WHY SHE LEFT:
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL, RELATIONAL, AND CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A WOMAN'S DECISION TO LEAVE AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

by

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Abstract

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Adviser: Professor Peter Fraenkel, PhD

The literature on domestic violence provides powerful and alarming evidence to support that intimate partner violence is a crime of epidemic proportion that demands serious attention. The goal of this study was to ascertain the nature of the dilemma that women in violent relationships face when determining whether or not to stay with their abusive partners and what ultimately influences their final decision to leave. The data analysis was guided by the principles of grounded theory, which places priority on discovering participants' meanings of their experiences and perceptions of reality. The interviews with the participants of this study brought to life the complex, evolving nature of their relationships with their partners, emphasizing not just the presence of abuse but also love, hope, attachment, and dependency. The respondents provided a range of reasons or catalysts that led them to leave their batterers. Four main themes were identified for leaving: (a) impact of abuse on the children, (b) shift in sense of self-efficacy, (c) escalation in violence, and (d) partner infidelity. The women were able to discuss in detail the ways in which these catalysts caused shifts in their perceptions of their partners, themselves, relationships, and realities, which ultimately enabled them to leave. While these findings are the first of their kind, because of the small sample size,

they cannot necessarily be generalized to the population at large. The definition of abuse, the barriers that prevent a woman from leaving an abusive relationship, and the ways in which she experiences the relationship depend largely upon the contexts of race, culture, and class. Therefore these findings must be recognized as specific to the distinctive population of this study, namely urban women of color and low socioeconomic class, who found respite in a domestic violence shelter. Future research must continue to look to the women who have lived and survived intimate partner violence for knowledge, guidance and inspiration. This research in turn should continue to empower women to leave abusive relationships and, most importantly, to leave earlier before the abuse has an even greater impact on the women and their children.

In Memory of D.M.
and the many other women,
who have lost their lives due to intimate partner violence

Dedicated to the brave women of this study,
who possess the courage and determination to create better lives
for themselves and their children

Notice of Eviction

I hereby give notice that on this day
You are forever evicted from my life

This house of love has turned to anger
But thankfully I have the power of controlled anger
Unlike yourself and your viscious inhumane treatment of the tenants and their rights.

I ask that you return the keys to my heart,
Your deposit cannot be returned because of broken promises and damaged lives

Find yourself a decent place in your own kingdom of madness and be the landlord of your own weakness
where no reference is required.

This notice is to take effect immediately and
all love is lost upon receipt of a new found Freedom

Written by G.M.,
a resident of HELP-Harbor

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Finally, I would like to thank my mom, who taught me how to listen and empathize and modeled for me how to believe in others.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The goal of this study is to ascertain the nature of the dilemma that women in violent relationships face when determining whether or not to stay with their abusive partners and what ultimately influences their final decision to leave. The analysis focuses on what happens in this moment, including the precipitating external events and the psychological shifts that lead up to the decision. In their literature review, Rhodes and McKenzie (1995) remark:

> To date, the guiding question in the domestic violence research seems to have been, 'Why do battered women stay in abusive relationships?' The result has been a body of research, which has focused on what is wrong with battered women. If we begin with the premise that domestic violence is damaging and demoralizing to battered women, a more effective question might be, 'What enables them to leave?' (p.402)

Concordant with Rhodes and McKenzie's sentiment, this is the question that is posited in this study. Further, through its Grounded Theory approach, this study places priority on discovering the participants' meanings of their experiences and perceptions of reality. They are the expert informants, providing detailed information about their lives and their experiences with intimate partner violence.

Almeida and Durkin (1999) provide a thorough description of domestic violence and its wide-ranging impact on victims:

> Domestic violence is the patterned and repeated use of coercive and controlling behavior to limit, direct, and shape a partner's thoughts, feelings, and actions. An

> array of power and control tactics is used along a continuum in concert with on another. These tactics include: physical abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse, threats and intimidation, isolation and entrapment, sexual abuse and exploitation, control and abuse of children, and isolation through job relocation and language barriers." (p.313)

It should be noted at this time that the terms *domestic violence* and *intimate partner violence* are used interchangeably within this paper, largely as a reflection of the evolving terminology within the literature. Intimate partner violence specifies violence between partners, where as domestic violence can refer to violence perpetrated against anyone within the home. As a result, intimate partner violence is now more commonly used within the literature. For the purpose of this paper however domestic violence will refer specifically to violence between intimate partners.

This paper is organized as follows: It begins with a review of the literature in the domains of: (a) incidence and prevalence of domestic violence, (b) the impact of domestic violence on both women and their children, (c) the impact of domestic violence on employment, (d) the history of domestic chastisement, (e) the theories on why women stay in abusive relationships, (f) the theories on the processes of leaving abusive relationships, and (g) multicultural considerations regarding intimate partner violence. This is then followed by a statement of the study's hypothesis and a description of the methodology. The results are then presented, dividing the data into three major categories: the start of the relationship, the abuse and its impact, and the process of leaving. Finally, the Discussion section will summarize the findings in respect to the

literature, speculate on the study's limitations, apply the findings to clinical work and propose suggestions for future research.

Rhodes and McKenzie (1995) capture the intent behind this study and the process through which the study is intended to contribute to the growing literature on intimate partner violence:

> Part of the reason that it has been so difficult to conduct research into why battered women resist leaving their partners is because most are mystified by their own experiences. As we help individual women to better understand their inner worlds and patterns of behavior in relationships, we will also increase our own insight into why battered women stay and how they ultimately end their victimization. (p.403)

Literature

Incidence and Prevalence

Every 15 seconds a woman is battered. An estimated 1.8 to over 4 million women in the United States are physically abused by their partners annually (Huang & Gunn, 2001; Wood, 2001), thus making intimate partner violence the greatest cause of injury to women, totaling more incidents than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined (Fraenkel, 2000/2001). Although domestic violence does not always involve female victims, the overwhelming majority of cases involve violence against women; approximately 85% of victimizations by intimate partners in 1998 were against women (Rennison, 2000). Depending on the survey, 25 – 33% of women are assaulted at the hands of an intimate male partner during their lifetime (Fraenkel, 2000/2001; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Wood, 2001). Further, approximately half of the women raped by an

intimate partner and two-thirds of the women physically assaulted by an intimate partner have reported being victimized multiple times by the same partner. Among these women, "62.6% of those who were raped and 69.5% of those who were assaulted said that their victimization lasted a year or more. On average, those women who were raped multiple times reported that their victimization occurred over 3.8 years, and those women who were physically assaulted multiple times reported that their victimization occurred over 4.5 years (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence an average of 10 women a day die at the hands of an intimate partner (Wood, 2001). Women aged 35-49 have been identified as the most vulnerable to intimate murder, based on the fact that almost 40% of homicides committed between 1993 and 1999 of women within this age group were committed by intimates. The second most vulnerable group to fatal injury from domestic violence is women aged 20-24. Thirty two percent of the homicides of these women between 1993 and 1999 were also committed by intimates. In regard to nonfatal violence, this same survey revealed that females aged 16-24 were found to be the most vulnerable (Rennison, 2001).

It is important to note that ending an abusive relationship does not necessarily result in an end to the violence. In fact, women who are estranged from their husbands are more likely to be killed (Fleury, Sullivan & Bybee, 2000) and 6 times more likely to be victimized by their ex-husbands than those who remain in their marriages (Fraenkel, 2000/2001). Interviews with men who have killed their wives have indicated that either threats of separation by an intimate partner or actual separation were most often the precipitating events that led to the murder (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). This is

corroborated in an analysis of 57 murders that were committed against women by their intimate partners, that showed that 43 (75%) of the women were separated or trying to terminate the relationship at the time of the murder (Barnett, 2000).

In addition to these figures are the statistics pertaining to the "silent," "forgotten" and "unintended" victims of intimate partner violence (Edelson, 1999). A national survey compiling statistics from the years 1993 through 1998 found that children under the age of 12 resided in 43% of the households where intimate partner violence occurred (Rennison, 2000). Straus (1992) has estimated that as many as 10 million teenagers may be exposed to parental violence annually. He estimates that "at least a third of American children have witnessed violence between their parents, and most have endured repeated instances" (p.98, cited in Edelson, 1999).

