I just felt numb or something, like I knew what he was going to do that. When he brought it down he just slid it down my face. And then he let the kids come out of the closet and he had them make a bed up in the living room. So they were seeing this and hearing it all.....

So then he had me go the living room, and I <pause, sobbing intensifies> didn't want the boys to hear. He couldn't have a hard on. So he wanted me to do oral sex on him even though I had all that blood and stuff all over me. Then he pushed me in the kitchen and put my leg on the counter, and I don't even know what he stuck up there.

And then he was handing me <pause> he handed me the bread knife. He just said to protect myself, like I couldn't even do nothing with the bread knife anyways, and I'm sure I wasn't going to try to fight him to give him more reason. So I just put the knife back down, and he walked away, and I just fell down on the floor, and I think I took a crap and a pee. Then he came back in there and he told me to clean it up. [Teresa was eventually able to call 911 after Tom fell asleep and she and the boys were able to get out safely when a SWAT team arrived. The family dog died several days later from injuries sustained during the attack.]

Deborah also indicated life-threatening attacks after leaving her husband of seven years. After each attack, she made the decision to return to him because she felt he would kill their seven year old daughter if she left for good. She reported, "He actually beat me up two times within inches of death. I was in the hospital for six weeks both times."

Jenny, who is missing one leg at the hip and uses a wheelchair, described a near death experience when her boyfriend ran her over with a ski boat and then left her for dead:

I mean my vagina was annihilated, there's nothing left. Nothing left. And what was, my internal organs, He threw me back in the water and left. The son of a bitch cut me in half and then pulled me up by this arm, and threw me back in the water. He ran me over. I came up with my legs spread and with the power of the boat. And he picked me up by this arm and I started screaming, "You son of a bitch you're drunk, you're drunk". And he threw me back in the water and he took off. I was in the water for 45 minutes before he got me out.

[So the boat motor ran you over?]

Yeah. Yep, the propeller. I had my leg in my hand. Had to let go of it, I looked down and went, oh shit. I was open from here to here [indicates her pelvis to her chest]. It cut this leg off too, this leg was hanging like this. And I literally had to put my own organs back inside of my body. I had to shove them in and hold them in until they got me out of the water.

Although the level of violence described by Teresa, Jenny, and Deborah was not typical of all of the women in this study, all three of the women reported that these attacks occurred after they had either attempted to leave, were in the process of leaving, or had left within the past month. Furthermore, although the remaining eleven women did not report this level of violence, all eleven were threatened with their lives during the course of the relationship, most often during a conversation when they were attempting to end the relationship. Unfortunately, this is not an unusual experience for battered women. Wilson and Daly (1993) demonstrated that estranged or divorced wives were more likely to be killed by their abusive ex-partner than women who remained in the abusive marriage. In relationships characterized by high levels of control, homicide is the ultimate manifestation of maintaining that control.

These three women who experienced such extreme levels of violence were different from the other participants in another way as well. All three had presented to the shelter because their primary issue was homelessness, not domestic violence (in other words, fleeing an abusive relationship was not the primary reason they sought assistance from the shelter). The trauma they experienced from these gruesome domestic assaults has clearly had lasting effects on their daily functioning that distinguishes them from the rest of the sample.

Deborah, for example, left her husband for good several years prior to the interview, but had struggled with homelessness and substance abuse since leaving. She originally went to the shelter while fleeing the relationship, and has returned

several times since because she was homeless. Likewise, Jenny also originally presented as domestic violence at the shelter when she was released from the hospital. She has since been unable to hold steady employment since the attack described above, has been fighting with the State for disability entitlements, and has been in treatment for severe depression, anxiety, and panic attacks. This was her third stay at the shelter; the last two have been because she and her two youngest children were homeless. About a month after meeting Jenny at the shelter, she secured a Section 8 Homeless Voucher and her and her children moved into an apartment, where my three interviews with her took place. Since the incident a few years prior, Jenny and her family seemed to still be living day-to-day in a state of crisis and survival.

Finally, the attack described above by Teresa had occurred five years prior to the interview; she was clearly still very traumatized when she described the event (she indicated the attack lasted approximately three hours and it took her a little over two hours to tell me the story, as she recalled it almost in real time). She was also in shelter for the third time due to homelessness. When Teresa was released from the hospital, she was charged with two counts of failure to protect and endangering the welfare of minors because her two children witnessed her attack. She has since regained custody of her two boys, now ten and fifteen at the time of the interview. She is an alcoholic and struggles with cocaine abuse. Both of her boys have severe eating disorders (the fifteen year old is morbidly obese, the ten year old has life-threatening anorexia), and the ten year experiences night tremors and screaming, and incontinence at school.

Between her struggle with substance abuse, being unable to find overnight child care willing to deal with an emotionally scarred child with violent nightmares, and being called to the school on a regular basis, she has been unable to hold steady employment since leaving her abuser (Teresa had been sober for three months at the time of the interview, however). Although all of the women in the study who had left their abusers endured emotional, sexual, and financial issues to varying degrees, none had been affected to such extent, or for such a long time-period as the three that survived brutal, near-death experiences.

Psychological Abuse. The physical violence that women describe is often brutal and horrendous, yet the emotional and psychological terrorism they endure in the form of continual and derogatory name calling, isolation, and constant surveillance is much more frequent (Ferraro, 2006). Psychological abuse is also equally important in creating an ascendant status in abusive relationships. Such forms of psychological abuse were commonly reported by women in this study. Women reported a variety of different forms of psychological abuse. It often took the form of derogatory name-calling and put-downs. Rose, for example, recalled, “I’d get, every day I was a stupid bitch, every single day I was called a stupid bitch.” Similarly, Cassie said, “He calls me lazy and no good and a bad mom, and all that shit. It’s all the time.” Elizabeth recalled, “He would call me a ‘cunt’ on a daily basis, ‘fat, lazy.’ ‘Stupid’ was another one that he liked to use and just ‘dumb bitch,’ just anything you could think of to really dig into me.”

Arizona indicated her husband went through her personal journal and left messages for her to read the next time she wrote in it:

He had gone through my stuff. And I knew that that piece was missing because I know where everything is. And I knew that that story was missing so he had taken it. He said six months ago. And written on it like, "You're a self-loathing, despicable, pathetic whore. You're a piece of shit, scum-bag." You know, just all this stuff, he wrote it on the cover.

[Did he say things like that to you often?]

Oh yeah. um... he calls me horrible things. Fat. Useless. A whore. Self-loathing. Self-deserving. Let's see, you know just, and any other horrible thing that you could possibly imagine.

DeeDee demonstrated how verbal abuse was often intertwined with excessive acts of control:

And ah, then when I lived with him, if I touched a certain towel – it got to be where I got so jittery, I didn't know which towel. I touch the wrong towel once, to wipe up – there was a towel for the table, towel for your hands, and a towel for the dishes. I used the wrong towel – he went off for a half hour, calling me a "stupid fucking bitch." "Lame-ass, worthless piece of crap", for a half hour! This guy went off, cuz I used the wrong towel. But, you know, it was a constant, you didn't know what to do, except whatever he said. And even then when he said, "OK you behaved," he would bitch me for a half hour about if I only did this are that, whenever it was, behaved beforehand. I'd have to listen for a half hour when I *did* behave.

A commonly used psychological tool used by batterers in order to maintain control is to threaten suicide. Several women in this study also reported that their partners had engaged in this emotionally abusive tactic. After DeeDee's boyfriend called the police on her during an incident where he was physically abusing her, she ended up pleading guilty to the domestic violence charge because she believed her boyfriend would commit suicide if he was convicted of domestic violence in the same

small town where he grew up and where his father and brother had been police officers. Nicole also explained how her husband manipulated her with suicide threats and an attempt:

He would actually kind of scare me, he'd come in and then he would, his biggest thing was he would threaten to kill himself. I've went back to him every other time. He makes me feel so bad and he's actually tried to kill himself before, he's actually attempted to kill himself before. He knows a lot of, I don't know, he smokes weed, you know, he knows where to get it, he knows a lot of people, like how to get anything. One time he actually went out and got a whole bottle of Vicadon and he actually took the whole bottle and he was like "you forced me to kill myself 'cuz you don't love me anymore."

Abusive partners use various other tactics of intimidation and control in addition to verbal abuse. They often play mind games, such as making their partners believe they are "crazy", that no one will believe their allegations of abuse, or that they brought it on themselves (Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Ferraro, 2006). Recall that all of these behaviors create the interpersonal context that influences in the self-concept becoming a reflexive process, and thus are imperative to explore in detail. These themes were illustrated repeatedly in this sample. Nicole, for example, recalled,

Yea, he used to, his biggest thing was that he used to tell me I was bipolar all the time. 'Cuz I would just like have mood swings, like one minute I'd be happy with him and the next minute I'd be mad at him. I'm like "well, you did something wrong, that's why I'm mad at you."

[Mmhmm].

You know, he actually for awhile had me very, very convinced that I had bipolar. So I went to my doctor and I told him, like, what was going on and he just looked at me like I was crazy. He's like well, he ran some test on me and he asked me some questions and he pretty much said I'm not bipolar, if I was bipolar that would happen with everyone, not just with him [her husband].

Several other women also indicated their partners attempted to convince them they were crazy (and in many cases, were successful in doing so). Similar to Nicole, actually, the most common accusation of mental illness involved bipolar disorder. All of the women who experienced this reported that their partners tried to convince them they were bipolar. It seems plausible that this may not have been a coincidence, but rather, a calculated control tactic. Sharing a home and relationship with an abusive partner who is unpredictable in when he shows love or when he is abusive may indeed create a climate in which one feels she is bipolar at times. It does not seem surprising that several of the women reported that they did, indeed, begin to believe they were mentally ill.

Emotional manipulation in the form of accusations of infidelity and attempts to convince women they had brought their treatment on by not living up to their abuser's standards were also commonly reported:

Um, he would, like say that I was a whore and I slept with this person and that person. It was all psychotic. You know, I did this to him and I did that to him. And I abused him and, and, I was you know, I was a bitch and I was, all kinds of stuff. And ah, I was a no good piece of trash. And I'm lucky that he got with me and I'll never find anybody like him. And, I need to do what he says or he's gonna hit me again, you know, or take my kids away, that was his big one is he's gonna take my kids away. Um, yeah, <pause> so it was it was bad. But I made it through that one. I got away from him. (Deborah)

Like, well, "The reason that I feel like this is because I didn't get a meal when he came home, the house isn't clean. You're not acting like you're supposed to." It was all excuses based around whether the house was clean, the food was cooked, or how I'm acting, like if I was bummed out that day or tired, you know, everything was my fault. It was just my fault. So no matter what it was, I should have been on top of everything. I should have been the one taking

care of everything. It was just <pause> that's basically how it was always.
(Elizabeth)

Many women also suggested that the psychological abuse they endured was worse than any of the physical attacks had been. Elizabeth, for instance, indicated,

Well, you know, I have to say that women who are physically abused have it a lot better than women who are mentally abused because the scars heal and yeah, they do have someone watching those stages that they go through because they were physically abused. But when you're emotionally abused that's a scar that's not on you. That's in your brain, and it doesn't go away. It doesn't matter what kind of pills you take for it. It just does not go away.

Such sentiments corroborates previous research which has been suggested that these forms of psychological abuse are more frequent (Ferraro, 2006) and much more lasting and damaging (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002) than the physical assaults that often accompany them. Indeed, mental, emotional, and verbal abuse is very prominent features within abusive relationships (Chang, 1996; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Kirkwood, 1993; Straus et. al., 1980, & Walker, 1984).

Sexual Abuse. Sexual abuse was commonly reported by the women in the study, including forcible and coerced rape, sexual assault, and forced prostitution. Of these, forcible rape, particularly rape that was accompanied by physical violence, was the most commonly reported during the interviews:

And the last straw was when he raped me. I came back from Texas. I went to Texas for two weeks for a vacation. I came home. Well, I was very tired, and <pause> I couldn't fight back. He wanted it, and he got it. (Amy)

And so, he wanted to, and he basically forced me to have sex with him. And ah, I didn't want to and he did. And, you know, he just basically held me down. And I, I didn't scream or anything like that because there was so many people around. I was just like, forget it. Yeah, and I ended up pregnant behind that. (Deborah)

We were talking, and he was just real tired. And I kept covering him up trying to get him go to sleep and just basically doing what I could not to make him mad, I guess, and trying to get him to -- hoping he'd fall asleep. And then he said, "Well, it's time." He stood up, and I was just kind of lying on the bed trying to go to sleep I guess. And I said, "No." And he backhanded me, and he must have gotten my nose because my nose started bleeding all over, just the first hit. (Teresa)

I went upstairs with him and um, we were sitting on the couch and we were talking and things were okay at first. But then, um, he said um, "Can I measure your waist?" And I'm like, "No, what the hell's the matter with you?" And then, um, he drugged off the um, the couch and basically took my clothes off me and got on top of me and was taking what he wanted. But, um, and I went to a friend's house and I'm all beat up and I'm crying hysterically and I can't, her kid answers the door and I can't, I go in and I'm talking to her and usually I can talk to her about anything, but I just, it's like the words just wouldn't form. And then finally I told her and we didn't, I asked her, I said, "Please don't say anything". (Abigail)

DeeDee illustrated a complex interplay of rape, control, and fear when she described her ex-boyfriend breaking in to her apartment and raping her while she was unconscious. She reported that he did this on two separate occasions, and both times he would leave items behind so she would know he was there. She knew she was raped because she would begin waking up during the attack and have some awareness of what was happening, when she did finally wake up completely the front door would be unlocked and she wouldn't have clothing on. Since this particular interview took place in her bedroom at the apartment, she was able to show me the items left behind.

He's broke in, I know he raped me one night. I thought I was dreamin it. When I'm finally out I'm out [she takes strong sleeping pills for narcolepsy]. I mean I'm out. And you have to, just do 'bout anything to wake me up. He knows how I sleep. What it is. One night there was a, I dreamt that my

underwear were off. I wear pads, all night long, cuz, um <pause> I'm at that age.

But um, I woke up one morning and I had dreamt he was in here. And, we were having what he calls "making love". I thought, it was so real. And then I realized my front door was unlocked, which I lock both of these doors, and I found this [gets out a condom wrapper and a pack of his brand of cigarettes]. I mean every time the he breaks in then he leaves his signature mark. He'll leave something so I know that it's him. And, you know, I wouldn't take my underwear off with a pad in it and not throw it away, you know what I mean? It was laying on the floor. Come on now, you know? Plus he left this [holds up a Pall Mall brand cigarette butt]. And this place was clean out of 'em. There were no Pall Malls. He smokes Pall Malls, I don't. And the next time he came in and did that, he left this [holds up a bullet and a gun lock], and definitely right there for me to see.

[Do you think he's trying to send you a message, leaving you that?]

"I'm gonna kill you bitch." Because that came *after* the PPO. That came before the PPO [holds up the Pall Mall cigarette butt], this came *after* the PPO [holds up the bullet and gun lock].

DeeDee's story demonstrates a unique level of control and manipulation by her ex-boyfriend. She called the police on both occasions and they were not able to do anything other than advise her to hold on to the items he left behind. They were clearly meant as a message to her, that he knew she would understand, but beyond that were meaningless to the authorities. Although DeeDee was the only one to report this particular chain of events, several other women also reported a similar type of control tactic where a clear message was sent, but was not prosecutable.

Coercive rape was also commonly reported. This would include rape without direct physical force, but often included a threat of some kind or a generalized fear about what may happen if women refused. Again, prior to ending the relationship with the partner described above, DeeDee recalled,

He made me have sex with him.

[What you mean he made you?]

He would threaten me. “Do I have to call your probation officer?” He would say this and that. Right here in this bed [the interview took place in her home]. It was degrading.

Rose recalled the threat of pending violence if she did not give in to her husband’s sexual advances. In the following except she also illustrates why some women may “give in” to coerced rapes as a resistance or survival tactic:

The last thing that you want to do with somebody that just hit you is go to bed with him. And therefore I always felt like it was rape because it wasn’t, it wasn’t consensual. But I knew if I didn’t I’d get something.

[What do you mean?]

Oh, you know. Some kind of, something would happen. <pause> I knew it would be bad.

[Was there ever a time you refused?]

Oh yeah. But, it still happened anyway. And the next day was never <pause>. It was never good. That’s why I feel it was rape but, I’m sure you would tell me it is but, it’s also a way to not get your ass kicked.

Arizona did not explicitly indicate what would happen if she did not have sex with her husband, but does demonstrate the power that fear can have in an abusive relationship:

[Was there ever any sexual abuse?]

Uh-uh. Not until the end, you know, where he just became, like, “You’re gonna have sex with me.” And I’m like, nope. You know, and that was a problem. And you know there’s something wrong when you can’t have sex with your husband. But it was to the point where I was so scared of him and so, that I <pause> I would. I’d just lay there and be like, okay fine.

Sometimes he'd be, <pause> he'd just do it and sometimes he'd be like, okay fine – this isn't worth it then. And I'd be like, thank god. You know? But I never knew which way it was gonna go.

[Did that change the way you felt about yourself?]

Absolutely. I hated me. <pause> I hated me.

Oftentimes women were assaulted with objects. Teresa, for example, was assaulted with a ketchup bottle, a wooden spoon, and several other items she was unable to indentify at the time of the attack. Similarly, Elizabeth reported that she can no longer have children because,

James messed up my system too much, I can't have any more kids.

[What do you mean, messed up your system?]

He, uh, he did just did some things that you're not supposed to do to a female's body. <pause> He got drunk one night and hurt me so bad to the point where I couldn't walk. It scarred my stuff up too bad.

Later in the interview she elaborated and said he assaulted her with a gun rifle barrel, and this had caused permanent damage to her cervix. Irene also recalled sexual assault without penile penetration,

He was abusing me behind the door, you know, the bedroom door. Sexually. Maybe I, I didn't want to have sex. Cuz I remember, you know, a pillow over my head. And him <pause, slowly> on top of me. But no, um, penetration, no. You know?

[So there wasn't penetration?]

No. I mean, he did it on top of me. He, would <pause> get off of me. Instead of putting it in me. You know what I mean?

[He would ejaculate on you?]

Yeah. And uh, he would uh, <nervous laughter> when I was sleeping, try to stick something up my <pause, nervous laughter>, you know what I'm saying?

[Like an object, or himself?]

Yeah. <slowly> An object. <pause> This is the first time I'm talking about this.

A less commonly reported form of sexual abuse included forced or coerced prostitution. Amanda and Elizabeth reported some form of sexual abuse indicated their partners made them sleep with other men, either to establish control or for their own substance habit:

And he used to make me sleep with his friends in front of him too. And, um, like there was nothing I could really do about it. I could've left him but I didn't because I was just too scared. And on top of that he paid all my bills. He supported us [her and her child]. I didn't have nowhere to go. (Amanda)

...He forced me into situations that I didn't want to be in because he had to have money for pills, so he sold me for pills. And then he tells me afterwards, "Well you didn't *have* to do that." It's like, ah, "What do you mean I didn't *have* to do that?" He's like, "I would have understood." But I knew better. Played the head games with me. (Elizabeth)

Threats and Intimidation. Women's partners exerted control over nearly all aspects of their lives, a common characteristic of abusive relationships (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Kirkwood, 1993). One of the most commonly reported form of control was eliciting fear, often in the form of an overall feeling of being afraid or fear of death. Many women recalled that their partners maintained an environment such that they often existed in a constant state of fear. Abusers maintaining fear in this way speaks to the inequality of power and status within the dyad. Arizona recalled,

I remember thinking to myself- like I was scared. I was scared all the time. I would lay in my bed and never sleep cuz I would listen to hear the outside door to see if he was going outside to get his gun to come in and shoot me, and how would I get my kids and get out. And, <pause> I just layed in bed wondering <pause> am I gonna die tonight?

Deborah expressed a similar sentiment, as she explained that in her relationship she seemed to always be living in a state of fear that her husband knew how to find her even if she left. She also seemed to spend time pondering what he would do if he found her. It is clear from the following excerpt that Deborah believed her husband's threats and took them seriously:

But, I don't know how to explain it but when you're in a situation that your partner will kill you to keep you, it's different. I don't, I don't know how to explain that. But, it's <pause> it's different because they will hunt you down, they will find you. No matter where you go, no matter what you do, they'll find you. And even if they don't find you, he'll do things like, cut the brakes on my car, or turn the lights off in the building. Or, you know what I'm saying? And part of it was I did not want to put other people in jeopardy as well. You know, it was hard enough to get out with myself and a small child. But, to have him, I mean he, I just knew he would come shooting the whole building up. So I, you know, I just, I didn't want to die. So I knew that I had to, you know, like I said, he said I'd get away over my or his dead body. So I took him seriously.

DeeDee was also threatened by her boyfriend and seemed to believe that he was capable of carrying out his threats to the extent that she stopped going to the woods by herself.

He had me so afraid to go in the woods. And I've lived in the woods ever since I was a kid. He would actually follow me out, he goes, and I have no family up here, he said, "you could be dead up here," he says, "the coyotes will eat you up. The ravens will eat your eyeballs, and nobody will ever find you." This man is a very strong man, but he will kill me. He made it clear to me, he will kill me.

[Do you think you ever get a feel safe again?]

No. Not till I'm allowed to have a gun. And then I still won't feel safe.

Likewise, Elizabeth also reported that she believed her husband's threat that he not only would kill her, but was capable of disposing of her body so that he would not be found out.

He never hit me or anything in front of Nathan [her son], but my nose and back. I was knocked out of a chair, thrown against the wall and threatened to be killed and that nobody would find me because he knows how to get rid of a body.

[Did you believe him?]

Mm-hm. I'm like, um, I think he was crazy enough to do it.

Although women's beliefs that their abusive partners are indeed capable of carrying out their threats may seem unfounded to someone outside of the relationship, these threats should be taken seriously. Bell, Cattaneo, Goodman, and Dutton (2008) found that women were more likely to be right when correctly assessing their actual risk in violent relationships.

Another commonly reported form of control was reported in the form of women's partners controlling their movements or behaviors. Amy, for instance, indicated her boyfriend was controlling to the extent that she had to check in with him quite literally before using the bathroom if he was not around:

I couldn't go anywhere. He was -- if I went anywhere the car -- ring -- he'd keep me on the phone 24/7. I wasn't allowed to call anybody. I wasn't allowed to -- if my grandparents wanted to go eat and I wanted to go with him, I had to call him to make sure I could go. And if I couldn't go, I had to stay home. For a while there, I had to call to use the bathroom.

DeeDee also reported that her boyfriend would time how long certain activities should take and therefore when she should return home. If she was late, he would also begin calling her.

I got outta church, my friend had called me up on my cell phone so I talked to him for like, 45 minutes or whatever. When I got back there, he's going, "well where did you go? You were gonna go to Rite Aid after church and that's all!" I said I didn't go. "Well why not?!" I said, "Well I got outta church and my friend called me up." He says, "See what church did for you?" I said, "Well I talked to a good friend, got good advice." "The advice you'll get is from me!"

It is clear from this excerpt that DeeDee's boyfriend also controlled who she was allowed to speak with or maintain other relationships with, a factor reported by other women as well. Deborah also illustrated this point control of women's movements overlapping with attempts to isolate them from other relationships when she expressed the following:

He always had to be in control of everything, it was his way or no way. And, I don't know, he was mean. Um, yeah he, he was always very controlling. He would where I went, how I could go, when I had to be back, how long I could be gone, who I could talk to, who I couldn't talk to. You know, so. Yep, he was bad, he was really bad. Um, he'd make me stay at home. I'd have to be there, I couldn't go anywhere, I couldn't talk to anybody. He'd take my phone privileges away. He was just, just something else.

Control was also exerted by treating women like children. As Amanda said, "I felt like a child with him.

[Why was that?]

Because he, <pauses, laugh nervously> was always ordering me around. And I was giving into his orders.

DeeDee also illustrated being put into a childlike role when her boyfriend would force her to sit at the table until she finished her dinner. In the following excerpt she also demonstrates how this is a form of psychological abuse, as he also followed her into the bedroom during this incident to verbally assault her:

When I told him I didn't want to eat - I don't want to eat I got a migraine. You can't eat when you have a migraine. Just let me sleep. I'd wake up, that plate would be sitting there - on the table. I'm like, what's up with that? "That's your plate! You're gonna sit there and eat it!" He said. He would just leave it on the table. And then he'd heat up the food and make me eat it.

[What do you mean he'd make you eat it?]

Oh I'd better or I'd have to listen to screaming and yelling... And then I would go into the bedroom, get under the covers and hide my head, and sure enough within 5 minutes he would start raging. Of course he's gonna come in. And I'd put the covers over my head and go [makes a buzzing noise to drown a sound], you know, so I couldn't hear 'em. But he would make sure he would pull them off - "When I'm talking to you, you better fucking listen bitch!" So I'd have to sit there and listen and listen and listen and listen and listen and the poor dog hid the closet.

Rose demonstrated a similar type of control when she described how her husband took household items and her personal hygiene products with him when he left for work in the morning:

And there were things, he would take, he would take all the telephones out of the house and take 'em to work. He would take the clothes soap, the dish soap, the shampoo, the cream rinse, he would take my razor. I'm like, "all right, I got a day off" <laughs>. He would take, he would take um, the remote to the tv. Like I can't figure out how to turn on the TV without the remote.

Batterers establishing an ascendant status by creating a dynamic in the relationship that was at odds with the goal of an egalitarian relationship within a non-abusive

coupling, as described above, was a very powerful way to maintain control within that relationship.

Much like the physical violence which often did not end after the relationship ended, men's controlling tactics often did not end either. Rose and DeeDee both illustrate the controlling stalking behaviors that several women in the study experienced after they had separated from their partners. DeeDee recalled, "Oh this shit's unbelievable to me! He stalks me down there. He stalks me up here. There is no where I can go where that man doesn't know where I'm at." Rose also described her ex-husband stalking her for a long time after their divorce:

When I see him on Main Street he will follow me. He'll be like, if he pulls up beside me at a light, he'll give me his "mean face" or flick me the finger, which I just laugh, but, <pause> he knows he scares me. He damn well knows he scares me. But I don't show it anymore. And um, if we're, we've passed in town and he'll point at his ring finger. And I don't know what's that supposed to mean, I just take it as either he's got another woman, in which case leave me alone and go home to her, or, "You're always mine, that ring is on, whether you're wearing it or not". I've talked to the police many times. Because, and do you know how stupid it sounds to walk in there and say, "well he pulled up to me and was making faces at me, and uh, you know," or "he followed me." Geez, I even gone shopping in Kmart and poof, there he is. Or if I'm in Walmart his truck will be parked right beside me and he'll be in there watching me, down an aisle. And I went outside and there's his truck, right beside my car.