Despite these astounding figures, it is likely that these figures actually underestimate the prevalence of interpersonal violence and related victimization. This is due to the fact that they reflect *reported* violence only; domestic violence is one of the most underreported crimes in the United States (Huang & Gunn, 2001; Wood, 2001). Some of the reasons for underreporting that have been cited are "respondents' shame or embarrassment, conscious or unconscious distortion or denial, attempts to manage the impressions they make and offer socially acceptable responses, and inaccurate recall or fear of retribution" (Lloyd, 1997, p.147). This dilemma has caused discrepancies in some of the figures that have been reported across numerous surveys. For example, in a community-based study of children's exposure to parental violence, it was found that one in four children reported witnessing parental violence. Notably, 78% of the children who reported having witnessed parental violence had at least one parent who reported, in

discordance with their child, that no violence had occurred or that their child had not witnessed such an event (Edelson, 1999).

Evidence suggests that we have yet to understand the enormity of domestic violence between intimate partners and the number of individuals who are affected by it. Yet even with these suspected underestimates of the incidence and prevalence of violence inflicted upon women by their intimate partners, there is ample evidence to support the fact that this is a crime affecting a large number of women and children and a matter that demands serious attention.

The Impact of Domestic Violence on Victims

Impact on women.

Perhaps one of the most obvious effects of domestic violence is the impact of physical injury that women sustain. Not surprisingly, research indicates that battered women are more likely to visit emergency rooms and private physicians than nonbattered women. According to a national crime victimization survey, 41% of women injured by an intimate sustained injuries that required medical attention. Women who are battered by their intimates are also at higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV (Mahoney, Williams & West, 2001).

In addition to physical injuries suffered during violent episodes, studies also show that battered women are more likely to have chronic health problems, which seem to be unrelated to the abuse. This may in part be accounted for by the fact that a correlation has been identified between being battered and smoking, alcoholism and repeated injury, all of which are likely to cause poorer health in women (Mahoney et al., 2001). It may also

be conjectured that the stress from the abuse causes women to have poorer health and/or interferes with women's abilities to fight off disease.

Domestic violence also puts women at significant risk for psychological problems. According to Kearney (2001), “In addition to increasing 10-fold the risk of physical injury, intimate partner violence triples women’s hospitalization rates for mental health disorders, substance abuse, and suicidality.” In their review of recent studies on domestic violence, Jones, Hughes & Unterstaller (2001) found that a substantial proportion of battered women (31% to 84%) suffer from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). One such study found that the most common symptoms of PTSD exhibited in battered women were hyperarousal, nightmares, intrusive memories and avoidance of reminders of the abuse (Saunders, 1994). Battered women who exhibit PTSD have also been found to be at higher risk of suicidal behavior (Jones et al., 2001). A high prevalence of other mental disorders, such as depression, dysthymia, low self-esteem, somatization, obsessive compulsiveness, generalized anxiety disorder, and phobic anxiety have been observed (Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992; Huang & Gunn, 2001; Jones et al., 2001; Kemp, Rawlings & Green, 1991; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998; Roberts, Williams & Lawrence, 1998). It should be noted that while these studies have all found high correlations, none have claimed a cause-and-effect relationship (Jones et al., 2001).

Several studies have examined the moderating effects of certain factors on the degree of symptomotology, such as frequency, severity and consequences of physical aggression. In their study on PTSD, Houskamp and Foy (1991) found that the greater the amount of exposure to life threatening violence, the more likely a woman was to be diagnosed with PTSD (cited in Jones et al., 2001). In their study of 33 currently battered

women who were seeking help from a community agency, Cascardi and O'Leary (1992) found that "as the number, form and subsequent consequences of the physically aggressive acts increased and/or worsened, the woman's depressive symptoms increased and self-esteem decreased" (p.256). Further analysis in this study also indicated that the physical abuse had a more powerful effect on self-esteem than depressive symptomotology.

In a review of qualitative research on women's experiences of domestic violence, a large number of the study participants commented on the deleterious effects of abuse on their self-identity. The author of the review shares some of the quotes that she collected: "'I'm not sure what you are, but you're not a person' (Moss, Pitula, Cambell, & Halstead, 1997, p.439). 'I don't feel, I just react' (Smith, Tessaro & Earp, 1995, p.177). 'He made me feel so low…what is there to live for?' (Dunn, 1989, p.74). 'It was like my soul was gone' (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995, p.404)" (Sleutel, 1998, p.526). The women tended to refer to the situation in terms of loss and of not feeling whole. They described themselves as feeling numb, passive, confused, and as having experienced a loss of identity, dignity and trust. Immediately following the aggressive acts, the women referred to feeling "degraded, fearful, depressed, devastated, sick, and helpless" (Sleutel, 1998, p.526).

Jones et al. (2001) list several additional conclusive findings that they took from the literature including: (a) a correlation between women who reported being victims of abuse, both in their childhood and adulthood, and drug and alcohol dependence; (b) evidence to support the claim that psychological abuse may be as damaging as physical abuse; (c) evidence that demonstrates that women in domestic violence shelters are at a higher risk for PTSD that victimized women who are not in shelters; (d) that having

multiple victimizations, including childhood victimizations places the woman at higher risk for PTSD and other psychiatric disorders; and (e) that women who have been battered exhibit some cognitive problems, such as perception and memory failures and a tendency to engage in ineffective and self-defeating problem solving.

Finally as will be discussed later, there is considerable evidence that demonstrates that battering has a deleterious effect on women's participation in the work force. By preventing their partners from working or pursuing their education, batterers cause women to have tremendous difficulty in providing food and shelter for themselves and their children, and deny women the benefits of employment-provided health insurance and retirement income (Mahoney et al., 2001).

Impact on children.

Numerous studies have been conducted to assess the impact of parental violence on children. The form of witnessing parental violence most often associated with children is the experience of being within visual range of the violence and seeing it occur. However researchers have highlighted a number of other ways that children may also experience parental violence that must be considered, such as hearing the violence and fighting, being in a mother's arms when she is struck, being taken hostage by the batterer in order for him to manipulate the mother's behavior, being used as a spy or being interrogated about the mother's activities. In addition, children may be affected by the aftermath of violence such as witnessing a mother's injuries and her need for medical assistance or seeing a father removed from the home by police (Edelson, 1999).

Although the literature thus far provides evidence that there is a positive correlation between children's being exposed to domestic violence and impaired

development, a review of twenty nine studies conducted by Kolbo, Blakely, and Engleman (1996) found discrepancies in the findings across the studies, particularly within the specific domains of social, cognitive and physical functioning. However, within the behavioral and emotional domains, Kolbo et al. found more concordant results. In terms of behavior, the findings strongly suggest that significantly higher instances of hyperactivity, aggression, and conduct problems exist among children who have witnessed parental violence than among comparison subjects. In terms of emotional functioning, child witnesses of parental violence tend to exhibit more anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms and temperament problems than other children.

In a separate review conducted by Edelson (1999) that examined the findings from 31 studies (eight of which overlapped with the previous review) conclusive findings were also found regarding behavioral and emotional functioning in children who been exposed to parental violence. Children were found to exhibit more aggressive and antisocial (externalized) behaviors, as well as more fearful and inhibited (internalized) behaviors and to show lower social competence than other children. Children who witnessed parental violence in their home demonstrated more anxiety, depression, trauma symptoms and temperament problems than children who did not. Similar to the previous review, the findings regarding cognitive functioning were equivocal. In terms of long-term effects, one of the studies demonstrated that witnessing parental violence as a child was associated with adult reports of depression, trauma-related symptoms, and low self-esteem among women and trauma-related symptoms among men. Another found greater distress and lower social adjustment in women who had witnessed domestic violence as children than women who had not. In addition, some evidence was found to support the

notion of transmission of violence, for example male batterers were significantly more likely to have grown up in homes where adult domestic violence was occurring than men who had not.

Both Kolbo et al. (1996) and Edelson (1999) highlight the mediating and moderating roles of particular factors on the effects of parental violence on children, such as the frequency and duration of the witnessing, the severity of violence that was witnessed, the gender and age of the child, and whether or not the child is also a victim of abuse. In both reviews it was found that boys were more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors, where as girls were more likely to exhibit internalizing behaviors (Kolbo et al., 1996; Edelson, 1999). Children in pre-school were, according to mothers, more likely to exhibit problems than other age groups (Edelson, 1999).

Edelson (1999) warns the reader when interpreting the literature to beware of the last factor mentioned above, namely whether a child is also a victim of abuse. One study compared children who were both abused themselves and witnesses of parental violence with children who were witnesses only and a control group of children who were neither abused or witnesses of violence. The children who were abused themselves, as well as being witnesses were found to exhibit the most problem behaviors, the children who were witnesses only showed moderate problem symptoms and the comparison group showed the least. Several other studies corroborate these findings. Interestingly, another study found that as the level of parent-to-child violence increased, the impact of witnessing violence on a child's adjustment decreased. The inverse was also found to be true, as the level of parent-to-child violence decreased, the impact of witnessing violence on a child's adjustment increased.

A few studies have also been conducted that address mothers' concerns regarding their children's being witnesses of their abuse and their perceptions of the impact of the abuse on their abilities to parent their children. Hilton (1992) interviewed twenty women regarding their concerns about their children's having witnessed the abuse that they sustained from their former partners. Despite efforts to hide or minimize the abuse, 70% of the women reported that their children had witnessed the violence or its aftereffects. Fifty five percent of the women reported that their children were direct witnesses to the emotional and physical abuse that they suffered. In one such interview, a woman shared that her toddler had woken up and cried out for her as she was thrown against the wall. Another participant described her older child as shouting, "Daddy, don't kill my mommy" (Hilton, p.77). While 30% of the women reported that they stayed in the relationship because of their children, e.g. due to fears that they couldn't financially support themselves and their children, the majority of women (11, or 55%) reported that they left the abusive relationship for the sake of the children; six (30%) of whom left due to fears that their children were in physical danger. While it was not directly addressed in the interview, 45% of the women spontaneously made reference to their concerns about intergenerational transmission of violence. Some of the women expressed concern that their sons would assault their wives as adults. Three women already had their sons in programs to manage emotional and behavioral effects of witnessing.

In their study on mothers' perceptions of the impact of domestic violence on their parenting, Levendosky, Lynch, & Graham-Bermann (2000) found that most women believed that their parenting was affected by their partner's violence. Interestingly, the participants reported perceptions of both negative and positive effects on their parenting.

In response to the question, "How do you think that the violence you have experienced from your partner has affected your parenting of your child?" (Levendosky et al., p.254), 24 of the 95 women described negative effects on their parenting such as experiencing a reduction in the emotional energy and time that they were able to provide for children and increased angry feelings toward children. A few reported becoming violent with their children. Nineteen of the women reported positive effects on their parenting such as increased empathy and caring toward their children and increased protectiveness of their children. Twenty of the women described no effect on their parenting. Fifteen of the women expressed concerns regarding the repetition of violence in their children's relationships. Mothers feared that their sons would abuse their female adult partners and that daughters might be abused when older in their adult intimate relations. Six of the women expressed concerns about the effect that the violence had on their children, including the images that they had developed regarding what a man should be. Twelve other women did believe that their parenting had been affected but provided only nonspecific responses as to how the violence had affected their parenting.

Domestic Violence and its Impact on Employment

One of the relatively recently and now commonly observed effects of domestic violence is its impact on a woman's pursuit of education and employment, both during the time of abuse and after. The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) found that of the adult female intimate partner violence victims that were interviewed, 35.3% who were stalked, 21.5% who were raped, and 17.5% who were physically assaulted lost time from paid work. According to the NVAWS estimates, these losses suggest that U.S. women lose nearly 8.0 million days of paid work because of domestic violence, an

equivalent of 32,114 full-time jobs each year. In addition, an estimated 5.6 million days of house hold chores are lost, as well (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003).

Interviews with battered women on welfare have provided a slew of examples of how batterers sabotage women's attempts to receive education and maintain employment (Lloyd, 1997; Raphael, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001). As listed by one of the leaders of this research, Jody Raphael, examples of sabotage are:

> …inflicting physical abuse in visible places, so that the women become too embarrassed or too injured to expose their black eyes, bruises, and cigarette burns to the outside world; engaging their partners in night-long quarrels the night before an entrance examination or job interview, leaving the women sleep-deprived and unable to perform well; promising needed child care or transportation, then failing to show up or turning up inebriated; hiding or destroying women's clothing, including winter coats; and tearing up homework assignments and books and materials. (Raphael, 1997, p.124)

From interviews conducted in 1997, one participant reported:

> Well, there were times when he would tell me, if you go to work, I won't be home when you get back…and I went through, I went through hell actually…like I'd be standing out in the cold, he'd tell me, "I'm going to pick you up"…and I'm standing outside waiting for him…waiting for him, my kids are at a babysitter that I've got to pay for…I know they're hungry, the babysitter hasn't fed them, I'm trying to figure, I don't have no money to get home, what am I going to do?" (Lloyd, 1997, p.157)

As a result of their attempts toward employment being undermined, battered women often find themselves in a bind, in which they are economically dependent upon their abusive partners and yet unable to gain the employment needed for independence due to their partner's deliberate methods of sabotage. One of the participants of a study describes this dilemma by sharing that "she knows that she can't hold a job because she is bruised up a lot, but can't leave her abuser because she doesn't have a job and can't support herself and her children on the welfare check alone" (Raphael, 1996, p.6).

Batterers often use psychological and emotional coercion as a means to interfere with their partner's attempts to work, such as undermining their self-confidence and making them feel guilty for leaving their children with outside child care providers, convincing them that they are bad mothers (Raphael, 2001). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and persistent anxiety, as a result of the abuse, have also been identified as interfering with women's abilities to work and study (Murphy, 1997; Raphael, 2001). One of the most harmful effects of domestic violence and symptoms of PTSD on employment is the sense of a foreshortened future. Women suffering from this symptom may suffer from a sense of a shortened life span, lacking any expectations or dreams of long-term achievements and being unable to establish career plans (Murphy, 1997). A twenty-year old participant describes how the abuse prevented her from being able to plan her life:

> Any minute or hour of any given day, I could be dead. I saw no importance to it. My life was fear, insecurity, confusion, uncertainty, worry, pain, and many days of wishing I was dead, since death was the final escape. One might say I became the 'walking dead' with no direction. I was never safe. (Raphael, 1996, p.3)

Other symptoms of PTSD may also interfere with a woman's attempts to work such as fears of leaving the house, an inability to focus or concentrate, and an inability to maintain appropriate social relations at work due to "numbing, irritability, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, or avoidance of job locations or situations which remind her of the past trauma(s)" (Murphy, 1997, p.174).

The women from these studies were able to provide several theories for why their partners interfered with their pursuits of work and education; the first of which is jealousy. One of the participants describes how her partner continued to harass her after she had left the relationship and gained part-time employment, stating that her partner stalked her, "out of jealousy. He did not want me to succeed. He didn't want me to have anything….He tried to strangle me in front of the office. He wasn't trying to kill me, he wanted my bosses to see it so I would lose my job" (Raphael, 1996, p.4). The second theory focuses on the batterers' need to ensure that their partners remain economically dependent on them. The batterers were described as fearing that gains in their partners' employment or education would lead to the necessary means to leave the relationship. A few studies have corroborated these theories. For example, one such study found that women with less than a high school diploma or its equivalent reported significantly fewer incidents of work-related jealousy than those who had achieved these minimal educational credentials. Based on this evidence the authors concluded that women's advances in education may precipitate or aggravate controlling behavior of intimates. Other studies examining economic differentials between intimates have found that when the differential leans in favor of the women and/or as a woman gains access to more resources, domestic violence is exacerbated (Raphael, 2001). The third theory for why

men interfere with their partners' attempts to work is that they typically fear that their partners will meet other men and form new relationships on the job (Raphael, 1996, 2001).

Numerous quantitative studies corroborate the findings from these interview studies and serve to identify domestic violence as a major barrier to education and employment. The following set of studies assessed the ways in which abuse interferes with work performance, particularly through tardiness and absenteeism. One of the first studies on the effects of domestic violence on employment, conducted in 1987, found that 56% of battered women seeking counseling services reported having lost at least one job and 54% reported missing an average of three days of work per month as result of their experiences of abuse. In another study, 58% of surveyed battered women from shelters reported that they had been working during the time that they were abused and that the absenteeism and tardiness caused by the physical abuse had had a deleterious effect on their job performance. 55% of the women reported that they had missed work, 62% reported having arrived late or leaving early, and 24% reported having lost a job partly as a consequence of the violence (Lloyd, 1997).