Rose's words illustrate the complexity of post-separation control tactics. Although it felt to her that her ex-husband was intentionally stalking and trying to intimidate her, she was unable to obtain a personal protection order against him. Moreover, his power and control was increased when he was successful in intimidating her or invoking fear in her, yet she was unable to prove that she was being stalked.

Engaging in behavior that is meant to evoke fear, intimidate, or exert control over women's lives, yet is either not quite illegal or difficult to prove, was seen time and time again in the women's narratives.

Financial and Property Abuse. Financial and property abuse was also commonly reported by women in this study. This typically included withholding money, withholding information about the family's finances, creating situations where women either lost their job or were forced to quit, or purposing damaging personal property. Deborah explained the tight control her husband had over the family's finances when she said, "Ah, if I went to the store and spent \$1.99, he wanted the penny back. You know, just, just very bring the receipts, don't spend money on this, don't spend money on that." Kay also said that her husband convinced her to take her name off of their joint bank account and off of the mortgage to their house. Once her name had been removed, she indicated that she had no idea what the family finances were, what their bank account balance was, or if he was even paying the mortgage on time.

Many battered women also face challenges to maintaining employment while in abusive relationships (Moe & Bell, 2004). Women may lose employment due to abuse for a variety of reasons related to the dynamics of battering itself or because they are prohibited by their partners in various ways from attending work regularly (Moe & Bell, 2004; Sable, Libbus, Huneke, & Anger, 1999). In the following excerpt, Rose demonstrated how her losing her job was related to the abuse and how little control she subsequently had over a simple daily task such as grocery shopping:

If he, he would sometimes call me to go grocery shopping and meet him, I couldn't even, I didn't grocery shop. I had to go the 12 mile drive or whatever it was, meet him at the store at Save-A-Lot cuz he's so damn cheap he couldn't afford a real loaf of bread, you know. And he makes good money, decent money, not big money but \$40,000 or whatever a year. That's not poverty level. And um, he would have me drive all the way into town, once in a while, I guess this was my big day out or something, and he would have me follow him around the store. And I'd say, "you know what, I'm just gonna take Carson [her son] and go home b/c there's no point to me following you around the store. I can't get what I want, can't get what Carson wants. We have to get what you want, I'm going home." And he's say, "Well then go get me a loaf of bread." You know, I'm not the fricken neighbors dog, you know.

[So he'd send you on errands?]

A errand. And that happened once. Other than that, if I went to town I just had to follow him around the store. I don't get it. He was just such a control freak, just unbelievable. I had no money available to me. If mean if I found a nickel in the dryer or the washer I kept it. I hid it. I'm serious. I'd have to save up money just to get a newspaper and then I'd have to hide that.

[So what happened with your paychecks? I thought you said you did in-home health care when you met?]

He made sure that I couldn't go to work so I had to quit.

[What do mean he made sure you couldn't work?]

Because he'd keep the truck on empty so I couldn't go. I missed so many days that, you know, no more job.

Rose also stated later on in the interview that on these shopping trips her husband would allow her to choose inexpensive items for her to eat during the week, such as hotdogs and pre-packaged lunchmeat, while he purchased steak and deli meats for himself. When they returned home he would put the better cuts of meat in a separate freezer that was pad-locked. When it was time for her to prepare dinner, he would retrieve a nicer cut of meat for her to cook for him and tell her she could choose from

the unlocked freezer for her meal. If she questioned him, she said he would explain that there was not enough in the budget for the whole family to eat the nicer cuts of meat, so that was her sacrifice as a parent.

Destruction of property was another way abusers financially controlled their partners.

He never gave me money. Like he would never, ever, ever give me money. Like I'd take my money and I'd pay the bills, or like, I would give him like my whole check, like \$400 for the week, my week check. I actually had a car at one point. I was going through Michigan Works! program, and they helped me get back on my feet because I broke my leg.

[Mmhmm].

So while I broke my leg even though I had my job, I was going through the programs, and I was getting cash assistance and all that, they actually bought me a car. Yea they did, I had to go through all their classes, and it was like seven to three every day, I went through all the classes, all the courses, I had to jump through every obstacle they gave me, so they bought me a car. And I was so excited, it was my car, it was a blue '94 Saturn, like, I loved it, because I earned it. I did everything they wanted so I felt like I earned it. It was my car. He actually, <sigh>, he smashed it. He actually smashed it. (Nicole)

Not only did Nicole's husband destroy her car, but she also indicated that her he took control of her paycheck and then denied her access to the family finances.

Isolation

As was detailed in chapter two, literature on the relevancy of reflected appraisal for adults has been mixed. Based on the contextual variables strengthening this process discussed in the literature, I have created three qualifying variables that make role-taking a reflexive process for battered women: power and control (discussed above), lack of self-efficacy (discussed in the next chapter) and finally,

isolation. As with other inherent characteristics of many abusive relationships, many of the women in this study were isolated, either physically or psychologically. Some lived miles out of town or were purposely stranded at their partner's homes without transportation. DeeDee recalled, "I was stuck at his house with no car. If I went outside for a walk, um, he would come out and look at me. I wasn't allowed to talk to nobody." Rose also reported that her and her husband lived far from town and was he would ensure she would not leave the house by restricting the amount of gas that was left in her car.

So, he would keep the, we had a, we always had newer vehicles and he would keep the DTE on 2 gallons of gas. I couldn't go any further than 2 gallons, and we lived 13, 12 or 13 miles out of town. So there was really nowhere I could go. Out to the mailbox, which was where the bus stops were, you had to drive out of the lake and out to the bus stop. So that's all I could do.

Rose further described that, in addition to restricting how when she was able to leave the house, her husband also isolated her from her friends and family,

I had no friends, no family, rarely family over. Like if it was his birthday, *his* family could come over, but, no friends, none of my family, completely secluded. I had no knowledge that there was a way out. There was no family, there, you know, my family is scattered all over the United States.

This form of isolation was echoed by other women as well. Deborah stated, "And, you know, just kind of limited me from all my friends and it was just, it was just bad." Several women experienced something similar, but added that their partners achieved this isolation by making the situation so uncomfortable when friends or family came to visit, they stopped coming over. DeeDee said, "Well he alienated me

from all my friends. They would call up, he would start screamin' at 'em and all this weird shit. Eventually they, you know, didn't come by."

Self-isolation was also common. In this case, women's partners did not explicitly forbid the relationships and friends and family attempted to continue the relationships, however, women's friends eventually initiated the separation:

And it was to the point where my friends didn't even come to my house anymore. Because every time that I'd have someone over he would just start a fight over like no reason, like he would, I swear to god he'd made things up, like stuff to fight with me over. You know like, I'd have my friends over and he'd be like remember that time two years ago when you did this to me? And, you know he'd start yelling at me and I'd try to stay calm, like I would stay so calm in front of my friends and after like 20 minutes, I'm like "just shut up and go away," like "you're ruining my day." I was just like so pissed off at the time. And then my friend would be like "alright, we're just going to go," and you know, "you guys are fighting in front of my kids," and he'd swear and he'd yell and you know, they don't want that around their kids so they'd go and I felt horrible. Then they, you know, started coming over less and less. (Nicole)

Several other women had similar experiences, but would self-isolate although their friends would continue to call and stop by the house. Arizona eventually stopped calling them and the relationships waned,

I felt embarrassed, stupid. You know, and I just stopped calling people and stopped talking to them. Cuz I'm like, I don't want them to know, I feel like an idiot... You know, and then it seemed like <pause> I didn't have friends, you know, anymore. I was all alone. I knew I *could* call them, but <pause> I didn't. And it was like, he knew it! (Arizona)

Self-isolation is a rather common occurrence in abusive relationships (Coker et. al., 2002; Rose et al., 2000; Smith et al., 1995). Arizona suggests that not only did she engage in self-isolation, but she felt that her husband was aware of how alone it made

her feel. There are many reasons for why a battered woman may self-isolate, pull away from friends and family, or not disclose abuse.

This awareness of vulnerability may work to provide batterers with more power. It certainly made women aware of their isolation, as Jenny indicated, “No one. There’s no one. I have nobody. Nobody to trust, I don’t. I don’t.” Kay also came to the painful realization that has no one. This feeling of isolation, when one feels they have nobody other than their partners, increases the dependence women ended up having on their partners.

Chapter Summary

This chapter contextualizes the external aspects of women’s experiences by exploring the characteristics of their abusive relationships. Although the women in this study were different in many ways and arrived at the shelter through various avenues, their experiences within abusive relationships were strikingly similar. Many of them endured similar types of physical abuse, emotional and verbal abuse, sexual assault, controlling behaviors, manipulation, and isolation.

Overall, women’s experiences supported the idea that batterers use a variety of tools in order to achieve the ultimate goal of creating a generalized climate of fear and complete control over their partner’s life (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2001; Dobash & Dobash, 1992; 1998; Goetting, 1999; Ferraro, 2003; 2006; Johnson & Ferraro, 2003; Moe, 2007). The finding that all of the women in this study reported such similar experiences with abuse within their relationships reinforces the notion

that this type of abuse is part of a larger system of dominance within a patriarchal social system (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo & Bograd, 1988).

Contextualizing the external factors of women's relationships is an important endeavor. It sets the stage for understanding why women reported the various degrees of changes in their self-concept and identity that are discussed in the chapter six. Chapter two presented in detail the contextual variables that are argued must be present in order for adults to experience such marked identity changes. In particular, certain external relational and situational criteria must be met in order for battered women to experience changes to their self-concept and certain features of their identity. The contextual variables that have been proposed in this literature include: an ascendant status organization within a dyad (Cooley, 1902; Franks, 1989; Turner, 1956); structural and personal dependence by one person on resources provided by another (Franks, 1989; Turner, 1956); when one is less able to engage in efficacious action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983); and finally, lack of access to supportive others or alternative perspectives (Turner, 1956) or when one is relatively socially isolated (Reeder et al., 1960).

For women to experience identity negotiation due to changes in self-concept, the above conditions would have to be met. The shared experiences reported in this chapter as they relate to battering do, in fact, meet these criteria. In terms of battering, the necessary variables for self-concept change could be qualified by three interpersonal conditions within the dyad that are related to the social context of battering itself: a) ascendancy and status (e.g., power and dominance), b), social or

psychological isolation, and c) weakening of self-efficacy (which is detailed in chapter five).

The next chapter focuses on the many different ways women showed agency within their abusive relationships and resisted the violence and control in their homes. It also details the various avenues taken for seeking help and leaving (or attempting to leave) the relationship, as well as the many barriers that were met along the way. This discussion is critical to understanding how women often experience a lack of self-efficacy and lack of opportunities in which to engage in efficacious behavior. Experiences with self-efficacy constitute one of the three qualifying conditions for self-concept modification.

Chapter six demonstrates how the external experiences of battering described here and in the subsequent chapter fragments women's identities and how they negotiate identities and changes in self-concept. It also shows how women engaged in meaning construction to attempt to understand why or how they were subject to the abuses reported here. Specifically, chapter six demonstrates how the abuse presented here modifies the self, particularly the self-concept, and how these various abusive attacks on women's bodies altered the way women felt about themselves and the way they described themselves. Understanding how the battering reported here affects women's sense of self is important because the self acts as source of behavior regulation (Charon, 1992). Fully understanding the dynamics of women's abusive relationships, therefore, is essential to understanding how women make sense of those relationships and how they affect their everyday cognitive processes.

CHAPTER V

AGENCY AND EFFICACY: RESISTANCE AND HELP-SEEKING

Women who endure abuse at the hands of their intimate partners continuously employ a variety of strategies to escape, to keep themselves and their children safe, and to prevent or stop the abuse. These strategies often include resistance and placating tactics, enlisting help from friends and family, calling the police, filing for a personal protection order, or seeking help from a domestic violence service or another professional. Indeed, all of the women in this study showed agency within their abusive relationships in one way or another and engaged in various strategies to resist their partner's abuse, to end the violence or the relationship, or to seek help.

Unfortunately, most of the women were also met with multiple barriers along the way. Barriers to obtaining help and/or leaving are a common experience for battered women. Some of the barriers to accessing resources commonly include the effects of being isolated from friends and family, lack of economic support, difficulty obtaining housing independent of one's partner or difficulty obtaining personal protection orders, to name a few (DeVoe & Smith, 2003; Moe Wan, 2000; Sullivan, 2000).

A discussion of the strategies women used to increase safety or resist the abuse, the ways in which they sought help, and the subsequent barriers they encountered, is essential to this dissertation as it raises the question of self-efficacy and its relation to self-concept. I proposed in chapter two that the unique context of

an intimate relationship defined by battering and control strengthens the necessary conditions for role-taking (i.e., reflected appraisal), to modify self-appraisal. Because the self-concept includes a self-efficacy component (Bong & Clark, 1999; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983; Pajares, 1996), feelings of self-efficacy may affect the extent to which one experiences changes to self-concept and self-appraisal.

The purpose of this chapter is to first explore the many ways women showed agency within their abusive relationships and courageously fought to keep themselves safe and second, to illustrate the many barriers they faced and the ways in which opportunities to engage in efficacious action were attenuated. Combined with the power and control tactics described in the previous chapter, examining agency and efficacy will help contextualize the changes to women's self-concept described in the next chapter. Similar to the presentation of narratives in chapter four, women employed many of these strategies simultaneously, despite the fact that they are presented separately here. Moreover, in this chapter I present barriers women faced as a distinct section, despite the fact that many of these barriers are implicit in the unsuccessful help-seeking strategies that are outlined below.

As an overview, all of the women engaged in various resistance and help-seeking strategies multiple times throughout their abusive relationships. The most common and most powerful form of resistance was leaving or attempting to leave the relationship. Leaving can be viewed as a powerful form of resistance because it is the ultimate threat to an abuser's power and control (Hydén, 2005). Every woman interviewed tried to end the relationship on at least one occasion, and most of them

several times. Even the women in the sample who had chosen to remain actively engaged in an intimate relationship with their abusive partners during the time of the interviews had attempted to leave at least one time over the course of that relationship. Other than leaving, women also showed resistance by refusing to follow their partner's directives, by fighting back either emotionally, verbally, or physically, or less frequently, by hiding or using weapons.

All of the women were also very resourceful help-seekers and engaged many different strategies throughout their relationships. The most common of which was to reach out to friends or family, which every participant did at least once at some point during the relationship. Unfortunately, this also proved to be the least useful strategy, as they reported that in most cases these informal networks either were not helpful or engaged in victim blaming. All of the women also engaged the legal or criminal justice system in some way, most often in the form of calling the police for help or attempting to file a personal protection order (PPO). Unfortunately, most reported that this system also proved to be largely unhelpful, most often because women felt officers and court personnel did not understand their victimization. Finally, formal networks for help were used the least frequently. This included contacting a shelter, going to a clergy member, a counselor, a medical professional, or a teacher. No single entity proved to be helpful for all participants. In most cases, women were met with barriers or blamed for their situation (substantiated by Moe, 2007).

Resistance

Leaving. Consistent with Lempert's (2006) theory that women often start out using private strategies before moving to a more public help-seeking option, women were more likely to first use resistance strategies within the relationship. The most common of these strategies was ending or attempting to end the relationship. In most cases, this happened several times before a formal separation. Arizona, for example, left her husband at several points. On most occasions she would take the children and stay with her mother at night, then return to the house during the hours her husband was at work. Eventually she decided to formally separate from her husband, "He once got in my face about something and I stood up and said, you know what, I don't have to tolerate this. I'm not going to tolerate this. I'm leaving." At this point she moved in with her mother and enlisted help from the local shelter to find housing of her own (although she was not a resident there).

At the time of the interview, Arizona was living with her mother and looking for an apartment and was still separated from her husband, although she sometimes wavered back and forth about whether or not the separation would be permanent. Many women reported a similar sequence of events. In these cases, although leaving may not have been a permanent end to the relationship, it was a way for women to exercise agency and an attempt to balance the power within the relationship. Oftentimes it was used as a threat or an ultimatum to try and stop the abuse.

Kay reported a similar leaving strategy, "I told him, I said if you ever lay a hand on me or even threaten to lay a hand I'm outta there." Although Kay described

her husband as controlling and psychologically abusive, she insisted that he never physically abused her. On the night she was referring to in the excerpt above, he did physically abuse her. She left him and entered shelter, but insisted that she planned on returning to him after he had some time to think about how he had treated her. In these cases, it seemed that women were using temporary separation from their partners as a way to resist the violence they were experiencing (and possibly had the hope of changing the abuser), but were not yet ready to give up the relationship (Baker, 1997; Peled et al., 2000). Indeed, women commonly indicated that they hated the abuse, yet still loved their partners.

Teresa and Elizabeth also left their partners, but, unlike Arizona and Kay, they had no intention of returning. In many cases, women endured controlling behaviors, emotional, verbal, and sexual abuse for a period of time, but then left after the first physically abusive incident. Teresa, for example, ended the relationship for the first time after her boyfriend kicked her.

And that's when he kicked me in the leg. So then really -- and that was the first time he ever really laid his hands or whatever on me. Before that, he'd get mad. He threw a can opener one time, and he called me "bitch" a lot, and he raised his hand at me. But that was the first time he actually ever touched me. So the heck with this, I'm done. I'm done. I told him to get out. And he was packing his stuff out and taking it out to his car, and then I was just trying to be calm. But at one point when he was out in his car, I ran off into the woods, and I hid back there until he was gone. But he kept driving back and forth.

[Back and forth where?]

In front of the house. I stayed back there in the woods, and I kept watching him drive back and forth. And finally, when I thought it was safe I'd left.

Although she insisted that she had no intention of getting back together with her boyfriend at the time, she eventually moved back in with him after her children's teachers reported her to protective services for not providing a stable home for her boys (she was living at a campground after leaving). Many women who leave abusive relationships experience subsequent poverty and homelessness (Brandwein, 1999; Raphael, 2000). Indeed, many reported leaving several times, only to go back because of barriers they faced, often financial in nature (discussed in more detail below).

In the excerpt that follows, Elizabeth illustrated a complex resistance strategy that, from the outside, may appear as if she abandoned her son because she left him with her abusive husband the night she ended the relationship for good.

I finally, left. And I knew that I couldn't take Nathan [her son] because it was midnight and I had to walk. So, I started walking, didn't know where I was going, didn't know who to call. I didn't know where I was gonna be at. I thought I was gonna have to stay the night outside. So, but eventually I knew James was gonna have to drop Nathan off because he can't handle him for too long. And he did, and that's when I'm like, "You ain't getting him back, sorry."<chuckles>. I knew it would be like that.

It may be difficult to understand how Elizabeth could leave her two-year old son with an abusive man when she fled their shared house and entered shelter. (This is an example of why it is important to ask women of their motives when questioning their decisions.) In this case, Elizabeth knew that if she tried to take their son with her that night, James would have fought for custody simply as a way to take her son from her as one final act of control. Elizabeth knew, however, that James could not handle their son by himself and would not want to keep him unless she tried to take him.

Indeed, several days after Elizabeth left, James dropped their son off at her mother's house and indicated he couldn't handle him. Knowing her husband's control motives, she was able to manipulate him into freely giving her their son when she left. Although it may have appeared that she abandoned her son when she fled her husband, this decision was actually a calculated move to ensure his future safety.

Indeed, many women showed resistance in the manner in which they planned to leave. They illustrated great resourcefulness and courage. In most instances this involved hiding money, food, or clothing. Deborah described how she planned her exit the first time:

[Had you been planning it or was it kind of spontaneous?]

No. I had been planning it for about three months before I did it.

[How were you planning?]

I would slowly, quietly pack stuff. You know, as I did laundry I'd sort out the stuff and I'd put it somewhere else. And ah, he didn't have a clue. I would tuck two or three outfits away. When I went grocery shopping I'd store a few cans in the garage. You know, I'd start to store stuff, because if you don't do it like that, they're gonna notice. Then I finally left. It felt so good, let me tell you. It felt so good.

Rose and DeeDee also indicated they hid money,

I had no money available to me. If mean if I found a nickel in the dryer or the washer I kept it. I hid it. I'm serious. I started saving up money just by keeping change I found around the house or in the washer after I washed a load. (Rose)

And so I took him off my bank account. All the girls at the bank know though, I keep little money in there just in case. (DeeDee)

Fighting Back. Other than leaving, fighting back was the most frequently reported resistance strategy. Although physical force may be the most commonly thought of form of fighting back, women more frequently reported they fought back verbally and emotionally. Elizabeth, for example, stated, “I started fighting back. I started hitting him where it hurt, not physically, but now I call him a ‘toothless bastard’, and I laugh at him for not having any teeth.” She also reported saying to her husband after leaving,

And he calls me “honey” all the time when I’m on the phone with him and its like, “Don’t call me that. I am not your honey!” I tell him that too. I said, “Don’t patronize me with that stupid honey bullshit, it’s not gonna work anymore.” He acts like I’m stupid. Like I’m gonna take you back after all the crap that you did to me, I’m not gonna take you back.

Deborah also verbally fought back against her husband,

I told him one day, I said, “I wanna live to torment you.” I got right in his face and smiled when I said it. I got smacked, but it was worth it <laughing>. That was worth it that day. I think that was the day he pushed me into the shelf and cracked my head open. I was being so sassy that day, he just really made me mad. I had had it, I had just had it. I had had it.

Some women reported that, although they may not have outwardly said anything directly to their abusers, they would internally resist. DeeDee, for example, recalled being seemly complicit to his desire to be called “Sergeant,” while she was adamant that on the inside, she said it sarcastically. Every time she referred to him with that title, then, she was resisting his control in a small way, “I called him Sergeant, he loved that. Or Master Sergeant. That, that was even better. To me it was a joke. Master Sergeant my ass <says sarcastically>.”

Several of the women also fought back physically against their abusers.

When women did fight back with violence, however, it was in retaliation against their abuser's attacks, *not* as a means to establish a pattern of control and fear, as was typical of their partners' violence. As was discussed in chapter two, this is contrary to research on mutual abuse indicating women are just as violent as men in intimate relationships (Gelles & Strauss, 1988), and supports research suggesting that the context, intention, and level of injury need to be critically examined when explaining what is seemingly "mutual combat" in intimate relationships (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). In this context, fighting back physically is a means of survival, rather than a means to inflict pain or cause fear.

Women most often fought back as a way to resist their abusers control or as a way to protect themselves during a violent attack.

And he was hitin' me, like with one hand and he had me by my hair with the other hand. <pause> I went, after I got away from him, in his mom's room and grabbed this two by four and I came out and I hit him across the back of his legs and he fell. And then I went to hit him again and he grabbed it. And then he hit me with it. (Amanda)

When I woke up, like I said, I woke up in a panic and um, I guess I felt him like, on top of me. Like the skin touch or whatever. He was on top of me trying to take my clothes off me. And I'm like, "What in the sam hell are you doing? Get off me." And he wouldn't, like, get up so I could breathe. And he weighs 200 pounds or more. And um, I um, I just started like hitting him in the face at first and then, I got him down to like, my feet where I could reach him with my feet. And I kicked him over, like a hope chest or whatever. And then, I um, I just kept like hitting him in the face. And he's like, "You're hitting me and it hurts." And I said, "Yeah now you know exactly how I feel right now." And um, I don't mean to be gross or anything but he had a hard on and it was, oh, it was bad. And I reached into the nightstand and pulled out this knife I kept in there. And, um, I opened up that knife. And I put it to his throat and I said, "You see those steps? You find a way to get your pants up

and get down those steps and get the hell out of here before I slit your throat end to end.” (Abigail)

Elizabeth described an incident where her husband was verbally abusing her in front of their son.

There was an incident where he kept calling me a stupid bitch in front of our son because I was getting frustrated with the seatbelt that kept locking, and I couldn't get it over Nathan's [her son] lap to buckle. And this was after we were separated, but I had to swallow my pride and ask him for a ride because he took my truck. And I was in the backseat when he called me a stupid bitch. I was like, "Please," I was like, "Please call me stupid bitch one more time. Please I'm begging you. Please." And he did, and I was like, "You stupid dumb, oh, you dumb-." And he didn't expect this because I waited. I didn't just haul off and sock him. I waited five minutes. I waited till he took a drink of his damn Mountain Dew in his stupid glass cup because he never drinks out of a pop bottle and never drink out of a can. I punched him really hard in the back of the head and busted his dentures out.

It is important to keep in mind that women did not retaliate physically after one incident. In all of the cases reported here, women had endured months or years of abuse at the hands of their partners before they began fighting back physically.

Kay, for example indicated,

It got to a point where I couldn't take it anymore. I'd start slappin' on him and stuff and throwin' things at him. I'd wipe the table off [large sweeping motion with her arm] with my hand, you know. Then it got to a point where I realized I'd have to clean up after I did it, so it's like, "screw this, I aint' doin' it no more" <laughs nervously>.

Jenny, who had been severely injured, was missing a leg, and used a wheelchair or crutches, also got to a point where fighting back physically seemed like a last resort.

And I'm not -- I can't -- I just didn't have it in me no more, you know? I mean there were times we were, <pause> I've had to throw the crutches down and go "come on let's go," because what I wanted you to do is kick me down on the ground 'cause I got the upper body strength of a man, you know? Knock me down because I'm bringing you down with me, and you're not going to

get back up because I -- I used the crutches for years. You got to figure every step I take, and plus I weigh 220 pounds. I've been lifting 220 pounds every time I walked, you know? Just get me on the ground!

Although DeeDee did not actually physically aggress against her boyfriend, she did fight back by destroying her boyfriend's property after she kicked him out of their apartment following a particularly violent episode.

He would um, he'll try to break through my picture window, this and that. Always calling me up for is clothes. He always, he left his clothes and then called me all the time or broke in trying to get 'em. So finely I burned them in the fire place. And I said, "You have no reason to call here for clothes anymore because they're burned, they're gone."

DeeDee indicated that she expected violence in retaliation for her resistance but, at the point, it was worth it as she felt she needed to take a stand and reclaim her life.

Finally, Deborah engaged in an extreme form of resistance against her husband. After seven years of mental, physical, sexual abuse, and several attempts to end the relationship, she informed her husband she was filing for divorce and taking their daughter, "Finally I'm like, that's it, I'm leaving. So I took my daughter, we went back home, and I packed my stuff and he called me. He said, 'You'll leave me over my dead body.'" Deborah indicated she took this threat seriously, "I knew, I just knew the only way I'd get out alive was if he wasn't. So I, I did the, you know, the burning bed thing." She described,

And he came home, the only thing that saved him was the fact that I told the neighbor lady what I was gonna do. I told her the next time he came home drunk, and started to hit me, that I was gonna tie him up, and set him on fire. So I was, I couldn't get out any other way. So he came home, and I did that. He beat me, then he was on the bed, he was so drunk. <pause> I didn't actually tie him up, but I started the room on fire, grabbed my daughter and left. And she [the neighbor] called the fire department. They got him out

okay. He said a cigarette fell outta his hand. Part of me hates that he lived because he, he's just a bad man.

Deborah insisted that her husband lied about how the fire started simply so he could continue to control her (not implicating her in the fire would mean she would not be arrested). She said that, although she was able to leave that day, he continued to stalk her for quite some time afterwards and threatened to kill her if she did not give up custody of their daughter. On one occasion, he cut the brake line of her car, causing a rather severe accident that injured her and her daughter. Fearing that he wouldn't stop until one of them were dead, Deborah willingly gave up custody of their daughter to him, a decision she said she made to keep her safe. During the interview, Deborah maintained that she truly believed allowing her husband to have full custody of their daughter was the only way she could keep her safe. She believed his attacks would not stop on both of them (cutting her brake lines, for example) until he had retained custody.

Refusing to Comply. Women also resisted their partner's control by refusing to comply with their demands or do what their partners told them to do. At times they outright went against their partners' wishes or ignored their rules.

He didn't want me to go anywhere, to my mom's, but I did it anyways, I didn't let it stop me from going to see my mom. I went anyway!

[Oh really?]

Yea but when I'd got back he'd always fight about it and he'd be like "Who was over there? You got guys over there?" And I'm like "You're crazy." But I would still go, I really didn't care what he said 'cuz that's my mom, I'm still going to go to my mom's. But he did, you know, stop me from hanging out with most of my friends 'cuz I just didn't want to deal with the fight when I

came back 'cuz I'd come back with the kids, we'd be tired after, you know, going out all day and we'd be tired, we'd go to like the zoo or the park and we'd try to come home, and rest and go to sleep, and he would just start yelling, you know, it'd just be a <sigh>. You know what? Towards the end it wasn't even worth going anywhere because I didn't want to come back and fight. (Nicole)

Amy reported that she said to her boyfriend,

I'm gonna tell you what John. I'm gonna sleep in the guest room and I'm gonna invite over whoever I want to invite over. I pay the friggin' rents here. I buy the groceries here. I pay for everything, and if I want friends over here and I should be able to have the right to have friends. (Amy)

I said that "I'm not moving out of this house. I'm not moving out so your girlfriend can move in. That's bullshit. This is my house. I have the job. I'm paying for it. It's in my name. Screw you." You know, at that point it was very angry. (Arizona)

Cassie stated, "He always cut me down, everyday. I was lazy, I was this and that," and so she eventually told her boyfriend, "The only reason I'm lazy is cuz you tell me I'm lazy so, fine, I'm not gonna do your housework if I'm gonna be called lazy. Plain and simple. Do it yourself!"

Some of the women refused to comply in a more passive, indirect way. Rose, for example, reported that her husband would cook for her after a physical or sexual assault.

See the next morning he'd always want to make me breakfast. Now I don't want to eat something he coughed up, you know? So, I'd just, when he'd go back downstairs I'd flush what I could down the toilet <smiles>.

By her facial expressions as she said this, it appeared that she took great pride in this silent act of resistance. As mentioned in chapter four, DeeDee reported that her boyfriend knew how much she loved being in the woods and so he would tell her one

of these days when she was out there, he would kill her and let the coyotes and crows take care of her body. She indicated that for a long time she stopped spending time in the woods, until she eventually decided to return to her normal habits in an act of disobedience.

I was actually afraid to be in the woods. I had to move twice because I figured, he knows this spot. Now that's pretty crazy too. But I won't let him take the woods for me. That's real fear, but I went to a place in the woods where I felt he wouldn't know where I was and I enjoyed it the most. Because he's not gonna take, that from me, <pause> what I love most.

Although continuing to go into the woods may not seem like a courageous act of resistance, it was clearly an act that was important and powerful to her. Even though many of the women acted in resistance to their partner's abuse, these behaviors often had serious consequences (as was illustrated clearly in chapter four). Resistance strategies did not end abusive behaviors, but they did allow women a sense of control over their lives, even if only temporary.

Help Seeking

Informal Networks. The most common form of help-seeking women reported was reaching out to friends and family. Unlike Goodman, et al. (2003), who found that engaging friends and family seemed to be particularly helpful for women, the women in this study rarely indicated this was a worthwhile endeavor. Nevertheless, reaching out to these informal networks is one of the most common, and often on the first ways in which women seek help (Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee & Sullivan, 2003; Lempert, 1997; Moe, 2007).

Women often described instances in which relatives and friends blamed them for the abuse. Teresa's father initially pressured her to date her boyfriend. After it became obvious that he was controlling, jealous, and verbally abusive, he then told her to stay away from him. Once the abuse became physical, Teresa went to her father for help, "That's when my dad said, 'Well, you brought it on yourself.' Because he told me, 'You stay away from him. He's going to beat the shit out of you one of these days.'" Deborah had a similar experience when she disclosed the abuse to her mother. Her excerpt also brings in an added race component to her interaction with her mother, who was extremely racist and Deborah felt she was not sympathetic about the abuse because her partner was black.

[How did your mom react when you finally told her?]

Um, just basically that I chose, two of 'em, were, well I've been with black men for 22 years, but she basically said that it was my bad choices. And I got myself in, I gotta get myself out, and she didn't really want to be involved.

Lack of support from people that women assumed would be empathetic was difficult for them to accept. It seemed to be particularly disheartening when women went to family for support and they were not believed. After several years of marriage to an abusive man, Irene went to her father for help leaving. Irene's plea for help was met with resistance because her husband had considerable financial means and her family apparently felt that was worth whatever strife there may have been in the marriage. Irene described a time when she tried to make her father understand the severity of the abuse.

My dad, you know, I said, dad, look at this, he shoves this up my pussy!

[What was it?]

It was, like a, like a baseball bat <nervous laughter>. You know, small though. I don't know what it was.

[And you showed your dad?]

Mm-hm. And I said, I want him out of my house! And my dad didn't believe me. <pause> I don't think my dad ever believed me. And everybody wanted, you know <pause> my family wanted me to get back with Bob but they didn't know the relationship as much as I did. You know what I'm saying? Cuz he was a quarter million dollar jerk, literally! I don't give a shit about his money.

Abigail didn't expressly say that her father blamed her, but did state that he refused to help her in the midst of a violent incident. She described,

And I got in the chair and I was crying and he [her boyfriend] goes, "I'll just blow your fucking head off." And I'm like, "Well how are you gonna do that?" He got the gun, loaded it, had his finger on the trigger, had the gun pointed at my head, and all my father said was, "I think it's time for me to leave." And he got up, walked out the door, didn't send the police or anything.

Apparently Abigail's father knew that her boyfriend routinely threatened her like this, and so he did not see any real crisis in the situation (he took it as an empty threat). Nonetheless, seeing his daughter in that situation and casually walking out of the room left Abigail feeling "alone and heartbroken."

Nicole and Arizona both described their family members having mixed responses. Both of them reported that their families were at times supportive and would listen to them while they shared their experiences. The contradictory messages of support and blame, however, are evident in their recollections. Although neither Nicole nor Arizona's families cut off contact or outwardly refused to believe or

support them, it was apparent that on some level they felt these women were to blame for the abuse they were experiencing at the hands of their husbands.

Like, I was even afraid to tell my mom that he would say things to me, like that. But once in awhile when I was crying, and I just couldn't stop, and it would just come out and my mom would be like "Oh my god!", like, "Why are you still with him?", like, "What is wrong with you?" And, yea. <sigh>

[Was she supportive of you when that stuff would come out?]

Yea...we would sit down, and we would talk, we would hang out, I would spend the night over there and we would, you know, watch TV together and she'd be like "What the fuck is wrong with you Nicole?" She'd be like "I just want to slap you." She says that to me all the time. (Nicole)

Arizona described her family's reaction to the news that she was leaving her husband, "My family's all mad at me and everyone's all angry. And I'm like, 'But you guys don't understand. It's not about what you think it is, I'm not going back to him.'" Arizona's excerpt points to a particular complexity that families often deal with when abuse affects their loved one. The person that she was accusing of horrendous acts was not some stranger that only she had a relationship with, but was also their son-in-law and the father of their grandchildren. In this sense, it isn't just the woman seeking help that is grieving the death of a marriage or of a family, the extended family is often also grieving the end of that marriage. Families wanting women to try and salvage the marriage, for the sake of the children or the sake of normalcy are a common occurrence. Unfortunately, it left women feeling isolated and misunderstood.

Many women went to their partners' parents to try and convince them to talk to their sons. In every instance where this was reported, women's in-laws were not

supportive. Deborah's in-laws told her they did not want to get involved in their son's business. She stated,

"I tried to talk to his mom and dad. I did talk to 'em and uh, they basically said they just didn't want to get in the middle of it. You know, that they would pray for me, you know, or if I needed the kids to come over there or whatever. But, that was it <pauses, looks down at the table>."

Several women indicated that their partner's family became a tool for abuse and in some cases, participated in or reinforced their sons' control. Amanda, for example, said her boyfriend's family would assist him in keeping her son from her.

It was always like, me and then him and his whole family against me. Like when I would come over to get my kid, they wouldn't let me have him. They always used my kid against me.

[So did his family know that he was violent?]

Yeah. And they always would bail outta the jail if he did go. When the last time he went he was in there for two months and his Grandma bailed him out! And that's when he split my lip open and choked me! I had marks all around my neck and my lip was split open and the cops took pictures of it. She bailed 'em out!

Amy described this of her boyfriend's parents,

I expected his parents to be supportive, because they're like parents to me. But they weren't. She [his mother] was mad at me, they threatened to take my car back cuz they bought my car. They threatened me that they would keep the car if I didn't pay for his stuff or if I left. I'm like, I'm not paying for his stuff so he can support his girlfriend and have someone else live there. I'm setting up my boundaries. <pause> They didn't talk to me after that.

Likewise, Nicole's mother-in-law also used transportation as a way to control her.

They asked me if I wanted to press charges, and Ruth, that's my mother-in-law, said that if I didn't press charges she would let me take the vehicle home. Because it was like a four hour drive to go home. And so I agreed not to press charges, then after the cops left she took my car anyway!

At other times, women seemed to indicate that they did receive support from their friends and relatives; however, this was reported much less frequently than the former. Oftentimes, the help women received from informal networks was pivotal in their ability to end the relationship.

[So how did you eventually break up with him?]

I just told him it was over. "I can't take it anymore. You need to leave." Of course he wouldn't. But then my grandpa told him to get the hell off of his property. And it *was* technically my grandpa's property, so the cops actually made him leave.

Although Arizona indicated that her family was mad at her for wanting a separation, when asked if her friends supported her, she recalled,

I have great friends. I have a great support system. And I'm not scared to call them, I used to be scared. I didn't want to call them to let them know how horrible and miserable my life was. Cuz you felt like an idiot, you felt ashamed, for it. You know? So now I just call and am like, this is what that asshole did to me last night. You know?

Legal/Criminal Justice System

Police Officers. Another popular means for help-seeking was from the legal and criminal justice system. Of the ways women reached out to the justice system, calling the police was the most common. Unfortunately, again the majority of reports indicated that this was not helpful, and in some cases, led to further victimization or even to the women themselves being arrested. It is not completely clear whether women rarely had positive experiences with the police or if negative encounters were the stories they recalled more readily because they felt an injustice had been done. Similar research, however, has found that battered women often do often experience

re-victimization from police officers who respond to their calls (Kane, 1999; Moe, 2007).

In some cases, calling the police did not improve women's situation and the batterer was not arrested.

And even that time he broke my nose I went up to the police station like a day or two later and I was finally gonna press charges on them and they're like, "We're not gonna do nothin' about it because you didn't tell us when it happened." And I'm like, "Here I have the x-rays of my broken nose!" And then another time he beat the hell out of me then. And I called the cops on him, and the cops came, just gave them a ride to work. (Amanda)

I guess you can beat the shit out of each other as a husband and wife and they don't do nothing. (Jenny)

Amy recalled that she felt the police were ineffective because they did not do anything when they responded. Depending on the situation when they arrived, sometimes the police officer did not have enough evidence to make an arrest and was unable to force the accused offender to leave the property. This nonetheless left women feeling like the police did not take abuse seriously or that they were not believed.

I told him he needs to leave now. He wouldn't leave, so I ended up calling the cops and telling them they need to come and get somebody out of my house that's trespassing.

[Did they come out?]

No, it wasn't technically my house, so they said they couldn't do anything. They don't give a shit.

Abigail worked midnights and her boyfriend often stalked her to ensure she was indeed working and not having an affair. She described a night when he was harassing her when she stopped by a gas station on one of her deliveries:

[Did you call the police?]

Yeah, and they were like, “Yeah, we know who you’re talking about, ha ha.” <shakes her head>. Like it’s funny to them. I had pulled up at a gas station to go in to get me a soda or whatever. And him and one of my cousins were in the parking lot at the store and he like started pounding on my windows an stuff and the police pulled up. And I’m like [to the officer], “Dude, he’s harassing me, can you do something?” And they’re like, “Well, what the hell are you doing out at 4:00 in the morning?” And I showed ‘em my FedEx badge, it’s not like I’m normally out at 4:00 in the morning, I work at FedEx. I’m at work!

[What did the police do?]

They just told him to go home at that time.

Women often felt as if the police either did not take them seriously or somehow were siding with their abuser. Abigail seemed to be insinuating this lack of seriousness on the police officers part as she recalled his casualness and laughter once he recognized her partner. Her recollection of the officer’s response seemed to be more in line with a “boys will be boys” philosophy than viewing this as a crime and handling it accordingly. This was reinforced for Abigail when the officer then turned his attention to her to ask why she was out at four in the morning to begin with. This type of victim blaming was reported by other women as well.

When I asked Deborah if she had any experiences with the police, she illustrated the complexities that calling the police often pose for women. She responded,

Oh I had stacks and stacks and stacks of police reports.

[What happened when the police would come out?]

He [her husband] would just say he was out of town, he didn't know what I was talking about, or you know, whatever. They kept giving me these crisis shelter things. Then they'd leave. Didn't ask more questions, didn't look into it. Just believed him that he was outta town so it must not have happened. Or a couple times he'd be gone by the time they showed. They do nothing then.

[So by the time the police responded he was gone?]

He was gone, yeah. Yep. There was a couple times they took him to jail and that was the two times that he beat me almost to death. So I learned not to, not to do that.

[You learned not to do what?]

Have the police go get him, and take him to jail. The beatings were worse when he was released. He got out, and, and twice, the two times that he went to jail for that, he came home and beat me almost to death and I ended up in the hospital for six weeks both times. So I, I didn't, you know, I would beg him, please don't arrest him, please don't arrest him. He'll kill me.

Deborah's excerpt illustrates the complexity in calling the police because, although they did make an arrest (which would seem to be helpful and indicates they view domestic violence as a crime), it shows how arresting a perpetrator can sometimes actually increase the level of violence women experience. When men are arrested for domestic violence, they are often arraigned and released within twenty-four hours. If a woman is ready to leave her abuser and has a safety plan in place, this may be the respite she needs to safely leave. If, on the other hand, a woman does not have a plan in place or is simply not ready or not able to leave, the consequences of the arrest can be more serious than the incident that prompted her to call the police in the first place (Wolf, Ly, Hobart, & Kernic, 2003). Indeed, many women do not call the police

because they fear the repercussions of what will happen if their perpetrator is not arrested or when he is released (Fleury, Sullivan, Bybee, & Davidson, 1998).

Sometimes when women called the police, they simply asked one of the two of them to leave the property for a while so they could cool off, another indication to women their victimization was not taken seriously.

I had nowhere to live and because we kept fighting they told me I had to leave.

[They told you that you had to leave?]

Yea because it legally wasn't my residence. It was her house [they lived in one of her mother-in-law's rentals] so they couldn't make him leave, so they made me leave. And me, Danny, and Lisa [her children] actually left in the back of a state police cop car and I left with what I could carry. And that included Lisa's car seat. So I had Lisa's car seat, I had Lisa, and I think I had two bags. And Danny didn't even have his shoes on. Danny was like horribly crying 'cuz he didn't want to leave. It was horrible. (Nicole)

So the cops, what did they do? "Oh, you have a place to go? You can take your kids and you can leave. You can go to your mom's. He doesn't have anywhere to go." I'm like, 'So you're saying officer that this house that I pay for, that he doesn't contribute to, he's making threats against me, I have to take my sick kids and leave.' You guys are a great court system. You guys are great justice. And a couple times when I was there he called them and they made me leave, the kids and I had to leave. (Arizona)

Sometimes they would make him leave, sometimes they would make me leave. I guess it would depend on if he was willing to leave. So if he was actually willing to leave, which happened most of the time he was, he would leave. The other times when wanted to be a complete jerk I would have to pick up the kids and leave. (Kay)

This one time when the police came, they um, it was a female trooper, she took me downstairs and I had to show her the bruise on my leg and the furniture all turned over and everything. Um, they just made him leave. He didn't have to go to jail, but they made him leave. (Rose)

Although many women said the police simply made one of them leave the property, others reported that they were arrested either along with their abusers or instead of their abusers. This occurred when women called the police for help and also, at times, when their abusers called the police. Regardless of how the authorities became involved, women indicated they felt a sense of relief knowing the police were coming. This quickly faded, however, when they realized that this obvious source of help was viewing them as the offender. Oftentimes this was after women fought back physically. Both Amanda and Cassie recalled being arrested after they fought back against their boyfriends when they assaulted them when they were pregnant.

I got arrested for domestic violence because I, I slapped him in the face because I was like seven months pregnant and, he was throwing me around the room and, um, <pause> after he was throwin' me around the room he saw that his brother had a video camera on the kitchen table. And he was like, "tape it Eric." Because then I was going crazy. You don't beat me when I'm seven months pregnant! And, he's like, "hit me, hit me." He was right in my face and so I just started smackin' him and his brother videotaped it. And then I got arrested. So I was arrested. But he was throwin' me around the room and smackin' me! He always gets away with everything. (Amanda)

He had just been beatin' me! And I mean, you don't hit pregnant women. And, finally I just went off. And I blacked out. I don't remember all of it. I remember just punchin' him. I remember the cops attacking me, well, tackling me. And I remember, well I got attempted R & O [resisting arrest] against an officer, cuz I guess I kicked him in the nuts, but I don't remember. But I had a bruise from here, to here, here, to here [motions to her arm from wrist to shoulder]. From the cops. Beating the hell out of arm, getting my kid out of my arms. Cuz I had my kid in my arms when he was beatin' on me. And I guess I still did when the cops came. (Cassie)

Physical violence often increases during pregnancy or shortly after the child is born, when a woman's attention is naturally taken away from her abusive partner (Baccus, Mezey, & Bewley, 2006; Blumberg, 2004).

On some occasions, the abuser was the one that called the police, a commonly used abusive tool. Often this occurred either when women fought back and their partners convinced the police they were the primary aggressors, or when women were under the influence. In DeeDee's case, it was both. Her boyfriend called the police when she spit in his face and proceeded to become intoxicated after he had physically abused her.

He got his close to me <motioning about an inch from her nose>, and I figured, I'm going to die here now. I already heard about how he'll kill me and the coyotes will eat me up. Um, next thing, I'm flying over to the other side of the room... And I figured I'm dying, he was saying this stuff – he had me on the floor, he was hitting me. I spit in his face. That was my mistake, I should have never told the cops I'd spit in his face... Um, he took off and I decided, shit, I'm going to get drunk. It was now like ten in the morning. I didn't care, I'm sitting here, I'm gonna get drunk. And I did, I got totally wasted. Well, he came back around six something. Oh he said a bunch of crap that didn't happen, stuck his head in the door and he said, "Oh I'll show you what I do to people that want to call the fucking police on me!" So *he* called the police and I thought, "Good!" Police came, they came in and I thought I had nothing to worry about. And then when I finally said that yes, I spit in his face and yes, I was drunk, they cuffed me and took me to jail. He fractured, three fractures in my wrist. They couldn't even take my fingerprints. I said, "Well, blessed Mother, I prayed to get away from him, jail's better than this."

[What was your charge though?]

Domestic violence. He told the cops a bunch of stuff, and I was obviously drunk. So they arrested me. Then he told my daughter, "That's what happens to people that try to call the police on me."

Rose's husband also called the police as a tactic of abuse. The previous night he had been physically and sexually abusive after a party they had hosted at their house.

Following the attack, she refused to sleep in their bed (when he demanded her to) and instead slept in her son's room. She was intoxicated during the assault and proceeded

to consume more alcohol after the attack, a commonly used coping mechanism for abused women (Clark & Foy, 2000; Gilbert, El-Bassel, Rajah, Foleno, and Frye, 2001). Realizing she did not have noticeable injuries, Rose's husband called the police and reported that she was intoxicated and had physically assaulted him.

And then when the police came out they found, I had the bottle of whiskey underneath my pillow because I had to hide everything. And, yes I did have drinks the night before, but you know probably 95% of America did. It was New Year's Eve. I had whiskey in the room [her son's room], which I wasn't drinking. And um, they took me for hitting my husband the night before, which I didn't do. It cost me \$1500, a year's probation, all of the bullshit that goes with it. I lost custody of my son to my mother for one year.

Rose was subsequently arrested for domestic violence and temporarily lost custody of her son. Recall that Rose had documented a long history of abuse at the hands of her husband, the police had responded at her request several times prior to this night, and she had hospital records where she had been treated for injuries in the past. It seemed to be a somewhat common theme for police to arrest women the first time they suspected them of abuse, yet not arrest their partners when called out on multiple occasions, despite the fact that many of these men had documented histories of being abusive. When victims are arrested for domestic violence, it poses serious consequences for their future help-seeking. Namely, such women often lose the rights of domestic violence victims, such as safe transportation to a shelter, free legal assistance, or the support services and temporary housing provided by domestic violence shelters (Hirschel & Buzawa, 2002).

While the majority of participants did call the police for help at least one time (and many of them, several times), some of them eventually stopped calling when they perceived that this was not a useful source for help.

So I stopped calling. You don't deal with the cops anymore because they don't help you. (Arizona)

They don't help. They say they do, but they don't help.

[What do you mean they don't help?]

They act like I'm a flake. They just, I don't know, whenever my last name gets brought up, I get treated like shit. One time I called the cops. When I had to go pick Nathan [her son] up because James [her husband] threatened to kidnap him. And, they acted like I was in the wrong. (Elizabeth)

... they're such assholes to me because of who I had around me. So, finally said "I don't care if I'm being raped, robbed or murdered, I will not call the police because they will not help me." And every time I would report something, I would end up in trouble, you know? (Jenny)

There were a couple of instances where women reported positive interactions with the police. Unfortunately, these were the exception. Deborah indicated one time the neighbors called the police: "The neighbors heard him, um, they heard me screaming and the baby crying and him, just going crazy. And they called the police and they came and they arrested him and took him to jail." This was the only time that an arrest was not followed by an even more violent attack when her husband was released, possibly because it was the neighbors that had called and not Deborah. Jenny also indicated that, with her first abusive boyfriend, the police were a great source of help. At the time she was living in a remote part of the United States and had been lost out in the woods after she fled her boyfriend on foot.

The state troopers found us [her and her two children]. We were in the bush. We finally called the police. We couldn't even get a signal. They picked up that there was a distress ping off of a tower. And they came out.

[What happened when they came?]

I didn't tell 'em anything. I said, just get us out of here now. And they took us to town. Well, no, first we stayed at a ladies house on the way. And they took us to town the next day to a women's shelter. And we stayed there for three months.

It was a couple of years later, and with another abuser, when Jenny indicated she stopped calling the police because they were not helpful. It seemed that through all of the contacts she had with officers throughout the years with respect to domestic violence, this was the only experience she had that she classified as an instance of successful help-seeking.

Personal Protection Orders. Women also reported filing for personal protection order, attempting to obtain a divorce, or trying to gain custody of their children. Much like other forms of help-seeking, this often proved ineffective for various reasons. Rose described being denied a protective order twice when she tried to file. Once she was denied following a physical assault after which she required medical care, and the second time, when her then ex-husband was stalking her.

[Did you ever have a PPO against him?]

They wouldn't let me.

[Why not?]

We both had been told to stay away from each other but it wasn't anything in writing. You know, because he didn't actually kill me <laughs sarcastically>. That's the way I look at it. Um, you know putting me in the hospital wasn't enough to get a PPO on him. I've talked to the police many times. And then

when he was following me - and do you know how stupid it sounds to walk in there and say, "well he pulled up to me and was making faces at me, and uh, you know," or "he followed me." Geez, I even gone shopping in Kmart and poof, there he is. Or if I'm in Walmart his truck will be parked right beside me and he'll be in there watching me, down an aisle. And I went outside and there's his truck, right beside my car. The worst was when they denied the PPO. They just wanted me to, to just let everything chill out and he had to go live somewhere else for thirty days.

While some women were denied protective orders when they applied, others were granted the order, but either violated it themselves or their partners found creative ways to violate the order. Deborah first recalled a time when she wanted to file a PPO, but then changed her mind because she feared the repercussions that would follow. After describing how her husband responded when she eventually did file for and was granted the order, it seems as though Deborah had good reason to initially fear his reaction.

When I got out [of the hospital] and I went to stay with my mom for three days. And then, I got back home and got my daughter and ah, I tried to file, like I told him I wanted to separate or whatever and that made him even angrier. So I'm like, you know what, never mind, forget it.

[So did you ever try to file a personal protection order or restraining order?]

Mm-hm. I did when I left him, I filed a personal protection order that he couldn't come within 100 feet of me. And, and he didn't. I mean, he did cut my brake lines and all that kind of stuff. But my car was at work when he did it and so I tried to call the police and tell 'em that. And they were like, "Well he wasn't around you so that's something else." So I'm like, "alright". He still terrorized me. And got away with it, because technically I wasn't within 100 feet of the vehicle or my child when he did it. <laughs>. Yeah. Isn't that something? (Deborah)

You know no damn restraining order is gonna mean shit. Shit, me and David [her boyfriend] had so many different restraining orders and you know how many we freakin' broke? Every single one. Shit, he was living with me and

I'm like, "I'll open the garage and you hurry up and pull your truck in there and I'll close it." You know? It's just that easy. And then there's just a point where the cops get sick of dealing with, comin' to your house and you not leaving him. (Amanda)

Finally, several women stated that they never even tried to obtain a protective order out of fear for how their partners may retaliate.