More recently a survey conducted at the University of Massachusetts in 1997 found that abused women were 10 times more likely than women who were never abused to have a current or former partner who did not like them going to school or work. During the same year, an assessment of new applicants for public assistance found that 44% of those who had previously been in an abusive relationship reported that their abusive ex-partners had prohibited them from working. Finally a study on women receiving welfare conducted in 1998 by Tolman and Rosen in Michigan found that 22.9% of the

participants reported that they had needed to miss work or school due to interference from their partners (Raphael, 2001).

Most studies have failed to find a difference in *current employment status* between women who have sustained current or past abuse and women who have had no such experiences; in other words, at any one time, abuse does not seem to be a significant determinant of employment (Lloyd, 1997; Raphael, 2001). However, there are some studies that provide insight on how domestic violence may interfere with *long-term employment status*. One such study conducted a random household survey and found that women who reported having experienced abuse in the past twelve months were more likely to have experienced unemployment, received public assistance, held more jobs, had lower personal incomes and had more reported health problems (Lloyd, 1997). In a separate study designed to assess the impact of domestic violence on poor women's abilities to maintain work over time that controlled for other relevant domains such as child care, education, and mental and physical health, found that women who experienced physical violence or aggression by male partners during a twelve-month period were found to have had only one-third the odds of maintaining employment for at least 30 hours per week for 6 months or more during the subsequent year than woman without the experience of abuse (Browne, Salomon, & Bassuk, 1999).

Finally, a study conducted by Riger, Ahrens, and Blickenstaff has investigated and found a correlation between the severity of abuse and the batterer's interference with education and employment. Not surprisingly, the researchers found that the more physical and psychological abuse a woman suffered, the more her ability to work and study was impaired (Raphael, 2001).

The History of Legal and Socially Accepted Domestic Chastisement

Dobash and Dobash (1977-1978) provide a review of historical and contemporary documents in order to "elucidate the legal, religious and cultural legacies which have supported a marital hierarchy, subordinated women in marriage and legalized violence against them" (p.439). The authors begin with the first reputed law of marriage from 753 B.C. and end by sharing data from a contemporary study that demonstrates that wives are still in large part socially accepted as 'appropriate' victims of domestic chastisement and violence. The authors remind, or perhaps inform, the reader that it was not until 1891 that all states in the U.S. denied men of the legal right to use physical force in order to control and chastise their wives.

The commonly-believed first law of marriage, established in 753 B.C. by the Roman Romulus, proclaimed that married women were "to conform themselves entirely to the temper of their husbands and the husbands to rule their wives as necessary and inseparable possessions" (O'Faolain & Martines, 1973, p.53, cited in Dobash & Dobash, 1977-1978, p.427). Within the institution of marriage men were permitted full rights to judge and censor their wives, including the right to use physical force. This was demonstrated in a speech by Cato the Censor during the 5th century B.C. in which he stated, "'If you catch your wife in adultery, you could put her to death with impunity, she, on her part, would not dare to touch you with her finger; and it is not right that she should" (Hecker, 1910, p.23, cited in Dobash and Dobash, 1977-1978, p.428). The subjugation of wives to their husbands and the right of the husband to use excessive physical force whenever he deemed necessary was established and protected through the law of marriage.

According to Dobash and Dobash (1977-1978), changes that occurred within the Roman family during the Punic Wars as a result of the men's long periods of absence and women's increased responsibilities induced the implementation of limits and restrictions on men's rights to physically chastise their wives and the new law proclaiming it illegal to beat women of the upper class. Yet the right of domestic chastisement for all other classes remained in place. During the Middle Ages throughout Europe and England women continued to be legally flogged, exiled or killed by their husbands for adultery and other lesser offenses. Dobash and Dobash point out, "Even the French code of chivalry specified that the husband of a scolding wife could knock her to the earth, strike her in the face with his fist and break her nose so that she would always be blemished and ashamed" (p.429). Under English Common Law the act of marriage dictated that the woman become the chattel of her husband and resulted in the abolishment of her civil rights and separate legal status. Dobash and Dobash further provide accounts of how Christianity "embraced the hierarchical family structure and celebrated the subordination of wives to their husbands" (p.438) by citing scriptures from the bible and the writings of Martin Luther, John Knox and John Calvin.

While "All of the legal systems of Europe, England and early America supported a husband's rights to beat his wife and so did the community norms" (Dobash & Dobash, 1977-1978, p.430), it was not until 1824 that the husband's right to chastise his wife was formally written into American law through the Supreme Court of Mississippi. Many states soon followed Mississippi's lead. A court in North Carolina later ruled, "The State should not interfere in cases of domestic chastisement unless 'permanent injury or excessive violence' was involved. They preferred to 'leave the parties to themselves as the

best mode of inducing them to make the matter up and live together as man and wife should'" (Eisenberg and Micklow, cited in Dobash & Dobash, 1977-1978, p.430).

As stated previously, it wasn't until 1891 that man's right to chastise his wife was finally made illegal throughout the United States. Yet, this change in law did not extinguish the patriarchal legacy that persists in American society and manifests in the hierarchical relationship within the family institution between men and women. As stated by Dobash and Dobash (1977-1978), "Although domestic chastisement of wives is no longer legal, most of the ideologies and social arrangements which formed the underpinnings of this violence still exist and are inextricably intertwined in our present legal, religious, political and economic practices" (Dobash & Dobash, 1977-1978, p.439). It was during the time of this article that the second wave of feminism was beginning to flourish and increased attention was being drawn toward the gender inequalities of American society.

Straus (1977-1978), also remarked on the largely implicit and unrecognized, yet powerful, societal norms that condone intramarital violence. In his article he cites the following piece from the Portsmouth Herald on September 13, 1977:

> Concord, N.H. (AP) The New Hampshire Commission on the Status of Women has rejected a plan to help battered wives, saying that wife-beating is caused by the rise of feminism. 'Those women libbers irritate the hell out of their husbands,' said Commissioner Gloria Belzil of Nashua. At a meeting Monday, commission members appointed by Gov. Meldrim Thomson, said any program to help battered wives would be an 'invasion of privacy.' (p.444)

Straus (1977-1978) refers to the marriage license as a "hitting license" and highlights the use of common everyday expressions and jokes, such as:

> A woman, a horse, and a hickory tree
> The more you beat 'em the better they be. (p.455)

While acknowledging the existence of the right to charge husbands with assault, Straus (1977-1978) refers to the so-called "stitch rule" used by policemen in some cities during this time that implies that men have a legal right to hit their wives as long as it doesn't produce an injury that requires medical attention. Straus cites this unspoken policy practiced by the police as the beginning of a judicial process in which women are continually discouraged from pressing charges against their husbands. As final evidence of societal norms that condone domestic chastisement, Straus uses the findings from a national survey published in 1970 in which one out of every four of those interviewed believed that it is sometimes permissible for a husband to hit his wife.

It was at this time largely because of the feminist movement that domestic violence began to be recognized as an epidemic that needed to be addressed. While a substantial number of studies have been conducted and a large amount of literature has been published drawing considerable attention to the issue of domestic violence, many still believe that the condoning of intimate partner violence against women remains embedded in our society. As stressed by Del Mar (1996), “Violence against wives will remain commonplace until we muster the will to examine how closely it is bound up with some of our most cherished values and most powerful cultural traits" (p.174, cited in Wood, 2001, p.241).

Theories on Why Women Stay

Some of the earliest research on domestic violence against women propounded that it was the female partner's masochistic needs that induced violence within a relationship. The violence was thus considered to provide equilibrium for both the wife and the relationship. This theory, proposed by J. E. Snell and his colleagues in 1964, which has subsequently been strongly rejected, has been criticized for failing to recognize wives' protests to the violence as well as the measures that they took to remove themselves from the relationships (Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998).

In the next decade, Troninger found in his analysis that women often attempted to terminate the abusive relationship only after a history of conflict and resolution and that the decision was made once a woman was no longer able to believe the batterer's promises of an end to the violence or to forgive the past episodes of violence. In terms of why women do not terminate the relationship, Troninger posited the following reasons: negative self-concepts; belief that husbands will reform; economic hardship; need for economic support for children; doubts of being able to live independently; concerns about the stigma of divorce; and concerns about the difficulty in finding work while raising children (Gelles, 1976).