...um, so I made a police report, and then I told my advocate and that, and I already forewarned the county police because he was breaking in. And uh, she said, "You gotta get a PPO." I said, "You don't understand this guy like I do. *He will kill me.* His dad was a cop... You don't know him. Yeah, I'm here this week. But I *do* know him. He will shoot me." (DeeDee)

As was mentioned in chapter four, battered women's assessment of their safety is an accurate indicator of lethality level. It is important to understand why they may choose to not pursue a protective order or why they may not chose to call the police. More importantly, this decision should be respected, as they know their abusers and what these men are capable better than anyone else.

Formal Networks. The least frequently accessed source of help among the women in this study was formal networks. Like other sources, these were sometimes helpful and other times not an effective source of help. The formal networks women reported using were the shelter system, clergy, a counselor, medical personnel, and child's teacher. For some, the shelter served as an important turning point in their ability to regain control over their lives. These women had nothing but positive things to say about their shelter experience. Deborah, for example said her thirty days in the particular shelter where our interviews took place were a "gift from God" and the staff were "amazingly helpful and understanding." Kay also indicated that the

night she called the hotline the staff that she spoke with made her feel safe and like someone was finally listening to her. The staff on duty walked her step by step through an exit plan and helped her arrive at the shelter safely around eleven o'clock at night.

Unfortunately, although shelter offered safety and a temporary reprieve from violence for all of the women, some women described it as a controlling, institutionalized environment, a finding that has been substantiated by others (Bogard, 1998; DeWard & Moe, 2010; Stark, 1994). A few women described the shelter as restrictive and controlling. Nicole, for instance, stated,

So they don't understand what it's like for somebody to go from a situation where they are being controlled, they are being treated like a child, and then have to come ask for laundry soap. You know what I mean? So it's from being controlled by the abuser, and then being controlled by a shelter. Just like the whole back to the jail thing. Like I can't even lock the bathroom door. And then they wake you up to do room checks. You have to really come into my room? You know? She [shelter staff] comes in at night, turns the light on, I mean it's just so invasion of my privacy.

Elizabeth had been to this particular shelter before and ended up returning to her husband before her thirty days were up because of the restrictive nature of the shelter rules and the complications that come with communal living. "When I was here [in shelter] the last time, it was, just, so bad. I ended up going back to him." Many other women described difficulties they had with communal living. Again, much of this centered around the rules that were in place because it was a thirty-five bed communal living shelter.

Clergy serve particularly important roles in help-seeking for domestic violence survivors, as they are often the people women confide in. Women reported mixed results when approaching their clergy leader for help. Deborah had an extremely effective outcome when she disclosed her abuse to her pastor. He and his wife believed her and went so far as to assist her in fleeing her husband by providing safe housing.

And ah, so I told my pastor that I was, I wasn't real into the church down there [referring to a southern part of the state]. And ah, I told my pastor what was going on. And she said, um, "You gotta to get away from him. You know, you gotta get away from him." And ah, so I tried a couple times and he found us. And, at the very end, um, my pastor said, "Pack your stuff and I will come and get you." So, we, my male pastor, they're married, so it's a male and a female pastor. So they made a plan, and the male pastor called him [her husband] to help him do a church project. So the male pastor called and he went with him. And then the female pastor came and got me and my kids out of there. This man would not stop. They took me to their house, he came to the house all times a night. Then they put in, um, one of the, a suite at the church. They had like, suites up above. They put me in one of those for a while.

Others' help-seeking experiences with clergy were not so successful.

They [her church] stopped supporting me after that [she filed for divorce]. My pastor thinks I'm dumb. He's just, and they don't like divorce. They're against it totally. It always felt like in the service he was singling me out cuz I was getting a divorce.

[Does your pastor know about the abuse?]

Yeah.

[And he still doesn't support the divorce?]

He wants me to work things out with James and talk to him. I go, "You don't understand emotionally what that man did to me. You don't know, physically what he did to me. I can't go back to that." He doesn't understand. Cuz nobody's ever shoved a gun up his, <short pause> privates. (Elizabeth)

Many had similar results when reaching out to other professionals. Abigail sought help from her counselor, but then never fully disclosed the abuse because her counselor was male and she felt he would not understand.

I mean, who do you talk to about that? That you can be honest about?

[You don't feel comfortable talking to your counselor about it?]

No I don't. I, he's, you don't understand. The therapist is quite a bit older than me, so I don't think he would understand, like, all the issues... And who wants to talk to a man about being raped or having been in a domestic violence situation?

The social stigma of seeking counseling was sometimes enough to prevent women from using this option. Jenny was originally seeing a counselor with Community Mental Health (a county-level resource), then switched to Catholic Human Services because she didn't want people to see her entering the CMH building and think she "was a total whack job". Although the counselor she met with at Catholic Human services was not as helpful when she would discuss domestic violence, she continued to see them because of the potential stigma of using CMH services.

Finally, Rose and Irene both reached out to people they viewed as helping professionals, yet nothing was done.

When you're abused you keep it a secret. You know, you don't tell. And then if you finally do, they don't believe you.

[Who did you finally tell?]

My son's teacher... One time uh, see we went to parent teacher conferences. The teacher asked me because I guess Calvin, he was in kindergarten and he went to school and told. As a little child you know, they don't know. And I don't know what he told, but Calvin's teacher looked at me, with him [her

husband] sitting right there, and she said, “He sure is full of stories” <in a sing-song way>. And I just put my head down cuz I knew exactly what she meant. But she never called. She never called anybody. And I couldn’t say anything more because he [her husband] was sitting right there. (Rose)

I went to my doctor. I didn’t call the police, I was too scared to get him arrested. Because I do love him. And I had a miscarriage with him. He, pushed me out the kitchen door, outside. And I landed in the hospital and I lost that child. I denied it. The doctor knew. But <pause> he didn’t do anything. (Irene)

Medical personnel are particularly well-positioned to intervene when women come in to their office. The very nature of a doctor’s office as a private and intimate space where women are often seen without their partners present makes it a potentially important way to offer help. There is also generally a certain level of trust individuals place in their doctor. This makes it more difficult for women who do disclose in this person they have a high level of trust in when nothing is done.

Barriers

Besides the many implicit barriers that women faced in their attempts at seeking help described above, many faced additional barriers as well. Of these, the most commonly reported were financial, barriers related to their children, and love or a belief their partner would change. Illustrating the various barriers women experienced when seeking help is critical because repeatedly encountering barriers to seeking help reduces feelings of self-efficacy. Recall that efficacy plays an important role in self-concept maintenance (discussed in chapter two); however, individuals must have the opportunity to engage in efficacious actions (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). When women’s opportunities for successful efficacious action are blocked,

(via the barriers encountered when seeking help) it increases the necessity for women to engage in role-taking as a survival tactic to predict the future actions of her abuser, thus increasing the propensity of self-concept change (discussed in the subsequent chapter).

Financial. The most commonly reported barrier women faced was financial in nature. Some women were financially dependent on their partners. Arizona, for example, reported that financial dependence on her husband was not only a barrier to her leaving the marriage, but also part of the reason why she did not want to call the police for help.

I was scared to call the police because I was scared of the repercussions. I didn't *want* him to go back to jail, because I'm like, he is the only means of income I have. How am I going to live? What am I gonna do? So I just felt like we had, like there were no resources. Like I couldn't get any help. And I certainly didn't have anywhere to go without income.

Amy was still involved with and living with her partner during the time of the interviews. She described one of the reasons she was unable to leave was because she could not afford a vehicle or an apartment on her own. Her boyfriend's mother purchased these items for her and used this as a way to encourage her to stay with her son.

I wanted to leave but my vehicle was his mom's. Because everything was pretty much in his mom's name. His mom bought us our car, the house was in his mom's name. We actually didn't own anything, it was hers. But she kind of gave it to us but not legally. You know, she always kept it in her name. So I got in the truck and I tried to leave and she told me that I couldn't leave. And I just kind of like freaked out, I'm like "I want to leave, I'm leaving," and she's like "It's my car. It's my apartment. Good luck!"

Other women also indicated the difficulty in having to balance the prospect of losing everything, giving everything up, in order to leave their partners. Rose lived a comfortable middle-class lifestyle before becoming homeless after she finally left her husband after many years of marriage. She stated, “But you know, you gotta three story house on the lake, or you go to a shelter. What are you gonna do?” Giving up her lake house to move her and her son into a shelter is a realistic challenge faced by women making the difficult decision to leave everything behind. Losing everything is a realistic fear. Both Kay and Elizabeth left their homes to seek safety at the shelter, only to realize that their fears of not being to find housing on their own were real. Elizabeth stated, “James has already done enough that damaged my credit. I can’t even get into an apartment now.” Similarly, Kay reported,

I filled out some applications on housing and they denied me because I’ve never rented before. So, um, they said I had to have a co-signer and I had to have, er yeah, a co-signer, but I don’t have nobody to co-sign for me. So, I had to write a note, a letter, stating why I never rented before or why I’m in the position I’m in now. I’ve never rented before and I went right from my mom’s house to my boyfriend’s house. Now I don’t know what to do.

DeeDee also made the difficult decision to leave everything behind in order to end her relationship with her abusive boyfriends. After separating, she lost their shared home and had to sell her second home for the income, as her boyfriend did not give her access to the income garnered from their shared business. In the following, she described where she was living after leaving.

No, I live in there, I got like a little apartment that has a shower, a sink. I got my microwave, got a hot plate, got a Murphy’s bed. And it works. When you’re paying on all these houses and you lost all this money. It hit me hard. Real hard. And ah, but I won’t give up. Really take some getting used to

after living in a three bedroom home.... I gotta Murphy's bed. I got a TV. I got a chair. I got a shower. But still, I've no windows and here. And that's about to drive me insane.

Children. Oftentimes finances intersected with issues surrounding women's children. When we talked about the why she remained with her boyfriend, Cassie described one of the reasons was that she was able to financially provide for her daughter if she remained with her father:

And her dad's already got, let's see, my daughter's bedroom is full of toys. Plus he's getting her a quad for her birthday. It's a \$200 quad. I'm happy about it because she wants it. She picked it out. She wants it. You know, she picked out her trike, she picks out her toys. If she wants it, her dad gets it. She's spoiled rotten. Me, I can't get her shit, but make her a cake. And that's what I'm doing, I'm gonna make her a homemade birthday cake. I'm not gonna buy one from the store, I'm gonna make her one myself. Well, it's gonna be out of the box, but still, I'm gonna make it.

In the lengthy excerpt below, Nicole illustrated the difficulty that many women face when taking children out of the comfortable lifestyle they are used to and bringing them into a shelter.

I hated coming here, like I cried the whole way, I like talked to mom and sister about coming here and I was like "David [her son], we're going to go to a hotel, it's going to be just like a hotel, we're going to have our own rooms and there's going to be so many people there, it's going to be so cool," you know, and then I turned around, I turned my face and I've got tears just falling down my face. I didn't want him to see. I think it was really hard for me to leave because, you know, just to come from having everything, even though it wasn't mine, you know it was still kind of mine, we were married, to having nothing. So, it's been hard. It's so different for me coming from having everything, like internet, cable, computer, and we had On-Demand, we could pause TV, and now here I have like five channels. And David's like "I want to watch cartoon network or nickelodeon," and I'm like "David, they don't have that here," he's like "Why?" Like David doesn't understand why, you know, we don't have those channels on this TV, and you know, I've never actually thought about that. Wow, you know. Like, we go to the store and he, James would buy him a new bike, that's one thing James did, he bought the kids

stuff, like, like just a couple months ago he bought David a brand new bike and David didn't need a bike. David asked for a bike so James was like, "Whatever, get him a bike." And he just bought him a bike. And now we go to the dollar store and I'm like "Oh David you don't need that," and he's like "but why?" I'm like "Well you're just going to break it!" The only stores we can go to are around here, and the dollar store he wanted this stupid thing, I'm like "David, you're just going to break it," he's like "but I want it." I'm like "David, well we don't really have money for it right now." He's like "Why don't you just call dad?"

Children also posed barriers to leaving or help-seeking in other ways as well.

In most instances, this stemmed from a tactic commonly used by abusers to use women children as a way to control them. They often incited fear that women would lose their children if they called the police or tried to end the relationship. Although women's abusers used their children in a variety of different ways, following excerpts are clear illustrations that this manipulation served as real barriers to seeking-help or leaving.

I had the kids. You know, and because of my drunk driving arrest I felt like he could have taken the kids away. You know, that he could use that against me and he said several times that he would. So it was fear that kept me grounded. You know? (Arizona)

No, I didn't call the police because I was afraid that they were going to take my kids then because -- well, I thought that was his stuff. I was afraid that they're going to say with all these fighting and violence going on, that they were going to take my other two out -- you know, my girls out of the house. (Jenny)

I mean, these people don't understand if I tell 'em that I'm scared and I'm going through this mental shit right now. Then they're gonna use that against me. You know, my kids are very well taken care of. They're very well loved. I don't need to be punished by somebody using what I'm going through, saying that I'm not mentally stable or something like that. And take my kids away from me. Because that's what will put me over the edge. That is what's putting me over the edge right now, is the fear of losing another child [crying a little], even to visitation. (Kay)

For Deborah, having a husband to help her with her son, even an abusive one, was better than raising him alone,

You know, I needed help or whatever. I had a special needs son. I was all alone. Things were out of control and I had no babysitter and I was trying to work. So I took him back and then, ah, it was good for a while and then another, maybe six months after that, it was really bad again.

At times women left the relationship, but then returned so they could maintain a relationship with their children. Cassie, for example, reported, "But I moved back in with him. To be closer to my daughter. That was the only way I thought I could see her." Likewise, Elizabeth stated,

And then he said that he was gonna take Nathan and if I wanted to see him again I'd come with him.

[Did you believe him?]

Oh yeah. He already had the stuff packed and Nathan in the car. So, I got in and went with him.

Love/Belief He Would Change. Many women stated that they still loved their partners or held onto a firm belief that they could change. Having difficulty leaving because of the strong emotional connection that women often continue to have with their abusers is a common occurrence in abusive relationships (Peled et al., 2000).

For years, I break up with him, he goes, "If we break up, we'll get back together. Oh, I promise I won't do it again. I'll change." I believed him. I shouldn't have believed him. But I believed him thinking -- giving him the benefit of the doubt, and I shouldn't have. I really should not have given him that. (Amy)

I always said I'm not going to stay in a relationship like that. But I did. You know? You make excuses, well the kids, he'll get better, he'll change, he won't do this tomorrow. Yeah he will. And he still has the tendencies now,

but at least now I know what they are and I can get away. Now that I've had the help that I have. It can, and I know it's okay. And he knows that I have those walls up now that he can't do that. (Arizona)

It is hard to leave. It's really hard, especially when once you start getting feelings for them, that's when it all starts. Once they know that you love them, and you know, that's when it all starts. (Nicole)

They've been with them for this many years. I wonder why it gets to me every time. <long pause> It's because <pause> you don't see it. It's because you don't -- <pause> you just don't see it. <long pause> You don't see it. You see the love and the manipulation of the love that they did to you to hook you. That's what you want. You want to feel good. You want him to pay attention to you emotionally, physically in a good way. You want that sweet, charming personality, and you think it's still in there. But what you got to -- <pause> what they've got to understand is that sweet, charming personality is part of the abusive characteristics. And once they learn that, it's all over. It might take them a few -- it might take them longer than it took me, but I'm a fast learner. (Elizabeth)

This belief is probably one of the more confusing aspects of battering for people on the outside to understand. Recall, however, the discussion in earlier chapters about the primary goal of battering being maintenance of power and control. For most women, the levels of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse described in this dissertation do not happen overnight and are not evident on the first date. Women often describe their partners as being charming and caring in the beginning of the relationship. Over time, batterers selectively employ various tools of abuse to assert power and control. They often will not use more force than necessary to achieve this goal and for many women, by the time they realize their partners controlling and possessive behaviors have crossed the line, they are already emotionally invested in the relationship. Many survivors report that they hold out for the person they fell in love with to return. Some also report that the man they fell in love with still surfaces

from time to time. Either way, they often attest to still loving their partner even as they hate the abuse (Baker, 1997; Peled et al., 2000).

In most cases, women experienced a combination of barriers that encompassed many of the issues described in this chapter. Deborah illustrated the complexities to seeking-help and ending her marriage in the following excerpt where she described being in love, being scared to death, afraid to parent alone, financially dependent, believing he would change, and justifying his abuse, all at the same time.

They need somebody to help them make a plan because one, they feel like they're never gonna get out. I was scared to death of 'em and still in love with them. You know what I'm saying? It's like, you need a push. You need a push because like me, I didn't even want to leave. I was scared to leave. Even with them there, I was scared to leave. Because, like I said you have mixed emotions. It's like, I had two children who I couldn't control. My life was out of control, I needed to work, I had not money, I needed the help. You know, and you rationalize with yourself and say, "Yeah he's abusive, but it's just once in a while. It's not as bad as this person; it's not as bad as that husband was." You know, "I've lived through that, maybe I can live through this the way it is." And you settle. You accept and you settle. You know, and then it gets bad again and you're like, I can't take this anymore. You know, and then they get sweet and, "oh baby, I'm sorry" [laughs]. But when you get other people involved, like I said, it's like you, you get that extra push, that extra, "you're getting out of this."

Deborah's experience is not unique, as women commonly experience many different barriers to seeking help simultaneously (Fugate, Landis, Riordan, Naureckas, & Engel, 2005; Wolf et al., 2003).

Chapter Summary

This chapter illustrated the multitude of ways women showed agency within their abusive relationships and engaged in many different ways of resisting the violence in their homes and seeking help. Unfortunately, it also demonstrated some

of the many barriers they met along the way. All of the women were also very resourceful help-seekers and engaged many different strategies throughout their relationships. The most common of which was to reach out to friends or family, which every participant did at least once at some point during the relationship. Unfortunately, this also proved to be the least useful strategy, as they reported that in most cases these informal networks either were not helpful or engaged in victim blaming.

All of the women also engaged the legal or criminal justice system in some way, most often in the form of calling the police for help or attempting to file a personal protection order. Unfortunately, most reported that this system also proved to be largely unhelpful, most often because women felt officers and court personnel did not understand their victimization. Finally, formal networks for help were used the least frequently. This included contacting a shelter, going to a clergy member, a counselor, a medical professional, or a teacher. Notably, no single entity proved to be helpful for all participants. In most cases, women were met with barriers or blamed for their situation.

Examining the ways in which women were able to demonstrate agency within their relationships and the experiences which increased or decreased their feelings of self-efficacy is important because self-efficacy is a central aspect of self-concept and self-appraisal maintenance. Battered women may experience marked changes to their self-concept because of the characteristics of power and control that commonly define abusive relationships (discussed in detail in chapter four), coupled with a decrease in

opportunity to engage in efficacious action (discussed in this chapter). The presence of these conditions occurring at the same time increase the necessity for women to employ the strategy of role-taking as a survival tactic to help predict the actions and emotions of their abusive partners. While role-taking may be essential for women to stay safe, it can also lead to adopting the standpoint of the abuser (reflected appraisal) as their own (self-appraisal), thus having negative consequences for their self-concept and self-esteem. The next chapter illustrates the range of effects that the tools batterers use to create power and control in abusive relationships, combined with the attenuated opportunities for efficacious action, had on women's self-concepts and self-appraisals.

CHAPTER VI

SELF-CONCEPT AND SELF-IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS

A primary concern of social psychology is that people construct their identities and sense of who they are through interactions with others (Charon, 1992; Sandstrom et al., 2006). The goal of symbolic interactionism in particular is to explain how individuals negotiate and construct meaning within particular settings and social interactions. This theory is premised on the notion that the nature of the self is fundamentally social in origin, and as such, is heavily impacted by our interactions with significant others within our reference group (Charon, 1992; Sandstrom, et al., 2006).

From this perspective, women's sense of self (i.e., their understandings of themselves) is partially influenced by the appraisals of their abusers, as they are likely very salient actors in women's lives (Burke & Stets, 1999; Lempert, 1994). Moreover, each distinct component of the self, including female identity and self-concept, involves an interactional process as well. It is interactional in the sense that women come to know themselves through others' perceptions of who they are, as well as through their own perceptions of themselves (Hollander & Howard, 2000). Identities are therefore negotiated as one moves throughout life and throughout significant relationships.

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate, through participant's narratives, how abusers fragment women's identities and how women negotiate identities and

changes in self concepts as they participate in, as well as strategize leaving these relationships. These changes are not lasting, however, as the self continues to be reconstructed as women work to survive the relationship with the self intact. Looking at these changes through the same lens and theoretical framework that we look at any human interaction allows for contextualization and understanding without blame or “othering.” My intention is to understand how participants constructed meaning around an abusive social interaction that was undoubtedly confusing and chaotic.

This chapter, therefore, demonstrates how abusive relationships modified the self, specifically self-concept and identity work, how attacks on the body modified conceptions and feelings about oneself, how participants engaged in meaning making, and examples of how self-concept can act as a source of behavior regulation. As discussed in chapter two, in trying to understand the perspective of the other, role-taking may or may not result in adopting the standpoint of the other. That is, it may be a reflexive process (Turner, 1956), or it may remain a mere object to individuals, without being internalized into their own view of self. This is particularly salient for this sample of women because characteristics of battering make-up the variables which qualify the reflexive process of role-taking (presented in chapter two). Specifically, power, control, and isolation (discussed in chapter four), combined with an attenuation of efficacy-driven opportunities (discussed in chapter five) create the context within which women experienced changes to their self-concepts.

Of the fourteen women interviewed as part of this study, all discussed changes to their self-concept and identity negotiation while in abusive relationships. In other

words, as women spoke of these changes, their conversations suggested both a fluidity in the social nature of self-concept as well as a stable core that remained intact even though some aspects of self-concept and identity underwent marked changes. Specifically, eleven women also reported that they began to place blame on themselves for the abuse, defining themselves as responsible for their partner's behavior, what I have termed "Internalization and Changes in the Self" below. Eight women suggested that they began redefining themselves in a positive light after exiting the relationship. Eleven women suggested that attacks on their body affected their self-concept. Finally, twelve of the fourteen participants engaged in the construction of meaning in a variety of ways throughout the interview as a way to understand the abusive relationships they survived.

Internalization and Changes in the Self

Many symbolic interactionists believe that what is internal (such as the "self" and self-concept) is a product of social, or external, interactional processes. A sense of self is, to some degree, impacted by our interactions with significant others within our reference group (Charon, 1992), or significant others whom we trust and with whom we maintain close relationships. Changes in and modifications to one's self concept are largely due to a process of introjection or internalization, where the external becomes incorporated into the internal. This process of internalization accounts for the idea that our self-concept is developed and affected by the appraisals of significant others in our lives (also supported by Lempert, 1994).

Participants often described themselves as somehow different, as feeling part of their identities had changed after being with their abusive partners. Amy, for example, recalled,

I don't know if it was a certain day or anything like that when I noticed I had changed, but yeah, you see it. I could see it. And I did see more of it once I was gone from him. I did understand more things. You know, looking into it instead of being in it.

[So when you were with him you weren't really aware of any changes?]

Not, not, you know like, you can't think what the other person's thinking so I can't say the minute he was thinking this, I changed. I can't, you know, I can't do that. But I, you know, I had changed. A lot.

Irene provided the following description of herself:

I've changed. I have a lot of hate in me now. I can't trust nobody. I wanna overcome it but I don't know how to. I used to be nice, kind and considerate, a giving person. I have hate in me now. It's like I can't trust nobody.

Similarly, DeeDee explained,

A lot of things have changed. I don't trust now. I don't trust <slight crying>. I don't trust people and general. But mostly men. I will never have a good relationship. I don't trust my own morals, you know values. But I figure maybe that's god's, way of punishing me.

Amy also suggested that she used to feel more confident in herself but now feels like the self she used to portray is a "mask," hiding the change underneath when she said, "but I still feel when the day is done and I stop pretending and I put that mask off, I still feel like a total loser."

Self-Concept as Fluid. These changes often appeared to be very fluid, as Mead (1934) attested the self is, due to its social nature. Women often described changes to their self-concept in what could be considered Meadian terms, as a fluid

and dynamic process that is impacted by whatever social interaction one regularly engages in. At some point in the interviewing process, many of the women described changes to their self-concept that appeared to encompass this level of fluidity, with relatively drastic changes occurring within the context of the relationship. One of the ways this fluidity was reported was when they discussed how they described themselves during the relationship. Cassie, who at the time of interview was still living with her abusive partner, described herself as “quiet, shy, introverted, not very pretty, average at best,” but went on to indicate that this self definition was formed during her abusive relationship. She recalled, “but it was different before I met him. It was at that point where I was okay with myself. You know, I had a job. I wasn’t heavy, and I had my own place, and things were okay. I was out-going, and, felt good about myself.”

Women described changes in self-esteem while in abusive relationships. Once internalized, these reflected appraisals from others helped to shape self evaluations and self concept. Amanda, for instance, recalled,

He made me quit my job. And then when I did, he was like, “You do nothing. You’re just a lazy bitch. You sit here all day while I do everything.” So it’s kinda hard you know? You start to believe it.

[And did you believe it?]

Yeah. Yeah I did. I eventually started to think that way about myself- lazy. Worthless.

The fluidity in the women’s self-concepts was also illustrated by Deborah, who described in detail how various aspects of her definition of self were modified

through internalizations of her husband's perceptions. While the following quote is rather lengthy, it illustrates drastic changes in self-concept before, during, and after the marriage:

He made me feel like I was a bad person. Like I wasn't good enough. Um, you know, low self esteem, really, really came in. Sometimes I felt helpless. Very helpless. You know, like I was in it by myself. Very helpless. I, I really thought I was gonna die in that relationship, I did. He, he was just very, this is it, this is the way it is, this is what we're gonna, this is how we're gonna do it. You had no say-so at all. You know, it was almost like you didn't exist. You were just part of his world. You know, and that was the way it was. But yup, I blame myself for that.

[You blame yourself for it, even today you do?]

Uh-uh <shakes head to indicate "no">.

[But back then you did?]

Yeah, I did. The person back then was scared to be alone. The person back then needed to be loved, by somebody. Uh, the person back then didn't know their self and know what they wanted. Today, I'm comfortable enough in myself. You know, but yeah. I'm a different person now. I'm bold. I say what I think. I mean what I say. I back up what I say. I'm healed and I'm whole and I'm happy. I really am happy. It's not fake, it's real.

[How did you feel about yourself before meeting your husband?]

Like I was beautiful. And I was, you know, an awesome, beautiful woman. You know, and I was the way I am now. Maybe a little more, you know. But he, it's really not about weight either, it's how the other person makes you feel, you know. If they make you feel beautiful, you feel beautiful. You know, you feel loved and secure and, honored and cherished and, you know, he just, it was just, I was just secure. You know, it just, it just felt good. I am a survivor in a lot of ways. Yes, I am. (Deborah)

Deborah seemed to make a very direct link between how she perceived her husband interacting with her and how she consequently defined herself. Particularly interesting within a discussion of fluidity of self-concept and identity is the way in

which Deborah shifted back and forth from first- to third-person in her dialogue. She used the terms “you” and “the person” when describing herself in past tense and specifically during the relationship, while using “I” in reference to whom she is today, as well as who she was before the relationship.

Other participants also switched between first- and third-person during the interview when they described changes in the self as a result of the abuse. Arizona, for example, asked, “where did *that person* go? <italics added>” when she described herself after years of marriage to her abusive husband. Elizabeth also referred to herself in third-person when she indicated that at one point, “I didn’t know if there was an Elizabeth in there somewhere.”

Several others also attested to a loss of self. Deborah illustrated this in the above excerpt when she indicated, “it was almost like you didn’t exist. You were just part of his world.” It was as if she was unconsciously aware that she had internalized him into her identity. Rose also talked about losing her identity almost as if it was a tangible thing, like her home and her family, “Slowly and surely I started to change and didn’t- I lost my identity, I lost my family, I lost my home, I lost my, I- I just lost myself.” Elizabeth echoed a similar sentiment:

I feel like, I lost my, identity? <says questioningly>

[Do you feel like you’re getting that some of that back now?]

Yeah. Slowly. I still don’t, I don’t even know if I had an identity with him. I didn’t know if there I was still in there. So, it’s, it’s not easy, to now know who I am. You know?

Similarly, Kay suggests that a part of her is dependent on her partner, a notion that supports the idea of the social self:

When I'm not with him I feel like there's a part of me missing. It's like I'm so dependent on him.

[So what about the part of you that's separate from him?]

I deal with her.

[What do you mean?]

I deal with the stuff that goes through my head, the imprints, the scars. I deal with it, but I won't deal with it in front of my kid. So I am very limited. But, I deal with her.

If a battered woman's identity is somewhat dependent on her partner, as that identity becomes constrained, she may experience a disintegration, or fragmentation of self, as demonstrated by the women above. Lempert (1994) suggested that it is common for a battered woman to give up part of herself and her identity to her abuser during this process of fragmentation of self. Symbolic interactionists would go so far as to suggest that this is indeed a normal process, considering the generally marked differences in power in abusive relationships and how this relates to role taking.

Some women, however, experienced a reverse change in self-concept upon finally exiting their relationships. Deborah and DeeDee both insinuate these changes are both firm and empowering:

This is the end of my story. From pain to power. I am a survivor. I've come to complete wholeness. A 30 year journey from helplessness to complete wholeness. Dealing with real struggles. Real faith, hope, love <laughs>. How to believe in yourself, love yourself, change your future, reverse the abuse and find real happiness. (Deborah)

You know, and I said, this is the stuff I'm not gonna do anymore. I'm gonna pick for me, I'm gonna chose for me. Cuz I deserve it. Hell yeah, I'm a great person. I'm a beautiful person. I've always been able to be so positive, I don't know how.

[Were you this positive and confident when you were with him?]

Um, in the beginning, yes. The last couple years, no. I felt so beaten. I felt so, tore down. Like I didn't feel pretty, I felt ugly. I didn't feel like I had the confidence to do anything because he wouldn't give me that confidence, you know. (DeeDee)

Abigail and Amanda also indicated a change once again after exiting:

... my aunt called, like, and said he's been making threats that when he goes to Kentucky he's gonna be knocking at my family's doors and if I answer any of their doors, he's gonna kick my ass. Or he's gonna this or that. You know what, I wish he would. Like, I wish I would be down there when he's down there. And, open one of their doors because it'd be an all together different, you know, situation. Cuz, I'm, I'm not the scared little girl that I was when I was first in Kentucky. I'm not that same person. I will stand up to him in a minute. And if he wants to go heads up, we can go heads up. (Abigail)

[So how do you see yourself now?] I'm more confident. I'm more stress-free. So, it's just like, my life is a changing and, I was always so damn dependent on him that it's a weird change but it's a good change. It's something that needed to happen. I mean, I'm almost thinking that last ass beating was worth it. I mean, cuz it was the final straw, you know? So it was worth getting my ass beat to get out of that situation, and start feeling good about myself again. (Amanda)

One of the qualifying aspects of reflected appraisal being an active process in adults is the saturation level of the interactions one has with a significant other. This saturation level can either be in terms of lack of competing interactions or perceptions, or the level of which one values the perceptions of that other. In the three cases given above, Deborah, DeeDee, and Abigail were describing changes after they had already left their abusive partner and had limited or no contact with them.

Arizona and Elizabeth, on the other hand, also describe a positive and confident change after separating from their abusers, but it was also evident that is it something they continue to negotiate. They seem to still hold perceptions of themselves that are in line with what had been internalized while in the relationship. Although both of these women were separated from their abusive husbands at the time of the interview, they still talked to them on a daily basis. This may explain why they described themselves as still cognitively maneuvering some of these internalizations. Although they now interact with many other people, they still have regular contact with their abusers, making his perceptions still somewhat salient. Arizona was living apart from her husband, but they still talked on the phone regularly and saw each other on a limited basis when exchanging their two children:

But, it's like I also think I'm different now, than I was then.

[What do you mean?]

Because I wouldn't tolerate it now. I wouldn't think that it's okay. I wouldn't continue to go back. You know? I'm a different person. I'm a healing person in my head. Where I have a different respect for myself. Like I know that I don't, deserve to be treated like that. And I know that there are good people out there and I deserve to be with them. You know, so it's like my mind frame is a lot different than what it was because before I was just so beaten down. So, and I mean it's not like the physical abuse, that most people have. You know? It's almost the complete opposite; it's all just all, the majority of it being verbal and stuff. But, I mean it goes to show that I was once the most confident, self-assured person on the planet. Where did that person go? I'm like, I lost her for a long time cuz I was so beaten down. I didn't feel I existed. So, and then, after learning what I've learned these past six months I feel like I couldn't walk anywhere. And be comfortable and confident with who I am. And I wasn't like that before. I think I, I don't know if I wanna say possessed the skills, to accept being beaten down because I was so, like, now I know that that's not the case. So, I don't, I don't know, it's kind of,

but, my guard's up, you know? My boundaries are set. But, is there still fear there? Yeah! (Arizona)

Although she described herself as different now, as being more confident and deserving better, Arizona also suggested that she still had her guard up and some of the fear she has felt was still internalized.

Elizabeth also described herself as being stronger now, but still seemed to be making sense of the aspects of her self-concept that were internalized during the marriage. Unlike Arizona, who had limited contact with her estranged husband, Elizabeth's husband called her at the shelter at least daily to contest the divorce, verbally abuse her, or make custody arrangements for their four year old son. She therefore had a higher level of interaction with him than the other separated or divorced women:

I'll tell you there's a lot of things that go through people's minds, and the worst part of it is the abuser gets you down to that point where you don't think you're worth anything. That's their main goal, and it starts off slow.
[And has that changed?]

Yeah.

[How so?]

I am stronger. I'm more educated. I'm educated so it does make me feel a little bit more like I've got the heads up and lights up. But it's still hard for me to look at myself and see what everybody else sees. It's very hard. I don't know how to get through it because I've been through counseling and everything, and it's just not, I don't know. (Elizabeth)

Language is a key factor in understanding the process by which something can become internalized because language does not simply reflect reality, but is primary in the construction of reality. It is therefore important to consider the effects of

language within abusive relationships, as this helps construct battered women's realities (Ferraro, 2003). When Elizabeth suggested that abusers "get you down to the point where you don't think you're worth anything," she was referring to this process of internalizing emotional and verbal abuse.

Internalization of Blame. Blaming the victim is not only part of the powerful dominant societal ideology, it is a tactic regularly used by abusers as well. A common result of the internalization of appraisals from women's abusers was the fact that many began to place blame on themselves for the abuse they were suffering. Women that began to feel as if they were undeserving of healthy relationships based on their experiences with their abusive partners suggest that aspects of these relationships had become part of their self-concept and possibly their identity. Amy, for example, began to define herself in terms of a person who was responsible for her partner's behaviors when she stated, "I didn't feel like I deserved to be with anybody." It appears that through her boyfriend's mental degradation, his perceptions of her have become her own perceptions of herself in the sense that she no longer feels "good enough" or deserving. Similarly, Jenny also stated, "I think my self-esteem is just so low, that I don't think I deserve any better than that. Oh, my self-esteem is zero. I know that. I mean I have no self-esteem."

Several women reported they began to directly place blame on themselves for the abuse they were suffering. Further, they began to define themselves as the one responsible for their partner's behaviors:

So he takes me over to Travis and Lea's, and he tells me, "If you think I'm abusive," he's like, "I don't hit you for no reason. Whenever I hit you, you deserve it." And he's like, "She's not even allowed to look at nobody else or she gets her ass beat. So if you ever think that I'm abusive then, you know, just take a look at their situation." So I used to think that he wasn't abusive, that I deserved it. So I always thought that I'm giving him a reason to hit me. You know?

[Do you still believe that?]

No.

[So what do you think now?]

I think that, when he was drinking or on drugs that he couldn't control his temper. But when he's off of drugs and alcohol, he can, he doesn't hit me. But the thing is, he can't stay clean.

[Was he ever violent to other people?]

He has never hit any of his other girlfriends. Ever.

[How about any of his male friends? Have you seen him be violent towards anyone else?]

No. (Amanda)

Amanda described how she internalized his blame as her own. Although after leaving the relationship, she indicated that she now places blame on his substance use rather than on herself, the fact that she believed she was the only person her boyfriend was abusive to likely exacerbated the self-blame when she was in the relationship.

Teresa indicated that she "felt bad" when a SWAT team was physically aggressive with her boyfriend during an arrest after he held her and her two sons captive for a three hour period. As was described in more detail in chapter four, during this time he tortured her and their family dog and sexually assaulted her

vaginally and anally with various objects. During this period he repeatedly told her and her children that he planned to kill them.

I felt bad about that.

[You felt bad that they arrested him?]

No, that they, beat him up. But I'm glad they did, you know. I mean I do... they didn't have to do everything they did. But I'm glad they did. Well, I don't -- I just -- I didn't feel bad -- but I did feel bad - about him getting beat up. I don't know. I just -- it just -- it didn't seem right. Nothing seemed right. I just felt bad that that happened because of me. Because I called the police.

It seems almost remarkable that she felt some level of blame for his subsequent treatment by the police. Even considering what she had just endured over the previous three hours, her response was internalized blame.

Although Abigail didn't directly say that she blamed herself for her partner's abusive behaviors, she was nonetheless taking responsibility for the abuse by suggesting she could have controlled it by being nicer or by modifying her behavior, "I realize it, but it is hard, because part of me just wants to go back, and you know I feel so stupid for saying this, but maybe I could change, you know maybe if I'm just nicer." Being told you are the cause of someone else's abusive behavior and then believing you are indeed to blame for their actions indicates internalization. This particular indication of internalization, however damaging to one's self-concept, also serves another function. Engaging in self blame and finding ways to alter one's behavior in the future to prevent additional attacks (i.e., taking the role of their abuser to predict his behavior), as Abigail did, may actually help women to restore a sense of control over their lives (Ferraro, 2006). However, each time women's responses are

modified in an effort to change something that is, in reality, out of their control and therefore the same or an unintended outcome is produced, their sense of mastery may decrease (Stets, 1995).

Identity Confirmation. Another feature of internalization was evidenced when women rejected perceptions of themselves that were inconsistent with their changing self-concept. Identity confirmation, also referred to as self-verification, involves looking for information which is consistent with the image one currently holds of oneself, while rejecting information which is not. Although such confirmation is important in all types of relationships, when identity confirmation or self verification is not achieved within intimate relationships in particular, it often results in negative affect – such as lowered self esteem, anger, depression, and anxiety (Cast & Burke, 2002) Nicole, for example, stated,

If you want to hit me, you know, bruises can heal, scars can heal, but you know what he has done to me inside, just, it's always going to be there.

[Do you think it's changed the way you relate to people now?]

Uh, not with my family, I think towards guys in general, like the other day we were um, we were in the grocery store and this really cute guy, he was really cute and he walked, he was shopping by himself, and he walked up and he's like "oh, she's so cute," to Laura [her daughter], he's like "oh, she looks just like her mom," and then he smiled at me. And I'm like "oh thanks," and I just walked away. Like I, you know, and then I started thinking about it, it's like wow, he was hitting on me, I think he was hitting on me. And I thought, I don't know why he would, you know?

Cast and Burke (2002) suggest that when confronted with information that is not congruent with our self-conceptions, individuals are motivated to relieve these negative emotions. This often causes them to either develop new understandings of

their identity and self concept or actively fight the appraisals of others. This latter option is most often not possible within an abusive relationship, however, because a negotiation assumes that each partner comes to the bargaining table with an equal amount of power to maintain their social identities (Hollander & Howard, 2000; Sandstrom et al., 2006). In abusive relationships where the abuser has more control to exert power over an interaction he has more influence in negotiating self-verification. The result is that the person with less influence will often exercise the first option, thus integrating the appraisal into one's own identity. Nicole, who was told regularly that she was fat, ugly, and that nobody else would ever want her, internalized this such that, when confronted with a conception contrary to this internalization, she rejected the idea.

A self concept that fosters the sense that one is undeserving of a loving relationship is also related to this process of self-verification. In cases where women have internalized negative images of themselves, however, this involves seeking out for information that confirms that negative image; while simultaneously rejecting or reacting with surprise at information that negates this negative self image. Elizabeth illustrated this in the following interview excerpt, when she described the difficulty she had when her current boyfriend, Tony, expressed nice sentiments to her:

I don't know how to accept, that's the problem I'm having in my relationship now. I'm trying really hard to accept all the nice things that he does and says. And he's overwhelmingly nice and I don't know how to, accept it in a proper manner. I get shelled up. Like I don't know what to say or do. He sings me to sleep for fucking crying out loud. He, calls me beautiful all the time. He just says just the most, off the wall things that you, I never, heard from anybody else. It's really nice. He's not rich and he doesn't have a job, but, I

could care less about that. I can get a job and support my family. I don't need his help. I just want, him to be there for me. And he is. I just don't know how to accept it. And it's really, a pain in my ass because, even the ladies in the shelter, they say nice things and it's like, um, thanks, whatever. You know, like, I'm not trying to sound mean, or like I don't appreciate it, I just don't know how to accept it. And they're just like, "just say thank you." It's not cuz I'm not trying to be impolite, but, I just don't know how to sound sincere about it.

[Do you believe the nice things they tell you?]

No. Not really, no. That's the hardest thing. Tony's just constantly complimenting me.

[Do you believe what he tells you?]

No, but I don't let him know that.

[Do you believe what your husband told you, the negative things?]

Yeah, eventually I did. And it's like, now that's all there is. Now that's all I believe (Elizabeth)

At an earlier part in her interview, Elizabeth described herself as confident and comfortable with herself before meeting her husband. The excerpt above demonstrates that this image was modified during the five year marriage. Moreover, the self-concept that was internalized during this abusive period was still salient at the time of interview, as she had difficulty accepting anyone's conceptions of her that ran contrary to her internalized self-concept.

Mutable Self. The excerpts above all seem to illustrate a self that is fluid and, as such, primarily formed or heavily modified by social interaction (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). As discussed in chapter two, Kuhn and Zurcher advanced Mead's original conception of the fluid self. Kuhn (1964) held that the self is primarily static,

with only slight modifications as a result of internalization. Similarly, Zurcher attested that the self is some combination of static and fluid, having a critical constant at the core, an element of who one believes they are, with other aspects of the self surrounding that static core being altered by social interactions. When participants described changes in self, they sometimes discussed them in terms of complete fluidity (drastically changing during and after the relationship or completely losing one's identity) and other times discussed stability, or a true self, that remained present. This change back and forth from feeling like they have completely changed to feeling like a part of them still exists is one way women negotiated their changing identities.

This mutable self, as suggested by Zurcher (1977), was also illustrated in women's dialogue. Although, DeeDee stated, "I felt so beaten. I felt so, tore down. Like I didn't feel pretty, I felt ugly. I didn't feel like I had the confidence to do anything because he wouldn't give me that confidence, you know." In the following excerpt she also maintained that she rejected her partner's definitions of her:

I started thinking I was going crazy. And, I thought he knew something I didn't know.

[Like maybe he was right about you? Is that you mean? Did you start to think that?]

No, I never really thought he was right about me. Never in my life. And that's why I prayed to get out of it. (DeeDee)

Although DeeDee at times suggested that she did internalize some of her boyfriend's perceptions of her, in the quote above she referenced awareness of a stable identity

core that she held. Similarly, in the lengthy excerpt that follows, Rose discussed changes in self, but at the same time indicated that she was still “in here” and “back to being me:”

[How did you feel about yourself when you were with your husband?] Oh, low. Very low. I knew, I know I’m in here. I mean I knew I was in here <points to chest/body>. But I had such a wall built around myself.

[Do you feel differently about yourself now?]

I feel differently about myself that I’m back to being me. I know what I, who I am, what I need, what I’m doing, where I’m going. Um, it’s a totally separate, I’m a totally separate person from that. Um, I’m back to being me.

[What does that mean?]

Well, I’m, I’m honest and I’m loving and I’m caring and, all the things that people are sposed to be. You know, and I’m not that little meek, hide in the corner kind of person that I was with him, because I had to be. Um, he was very degrading. That’s how I felt, degraded. And I don’t have that anymore. I’m free of that. And I’m going to stay that way.

[So are you happy with the way you describe yourself now?]

Yeah. I, I am an honest person and that’s the way I was raised. To be honest and trustworthy and, you know, try to raise my kids as best I can, and just go about my business. I’m not here to hurt anybody else. You know? And that person was always in there. (Rose)

Rose further illustrated a mutable self when she suggested she was “the person I was with him because I *had* to be <emphasis added>,” as if it was more of a survival strategy than an actual internalized change like several of the participants in the previous section illustrated. She knew she was still “in there,” but also had to survive on a daily basis, thus she modified her behaviors. As will be elaborated on in chapter six, these types of behaviors are commonly referred to as placating strategies.

Nicole echoed similar placating strategies in the following excerpt when she indicated that she did not fully internalize her husband's perceptions and simply did not share her feelings with him. This strategy allowed her to maintain much of her core self without having it challenged:

[Do you think it has changed the way you feel about yourself?]

Mmm, no. I think I'm sad, I'm sad a lot, but you know, I'm going to get over it. I am so going to get over it. And I don't think, it's not changed the way I feel, yea I don't feel like I'm ugly, I still feel, I feel good about myself. I like who I am, I like my kids, I feel good about myself, I'm just kind of a little bit depressed right now.

[So are you happy with how you describe yourself?]

Yea. Now, not then.

[Did your feeling about yourself change because of the way he treated you?]

I wouldn't say that I changed them, I guess I more or less kept them to myself, really. I just wouldn't tell him 'cuz he wouldn't care anyways, so why tell him? I just kept myself inside. (Nicole)

Finally, Arizona also indicated that, although she experienced a change in self while married to her emotionally abusive husband, she also retained somewhat of a stable core. This was particularly evident when she indicated that she was "becoming more of who I was and learning about me again":

I'm kind of, reclaiming myself I guess.

[How long after you left did you start reclaiming that?]

<sighs> I would say probably four months. I was physically ill for the first four months. I lost sixteen pounds, which on my frame is not good. Um, way too much. Um, I didn't eat, I didn't sleep, I you know, I was a mess. I was a walking, talking mess. But, um, it took about four months before I started to recognize that it wasn't worth it and that I would be okay. Because I *loved*

him. *So* fiercely. And I seriously thought I was *dying*. I remember thinking, I'm going to have a stroke and die. This is going to be the end of me. But then like I said, I kept waking up every morning and I'm like, well, I guess I can do this. I have no choice but to do this. And then I started becoming more of who I was, and learning about me again. And I feel like I, this is the best that I've ever felt. This is the best I've ever looked. You know? I have more confidence than I probably should sometimes <laughs>. You know? But I'm happy. You know, and people can see that. They're like, wow, you look really good. You sound really good. It's taken a while. It's taken a lot of self-discovery. But I think I'm, I'm doing okay. I always knew that was still in there. You know, it more affected the outside though. Because I always thought I was such a good person, you know? And I don't think that that changed with what he said. And I think that that's really hard for him. Because I'm doing so well. And he's doing so poorly. And he's seeing how well I'm doing without him. And that's a big eye-opener I think.

[Do you still love him?]

Absolutely <said confidently and without hesitation>. He was my soul mate. You know. I will always love him. We have children together.

Saying she always knew she was “still in there” and she doesn't think her sense of self changed with what he said again suggests Arizona retained a stable core identity that was left unfractured, unlike some of the women quoted above who indicated, “I lost my identity... I didn't know if I was still in there” (Elizabeth), for example.

While it is true that Arizona, Rose, and Nicole also expressed changes in self at other points in their interviews, the above excerpts suggest that they retained a core identity at the same time.

Body Identity and Self-Concept

To some extent within our patriarchal culture women are defined by and learn how to negotiate the world through their bodies (Davis, 1996; Wesely et al., 2000). Since the female body carries a unique meaning for women in our society, repeated

attacks on the body (both physical and emotional) may have effects on the socially constructed self-concept. From this perspective, if a woman's self-concept is at least somewhat related to the relationship she has with her body, the self-concept and identity will undergo changes depending on how others interact with her body. A woman's relationship to her body is therefore important to her relationship to herself.

Perpetrators of domestic violence often use a victim's body as a vehicle to exercise their control and domination over the victim's identity (Lempert, 1994). The abusers' attacks on the body can be interpreted as an intention to fragment and assault a woman's sense of self. Specifically with respect to battering, female embodiment becomes problematic due to the fact that abuse takes the form of violations to the mind and to the body. When an abuser takes ownership of his partner's body (through physical, verbal, and sexual abuse, as discussed in chapter four) and she loses the power to control it, she may feel a loss of control in other aspects of her life as well, a concept referred to as mastery (Stets, 1995). This process is one way in which a battered woman's conception of and interaction with herself as an object alters her self-esteem, self-concept and efficacy in an abusive relationship. Lack of control over one's body, over one's identity management, and over one's life therefore may become problematic.

The effects of abuse on women's relationships with their body identity and self-concept is powerfully illustrated by Jenny, who maintained a positive body image even after the horribly disfiguring accident detailed in chapter four in which she lost one leg and mutilated her vaginal area to the "point where it was unrecognizable."

After that accident she had the self-confidence to enter into a beauty pageant, yet “just let everything go” following her long-term relationship with her abusive boyfriend:

I went from, I cared about my looks and everything. Even after my accident, I won second runner up for Ms. [name of pageant]. I was in the pageant! I mean I could show you pictures that you would go, that’s you? You know, I mean, now I’ve just let everything go. I don’t give a shit no more. Cuz I mean, I’m not the person I was before, I gotta say. (Jenny)

Arizona also discussed the impact of emotional abuse on her body image and how that affected her self-concept:

[How do you think Shamus describes you?]

Um... he calls me horrible things. Fat. Useless. A whore. Self-loathing. Self-deserving. Let’s see, you know just, and any other horrible thing that you could possibly imagine. You know? Selfish. You know, you’re a piece of shit, you’re fat and all this type of stuff.

[Did his opinion matter to you?]

Well, of course. He was my husband.

[Do you think it affected the way you thought about yourself?]

Oh yeah! Cuz for the longest time I believed I *was* horribly fat. And I mean, I’m not. <laughs>. You know what I mean? But I believed it! You know, I came to believe that I wasn’t, you know, pretty enough or skinny enough anymore. So, and that’s probably the big reason why I went out and cheated. Because you want someone to make you feel those things. You want to feel that way about your body. Not, that constantly degrades you for. Well here’s someone else, he thinks I ‘m beautiful and blah, blah, blah.

[Do you think his opinions affected the way you thought about yourself?]

Mm-hm. You know, I think maybe my appearance did cuz I didn’t feel comfortable with myself for a long time. You know, and he gave me this wonderful tactic of picking at myself. Now I can’t stop. You know? But um,

it just, changed I think how I felt about myself and how I looked. Yeah, of course it's what I thought on the inside.

Arizona internalized her husband's words so that she began seeing herself as "fat" when she looked in the mirror, when she clearly was very thin. The drastically different physical image of her body that she saw in the mirror did not overpower her internalization of his perceptions of her. She also engaged in the maladaptive behavior of self-mutilation. When she described "picking" at herself, she was referring quite literally to picking off her skin, a condition she was undergoing medical treatment for at the time of the interview.

Elizabeth also discussed her difficulty with accepting her body now in the excerpt that follows. Although Elizabeth seemed to be focusing on the effects of emotional and verbal abuse on her body image and implied that she was not physically abused (because he never hit her), her husband did sexually assault her with the barrel of a gun and prostituted her to his friends for pills.

But it's hard because I look at myself and right now I look like – but I look at myself and I feel like I'm not the person I should be like-

[What do you mean?]

Like I don't recognize myself. And it's hard in this – because of all the stuff that – John put me through some terrible, not as bad as a lot of other women. I do have to say I got the light end of the stick but I was – he solicited me to other men for pills. He would call me a "cunt" on a daily basis, "fat, lazy." <pause> "Stupid" was another one that he liked to use and just "dumb bitch," just anything you could think of to really dig into me. And he knew that it would hurt because he knew – you know. I just, he knew. And I was never – I never looked like this before. I've always averaged my weight at 125. So I was pretty thin and then all of a sudden this girth that's all over me is – it doesn't help me with my situation and my body.

[I wouldn't consider that getting the light end of any kind of stick.]