During this time, sociologists began to focus on the role that socio-cultural and socio-economic influences play in a woman's remaining in an abusive relationship. Dobash and Dobash (1977-1978), as mentioned previously, argued that the patriarchal society and the structure of the family sanctioned violence against women. It was their opinion that until the mid-1970's legal, cultural and religious legacies explicitly permitted male violence within intimate relationships. They believed that the policies set in place in

the late1970's were still condoning of violence, but in a more covert manner (Dobash & Dobash, 1977-1978; Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998). This theory has remained active throughout the feminist literature.

Straus (1977-1978) also explored socio-cultural and socio-economic factors, as well as factors within the family structure in terms of the maintenance of domestic violence. He was the first author to publish findings on domestic violence from a nationally representative sample. As mentioned previously, Straus focused in large part on the influence of our patriarchal society and the implicit societal norms that condoned intramarital violence directed towards women. From his study, Straus determined violence to be a "function of cultural sex-stereotyping, stratified marital roles, and family stress" (Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998, p. 392). Straus has contributed significantly to the research on domestic violence, including his design of several measures to assess the presence of violence within families, such as the widely used Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979, 1990).

One of Straus' colleagues, Richard Gelles, also conducted a study during this time designed to assess the factors that influence women to stay in abusive relationships. From his findings, Gelles (1976) identified three major factors: firstly, the less severe and less frequent the abuse, the more likely a woman will remain with her husband; secondly, the more abuse a woman experienced as a child, the more likely she is to remain with her husband; and thirdly, the fewer resources and, hence, the less power a woman has, the more likely she will feel "entrapped" in the relationship and will remain with her husband. Gelles also recognized the role that police, outside agencies, and the court system played as a function of their lack of understanding in women's remaining in

abusive relationships. Gelles referred to the influence of these institutions as "external constraints."

Strube and Barbour (1984) tested the factors that Gelles identified, in addition to several others such as length of relationship, abusive history, number of past abusive relationships, social support and reasons for staying in the relationship at the initial time of assessment. Their results suggested that: (a) a longer length of relationship, (b) the use of love and economic hardship as reasons for staying in the abusive relationship at the time of the initial assessment, and (c) a lack of employment were factors likely to contribute to a woman's remaining in an abusive relationship. The authors identified these factors as both objective and subjective measures of commitment and economic dependence. Two additional factors were that minority women were more likely to leave than Caucasian women and that women who reported that they had no where else to go were less likely to leave.

One of the earliest and still commonly held theories on why women stay, first put forth by Leonore Walker (1977-1978), utilized the concept of learned helplessness developed by Martin Seligman. The basic idea of learned helplessness is that responses that are not reinforced will eventually become extinct. Hence, this theory is based on socially learned behavior. Walker explains the basis of her theory:

> On the basis of clinical work with battered women, it was hypothesized that the women's experience of the noncontingent nature of their attempts to control the violence would, over time, produce learned helplessness and depression as the repeated battering, like the electrical shocks, diminish the woman's motivation to respond. (1984, p.87, cited in Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998, p.396)

It was Walker's belief that women in abusive relationships learn to view themselves as helpless and powerless in terms of stopping the violence or removing themselves from the violent relationship. Therefore, these women remain with their abusive partners, not out of choice but rather because they believe they have no ability to get themselves out (Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998; Walker, 1977-1978). Walker used this notion to account for why women do not accept outside agency's offers of assistance. She explains:

> It is probable that battered women do not accept the helper's assistance because they do not believe it will be effective. This can be attributed to the learned helplessness hypothesis in which their cognitive set tells them no one can help them. They see the batterer as all powerful. Thus, there is no safety for them. (p.530)

Walker's goal was to apply the knowledge from social learning theory to interventions for battered women. It was her idea that the passive behavior could be unlearned through systematic procedures designed to allow battered women to gain power and control over their lives (Walker, 1977-1978).

Studies that tested the learned helplessness theory have had equivocal findings. Wilson and colleagues (1992) found affirming results in their study comparing the relationship between help-seeking behaviors, learned helplessness and severity of abuse. Consistent with Walker's theory, it was found that as levels of abuse rose, so did levels of learned helplessness traits. However contrary to expectations, it was found that a number of battered women who sought help from outside agencies exhibited learned helplessness traits. In order to preserve the theory, the authors accounted for these actions by

describing them as evidence that the women had come to rely on others (Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998).

There are many studies that argue that the learned helplessness theory neglects to recognize the help-seeking behaviors of battered women. These studies highlight the help-seeking behaviors of battered women and the numerous actions that they take to stop the violence and/or remove themselves from the abusive relationship.

Ferraro is one of the theorists who has observed the more active roles that battered women assume. Based on her two-year observation of women in a battered women's shelter and assessment of why women stay in abusive relationships, Ferraro (1983) devised a theory focusing on the mechanisms employed by women to make sense of the problematic situation of violence. In her theory, Ferraro recognizes the social, economic and political context that influences women in abusive relationships and the decisions that they make. She identifies this context as assigning primary value to the nuclear family and a secondary status against women. From her assessment, Ferraro came up with six techniques of rationalization that battered women utilize in order to continuously adjust to their experiences, feelings and ideas while remaining in an abusive relationship. The first technique, “appeal to the salvation ethic,” is composed of a set of beliefs that are grounded in the notion that at the root their partner is a good person and that his undesirable actions stem from specific, resolvable problems. This set of beliefs leads the woman to believe that it is her responsibility to persevere and to help her partner overcome these problems. Ferraro shares an excerpt from one of her interviews that reflects this mentality:

> I thought I was Florence Nightingale. He had so much potential, I could see how good he really was, and I was going to "save" him. I thought I was the only thing keeping him going, and that if I left he'd lose his job and wind up in jail. I'd make excuses to everybody for him. I'd call work and lie when he was drunk, saying he was sick. I never criticized him, because he needed my approval. (p.205)

Ferraro (1983) remarks on the fact that the women who adhere to the salvation ethic "assume tremendous power to control and salvage their husband's lives" (p.205). Actions such as these that battered women take in order to minimize stress and reduce their husband's problems by controlling the environment contradict the argument that battered women experience themselves as helpless.

The second technique, “the denial of victimizer,” refers to women who are able to acknowledge the presence of abuse in the relationship, yet tend to attribute the abuse to external forces beyond either their own or their husband's control. Ferraro refers to the associated conviction that the violence will end when the situation changes.

The third technique, “the denial of injury,” enables women to avoid the conflict between their feelings of mutual love and intimacy and the violence. Ferraro remarks that often in the early stages of the relationship it is less painful to receive and deny the beating than to abandon the hopes and feelings of commitment and love.

The fourth technique, “denial of victimization,” is referred to elsewhere in the literature as self-blame. Women who utilize this technique tend to blame themselves for the violence. They tend to view themselves as instigators rather than victims.

The fifth technique, “denial of options,” refers to those women who have options but are unable to acknowledge them. Ferraro (1983) describes these women as being

convinced that they cannot survive without their husbands and identifies them as often coming from impoverished backgrounds and having little reason to hope that they will find a person to love them without abusing them. Ferraro remarks that for these women the experience of abuse is preferable to the prospect of indefinite isolation. Importantly, Ferraro distinguishes these women from the large number of women who do, in fact, lack material resources and who are largely influenced by this factor in their decisions to stay in abusive relationships.

The sixth and final technique, “appeal to the higher loyalties,” refers to the role that culture plays in influencing women's decisions via its "stock of justifications for placing a higher value on marriage than on the personal safety of a battered woman" (Ferraro, 1983, p.210). As an example, Ferraro points to the secondary status that Christianity places on women and its encouragement for women to obey their husbands as men obey God, as illustrated in the following excerpt, "My relationship with Jesus comes first. And to keep my faith I must follow the commandments. If I leave John to have a better life now, I will suffer forevermore. As long as I have Jesus, I can endure anything" (p.210).

As a final addition, Ferraro (1983) points out that battered women may also choose not to leave their partners because they fear that it would be harmful to their children. "Regardless of their opinion of their husbands as spouses, they may believe they are good fathers" (p. 210).

Similar to Ferraro's notion of the appeal to the salvation ethic, Doran describes battered women as taking on a missionary role in their relationships and as maintaining rescue fantasies of saving their partners from the violence. Doran posited that for women

assuming this role the act of leaving would require an admission of defeat and an abandonment of their needy, helpless partners (Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998).