Well, you know, I have to say that women who are physically abused have it a lot better than women who are mentally abused because the scars heal and yeah, they do have someone watching those stages that they go through because they were physically abused. But when you're emotionally abused that's a scar that's not on you. That's in your brain, and it doesn't go away. It doesn't matter what kind of pills you take for it. It just does not go away. With as much counseling as I've had and as many different kinds of depression pills that I had been on, it don't go away. It gets easier to deal with over time but it doesn't go away.

[What do you mean it doesn't go away? How does it affect you now?]

Oh, I'm very self-conscious. I wouldn't even dream of Tony [her current boyfriend] doing anything with the lights on. You know? Lights have to be off. Every time we're together. You know?

Talking about her body in terms of not "being the person I should be...like I don't recognize myself" provides evidence that Elizabeth's image of herself is indeed part of her body identity (Olsen, 1996). Furthermore, it is clear that this self-consciousness about her body has had some lasting effects, in that she "wouldn't even dream" of allowing her current boyfriend to see her without clothing when they are intimate.

Discussed in more detail in chapter four, the sexual assault that women endured also impacted their body image and self-concept. After years of sexual assault by her husband, Irene indicated, "I never knew I was good looking until three years ago. I looked at myself as ugly. Maybe because of all the abuse. I didn't, I didn't think I was pretty." Amanda's boyfriend prostituted her to his friends for drugs, an act that she internalized into self-defining as a "slut," after which she began engaging in sexual acts with them on her own:

And he used to make me sleep with his friends in front of him too. And, um, like there was nothing I could really do about it. I could've left him but I didn't because I was just too scared. And on top of that he paid all my bills. He supported us [her and her child]. I didn't have nowhere to go. I just, I thought, like, I was becoming one of the whores, like this town had so many of already. And then, I started sleeping with his friends without him being around because I felt like a slut anyways after what he had me doin, so I was just like, get drunk and sleep with em. But, yeah, I started sleeping around and cheating on him a lot more after he made me do stuff like that. Because I didn't have any respect for him or myself. I was just like, fuck it, if he wants me to be like this then I'm just gonna be like this. Even when he's not around.

Self-Concept and Behavior

An examination of a cognitive process like self-concept is important to consider because the self-concept becomes a source of behavior regulation (Kinch, 1963; Shibutani, 1987), and therefore may affect the decision-making process. The primary ways in which self-concept affected women's behaviors in this study were attempted suicide or other self-injurious behaviors, substance abuse as a coping mechanism, changes in help-seeking behaviors, and decisions to return to their abusive relationships after leaving (these are also discussed in more detail in chapter six).

Irene, Abigail, and Cassie, all three of whom had suffered more than one abusive relationship, recalled at least one suicide attempt. After seven years of marriage to her physically, emotionally, and sexually abusive husband Irene indicated,

I just started to believe everything, you know, from him. After all those years-every day, you know? And then one day I went to the store and got two forty-ouncers and two bottles of Z's. I took about 37 sleeping pills, drank two bottles of uh, Budweisers at the baseball benches, and I don't remember

coming home. I passed out on the bathroom floor and, lucky a friend came and took me in Vick's van and they were trying to keep me alive. (Irene)

Abigail had been under psychiatric care for depression following her abusive relationship and reported several suicide attempts:

I fell right into it, I was naïve and I went and I um, I um, went there, whatever, with him. And I should have known. I should have known. But I've never, I've never, I don't know how to defend myself against that kind of stuff [referring to a sexual assault]. Cuz, I never done it. I've always let the abuse happen.I don't know what the best option is right now. I just want the pain to end. And suicide is the only way I know to make it end. I'm not gonna keep taking all these, pardon the expression, I'm not gonna keep taking all these fucking pills and, dealing with all this bullshit. It's, you know, I'm hurting. I don't know how to really express that hurt. It's not physical, it's emotional. And I don't know how to deal with it other than to self destruct. (Abigail)

Cassie also recalled,

But when I went to jail I had a lot of time to think. And I thought about all the wrong doing I did. And I did a lot of wrong doing. I did a lot. But it wasn't all just me. It was other people too. When I was suicidal, I didn't have my mind on. I didn't have, I was a mom, but I wasn't. Like when my daughter was around, I tried not being suicidal. I did have them thoughts, but I had my daughter, I couldn't do that. Unless she went to her grandmas' for a week or two weeks at a time. That's when I was suicidal, and I tried to kill myself. (Cassie)

Amy did not report a suicide attempt, but indicate that she had a history of cutting, "I stayed in my room sometimes because I used to cut really bad. I was a severe cutter. I did it because mostly because of the pain." Finally, Deborah indicated, "I just gave up at that point, trying to get out. You know, I just, I just thought there was no way out. There was no way out. So I just, I held it all in and kept drinking. You know, that was how I, how I escaped." (Deborah) Abuse of alcohol and other substances was reported by several other participants as well:

I just kind of learned to hold everything in and not talk about it. Cuz it's like if you don't talk bout it, it doesn't exist. So I just buried it, and I drank, and I buried it. (Teresa)

I think the abuse did and I tell ya what, because right now, I will, it won't happen like all the time, but when before I left my house or whatever, I have Klonopin, and I will take, I will over medicate myself to numb things out. Or I'm not gonna lie to you, I'll, you know, kind of overdo it with beer or whiskey or whatever to take the edge off things. (Abigail)

Changes in help seeking behaviors were also reported, such as returning to an abusive relationship due to self concept changes rather than other barriers mentioned in the previous chapter. Referring to her abusive marriage, Kay alleged, "I'm thinking I'll probably never, I don't think I'll ever get the best I got now I guess. I left, but then I went back, I don't think I can ever find anybody better than what I have now."

A commonly reported behavioral change was self silencing. Rose, for instance, recalled, "When you're abused you keep it a secret. You feel stupid. You know, you don't tell." Several women reported something similar:

[Did you tell friends or family?]

I waited a long time before I did. I felt embarrassed, stupid. I didn't want to hear I told you so, "we knew he was a creep and you didn't believe us". I didn't want them to have to deal with all the problems that I went through. I told my best friend, but that was about it. I eventually just stopped calling people, stopped talking about it. Cuz I'm like, I don't want them to know, I feel like an idiot. You know, here he is saying all these horribly degrading things and I'm putting up with it. What does that make me look like? You know, and then it got to the point where I just, I just started calling people and started reaching out for help and support. You know, and I just stopped calling people and stopped talking to them. Cuz I'm like, I don't want them to know, I feel like an idiot. You know, here he is saying all these horribly degrading things and I'm putting up with it. What does that make me look like? You

know, and then it got to the point where I just, I just started calling people and started reaching out for help and support. (Arizona)

Likewise, Jenny indicated,

[And did you ever tell them about what was going on?]

Not really.

[Why was that?]

I guess I was kind of embarrassed, I didn't want them to know, like, he does things like that to me. Because I was just so embarrassed. I didn't want them to know. I just never talked about it. (Jenny)

Participants silencing themselves went beyond friends and family. Irene

denied the abuse to her doctor when he asked her what had happened:

I went to the doctors. I didn't call the police, I too scared to get him arrested. Because I do love him. And I had a miscarriage with him. He, pushed me out the kitchen door, outside. And I landed in the hospital and I lost that child. I denied it. I think the doctor's knew. But he didn't do anything. I just kept denying it.

Similarly, DeeDee accepted blame for abuse her boyfriend enacted on her, resulting in her erroneous arrest for domestic violence:

[What was your charge?]

Domestic violence. So then I went in front of the judge, the judge asked me what happened and I told him what he needed to hear. I was pleading guilty. John is an avid hunter and an avid fisherman and I thought if he can't hunt, he does live to hunt, he'd kill himself. I got a social worker's license that I worked my ass off for, I went to college at 40. And here I'm pleading guilty to this - I don't regret, what I did because if he went to jail he'd kill himself. It would always be hanging over my head.

[So you plead guilty so he wouldn't be charged?]

Yeah, so he wasn't charged. Just me.

Women often changed aspects of their environment with the hope of preventing a future attack (Stets, 1985). Rose, for instance, recalled, “I had to tip-toe, I had to walk on egg shells. I hoped that would keep him calm.” Likewise, Nicole maintained, “I guess going out, no, I never went out. I think I just didn’t want to do it because I didn’t want that to happen again. It was a little embarrassing. I don’t want to be embarrassed. ‘Cuz I know he would embarrass me.”

Construction of Meaning

Almost all of the women engaged in various strategies for constructing meaning during their interviews and trying to make sense of their realities or of their abusive relationships. This took many forms, such as asking themselves questions and then answering those questions during the interview, asking me questions as to why something happened to them, or by constructing meaning through free-flow type of dialogue. All of these techniques illustrate women taking themselves as an object, that is, examining their situations in the same manner as they would examine another’s.

Participants engaged in the process of interpretation and meaning construction by interacting with themselves in a similar manner as others would interact with them. In this study, this often took the form of women asking themselves questions, as DeeDee did, “Why did all this bad stuff happen to me? Why couldn’t I have just had a semi-normal life? Ya know, why did it have to be all this bad stuff?” Jenny engaged in a similar process, “Am I punishing myself? I don’t know what I’m doing. Is it a form of punishing myself or something? I don’t know. I’m trying to analyze

myself here with it. I mean, maybe that's what I'm doing. I'm punishing myself, without even knowing it. You know?" Arizona also asked questions of herself during the interview, and at times, answered them:

I've spent most of the time these last couple years trying to figure things out. Asking myself the same question, what would make him like this? What would make *me* like this? I mean it goes to show that I was once the most confident, self-assured person on the planet. I think to myself, remember how you were in college? Remember how you could walk into a room and just captivate anyone? Where did that person go?... So, I don't, I don't know, it's kind of- But, <pause> is there still fear there? <pause> Yeah. (Arizona)

Kay and Nicole illustrated how they engaged in meaning construction while they were in their abusive relationships. They recalled,

I remember thinking, how, could I let myself do this again? I promised myself that I would never feel this way again, and I feel this way. It's time to do something. You know? And just, just things that he said and how he said it. And I'm like, wow. And then to lay in your bed every night and think wow, am I gonna die tonight? Or am I not? (Kay)

It's just in my past experience it usually involves anger so that's just kind of what I was thinking. But that doesn't make sense 'cuz you know, he's not angry at his mom when his mom does something wrong, he don't yell at his mom. So why does he do it to me? I don't know. It's just the control thing? It could be. Um, he would get mad at people but he was never as mean to someone else as he was to me. Like he would never yell, if he got mad at someone and there was kids around, like he would just be like "oh, I'm not going to embarrass myself." But when my kids were around, he would do it. So yea, it was just me pretty much. I don't know.... (Nicole)

Several women also asked questions during the interview with an expectation of an answer for me. These were distinct from other questions asked because they would pause and look at me, waiting for an answer. Irene, for instance, asked, "Why'd he do it to me? [crying] Why did it happen to me Jessica? <pauses and makes eye contact> I wanna overcome it but I don't know how to." Rose also asked, "You

know what, can you really believe that a person thinks that though? <pauses for me to answer> Do they really think that that's why, or do they go, "man, am I an idiot, I wish I hadn't done that? <pauses again>" Similarly, Nicole first pondered to herself, then directly asked me, "And then I got pregnant right away and, maybe he did that on purpose <pause>. Do you think that he purposefully got me pregnant <eye contact>?"

Amanda and Elizabeth also engaged in an interactional construction of meaning with me during their interviews:

He has never hit any of its other girlfriends. Ever. So, I don't know. You know? He's had other girlfriends and he's never hit any of them but me. I think it's cuz he's so skinny that he, I might, you know, he thinks like if I beat *her* up I'll probably hurt her real bad. But he knew I could handle it. Mm, maybe they just shut the hell up when he gets pissed. I don't know, you know? He's a big guy. They might fucking listen to him. But not me. <pause> What do you think <eye contact>? (Amanda)

I'm just trying to learn how to accept it and learn how to feel that way about myself. It just -- it's hard 'cause I loved John. I loved him. It was hardcore love. It was like I defended him tooth and nail on everything... But, Jessica, why am I making excuses for somebody that treats me this way? <eye contact, pause> It's like it a habit. Am I coming up with excuses... for him, you know. I make it easy for him, and I maybe shouldn't because it's not --it's not -- I hate to say this, but it's not fair. It's not fair. I mean he didn't touch me for years. It was years, and he would go and cheat on me with other women. And when we did do stuff, he couldn't get his equipment to work. So it was like even worse. It's like, shit! What's wrong with me? What the fuck did I waste years like that for on him? (Elizabeth)

Many times during the interviews, participants engaged in a process construction of meaning and interpretation through talk. This process could be actively seen through many rambling-type monologues. These particular interview sections were set apart from other areas of the conversation by the marked amount of

pausing, unnaturally slow speech, and self-reflection within them. What appears to be a rambling on of one's internal dialogue process is indeed important to consider, as human action is mediated by one's interpretations of one's own behavior or situation (Blumer, 1969). Similarly, the truncated, staccato-like presentation of speech in these sections of women's narratives indicates that they are constructing meaning during the moment; they are attempting to reach understanding as they speak (Lempert, 1994).

How individuals act and react in a situation depends on how meaning is constructed, and language is centrally involved in the process of constructing and exchanging meaning. Women engaged in this process of interpretation throughout the interview, which helps garner understanding of their actions and choices within and after the relationship.

But um, no, I've never had a normal relationship, at all, not once in my life. <pause> Never, never, at all. It's, I, it's, I don't know if it's that I purposely go out and seek the asshole. <pause> Or that I just got that in me that that's what I attract for some reason. <pause> I mean this stuff don't help, you know, the tattoos and that, I regret. Um, I'm judged by that. <pause> I, you know, it's just, I don't know. <pause> I don't know if that's, if I just put out that vibe or what <pause> but I've never even, like I said even friend wise, I've never had. <long pause> I had to call the police on, what was it, it's been since you've been here the last time, two weeks? And since I called the cops, at least that's one thing I don't got to worry about anymore. But <pause> that's what I always encounter. That's my experience with people. <pause> That I, you know, <slowly> I'm either being <pause> taken advantage of or being abused. One or the two, there's no in between, there's no, there's always gotta to be something in it for the other person. Like I said, either I'm being taken advantage of or being abused. <pause> That's all it is, it's all I know. (Jenny)

The more it progressed the more I understand that, yeah. I mean <pause> at first, you know, you kind of, <pause, slowly> you put it in your mind like.

<pause> This will change. <pause> This is just a moment. <slowly> This, will, change. <pause> Or if he sees that we have a really close-knit family, you know, my family, then he would maybe like to look into that and be part of that, you know, that would change. <pause> And, yeah, I was stupid in some ways thinking that he would change because, <pause> people are who they are. I mean, <pause> we all change somewhat but, he has to change *drastically* and, and actually, you know, when it came down to it <long pause> I guess I was the one that had to change and be gone. Because if he's that way, <pause> he may always be that way <pause> I don't know. But I just, <pause, slowly> had to be outta there, that was. When my little boy put his fist up to me that was, <long pause, slowly> that was the mirror <slow speech, pondering>. (Rose)

It's like, now I'm more confused than ever. So I'm like, I don't think I'm done talking to him, <pause> I just don't know <pause> what to do with this information now. And it's just like it's so <pause> weird to me right now because I think, you know what, I feel all this <pause> stuff <pause> we talked about today <pause>, shame, guilt, you know, all this type of stuff. Like I feel that way for staying with Shamus, when I know that there's someone else out there and <pause, slowly> maybe he's not even the right one. And it's just, I <pause> think I'm only <pause>, I'm trying to decide if I'm only hanging out with Shamus because I'm so <slowly> lonely. You know? And I think that it is for loneliness, <pause> for companionship because <pause> I look at like, if I had another guy in my life, I wouldn't be <pause>, as <pause, slowly> involved with Shamus as I am. And I don't know if that's good or bad. Trying to validate it <pause> and figure out what that means. So, I don't know. So <pause> hanging out with this new guy makes me think, you know what, <slowly> maybe I'm not that shitty person after all. You know? So I don't know what will become of it or what will happen. (Arizona)

Teresa's speech showed a similar pattern in the following excerpt, as she engaged in an interpretive process to understand her boyfriend's more brutal attack:

And then he said, "Well, it's time." He stood up, and I was just kind of lying on the bed trying to go to sleep I guess. He said, "Well, it's time for sex," and he started to undo his pants and I said, "No." <long pause, slowly> So, that would have been <pause> the third time that I refused him? <says questioningly>. This is in my mind, 'cause I think, what the heck did I do to...<pause> I mean, <pause> he liked to have sex all the time. He was very sexually active, I guess. And I always <pause> went along with it <voice inflection> and stuff. <long pause> That week before the incident kind of,

<pause> like <pause> worked up to the incident I think. <long pause> I guess I'm jumping around quite a bit.

[That's okay.]

No. I was just getting that 'cause, <long pause> I had refused him sexually <pause> three times in a row? <speaking slowly and almost absent-mindedly>. Once it was in the morning -- I had to hurry up and go, get the kids to school, I had to work, whatever it was. I don't remember. <pause> And then it was like, that evening, and there's something or vice versa and then that night of the incident. <pause> So that was like, <slowly> the third time. I don't know if that <pause> really pissed him off more <pause> or what. It probably <pause> hurt his pride or his ego or something. So yeah, the third time that I said no or turned him down or whatever... Maybe that's why? <very long pause> And I just remember I just didn't want the boys to hear it. <speech begins coming quickly> It was hard to, you know, understand, I don't know, what was happening, I guess? I, I still play it over and over in my head, you know, maybe trying to figure it out or something? I don't know, you know? And I don't know. You know? I don't know whether the boys heard that part. I just remember just trying to stay as quiet as I could and praying the boys had fallen asleep [begins sobbing]. (Teresa)

Similar speech patterns were also evidenced by Kay and Amy:

I think, <pause> that was how <slowly> he, felt, about himself... And I <pause> I believed it back then. That made sense. <pause> But I <pause> don't know. I think he probably did <pause, slowly> feel, that, way about himself. I mean, <pause> I've learned <pause> -- I've learned a lot since then too. <pause> and it could have been <slowly> part of it. But sure, there was a lot more to it than that. (Kay)

And now that I look back, <long pause> I can see a lot of reasons to be confused. <pause> And plus <pause> I had quit drinking for the first time in my life. And I had like a year or 13 months when all this was happening.

[Thirteen months sober?]

Uh-hmm. <slowly> So that, might, be a reason for <pause> being confused and stuff too. <pause> I don't know. <pause> I'm not trying to <slowly> find excuses or anything but -- I don't know. <pause> I just didn't know what to do sometimes. So we'd break up, and well, it's done or -- <abrupt stop, long pause>. (Irene)

Still others displayed a similar way of constructing meaning through monologue, but presented this in a slightly different manner. In the following excerpts, Deborah and Elizabeth present an interesting analysis of their relationship and how it was that they understood their reasons for staying. In both examples, they don't appear to be wholly constructing this understanding in the present moment of telling the story, as the women above. Rather, it seems they were recalling past interpretations, as well as constructing meaning during the actual moment of recalling the story. Deborah seemed to be going back and forth between telling the story, recounting how she understood her situation at the moment, and constructing meaning in the moment. She explained,

Because, like I said you have mixed emotions. It's like, I had two children who I couldn't control. My life was out of control, I needed to work, I needed the help. You know, and you rationalize with yourself and say, yeah he's abusive, but it's just once in a while. It's not as bad as this person, it's not as bad as that husband was. You know, I've lived through that, maybe I can live through this the way it is. <pause> And you settle. You accept and you settle. <pause> Yeah, I guess I settled. <pause> You know, and then it gets bad again and you're like, I can't take this anymore. You know, and then they get sweet and, "oh baby this and that", you know? Like, <pause> remorseful. Maybe? <pause>

[Did you see that kind of remorse in your relationships?]

Yeah, they are. They are sorry, they're truly sorry. <long pause> I mean, <pause> it's, it's crazy but, I think maybe they love you, so <pause> passionately that they abuse. <long pause> They want to control you because they're so scared of losing you <long pause>. Nine times out of ten abusers are, have low self esteem, um, control issues, they think if they control you and you're afraid of them, you'll never leave them. <speech more rapid> So they try to make you scared and then when they realize that you're so scared, that you're scared of them, then they try to romance you with the, "I'm sorry". You know, "I didn't mean to hit you, I lost my temper". And, I believe they mean it. You know, I do. I think that they're sick. And I think that, a lot of

em can't help their self. You know, they need counseling. They need, you know. And that's, that's another thing too. Maybe, if they had ah, some kind of anger management classes for the men or taught them how to have a healthy relationship with a woman. I don't know. (Deborah)

Elizabeth also engages in meaning construction in the moment of story-telling:

I wonder why it gets to me every time. <long pause> It's because <pause> you don't see it. It's because you don't -- <pause> you just don't see it. <long pause> You don't see it. You see the love and the manipulation of the love that they did to you to hook you. That's what you want. You want to feel good. You want him to pay attention to you emotionally, physically in a good way. You want that sweet, charming personality, and you think it's still in there. But what you got to -- <pause> what they've got to understand is that sweet, charming personality is part of the abusive characteristics. And once they learn that, it's all over. (Elizabeth)

Participants engaged in similar technique of meaning construction throughout the interview, as the women's excerpts presented here. Women used story-telling to convey the way in which they have come to understand their experiences (Hollander & Gordon, 2006). This provides a glimpse into their cognitive processes and, in some cases, a verbal reflection of how they understood themselves both in the past and in the moment. The act of telling stories in such a way as to create meaning of a situation through the narrative itself can play a critical role in the development of the self (Lempert, 1994; McLean, Pasupathi & Pals, 2007)

Chapter Summary

A primary theme throughout women's narratives was a fluid sense of self that was shaped and modified in rather maladaptive ways by participation in abusive relationships. Their narratives suggest that what appear to be internal, solely intrapersonal processes may indeed reflect a more complex interplay between

interpersonal and intrapersonal processes. Women primarily reported that their definitions of self changed both during the relationship and after exiting the relationship. Some described these changes in a very fluid way, going so far as to suggest a fragmentation of self and loss of identity. Others suggested having to negotiate changes in self-concept, yet indicating that a stable core remained intact. Almost of the women interviewed reported a relation between verbal and physical attacks on their body and effects on identity. Similarly, the majority of women also reported internalizing their abuser's and society's tendency to blame the victim into their definition of self.

Of particular interest was the way in which so many of the participants showed such similar patterns of constructing meaning through narrative. Indeed, the construction and communication of meaning exists at the very heart of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Within the framework of their controlling, isolating, and abusive relationships, participants strived to construct an interpretation of their realities and their choices that made sense to them and seemed to play a role in their negotiation of self and observed changes in self (Ichiyama, 1993; Kinch, 1963; Shibutani, 1987).

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The women in this study suffered horrendous abuse at the hands of their intimate partners. The stories that are presented here, however, represent more than a simple descriptive retelling of the abuse that occurred in women's lives. They illustrate the social and structural power that creates the framework from which the dynamics of battering are maintained. In this sense, battering is understood as a phenomenon connecting individual experiences to historical social structures of inequality and patriarchy. It is from within this framework that I examined women's identity negotiations using a symbolic interactionist approach to role taking and changes to self-appraisal. Symbolic interactionism locates women's individual experiences with intimate abuse within this broader social context.

Summary of Research

This dissertation examined women's lived experiences with battering, with attention paid to how women conceptualized and understood the abuse in their lives, as well as subsequent negotiations of identities that occurred within abusive relationships. To accomplish this, I conducted multiple in-depth interviews with fourteen women being served by a domestic violence agency in a rural part of the Midwest. Each woman participated in one to three interviews, lasting approximately one and a half hours to three hours in duration. The only inclusionary criteria were for participants to have been involved in an abusive relationship and to have been

receiving some level of services from a domestic violence agency. At the end of the interviewing process, I had approximately fifty hours of recorded data. Although I ended up not using the original semi-structured interview schedule I had created, our interactions generally focused on women's personal experiences with battering, how they understood those experiences, how they constructed meaning within their abusive relationships, and what effect abuse had on how they came to define and interact with themselves (discussed in more detail in Chapter three).

Overall, women's experiences with intimate abuse supported the idea that batterers use a variety of tactics in order to create and maintain power and control over all aspects of their partner's lives (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2001; Dobash & Dobash, 1992; 1998; Goetting, 1999; Ferraro, 2003; 2006; Moe, 2007; Johnson & Ferraro, 2003). This finding reinforces a feminist theory of battering, which suggests that, although women experience abuse on an individual and personal level, it is part of a larger system of dominance and gendered structural power. (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllo & Bograd, 1988).

Physical abuse, mental/emotional abuse, and sexual abuse were the most commonly reported forms of violence in women's lives. These were followed by isolation, threats and intimidation, and financial/property abuse. All of the women described this abuse taking place in heterosexual relationships, despite the fact that three of them self-identified as bisexual and reported having relationships with women as well. This finding is specific to this sample; however, as similar forms of

battering have been found to be equally prevalent in same-sex relationships (National Intimate Partner & Sexual Violence Survey, 2010).

All of the women in this study showed great agency within their abusive relationships and engaged in many different forms of resisting violence and seeking help. The most commonly reported resistance strategies were leaving or attempting to end the relationship, fighting back, or refusing to comply with their abuser's demands or expectations. The most common form of help-seeking was enlisting the help of friends and family, and every participant did this at some point during their relationship. Unfortunately, this proved to be generally unhelpful for women, as these informal networks often either did nothing or blamed them for the abuse. All of the women also involved the legal or criminal justice system in some way, most frequently in the form of calling the police or filing for a personal protective order. Again, this often turned out to be a system that commonly failed them. Of all of the help-seeking techniques women used, formal networks were used the least frequently. This included women going to a shelter, or consulting clergy, counselors, medical professionals, or teachers. Women had mixed success with these networks.

These external experiences of battering fragmented women's identities and created changes in self-concept and self-appraisal. All of the women discussed changes to their self-concept and identity negotiation while in abusive relationships. The most common change reported was an internalization of their abuser's reflected appraisal of them. In other words, at some point women began, on some level and to varying degrees, to define themselves as they perceived their partners defining them.

Almost of the women interviewed also reported a relation between verbal and physical attacks on their body and effects on identity. Similarly, the majority of women also reported internalizing their abuser's and society's tendency to blame the victim into their own definition of self.