Other theorists have also focused on the rationalizations based on rescue fantasies and perfect-love discourses that battered women use to persist in abusive relationships. In their article, "If I loved him enough, he would be okay", Towns and Adams (2000) reflect upon the role of “culturally endorsed constructions of the perfect-love in maintaining women in relationships with men who use violence against them…” (p.558). The authors of this article focus on the ways in which women's discourses of perfect-love influence them to remain in abusive relationships, to stay silent about their partners' violence and to make attempts to change their partners. The authors identify these discourses as serving to preserve the status quo of male dominance and maintaining the dominance of patriarchy.

Within the notion of perfect-love, Towns and Adams (2000) refer to the duality of man’s image that is presented in well-known romantic narratives that depict male characters as having a hard, masculine exterior and a deeply embedded softer interior. This type of narrative often portrays an idealized romance in which a rough, abrasive, and sometimes even monstrous male, is turned good by the patience and empathy of the all-forgiving heroine, as for example in Beauty and the Beast and The Frog Prince. Often in these stories there is an explanation for the cruelty, which allows for the violence to be depicted as a temporary affliction. The ‘princely’ core of the man is inevitably revealed once he is able to declare his love for the heroine. This dual image of a violent partner is depicted in the following excerpt from an interview: "He was like a split personality. He could be this lovely caring gentle person. And then he could be this absolute tornado of sort of rage" (p.565), and also in the following:

> But I really must admit I really-because when I first met him he was just really terrific, he was a lovely man. I would have liked to see that man again. And that's what I always held onto while he was hitting me, that I would get that man back. (p.565)

Towns and Adams (2000) refer to the “splitting” of the man’s good and bad qualities as allowing for the batterer to be separated from the abuse, so that he may still be loveable and worthy of staying. Through this split he is no longer culpable of the abuse. Towns and Adams postulate that women who are in abusive relationships use these perfect-love discourses in order to make sense of the violence and determine how to respond. These discourses provide rationalizations to remain in the relationship.

Wood (2001) also focuses on the ways that women in abusive relationships use romantic narratives to make sense of their experiences and the chaos that is intruding upon their lives. Wood refers to the Western culture's primary gender narrative of the dominating and superior male and the deferent and dependent female as a common narrative that is utilized by battered women. Wood points out the danger of this narrative, "Women who accept the gender narrative that links their self-worth inextricably to having a male partner are at risk for believing that they must sustain romantic relationships, even destructive ones" (p.243). Wood supports her claim by reporting findings from a study that determined that "wives who tolerated assault from husbands held more traditionally feminine gender identities than did wives who were not assaulted" (p.243).

Wood (2001) presented two Western culture romance narratives that were used by women from her study, the first of which is the fairy tale romance as described in Towns and Adams' article. In order to accommodate these narratives the women relied on several

beliefs within this narrative such as the violence was not so bad, the good outweighed the bad, they had control of the violence, and the violence was not a part of the partner's 'real self.'

Wood (2001) found when women are not able to sustain their beliefs in this narrative, they often turn to the other romance narrative that she refers to as the dark narrative. This narrative casts men as being periodically controlling and violent and relationships as "typically harmfully, yet necessary, for women" (p.257). Women in the study expressed two beliefs to support this narrative: self-blame for the violence and entrapment in the relationship. Wood offers, "The beliefs that romance narratives authorize are not a collection of discrete convictions. Rather, they function interactively and coherently to define violent romantic relationships as normal, tolerable, or at least preferable to no relationship" (p.257-258).

As mentioned earlier, a large proportion of the literature emphasizes the role that our patriarchal society plays in condoning and maintaining the pervasiveness of male violence against females in intimate relationships. Ann Goetting (1999) writes, “Battering is an obsessive campaign of coercion and intimidation designed by a man to dominate and control a woman, which occurs in the personal context of intimacy and thrives in the sociopolitical climate of patriarchy” (p.4).

In her review of the literature, Barnett (2000) presents the patriarchal structure of society as one the leading and most influential factors involved in a woman's decision to remain in an abusive relationship, or more accurately, she identifies this structure as one of the primary obstacles battered women must overcome in order to leave.

One of the primary reflections of patriarchy and major reasons for why women remain in abusive relationships that Barnett (2000) posits is female economic dependency. In support of this claim, Barnett cites the numerous studies that have demonstrated a positive association between lack of independent income and not leaving. She also refers to the well-established inverse relationship between rates of partner assault and lifetime income. Barnett provides a plethora of facts and statistics to demonstrate the sexist practices that contribute to the economic inequalities between men and women and the dangers associated with poverty that dependent, battered women are at risk for if they leave, such as crime and violence, illness and death of children, and inadequate housing. Barnett also refers to the ways, as mentioned previously, that intimate partner violence contributes to unemployment, thereby ensuring that economic dependency persists.

Barnett (2000) also refers to the influence of the policies and practices of the criminal justice system (CJS) as a major contributing factor in women's remaining in abusive relationships. She views this force as a function of our patriarchal society, as well. Barnett refers to the traditions of nonenforcement of the laws and confusion about policy and procedures as barriers in women's attempts to leave, as well as child custody laws and judicial rulings, which typically perceive the abuse of the mother as totally separate from paternal custody rights. Barnett identifies the following as the most obvious challenges faced by battered women in dealing with the CJS: “(a) confusion about the court system…(b) frustration with the criminal justice system…(c) conflict over batterer incarceration…, and (d) views of the criminal justice system as racist and oppressive…" (p.350).

In the second part of her review, Barnett (2000) refers to one additional but powerful external inhibiting factor that battered women must overcome in order to leave their abusive partners: inadequate social support from workplaces, community agencies and religious institutions. Barnett presents numerous reasons for why battered women may be discouraged from seeking help, such as feelings of humiliation, fears of child protective services removing their children, and messages from religious leaders that condone intramarital violence.

In terms of internalizing inhibiting factors that battered women must overcome in order to leave the abusive relationships, Barnett (2000) refers to the processes and effects of socialization, psychological and victimization events, and victim traits. The following represents a synopsis of both her findings and much of which has been discussed in this paper. The following potential factors have been identified as playing a role in a woman's remaining in an abusive relationship: (a) gender-role socialization that teaches female gender devaluation, gender role restrictions, and gender role violation; (b) the belief that violence is a reflection of her failure to maintain a positive quality in the relationship, rather than the consequence of a problem in male partner; (c) not recognizing or defining the violent interactions as abuse; (d) self-blame for violence; (e) the wish to provide a two-parent family for children; (f) holding socially approved attitudes of love, hope and commitment (as reflected in romantic narratives discussed before); (g) the processes of denial, rationalization and minimization that allows female to blame some agent other than the abuser for the aggression; (h) crippling fear of leaving (which according to multiple studies is a realistic fear); (i) diminished cognitive abilities due to abuse, e.g. ineffective problem-solving abilities and coping strategies; (j) learned helplessness

conditioning behavior or what Barnett prefers to interpret as reinforced passivity; and finally, (k) prior victimizations that cause women to be vulnerable to continuing abuse.

Theories on the Process of Leaving

Several researchers have postulated theories on the ways in which women persist in abusive relationships and ultimately find ways to leave the men who have been abusing them.

Merrit-Gray and Wuest (1995) describe the “reclaiming of the self” as the central process in counteracting and breaking free from abuse. They argue that from the beginning women are not passive victims. They describe a process entitled “counteracting the abuse” that women utilize until they are eventually able to break free and leave the abusive relationship. The three sub-processes that they present within counteracting the abuse are: relinquishing parts of self, minimizing the abuse and fortifying defenses. The authors referred to women’s plans of escape and anticipated leaving dates, such as, "When I can collect unemployment," "When the course ends," or "After Christmas," (p.408) as occurring during the third sub-process of counteracting the abuse. However, the authors stress that these plans were rarely followed out to the letter and that often multiple plans were constructed.

Merrit-Gray and Wuest (1995) describe the breaking free stage as a transition between counteracting the abuse and not going back. They found this transitional stage to be a gradual process in which women are initially reluctant to leave due to their clinging hopes that the abuse will stop and their reluctance to sustain the associated losses. Yet through this stage women are described as slowly beginning to take steps toward leaving, such as staying away from home as much as possible, sometimes leaving for extended

periods of time; withdrawing from their partners; avoiding intimacy; and establishing new independent living arrangements.

In open-ended interviews conducted with women from past and present abusive relationships, Landenburger (1989) discovered a four-phase process of entrapment in and recovery from abuse. She describes the process as non-linear and involving the following four phases: binding (initial development of the relationship and beginnings of abuse); enduring (woman sees herself as putting up with the abuse); disengaging (the woman begins to identify with other women in similar situations, e.g. through advertisements, television); and recovering (the period of initial adjustment after the woman has left her batterer). During the disengaging phase, women are described as identifying themselves with others and reaching out in order to seek help and support. During this phase women also come to realize that violence is not normal. Landenburger describes within this phase a breaking point, in which a woman not only fears for her own safety, but also begins to worry that she might harm or kill her partner. Landenburger postulates that the woman eventually becomes angry with both herself and her partner, mixes this anger with the fear and then utilizes it in order to remove herself from the dangerous relationship.

Another theory on the process of leaving is posited by Burke, Gielen, McDonnell, O'Campo, and Maman (2001). The authors apply the "Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change" (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982, 1983, 1986, cited in Burke et al. 2001) to the process of a woman's leaving a violent relationship. They describe the five steps of this model as: (a) precontemplation (nonrecognition of abuse), (b) contemplation (acknowledgement of the abuse), (c) preparation (consideration of options to end the abuse), (d) action (selection of actions to end abuse), and (e) maintenance (use of safety

strategies to remain free from abuse). Burke and her colleagues found that this model was in deed consistent with women's descriptions of how they survived the abuse and were eventually able to leave.

Burke et al. (2001) found that once the women were able to acknowledge that the relationship was abusive, they began to consider their options, and yet were typically still affected by factors that prevented them from leaving such as concerns about personal safety, concerns about financial stability, having no place to go, etc. One woman describes her experience during what Burke and her colleagues identify as the preparation phase:

> I think that if someone had said you can come and stay, or provided me with a place to stay [I would have left]. Because I did try to get into the Y a couple times, but no beds were available. I was afraid to leave and I was afraid to stay. I was afraid to leave because I felt as though he may find me and kill me. (p.1153)

It is during the next phase, called "action," that women were identified as taking actions toward ending the abuse. The authors describe this phase as involving a range of actions, such as avoiding possible abusive situations, electing to fight back, seeking help from family or the police, and terminating the relationship. The authors share that among these numerous strategies leaving was the most frequently mentioned (Burke et al., 2001).

All of the above articles stress that leaving an abusive relationship involves a gradual and active process that takes many forms. While the processes that they propose are quite comprehensive, they provide little information regarding the psychological and other turning points for women that lead them to take action or the moment when women take the final steps to terminate the relationship. Only a handful of theorists have focused

on this point or moment. Based on Ferraro's theory on the rationalizations that women utilize to remain in their relationships, Ferraro and Johnson (1983) identified six catalysts that burst these rationalizations and cause women to redefine their relationship as abusive. These catalysts are:

> (1) a change in the level of violence, (2) a change in resources (availability of housing, money, and so on), (3) a change in the relationship (fewer periods of loving affection, and so on), (4) despair (loss of hope that the relationship will get better), (5) a change in the visibility of violence (public humiliation and abuse), and (6) external definitions of the relationship (friends, relatives or community support can contradict the batterer's view and reinforce society's view of the abused). (Sleutel, 1998, p.528)

Cambell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd (1998) described several turning points, characterized by a specific incident or process that was seen as being pivotal to how the relationship was viewed, in a woman's action toward achieving nonviolence. The data, collected from 31 in-depth interviews, provided five primary turning points: (a) escalation of abuse involving both themselves and property, for example having a gun turned on them or experiencing a shift from psychological abuse to physical abuse; (b) women becoming violent themselves, fantasizing about killing their partners; (c) women coming to view themselves as abused; (d) financial independence, for example, achieved through new employment or arranging for direct deposit; and (e) partner infidelity.

Finally, from their assessment of 22 focus groups of urban and rural African American and White women, Short, McMahon, Chervin, Shelley, Lezin, Sloop, and Dawkins (2000) found that the women tended to describe their decision to leave as

involving a breaking point. Often the breaking points were described as involving a sudden shift in how the women viewed themselves and their partners. In each group an especially violent episode that involved severe injuries was mentioned. "Reevaluation of their circumstances, loving themselves, and considering their own needs were mentioned often as important precursors to ending the violence and were points of view that were previously unfamiliar to many of them" (p277). One of the African American participants shared, "To me it's like loving yourself too, 'cause a lot of times we put men before we put ourselves. The minute you start liking yourself, you're not gonna allow him to disrespect you" (p.277). Other factors also mentioned in association with the breaking point were realizing that the abuse was not going to end or that it was going to continue to escalate to the point of lethality, and concerns about children being affected by the violence, mimicking the violence and becoming victims of the abuse as well.

Since the time that this study was initiated, 4 studies appeared in the literature that also focus specifically on the process of leaving, two published and two from the dissertation abstracts. In the first published article, Davis (2002) reports her findings from a phenomenological investigation of the coping strategies of 17 abused women who left their partners. While she reports some specific factors influencing the women's reasons for staying, e.g. lack of financial resources, and for leaving, e.g. abuse impacting children, she did not determine any one factor to be responsible for the women's choices to leave. "Relationship issues, safety, finances, housing, and legal issues, among others, were significant in the women's decision making. Although determination of the timing involved in their leave-taking was based on a history of these factors, no one factor is a key to termination of abusive relationships" (p. 300). Instead she emphasizes the

importance of a “sixth sense” in the women’s decisions to leave. “A premonition of abuse usually precipitated the act of leaving (p.296)….the intuition alluded to by the women through the interviews seemed to have the most impact on immediate leave-taking as well as on subsequent relationships” (p.300).

In the second published article, Senter and Caldwell (2002) report their findings from a phenomenological study that focused on the spiritual experiences of nine women who successfully left abusive relationships. They describe the process of leaving as a major life-altering transition that for many is complicated by poverty, homelessness, the stress of single parenthood, continuing safety concerns and social isolation. Referencing two other authors, they refer to the process as a “heroic process.” Twelve major themes arose from this study that chronicle the process of leaving: (a) acknowledging the truth/ reality of the abusive relationship; (b) being receptive to and acting on advocating voices; (c) accepting the support of others; (d) making adjustments to a new way of living; (e) acknowledging anger and feelings of loss/ fear; (f) letting go/ releasing the unproductive; (g) awakening / rediscovery of self; (h) looking within/ focusing on self; (i) reconnecting with/ strengthening supportive relationships; (j) reaffirming faith-based beliefs and practices; (k) helping others/ reaching out; and (l) embracing a new perspective of self, others, and life. This study provides a detailed and thoughtful analysis of the conflicts that female survivors face and the steps in which they take in the process of leaving. While the focus of the study was on spirituality, a number of the early stages may apply to a larger population, as these conflicts and decisions could take place within the presence or absence of God. Notably, the women in this study had been separated from their partners for an average of 11.7 years. This is a far longer average separation than is typical in the

majority of studies on intimate partner violence.

In her dissertation, Janet Fiorello (2002) interviewed ten women who had left abusive relationships in order to identify the significant factors that influence women's decisions to leave abusive relationships. Fiorello found that the participants in her study left their relationships for a number of different reasons, e.g. religious beliefs which helped them to feel that they were not alone and provided them with a higher power for strength and courage. However, she was not able to identify any key factors that led them to leave. Fiorello commented on the fact that none of the women referred to abuse as the reason for leaving. In the discussion section she speculates on why:

> It could be that the women actually did leave because of the abuse, but time and reflection on their experiences changed their perspectives. Another explanation may be that the abuse had reached a point where the women had habituated from it. In this case, any additional stress on the relationship caused the women to make the decision to leave thus making the stressful incident what they remembered. (p.105)

What Fiorello did find in common among all of the women was that they each employed resilient behaviors both in the process of leaving and in the aftermath when they encountered problems. Again, notably the average length of separation from their batterers was over 11 years.