Contextualizing the external factors of women's relationships by illustrating the various forms of abuse they suffered (discussed in chapter four) is important to a subsequent discussion of identity negotiation. Examining the conditions which limit women's opportunities to exercise agency (discussed in chapter five) is also important to this discussion, as self-efficacy is a central aspect of self-appraisal and self-concept maintenance (Bong & Clark, 1999; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983; Pajares, 1996). The presence of these factors in women's lives at the same time created a unique situation, which increased the likelihood that taking the role of the other (in an attempt to construct meaning within their abusive relationships) was internalized and lead to changes in self-concept.

In this dissertation I have suggested that women engaged in role-taking as they attempted to understand their abusive relationships. The extent to which the process of role-taking is internalized into self-appraisals or self-concepts relies on these external contextual variables. In particular, certain external relational and situational criteria must be met in order for battered women to experience these self changes. The contextual variables that have been proposed in the appraisal literature include: an ascendant status organization within a dyad (Cooley, 1902; Franks, 1989; Turner, 1956); structural and personal dependence by one person on resources

provided by another (Franks, 1989; Turner, 1956); when one is less able to engage in efficacious action (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983); and finally, lack of access to supportive others or alternative perspectives (Turner, 1956) or when one is relatively socially isolated (Reeder et al., 1960).

I proposed that the shared characteristics of intimate partner violence, understood here as battering within the context of coercion, power, and control, indeed meet these criteria. I subsequently qualified the variables set forth in the appraisal literature into three interpersonal conditions within abusive dyads: a) power, dominance, and control (ascendancy and status), b) social and/or psychological isolation, and c) attenuation of opportunity for efficacious behavior.

Fully understanding all of dynamics of women's abusive relationships is essential to understanding how women make sense of those relationships and how they affect their everyday cognitive processes. In various ways, all of the women in this study discussed identity negotiations in the form of changes to their self-concepts during their relationships or after exiting the relationship. In trying to understand the perspective of their abuser, and therefore construct meaning around his abusive behaviors, women often internalized his standpoint as their own as they actively struggled to negotiate meaning for themselves. This provides strong evidence that, under these conditions, role-taking is indeed a reflexive process.

Strengths

This dissertation sought to acknowledge very important and unique ways of understanding women's experiences with battering that have so far been largely

underreported in the literature. This study uniquely informs about women's cognitive processes by using theoretical models that are used to explain much of our everyday behavior. This is important because battered women are not defined in terms of difference and are not seen as defective or deficient in some way. This approach, therefore, allows the ability to understand and conceptualize battered women's cognitive processes while recognizing their agency and without leading to victim blaming.

Another strength of this study is the merging of multiple disciplines and research approaches. This project provides support for the idea that a symbolic interactionist approach and feminist standpoint theory complement each other nicely because of both approaches' emphasis on understanding a person or phenomenon via individualized experiences. Symbolic interactionists hold that the role of individual perspectives is very powerful in our interpretations of reality (Charon, 1992). Shibutani (1987), for example, explained, "in studying the behavior of human beings it is necessary to get 'inside' the actor, to see the situation from his point of view" (p. 257). This sentiment is echoed in standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1987; Hartstock, 1987; Smith, 1974) which privileges battered women as legitimate creators of knowledge, as well as epistemic privilege, which suggests that marginalized populations are better positioned to understand their own lives and experiences than are more socially dominant groups (Bat-Ami, 1993; Hill-Collins, 1991; Smith, 1987). This dissertation, therefore, lends strong support to the bridging of these theoretical and methodological approaches.

This study has relevant contributions to the literature on intimate partner violence, as well as the symbolic interactionist literature on role-taking, reflected and self-appraisals, and self-concept. Using a symbolic interactionist approach to understand women's experiences also helps explain why women make some of the seemingly confusing choices they do while in abusive relationships. This dissertation therefore contributes to contemporary conceptualizations of battered women's state of mind, construction of meaning, and cognitive processes within abusive relationships. It will also provide useful information on social and psychological barriers encountered that adversely affect help-seeking opportunities and subsequent ability to successfully exit the relationship.

Limitations

Like any research, this project is not without limitations. Primarily, the sampling procedure is a limitation because it did not allow for control over the demographics of the participants. Because the geographical area in which I recruited participants was primarily white, the sample was highly racially homogenous. The research site is also a limitation because women receiving assistance from shelter services may be different in important ways from battered women who have not sought help from such agencies. For instance, women who have not sought help from a domestic violence agency may have experienced fewer barriers to help-seeking (and thus had more options), may have had more support from friends and family (and therefore a safe place to go), may have had increased financial independence, or may have experienced less barriers or more positive interactions with those from whom

they sought assistance (unlike many of experiences of the women who participated in this study).

Interactions with the criminal justice system and help-seeking opportunities often vary by race and ethnic make-up (Sullivan & Gillum, 2001; Xu, Campbell, & Zhu, 2001). Several distinct cultural barriers have been identified that present unique barriers for battered women of color, such as the definition of family (Wang, 1996; Xu et al., 2001), culturally-specific stigma related to divorce (Bauer, Rodriguez, Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000), as well as empirically different definitions of domestic violence (Bauer et al., 2000; Teehee & Esqueda, 2008; Xu et al., 2001). Traditional cultural beliefs about community, family, and gender roles also have important relevance for some women of color. It is important to understand cultural barriers that are integral components of women's experiences (Sullivan & Gillum, 2001). Although race and/or ethnic make-up may affect a woman's opportunities and abilities to seek help, however, I believe the theoretical concepts of self-concept change developed in this dissertation would also apply to non-white battered women. While different than many of the specific barriers experienced by the women in this study, the barriers mentioned above would nonetheless affect feelings of self-efficacy through attenuation of opportunities for efficacious behavior in a similar manner.

Validity, Reliability, and Theoretical Transferability

The goal of this research was to tell battered women's stories. Therefore, their stories, whatever they may be, constitutes "truth" because their voices are situated knowledge. I recognize women's agency and recognize women as privileged

knowers (Mies, 1982; Reinhartz, 1992; Bat-Ami, 1993). I therefore consider the women participating in this study as the experts and authority of their own experiences, and view them as legitimate producers of knowledge, as credible, and as experts of their own lived realities.

In this dissertation, I have accomplished validity in terms of “quality of craftsmanship” (Kvale, 1996), which suggests that verification is built into the entire research process, from its conception to its completion; it involves “continual checks on the credibility, plausibility, and trustworthiness of the findings” (p. 242). Throughout the entire process, I continually checked my findings and interpretations against the extant literature and presented my initial interpretations to my participants during the second interview to ensure that I understand them correctly.

Likewise, replication in the traditional sense with the goal of describing an entire population was also not my intent. However, because I have made my procedures available in such detailed description, the methodological procedures of this dissertation could be replicated if one was so inclined, thus creating a form of methodological transferability. By structuring the project with rigor and attention to detail so as to allow an assessment of quality of the research process and potential transferability of the results, replication *could* be possible. I strived to accomplish this through descriptive clarity - providing thick descriptions of my participants, the setting, the research process, the method of data collection and analysis, and the phenomenon under study (Rossman and Rallis, 2003).

Within this project I am not trying to generalize specific conclusions to a larger population, nor is it my intent to be able to generalize the results of this study to battered women universally. What is generalizable from this study are the theoretical concepts of the three qualifying variables common to abusive relationships that I have created and that are essential for internalization of role-taking and changes to identity. These include power and control, physical or psychological isolation, and attenuation of self-efficacy. By keeping generalizability on this theoretical level, a more thorough understanding of the complexities of battered women's experiences can be garnered without attempting to make globally empirical statements.

Policy and Prevention Recommendations

This study has several implications for prevention and systems change, both in terms of what was learned from women's experiences with help-seeking and systemic barriers, as well as women's own advice on what changes need to be made. Many of the recommendations I make came directly from the survivors interviewed for this dissertation.

Prevention and Awareness. First and foremost, a greater focus needs to be put on domestic violence as an important issue on a national level. This can be accomplished by political leaders showing through legislation that domestic violence is a critical social problem facing our society. History has shown, however, that such issues are often defined and treated as specialty side projects that are pushed aside. Elizabeth and Amanda suggested as much,

It's sad that domestic violence gets put on the back burner to tax laws and war efforts. If they could just put out some more effort in domestic violence then they do, it would make a huge difference. (Elizabeth)

Oh yeah, there's a lot more they can do. But, that's domestic violence isn't important. That's not an important issue. It's not as important as you know, what your taxes are. You know? (Amanda)

The need for gendered violence to be put on the national center stage is critical, particularly because during the writing of this dissertation, we have just witnessed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) not being passed in Congress for the first time since its legislative inception.

An equally important implication is the need for greater prevention efforts. Dispelling myths and building public awareness about the dynamics, the prevalence, and the commonality of domestic violence will assist victims and survivors, their friends and families, and the community as a whole. As Arizona suggested, public awareness campaigns get people talking about domestic violence, which in turn increases opportunities for battered women,

I think talking about domestic violence is an important thing that helps with prevention, you know? I mean, it's an epidemic, and it's -- the worst thing is it's a closet epidemic because nobody wants to talk about it.

Targeted and widespread education is imperative to any prevention effort, particularly one so aptly described as a "closet epidemic." Awareness campaigns should also include a comprehensive understanding by focusing on all aspects of battering, not just physical violence:

They need to stop looking at domestic violence as simply bruises or somebody being hit all the time. They need to be more aware of the emotional state. They need to be more sympathetic to all the different ways the person is being

abused and understand what's going on in their life and why they make some of the, do some of the things they do. (Elizabeth)

The results from this dissertation also suggest the need to include the potential internal changes that occur, in the form of identity negotiation through self-concept change, into this comprehensive understanding of the effects of domestic violence.

A focus on batterer accountability must also be included in prevention efforts. Much of the academic research and social awareness of domestic violence in the past thirty years has been on victims, and rightly so. In order to truly end battering, however, we must also begin to heavily focus on batterers themselves. This cannot supersede the need for survivors to receive social support and assistance or the need for communities to understand what survivors and their children are enduring. Nonetheless, the only way to ultimately end domestic violence is to stop perpetrators from perpetrating. I believe this can only be accomplished through a two-pronged attack. The first being prevention through education, the second being a heavy focus on batterer accountability. As Amy suggested, "You know, I think we need to focus on the abusers too. I really do. I think a lot of times we focus on the women, but it's the abusers who are doing it, you know?"

Systems Change. Batterer accountability, education on the dynamics of domestic violence, and focusing on the seriousness of domestic violence are also critical aspects of necessary systems change efforts. This dissertation raises serious questions about the effectiveness of many of the systems currently in place that deal with domestic violence, namely, police response, the criminal justice system as a

whole, and social service agencies. These systems play a critical role in either the revictimization of women or their ability to remain safe and get assistance.

Police Officers. Police training should include not just a cursory overview of intimate partner violence, but a sufficient, working understanding of the complex dynamics of battering. As women have suggested here, police response to domestic calls was inconsistent at best. It is important that policy and sufficient training be in place so that all officers have a quick response, have enough training to be able to accurately identify and arrest the primary aggressor, to provide advocacy and information to the victim of who can offer appropriate help after the officer leaves, and to consistently and forcefully send the message that domestic violence is illegal, that batterers will be prosecuted, and that victims are not to blame for the abuse. Officers must also be trained on these facets of psychological internalization so that they are aware of and understand the propensity for battered women to deny an abusive relationship exists and/or to accept blame (discussed in chapter six) when they respond to a domestic violence call. Moreover, by understanding these effects on the self-concept, coupled with the dynamics of abuse (discussed in chapter four), as well as all the ways women stay safe, seek help, and the barriers to leaving they experience (discussed in chapter five), officers will be better trained to respond appropriately to victims and will better understand why they may have responded several times to the same house.

Furthermore, although it is understandable that officers would focus more on the perpetrator than on the victim, women frequently felt that police were not

sensitive to their needs and did not listen to them. DeeDee, for example, stated, “I just wish the police would listen to us and believe us.” Similarly, Amy said, “I think they actually need to come and sit with us and listen to us instead of just listening to them [referring to the abuser]. They need to sit and listen to us for once. Maybe then we’d actually want to call.” These excerpts clearly suggest the need for more consistent training on taking victims’ statements and the link between how women perceive officers interact with them and the effect on subsequent decisions to call the police.

Criminal Justice System. Systems change efforts are also imperative within the criminal justice system as a whole. One of the identified barriers to calling the police was the perception that, if they did respond and if they did make an arrest, there would be little to no criminal justice penalty for the abuser. The response of the criminal justice system and domestic violence charges need to be consistently imposed and imposed in a manner that reflects the seriousness of the crime. This response should include multiple aspects, including not only specialized training and education for officers (as mentioned above), but also for victim’s advocates, prosecutors, and judges. These trainings and strategies should be regularly evaluated in terms of their level of success in prosecution and recidivism. Victims’ perception that the criminal justice system does not take domestic violence seriously and/or does not respond in a consistent way reduces the likelihood they will reach out to this system for help or cooperate if already involved.

Social Services. This dissertation also raises important implications for social service systems change. Current policies of some Department of Human Services (DHS) and local Child Protective Service (CPS) offices can have rather negative consequences for battered women and their children. As was evident in this study, for many women leaving is not an option unless there is either the ability to financially thrive independently or economic assistance after leaving. To increase the likelihood that women may achieve financial independence in a useful amount of time, social service programs would do well to provide job training (for meaningful employment at a living family wage) and educational opportunities alongside day care opportunities.

Moreover, women's fear of CPS removing their children if they become aware of violence in the home often leads to either silencing (an obvious barrier to help-seeking) or to women denying or lying about the abuse. The internalization of blame illustrated in this study also contributes to women lying about the abuse. Women in this study provided support that fear of removal of children is indeed legitimate. To the degree that this fear is grounded in reality, this points to an increased need for education and training to CPS and DHS workers on dynamics of battering, understanding what women are already doing to keep their children safe, offering new ways to increase children's safety, helping mothers safely leave abusers, and identifying which internal policies are detrimental to increasing the safety of both mothers and their children.

Increased education and attention to policy reform within these social services can also increase the safety of women and their children by, again, holding batterers accountable for their chosen actions. This includes recognition that physically, sexually, or verbally assaulting a child's mother in front of him or her is a form of child abuse in itself. As the women in this study testified, when domestic violence is suspected in the home, the children are often removed from the mother (victim) and/or she is made to leave the home, while the offender often retains custody rights. This not only sends a clear message to mother and child that the offender's actions are acceptable, but also puts women in danger during custody exchanges and mandated visiting time. Nicole stated this clearly when she said, "I think, and this is just my opinion, but I think if a man is going to domestically abuse his spouse, especially in front of their children, he should lose his parenting rights." In many cases, women report the opposite actually occurred, despite the evidence that children growing up in homes in which their mothers are abused are at serious risk of behavioral problems (Cummings, Pepler, & Moore, 1999), poor academic achievement (Gleason, 1995), child abuse (Rumm, Cummings, Krauss, Bell, & Rivara, 2000), and becoming future perpetrators or victims (Ehrensaft et al., 2003).

Domestic violence has an enormous effect on victims, survivors, their children and their families, as well as on communities and society as a whole. We must continue to educate, raise awareness, and critically examine our formal response systems to evaluate them for effectiveness, for potential for revictimization, and to ensure they are informed by notions of victims' safety and right to self-determination.

Educational efforts need to focus on the fact that threats and intimidation, stalking, verbal abuse, and coercive sexual acts from a partner are just as legitimate of reasons to call the police as is physical assault. The results presented in this dissertation also strongly suggest that a coordinated community response is as essential to immediate assistance as it is to prevention and to systems change. Finally, coordinated efforts from all avenues should focus on sending a strong and consistent message that abuse is never the victim's fault, that battering in all forms is a crime and will be treated as such, and that batterers will and should be held fully accountable for their actions.

Closing Remarks

By locating women's experiences with abuse within a larger framework of social structural inequality, I used symbolic interactionism to illustrate the ways in which women negotiated changes to their identities while in abusive relationships. The common characteristics of battering, particularly power and control, lack of social supports, and strained opportunity for efficacious outcomes, created a unique circumstance where role-taking became a reflexive process for women in this study. This reflexivity was illustrated by women reporting changes to their self-concept in the form of reflected and self appraisal, internalization of blame, and negative body identity. This internalization and subsequent changes to the self influenced some of the choices women made with respect to their current abusive relationships and to subsequent relationships.

This dissertation makes a contribution to existing research in domestic violence and symbolic interaction by illustrating that, when used as a survival

technique for battered women, role-taking became a reflexive process and was internalized into the self-concept. The importance of this finding for domestic violence literature is that it increases understandings of women's experiences of battering, effects of abuse, and limitations that entrap women in abusive relationships, all while maintaining an agent status, denying learned helplessness, and avoiding victim blaming or defining battered women as sick, defective, or deficient.

A richer understanding of the interaction between the external characteristics and dynamics of battering and the subsequent effects on internal cognitive processes is important to better understand what women experience and how this affects the choices they make. By developing a more comprehensive understanding of the social psychological effects of battering specifically, better assistance programs may then be established that will enable service providers a more complete picture of necessary services and help to minimize the revictimization that so often occurs. The results from this research will also be important in furthering community education regarding domestic violence and ways to assist battered women in seeking help. The merging of disciplines may also prove useful in providing more insight into this social problem, which by its prevalence in the United States alone, still demands our attention.

Time and time again, the women who participated in this study reported being met with barriers- barriers to safety, to help, to understanding, and to escape. These were, in different instances, inter-relational, external, structural, social, or cognitive. The social psychological barriers women faced in terms of internalization of various

experiences of abuse and their abuser's appraisals reported in this study add a richer understanding to domestic violence and the many challenges battered women face. This element adds to a conception of the already complicated web of entrapment many women experience, and which few of us fully understand. Women often reported that they felt trapped - literally, metaphorically, and psychologically. Their individual support systems, our larger social systems, and society at large often have difficulty understanding this notion of entrapment, when it seems it could easily be solved by simply leaving.

Indeed, the power and control that characterizes battering, coupled with the internalization process and subsequent effects demonstrated by this study create a cage from which escape is incomprehensively difficult. Each of these external and internal factors taken individually may not be restrictive or immobilizing, but taken together, these women demonstrated how they can be as confining as a steel cage. Elizabeth stated this assertion clearly when she said the reason she participated in this research was because, "I'm tired of not being heard. I feel like, like I've been in a cage. And people, they don't understand that feeling. But I have a story to tell. And I think that, that it will help people."

Although it illustrates just one additional wire in the cage Elizabeth spoke of, examining the social psychological and cognitive effects of battering on women's sense of self and their decision making process, allows for a richer, more expansive understanding of a cage in which battered women actively and continuously try to

escape. As eloquently demonstrated by Frye (1983), a more comprehensive understanding of women's lived experiences is important because,

If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere... It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one... [that] it is perfectly *obvious* that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon (p. 50, *italics in original*).

Locating battered women's social psychological processes within a larger framework of structural and systematically related barriers is an important contribution to the extant literature on domestic violence and to an overall richer understanding of women's experiences.

ⁱ I vary the terms domestic violence and battering for ease of readership. I prefer the term "battering," however, as it reflects a wider conceptualization of the phenomenon (the term "violence" seems to obscure the central premise of power and control, as well as other dynamics of abuse (such as emotional battery, manipulation, and financial abuse).

ⁱⁱ Throughout this dissertation, male pronouns are generally used when referring to batterers, abusers, or perpetrators, while female pronouns are generally used when referring to victims. Although men are also victims, this language is to reflect the highly gendered nature of domestic violence. Women are at far greater risk of intimate violence perpetration at the hands of their male partners than are men (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

ⁱⁱⁱ Several of the residential women had also been arrested for domestic violence at some point during their abusive relationships, however, the arrest was not recent and they were not mandated to the Alternatives to Abuse program. In total, seven of the fourteen women had been arrested for domestic violence at some point.

^{iv} This finding is specific to this sample. Domestic Violence has been found to occur in same-sex relationships in similar forms and at similar rates as is found in heterosexual relationships (National Intimate Partner & Sexual Violence Survey, 2010).

APPENDIX A: PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

	ABIGAIL	AMBER	AMY	ARIZONA	CASSIE	DEBORAH	DEE DEE
Race/Ethnicity	White	White	White	White	White	White	White
Age at Interview	35	28	24	31	22	43	57
Shelter Status	Residential	Residential	Non-Residential	Non-Residential	Non-Residential	Residential	Non-Residential
Education	High School	11 th grade	11 th Grade	BA: Social Work	10 th Grade	Assoc: Nursing	MA: Social Work
Rel Status	Single	Single	Dating	Married (7 yrs)	Dating	Dating	Single
Occupation	Disability (CP)	Cashier	Disability (MI)	Social Worker	Restaurant	Minister	Independent Business Owner
Sexuality	Bisexual	Hetero	Hetero	Hetero	Hetero	Bisexual	Hetero
Religious	Fund Baptist	No	No	No	No	Apostolic	Catholic
Self-Sub Abuse	Alcohol	Alcohol; Meth	No	No	No	Alcohol (past)	No
Abuser~ Sub Ab	Alcohol	Alcohol; Meth	Dk	Alcohol	Alcohol	Alcohol	Dk
Physical Abuse	Yes	Yes	Dk	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Emo/Psych Abuse	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sexual Abuse	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Financial Abuse	Yes	Yes	Dk	Yes	Dk	Yes	Yes
Childhood Abuse	Sexual: uncle; m b/f	No	Sexual	Sexual abuse by uncle	Emotional (mom)	No	No
Children	0 (miscarriage)	2 boys (8 & 6)	1 (girl: 2yrs) 1 fcd abortion	2 (girl: 5 & boy: 4)	1 (18 mo)	3 (girl: 22; boy: 17; boy: 16)	3 (boy: 37; girl: 25; girl: deceased)
Number Abusive Rel	4+	1	2	1	1	3	1
External Support	No	Limited	Limited	Mom; Friends	Limited	No	Friends
Interviews	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total Time	283 minutes	159 minutes	129 minutes	154 minutes	178 minutes	152 minutes	260 minutes

	ELIZABETH	IRENE	JENNY	KAY	NICOLE	ROSE	TERESA
Race/Ethnicity	White	White	White	White	White	White/Native Am	White
Age at Interview	28	43	38	32	25	52	45
Shelter Status	Residential	Residential	Non-Residential	Residential	Residential	Residential	Residential
Education	Some college	Some college	Some college	Some college	BA	BA	Some College
Rel Status	Divorced/ Dating	Divorced/ Dating	Single	Married	Married	Divorced	Divorced (2)
Occupation	Unemployed	C.N.A.	Disability (accident)	Disability (CP)	Medical Assistant	Health Care	Mother
Sexuality	Bi-sexual	Hetero	Hetero	Hetero	Hetero	Hetero	Hetero
Religion	Fund. Baptist	Catholic	No	No	No	Nat Am	Christian
Self~Sub Abs	No	Alcohol (past)	No	Alcohol-past	No	No	Alcohol
Abuser~ Sub Ab	Alcohol	Alcohol	Dk	No	Dk	Alcohol	Alcohol; Drug
Physical Abuse	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Dk	Yes	Yes
Emo/Psych Abuse	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sexual Abuse	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Dk	Dk	Yes
Financial Abuse	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Childhood Abuse	No	Witness	No	Yes	No	No	Witness
Children	1 boy: 4	1 boy: 24 yrs	3 (boy:1; girl: 14; girl: 10)	2 (boy: 9; girl: 11)	2 (girl: 2; boy: 5)	4 (g33; g:30; B:18; B:13)	Boys (10, 15)
Number Abusive Rel	2	3	2	1	1	1	3
External Support	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Family (limited)	Limited	Limited
Interviews	3	2	3	1	2	2	1
Total Time	328 minutes	130 minutes	382 minutes	120 minutes	162 minutes	126 minutes	112 minutes

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview One: Demographic Information and Background Information about Abusive Relationship(s)

Demographic/Background Information

- 1) Demographic information
 - a. What year were you born?
 - b. What racial/ethnic group do you identify with?
 - c. What level of education have you achieved?
 - d. Where are you originally from?
 - e. How long have you been in the [name] area?
 - f. Do you have any children? How many? What ages? Gender?
 - g. Are you currently in a relationship?
- 2) What happened that brought you to seek assistance from Lakewood?
What types of services are you receiving and how long have you been receiving them?

General Questions about Abusive Relationship(s)

- 3) Is this the first abusive relationship you have experienced?
 - a. Have you been in more than one abusive relationships? Which one is most significant to you? Why?
 - i. Were there any significant similarities and differences between the various abusive relationships you are talking about?
 - b. How old were you when the relationship began? How did you meet your partner? How long have you been together?
 - c. Are you currently still with or living with your abusive partner?
- 4) Can you tell me when you first started thinking or noticing that the relationship was abusive?
 - a. Can you tell me about the very first abusive incident?
 - b. Can you tell me about the worst/most memorable incident? Why do you consider it to be the worst/most memorable?

- c. Can you tell me about the very last incident before you left/sought help?
- d. Were there other ways that you sought help throughout the relationship, either from formal agencies or friends/family? Can you describe these? How helpful did you find this?
 - i. Were there any other coping mechanisms that you have used in order to help deal with the abuse? For example, using drugs or alcohol?
 - ii. Did your abuser ever use drugs or alcohol? Do you think this impacted his behavior in any way?

Specific Questions about Abuse with Initial Probes into Feeling States and Self-Concept

- 5) In what ways did he abuse you? What kind of abuse occurred? (possible probes: For example, did your partner ever force, trick, or manipulate you into sexual activities? Did he ever make you feel bad about yourself or make you feel like you were worthless or didn't matter? Did he ever control or manipulate your money? Did he ever try to use a lawsuit, PPO, or child protection order against you? Did you ever feel like he was trying to turn the children against you?)
 - a. Did you receive any injuries? If so, what kind of injuries? How serious were they? Did you receive medical treatment or had been hospitalized?
 - b. Were your children ever involved in or witness the abuse? Did you ever talk to them about it? What kind of things would you say to them?
- 6) If not already mentioned, did/does your relationship include physical violence or sexual assault? Can you talk about any of these episodes? How often/long?
 - a. How did you feel about your body during or after these attacks? Did you feel differently about your body afterwards? How so?
- 7) If not already mentioned, did/does your relationship include financial, emotional or verbal abuse? Can you talk about these instances? How often/long?

- a. How did you feel about your self during these times? Did you feel differently about yourself afterwards? How so?
- 8) During any of these incidents or when your partner would do/say these things, do you remember/can you tell me how it made you feel?
 - a. How did/does it make you feel about yourself?
 - b. Did/do you think any differently about yourself during or after these abusive episodes or during or after the relationship as a whole?
 - c. Do you feel like these relationships have impacted the way you now relate to people, especially your current or future partner?
- 9) During or after these relationships, did/do you ever feel alone/lonely? How so? Why do you think you felt that way?
 - a. Did/do you feel like you were/are in control of your life? Do/did you feel like you had/have control over what happens to you?

Closing Questions

During our meeting today we really focused on some background information so that I could get to know you a little and learn about your life and what brought you to Lakewood Shelter. I was interested to hear about your personal experiences with abuse and what kind of experiences you have had. The next time we meet, I would like to talk specifically about how these abusive experiences made you feel, or if that(those) relationship(s) made you feel differently about yourself. For example, if you thought part of you had changed while you were in that(those) relationship(s), how you would have described yourself then and if that is different than how you describe yourself now.

- 10) Before we end for today, is there anything else you would like to explain before we end this first interview? Is there anything else you would like me know right now before we move on to the next interview in a couple of days? Anything else you would like to say that I haven't asked about yet?
- 11) Do you have any immediate feelings, thoughts, or comments about what we talked about today?
- 12) Do you have any questions for me at this point?

- 13) What are your goals for the rest of this week? What do you hope to accomplish this week after meeting with your advocate today?

Interview Two: Measurements of Cognitive Processes, Self-concept, Reflected Appraisal, and Relationship to the Body

Interview One Recap

- 1) Before we begin the second interview, I would like to share with you my initial thoughts about what we talked about [last week, a few days ago] and see what you think so far.
 - a. Summary of last interview
 - b. Summary of what I am “hearing” (in terms of analysis)
 - c. End with recap of the last few questions of how she felt – questions that began to lead into self-concept.

Specific Questions Measuring Self-Concept, Reflected Appraisal, and Body Relationship

- 2) (You ended the last interview by saying that you felt.....when your partner was abusing you. How do you describe yourself now? What kind of a person do you think you are? For example, if we were doing a “ice breaker” exercise and you were asked to close your eyes and think about who you are, deep down inside, then open your eyes and write down what you saw, what would that description look like?
 - a. Is this understanding of yourself any different today than it was before you were abused by your partner?
 - b. Think back to before you were in that relationship (if appropriate), how would you have described yourself then?
 - c. Did you feel differently about yourself while in this relationship?
 - d. Did any of these feelings last after you were able to exit the relationship [if she has exited]? How so?
 - i. [If you have been in more than one abusive relationship, did these self-descriptions change over time, or after a specific relationship that stands out more than the others? Do you think

it a “cumulative effect” in some way, perhaps the result of something building over the course of these different relationships?]

- ii. Do you think you will always feel this way about yourself?
 - e. Are you happy with the way that you describe yourself, the person you think you are?
 - i. If this is different than when you were in abusive relationship, were you happy with how you would have described yourself during that time?
- 3) How do you think your partner describes/would have described you? What do you think your abuser thinks/thought of you?
- a. Does this matter to you?
 - b. How was this different from how you thought of yourself?
 - c. How important to you is his conception/opinion/description of you? Do you value/respect his opinion of you?
 - d. Do you think this affected the ways you thought/think of yourself? How? Tell me about this.
 - e. Did his conceptions/opinions/descriptions of you change the way you thought/think of yourself?
 - f. Did his abuse change the way you thought/think of yourself?
 - g. Do you think your partner really “knows/knew” who you are/were inside?
- 4) Have you ever been in a relationship that wasn’t abusive? Can you tell me about this relationship?
- a. How would you have described yourself at that time? What kind of a person do you think you were?
 - b. How is that different/how did that conception change after your abusive relationship(s)?

Closing Questions

Today we talked a lot about how the abuse has made you feel inside, or if/how it changed who you are. I feel very grateful and privilege that you have shared this very private information with me. Before we finish:

- 5) Is there anything else you would like to talk about or would like me know?
- 6) Do you have any questions for me at this point?
- 7) What was your overall impression about what we have talked about over the past few days [week] in the two times we met? How do you feel about what I asked you or how you responded? Were you surprised at any of the questions or at any of your responses? Is there anything that I didn't ask that you would have liked me to? Did you feel like it was helpful to talk about your experiences? How so?
- 8) Do you have any hopes or dreams for the near or distant future? Can you tell me about these?

Interview Series Ending

Here is an envelope that is stamped and addressed to me at my office in Kalamazoo. If you think of anything else you would like to share with me that didn't come up in these interviews or anything that you would like me to also have, please feel free to mail it to me.

Possible Probing Questions

Can you tell me more about that?

How did you feel at the time?

Can you remember what you said/what happened then?

Can you give me an example of that?

What do you mean by that?

I'm still not clear on that. What happened exactly?

APPENDIX C: LETTER TO SHELTER

Dear _____,

Date: _____

I am a battered women's advocate and volunteer, and also a graduate student at Western Michigan University. I am currently working on my dissertation research entitled, "A Social Psychological Exploration of Battered Women's Narratives." I would like to consult with you regarding possible participant opportunities. Please allow me to tell you a little about my research.

What I am working on:

Women's stories of domestic violence need to be told. I would like to give them an opportunity to share their stories and to let their voices be heard. My research involves the confidential documentation of the life stories of women who have survived abusive relationships. My ultimate career goal is to use this information to further our understanding of how communities can help women affected by abuse, increase necessary resources, affect state and federal level policy, inform expert witness testimony, and in general, better understand the lived realities of battered women.

Why am I doing this?

I have worked with the Michigan Domestic Violence Clemency Project as a research assistant and have recently begun volunteering at Capital Area Response Effort as a volunteer, responding to women's homes following domestic violence arrests to begin crisis intervention. Through this work, I have become acutely aware of the justice system's and local communities' lack of understanding of battered women's experiences. Through my community involvement and research, I hope to increase public awareness, understanding, and education about the complex effects domestic violence has on women and their children.

How I plan to go about it:

I'd like to come in and talk to you about the possibility of asking the women staying in your shelter if they would like to share their stories with me. I've found in the past that some victims and survivors of abuse often find it empowering to have the opportunity to share their experiences with someone. It is completely voluntary for them to talk with me and I would not pressure them in any way. Interviews would be held in a safe place within the shelter. I would offer women modest monetary compensation for their time, and will assure them and the shelter complete

confidentiality and protection. I would like to post flyers at the shelter and possibly ask the staff to make my contact information available for women to express interest in sharing their stories with me over the next six months or so.

I hope you find my research interesting and worthwhile. Please feel free to contact me by phone or email with any questions or concerns you have. I will also follow up with you in a couple of days. Then, if you are willing, I would like to schedule a short visit to further discuss this research participant opportunity with you.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I look forward to talking to you.

Respectfully,

Jessica R. Edel

APPENDIX D: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

You're invited to participate in a research project!

“Social Psychological Exploration of Battered Women's Lived Experiences”

I am a battered women's advocate and volunteer, and also a graduate student at Western Michigan University. I am currently working on my dissertation research entitled, “A Social Psychological Exploration of Battered Women's Narratives.” Please allow me to tell you a little about my research.

Women's stories of domestic violence need to be told. I would like to give you an opportunity to share your story and to let your voice be heard. My research involves the confidential documentation of the life stories of women who have survived abusive relationships. In this project, I will be examining the complex effects domestic violence has on women and their children. I've found that some victims and survivors of abuse often find it empowering to have the opportunity to share their experiences with someone. It is completely voluntary for you to talk with me and I will not pressure you in any way. I will guarantee your complete confidentiality in order to ensure your safety.

I will be tape recording all interviews for accuracy. However, the tapes will be destroyed after I transcribe them and no names or identifying information will be used in any of the findings.

Requirements: 1) You **MUST** be at least 18 years old
 2) You **MUST** be willing to meet with me for two separate interviews which will last 1-2 hours each. Interviews will be conducted 3-7 days apart.

Benefits: You will have the opportunity to have your voice be heard and your unique story documented in an effort to help increase awareness and understanding of women's actual experiences in abusive relationships.

If you are interested in finding out more about participating in this research project, please contact Jessica Edel via telephone: (269) 744-5417.

Thank you for your interest! I look forward to hearing your unique story!

Questions or comments concerning this project or this particular advertisement should be made to: Jessica Edel, at Western Michigan University (269) 744-5417 or to Dr. Angie Moe, faculty advisor at (269) 387-5276. Any participant may also contact the chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269) 387-8293 or the Vice President of Research at (269) 387-8298 if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

APPENDIX E: STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

Western Michigan University Department of Sociology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Angela Moe
Student Investigator: Jessica R. Edel
Title of Study: Social Psychological Exploration of Battered Women's Lived Experiences

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled, "Social Psychological Exploration of Battered Women's Lived Experiences." This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

This research is intended to study how women understand their experiences, how they make meaning within their abusive relationships, and what effect abuse has on their relationship with and sense of self. This project is Jessica Edel's research for a doctoral dissertation. In order to participate in this project, you must be a female over the age of 18 who has experienced abuse within an intimate relationship at some point in their life.

Your participation includes two private interview sessions with Jessica Edel that will last 60-120 minutes each, with 3-7 days in between interviews. In this session, you will be asked several questions regarding your personal experiences, perceptions, and other questions that relate to experiences of domestic violence. The interview will be tape-recorded for accuracy. During the interviews, you will have the opportunity to have the tape recorder in your possession which will allow you to stop the recording or record over information that you wish to be deleted from the tape. In addition, after the interview has been typed into a word document (transcribed), you can request access to this document so that you may read it. All tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed.

In all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. One potential risk of participation in this project is that you may become upset by the content of the interview. Jessica Edel is not a counselor, but has been trained to intervene in crisis. She has information about crisis counseling and other various community services that offer additional types of support. One benefit of this activity is having the opportunity to share your story, which you may find to be empowering experience.

All of the information collected from you is confidential. That means that your name will not appear on any papers on which the information is recorded. The conversations will all be coded using a fake name (pseudonym), chosen by you, or assigned by the researcher. The typed conversations will be retained for at least three years in a locked file cabinet in the faculty investigator's locked office. There is some information that the researcher is required to report if revealed in the interview including information that suggests a clear plan to do harm to yourself or others and the current abuse or neglect of a minor. Such information will be reported to and handled by the appropriate authorities including but not limited to the local police or Child Protective Services. These exceptions regarding the confidentiality serve to protect anyone from potential or current harm.

You may refuse to participate or quit at anytime during the study without prejudice or penalty. You may also refuse to answer any question at any time during either interview. If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Jessica Edel at (269) 744-5417 or Dr. Angela Moe at (269) 387-5276. You may also contact the chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at (269) 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at (269) 387-8298.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as directed by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is more than one year old.

Your tape-recorded verbal consent indicates that you have read and/or had read to you the purpose and requirements of the study, you understand the risks and benefits, and that you agree to take part in this study.

Signature (student researcher) acknowledging
Tape-recorded verbal consent

Date

APPENDIX F: LIST OF REFERRALS

Lakewood Shelter ~ **888-XXX-XXXX**

National Domestic Violence Hotline ~ **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**

Crisis hotline ~ **1-888-XXX-XXXX**

Local Hospital ~ **(XXX) XXX-XXXX**

Regional Medical Center ~ **(XXX) XXX-XXXX**

National Sexual Assault Hotline ~ **1-800-656-HOPE**

APPENDIX G: APPROVAL LETTER FOR ACCESS

Office of the Vice President for Research
240 W. Walwood Hall
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456

January 31st, 2010

To whom it may concern,

I am the director of a shelter located in ----- that provides services to survivors of domestic violence. Recently my staff coordinator and I met with Jessica Edel, a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at Western Michigan University. During this meeting we discussed the research parameters of her dissertation project called, "A Social Psychological Exploration of Battered Women's Narratives."

Our organization serves clients in four counties in ----- and offers in-house shelter as well as services to survivors of domestic violence not currently staying in the shelter. Our advocates meet with these clients in various Community Mental Health buildings in each county on a weekly basis. I have granted Ms. Edel permission to pass out flyers in our shelter and the offices we use in the other three counties asking the clients that we serve if they would like to participate in her research. Our staff will assist her in passing out flyers; they also understand that all participation is completely voluntary and confidential and that they are not to coerce our clients in any way.

I understand that Ms. Edel will be conducting two confidential interviews with each client who volunteers, that each interview will last one to two hours, with several days in between, and that all interviews will be tape-recorded. I understand the potential benefits and risks of participation and have provided Ms. Edel with relevant community resources that she may hand out if the survivor becomes distressed during the interview. I further understand that Ms. Edel will be using the information gathered in these interviews as data for her dissertation research, and that findings for this study may be presented within the community, at academic conferences and published in articles or books. I also understand that from this point forward, the name and location of our organization will not appear on anything associated with her dissertation and will only be referred to as "a shelter in a rural town in the Midwest." Finally, Ms. Edel has informed me that she would like to have access to our organization for approximately six months in order to interview 10-15 survivors of domestic violence. She has agreed to provide me with a copy of her final report and make a formal presentation to our organization after completing her degree.

With regards,
Director of Lakewood Shelter

APPENDIX H: INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

You're invited to participate in a research project!

“Social Psychological Exploration of Battered Women’s Lived Experiences”

I am a battered women’s advocate and volunteer, and also a graduate student at Western Michigan University. I am currently working on my dissertation research entitled, “A Social Psychological Exploration of Battered Women’s Narratives.”

I believe it is important for women’s stories of domestic violence to be told. I would like to give you an opportunity to share your story. My research involves the confidential documentation of the life stories of women who have survived abusive relationships. In this project, I will be examining the complex effects domestic violence has on women.

It is completely voluntary for you to talk with me and I will not pressure you in any way. You may end the interviews at any time. In order to help protect your safety, your real name will not be associated in any way with this research. You will be identified only be a pseudonym (false name). I will be tape recording all interviews for accuracy. However, the tapes will be destroyed after I transcribe them and no names or identifying information will be used in any of the findings.

<u>Requirements:</u>	1) I ask that you be at least 18 years old , and 2) be able to meet with me for two separate interviews which will last 1-2 hours each . Interviews will be conducted at the shelter, 3-7 days a part (although you may discontinue participation at any time)
<u>Benefits:</u>	You will have the opportunity to have your unique story be heard and documented in an effort to help increase <i>awareness</i> and <i>understanding</i> of women’s actual experiences in abusive relationships.

If you are interested in finding out more about participating in this research project, **please contact Jessica Edel** in person at the shelter. If I am not available, please indicate the approximate time block you would like to speak with me to learn more about participation. On the sheet below, simply place a check mark (not your name) by the time block in which you would like me to be available.

Thank you for your interest! I look forward to hearing your unique story!

Questions or comments concerning this project or this particular advertisement should be made to: Jessica Edel, at Western Michigan University (269) 744-5417 or to Dr. Angie Moe, faculty advisor at (269) 387-5276. Any participant may also contact the chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269) 387-8293 or the Vice President of Research at (269) 387-8298 if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

Sorry I missed you!

Please place a check mark (not your name) by the time block that works best for you. I will be at the shelter at that approximate time if you are interested in learning more about participating.

Week of _____

_____ **Morning (9:00 – 1:00)**

_____ **Afternoon (1:30 – 5:30)**

_____ **Evening (6:00 – 11:00)**

_____ **Morning (9:00 – 1:00)**

_____ **Afternoon (1:30 – 5:30)**

_____ **Evening (6:00 – 11:00)**

_____ **Morning (9:00 – 1:00)**

_____ **Afternoon (1:30 – 5:30)**

_____ **Evening (6:00 – 11:00)**

_____ **Morning (9:00 – 1:00)**

_____ **Afternoon (1:30 – 5:30)**

_____ **Evening (6:00 – 11:00)**

You're invited to participate in a research project!

“Social Psychological Exploration of Battered Women’s Lived Experiences”

I am a battered women’s advocate and volunteer, and also a graduate student at Western Michigan University. I am currently working on my dissertation research entitled, “A Social Psychological Exploration of Battered Women’s Narratives.”

I believe it is important for women’s stories of domestic violence to be told. I would like to give you an opportunity to share your story. My research involves the confidential documentation of the life stories of women who have survived abusive relationships. In this project, I will be examining the complex effects domestic violence has on women.

It is completely voluntary for you to talk with me and I will not pressure you in any way. You may end the interviews at any time. In order to help protect your safety, your real name will not be associated in any way with this research. You will be identified only by a pseudonym (false name). I will be tape recording all interviews for accuracy. However, the tapes will be destroyed after I transcribe them and no names or identifying information will be used in any of the findings.

<u>Requirements:</u>	1) I ask that you be at least 18 years old , and 2) be able to meet with me for two separate interviews which will last 1-2 hours each . Interviews will be conducted right here in the CMH building following your meeting with your advocate, 3-7 days a part (although you may discontinue participation at any time)
<u>Benefits:</u>	You will have the opportunity to have your unique story be heard and documented in an effort to help increase <i>awareness</i> and <i>understanding</i> of women’s actual experiences in abusive relationships.

If you are interested in finding out more about participating in this research project, **please visit Jessica Edel in room _____**. I will be available on the following dates:

Thank you for your interest! I look forward to hearing your unique story!

Questions or comments concerning this project or this particular advertisement should be made to: Jessica Edel, at Western Michigan University (269) 744-5417 or to Dr. Angie Moe, faculty advisor at (269) 387-5276. Any participant may also contact the chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (269) 387-8293 or the Vice President of Research at (269) 387-8298 if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

APPENDIX I: HSIRB APPROVAL LETTER

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: April 2, 2010

To: Angie Moe, Principal Investigator
Jessica Edel, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy Naugle".

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 10-02-09

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Social Psychological Examination of Battered Women's Narratives" has been **approved** under the **full** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: February 17, 2011

Walwood Hall, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456
PHONE: (269) 387-8293 FAX: (269) 387-8276

Appendix J: Participant Poetry and Artwork

The System

~ Elizabeth~

There are places we go to forget the pain of our lives.
The darkness consumes our souls, bodies and minds.

We try to run but it's like we can't move.
We fight though we feel we have nothing left to prove.

We cry at night but try to stay silent.
The fear of him hearing is enough to choke our weeping

I can't escape his terror, the threats or the screaming.
I'm only happy in a place when I'm dreaming.

Dreaming of a home full of peace and love.
God bring down your angels from above.

I know that he loves me but why?
All of his words, apologies, and gifts are lies.

When will I escape from him? Even now, now that I'm away,
he still has me psychologically. God save me from his sin!

I am alone fighting for my son but no matter what I do I can't run.
No one has helped me, I've exhausted all of my options,
they don't care no matter what he's done.

I'm here in this place for a short time. Without a dime to my name,
no home to call my own; where will I go?
What will I tell my son? Who can I trust?

The future looks dim at best.
I'm alone in this god forsaken mess.

The pathetic thing is my son's the one that suffers.
The only answers I get from you are "I'm sorry for this"
or "we can't help you" or "we've done all we can."

I say to you walk a mile in my shoes, watch your child endure this pain,
feel what I feel every waking day. With the answers you give,

you can't handle it; you wouldn't last one day with this battle!

You think I'm weak. You think this is my fault, but all of you are wrong.
You go home to your family with no worries except what's for dinner tonight,
while I tell my son that this place is our home.

We have nothing to call our own. He asks me why, what should I say?
The only thing I can – "I love you son now close your eyes and dream good dreams,
it won't be long before we reach our dreams."

To go through this life with all of that responsibility;
makes me the strong one because you, my friends, have it easy.

So when you reach your nice comfy beds
think about this and what you should do instead.

Sweet dreams my fellow comrades, sleep a good sleep.
I hope my son's face won't keep you awake.

Remember this is my life and my tragedies; so stop and think before you judge.
Think of my son, my life before the next smile you have to fake.

Maybe one day you'll change, maybe one day you'll listen;
to more than just politics, popularity contests or money.

You won't laugh or smile 'cuz you'll realize none of this is funny!

The Girl Within

~Arizona~

There is a young girl
who hides out inside of me.

She wears her cloaks like armor,
even though she is terrified of what might be.

The words cut like thunder
when the storm comes out of her.

The little girl is like an animal,
to survive, needs her comforting fur.

She is tiny and sometimes feels lost.
For the princess, sometimes money isn't enough.

The girl is sorry, her emotions are still tender and raw.
There is a part of her she forgets and hides.

Suddenly she waits with nothing but time to bide.

The sun comes out and the rays feel glorious and warm.
Her prince has come!

It's like her life has come undone.

The little girl loves her prince and wonders why she tests the waters
and lets the storm brew. Sorry isn't enough after the many hours that pass.
She will act, even if it means to come out of hiding.

She promises always to improve
and will let her actions be the proof.

"I'm sorry, let this be my first action and apologize for the violence."

Seek and ye shall find
and the answers suddenly belong.

Marry Me

~Arizona~

This is a poem to express
how I feel

Sometimes I am not very nice
and should be left like an uncooked meal

It's hard to explain my emotions
and my consumptions of pain

I have become spiteful and mean
and with what to gain?

Someday you will leave me
and I will become just another

It's my fear of loneliness
and my constant quest for love

I need to trust in me
to trust in you

I need only you
especially when I am blue

I am sorry and I apologize
for acting socially inappropriate

You are my life
my husband to be

I'm sorry,
will you still marry me?

The Rugged Deal

~Arizona~

There once was a man that knew how to call

It is easy to see how quickly
the ball will fall.

I remember a time in which the only
thing that mattered was me.

And now, he would rather
“let things be.”

My pain is clear and its easy to see
how alone I really feel.

But I guess that what happens in marriage,
isn't that the deal??

I am left to be silent and full of fear.

For I wonder where the times went
when I was his dear.

The contract signed and made of stone.

I lay my head back and utter a
soft moan.

Never in my life, have I felt so alone!

Pain and Truth

~Arizona~

There is a man who calls
me by name

I don't think he realized
my soul would be so hard to tame

I am realizing and now wondering
of the cards of my fate

He was the one who I
thought would forever be my fate

The world speaks of truths and
I was too naïve to see

I feel like a fool and think
“what is to become of me?”

My world is full, yet I feel
so alone and blue

There was a day when the
words he spoke were true

Now I swallow my fears
and snifle my tears

Where is my friend who would hold
my heart dear throughout the years

My heart is sad and I
feel so small

I guess it's no wonder
for I can't climb his simple wall

No more excuses and no
more tears of guilt

The words are spoken and the
time is here

It is the day in which all people
have taught me to fear

for what I have only to hold
is all that will remain dear

Questions

~Arizona~

Where oh where do you go?
My tortured heart asks why.

Do you like me to wonder
as I bow my head to cry?

I sit and stare,
oh how I hate to wait!

Its as if your mom was right
I should just leave it to fate.

It is dark and I feel such despair.
Why do you have to leave?

I know how it feels and
strongly I grieve.

Do I make it worse?
My heart breaks at a slow steady rate.

After all, I thought you were my only mate.

My Greatest Fear

~Arizona~

I look around me and
all becomes so clear

Why is it her I suddenly fear?

I realized I have changed
and I am not the same

I expected more respect
and a little bit of fame.

My heart is jealous and I think “why?”

Those thoughts stick in my head and
I just want to cry

I feel so alone, slow and out of pace

When will it be my turn to be
blessed by his grace?

My world spins and I come crashing down

All my husband can do
is shake his head and frown.
“I expected so much better.”

So, listen up and open your ears

I will be soon, shifting gears.

Dark
~Arizona~

There was a time and place when I looked
down upon your face

Amongst the pain and anguish
was a man who could make my heart race

It hasn't been long, only a couple of years

And now it seems I have
faced all my biggest fears.

There is a sadness and an emptiness within,
a hollow place of an empty shell

And you just tell me to wait
for all will be well.

Time is running out
and my ears have bled.

I feel as if our path is twisted
and now become dead.

Open your eyes and your heart
move away from the dark!

Feel the warmth and shelter I can bring

Let the Heaven's sing and
allow the bell's to ring.

Time is too short!
Make your mark!

Before all becomes dark.....

Rock Bottom

~Arizona~

In a world of darkness,
I see no light

I am walking down the tunnel
and suddenly I have no sight.

There are no words to justify
the means.

I am always looking for the brighter
side of the greens.

My feelings are hurt
and can that be understood?

If for you,
only I could.

Well I guess you got your wish
because now I have walked in your shoes.

Now for a minute, step into mine.

I know, it doesn't feel very fine.

Now at least we have
something in common.

Both of our feelings
have hit rock bottom.

Paved
~Arizona~

I'm looking through the world
today with different eyes.

I live in a world of shame,
am I the one to blame?

Lost and alone in a place
where I feel no pain.

Really, what am I looking to gain?

The blue of my eyes lift up and
I know I am not alone

it's as if she is my clone.

My spirit, my guide,
she's been with me during
this treacherous ride.

I feel my lips tremble
and my heart starts to break.

Boy, I never realized
how much was at stake.

Suddenly I see the light
and confess my sins.

And then, she grins.

For I am not alone
I have been saved.

My conscious, my path
for life has been paved.

Nightmare

~Arizona~

What is my purpose?

What is my place?

Why do men think
they can slap me on the face?

Who am I suppose
to blame?

What will I gain?

I don't deserve
this horrible pain.

Free me from the pattern,
help me find my way.

I can't live this nightmare
day after day.

Help me stand strong
unite our bond.

There is always a place
to be safe.

-dedicated to Alexandria, counselor of a domestic violence class

Anymore

~Arizona~

The silence is deafening
way beyond loud.

I rack my brain
the answers never appear.

So is that why
I have so much to fear?

My head aches, thumps
and pounds.

But really,
is there no sound?

Empty space
I lost my place
can't feel my face.

"I need your help!"
My brain can only yelp.

Let me find peace within.

And remove all the sin.

I need a plan,
without a man!

Feel the burn
feel the yearn

I just can't take it anymore!!!!

**Warm Embrace
(divorce final)**
~Arizona~

I found the
sun today.

What will come
will may.

Its been a long road,
and I am far from healed.

But finally,
the cards have been dealed.

I am ok,
I found my feet.

My soul
will never be beat.

I smile and laugh
it's not half bad.

For finally
I am no longer mad.

Thanks to those that
have helped along the way.

And for me especially
as I have lived to see another
day.



Fuckin' Bitch!

Slut! Whore! Stupid Bitch!
Cunt! Fat lazy bitch! I hate
you! Worthless piece of shi



Ugly, fat whore! You're no
good enough! I'll find some
one better!

Live with this for years
and see how much time
it takes to heal.



Aggie Aggie



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