Finally, in her dissertation, Barbara Stanton (2003) analyzed data from 10 women who had left abusive relationships and nine women who remained with abusive partners. Using qualitative analysis, seven themes emerged, including (a) All the women had hope the relationship would work; (b) there was no set pattern in how the abuse occurred or

when the women recognized that they were being abused; (c) other people knew about the abuse; (d) some women took steps to end the abuse while others did not; (e) support from family, friends, and professionals is important for a permanent ending; (f) there is no commonality in the reason or event that caused or would cause a woman to leave; and (g) the women experienced negative effects whether they left or stayed in the relationship. Similar to Davis from the previously mentioned study, Stanton is able to list specific reasons for why women left their abusers, e.g. infidelity, abuse against children, the death of a pet. However, she was not able to determine one common factor that led to the women's decisions to leave. She also stated that rarely was a single event reported as the reason for leaving a relationship.

Of the women who remained in abusive relationships, the events that they reported might cause them to leave in the future were escalated physical abuse, infidelity, child abuse, and a lack of change. However, Stanton was not able to determine any common factor in their reasons for potentially leaving. Interestingly, seven of the nine women who remained in abusive relationships, reported that they stayed for their children, yet none of the women who already left, recollected this as a reason for their staying in the past.

Also published since the initiation of this study, Kearney (2001) conducted a grounded formal theory approach in her analysis of 13 qualitative research reports on domestic violence in order to better understand women's experience of domestic violence and the ways in which the manage their experiences both within the relationship and through the process of leaving. Through her investigation Kearney came to view intimate partner violence as a normalized behavior across sociocultural contexts that was

"invisible and accepted by the women themselves, the couple, their families of origin, and their acquaintances and community in order to preserve the values or commitment and social stability" (p.275). She entitled the basic process through which women were able to reconcile the internal and external conflicts within violent relationships as *Enduring Love*, which she defines as, "a continual struggle to redefine partner violence as temporary, survivable, or reasonable by adhering to values of commitment and self-sacrifice in the relationship and by using strategies to survive and control psychic and physical harm of unpredictable abuse" (p.275). She defines *love* as, "a complex emotional attachment and commitment to relationship and family unity" (p.275).

Kearney (2001) identifies four phases of *Enduring Love* in Violent Relationships. The first phase, entitled, "This is what I want," reflects the women's entering into the relationships for romantic involvement, which fulfills their dreams of loving and being loved and drive them forward by "culturally defined expectations of a loyal, homemaking, love-sustaining role in their new family" (p.275). When in this stage, women are able to cope with abuse through the concepts and hopes of romantic love and ideals of commitment. Sacrifices and disappointments are accepted as a normal element of a loving relationship.

The second phase, entitled, "The more I do, the worse I am," refers to the stage in the relationship when abuse becomes a regular occurrence. In this phase the women begin to recognize that that there accommodations and sacrifices are no longer effective in pacifying their partners. Kearney (2001) recognizes that women in this phase are often trapped in the relationships by children and economic dependence. In order to preserve their hopes for the relationship women's senses of self are diminished:

> "…women submerged their individual worth for the sake of the relationship. They relinquished once-valued parts of their identities, such as profession, physical attractiveness, intelligence, and membership in family of origin or community, in interactions with the violent partner and eventually in their own self-estimations. Shrinking of oneself involved restraining one's emotional responses in order to avoid flare-ups, perform unwanted tasks, or accept undeserved punishment. (p.276)

In addition to shrinking one's sense of self, other strategies that are employed during this phase are (a) rationalization, which involves the women's forming of logical explanations for their partners' abusive behavior and the their own inability to control it, and (b) anticipatory maneuvering, which involves women making great efforts to make arrangements and behave in ways that will reduce the risk of provoking the partner.

The third phase of *Enduring Love,* entitled "I had enough," involves a turning point, in which what had been earlier viewed as within the bounds of a loving relationship is no longer recognized as such. Yet within the enduring love paradox, the "increasing realization of the intolerability of the situation was permeated by emotional pain, as women considered losing security and family status" (Kearney, 2001, p.277).

Kearney (2001) states that this turning point can be subtle or sudden and lists a number of factors that led to the change of perception, including:

> deliberate intervention from the outside; inadvertent exposure of the abuse, leading to framing the situation in a new way, an act by the partner so egregious that its wrongness became undeniable; an internal accumulation of hurt and disillusionment that finally outweighed the hope of improvement; or an increase

> in self-worth because of outside experiences that made independence seem possible. (p.277)

Notably, Kearney found that U.S. and Nicaragua women referred to shifts in their perspectives on the relationship and themselves as enabling them to leave.

The final phase of *Enduring Love*, entitled "I was finding me," reflects the time period after the women have left their partners and they venture to begin a new life. This period involves a new set of difficulties, a relinquishing of the bond with the abuser and the hopes of an intact family, and the formation of a new, fragile kind of love that holds onto what is healthy for the women and their children.

Multicultural Considerations regarding Domestic Violence

While domestic violence occurs across all ethnic groups in the United States, mounting evidence indicates that some groups have higher rates of intimate partner violence than others and that the women's experiences of violence differ depending upon their racial, cultural and class backgrounds. The National Family Violence Survey (NFVS) of 1975 and National Family Violence Resurvey (NFVR) of 1985 found that crude rates of male-to-female partner violence (MFPV) and female-to-male partner violence (FMPV) among Blacks were 2 to 2.7 times higher and among Hispanics 1.5 to 2.4 times higher than the rates among Whites. Additionally the 1995 National Longitudinal Couples Survey (NLCS) indicates that 23% of Blacks, 17% of Hispanics, and only 11.5% of Whites reported an incident of MFPV in the year prior. While Whites and Hispanics each reported similar lifetime rates of intimate partner violence to those that they reported from the prior year, Black respondents reported higher lifetime rates (Field & Caetano, 2004).

While these differences in intimate partner violence rates across ethnic groups are becoming widely recognized, it is important to note that various factors may account for these differences in rates. In fact many studies on intimate partner violence have found that when socioeconomic factors are controlled, racial and ethnic differences in the rate of intimate partner violence largely disappear (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005; Kasturirangan, Field & Caetano, 2004; Krishnan, & Riger, 2004; and West, 2004). This effect has been identified to be stronger within the Hispanic community than the Black community (Field & Caetano, 2004).

Factors such as age, employment status, education, income, alcohol and drug use, social context and isolation have all been suggested as interrelated influences attributable to the higher rates of abuse within minority groups, rather than race or culture. Field and Caetano (2004) contemplate the dilemma of individuals living in poverty by referencing the greater degree of stress in their lives inherent to their living conditions and the inequalities in which they are subjected to, the more severely these stressors likely affect them, and the fewer resources that are available to them. For this dilemma, Americans from the lower socioeconomic class, particularly minority groups, may be more prone to intimate partner violence. In fact in a recent study, partner homicide risk did not correlate with the race of the abusers and victims after controlling for demographic factors, but rather the strongest sociodemographic predictor was the abuser's unemployment status (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005). The authors go on to point out, "This finding suggests that at least one major underlying reason for the greater level of domestic violence among African Americans is not attributable to racial and cultural factors but to the high and extreme levels of poverty in Black communities" (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005, p.48).

Kasturirangan et al. (2004) remind us that there is an ethical responsibility among researchers to be careful of presenting data across ethnic groups without accounting for socioeconomic differences. Not doing so would create an inaccurate understanding of the higher rates of intimate partner violence among minority groups, causing misassumptions about the effect of cultural factors rather than economic disadvantages. West stresses the potential danger of this type of societal misconception:

> …a consistent demographic profile of victims and perpetrators has emerged: African American couples who are young, undereducated, impoverished, unemployed, urban dwellers. Based on these findings, it should not be concluded that Black Americans are biologically or culturally more prone to violence than other ethnic groups. Rather these results suggest that African Americans are economically and socially disadvantaged, which places them at risk for IPV (intimate partner violence)." (p.1487-1489)

In addition, Sokoloff and DuPont (2005) stress that there is a danger of presenting cultural influences as solely negative forces in relation to DV. They remind us that the role of culture can also be a positive one providing protection for women, which is a notion not as widely recognized or studied.

Scholars who recognize the multiple factors that influence intimate partner violence have also challenged the primacy of gender as the traditional explanatory model of domestic violence and begun to emphasize the importance of examining how other forms of inequality and oppression, including racism, ethnocentrism, class privilege, and heterosexism, intersect with gender oppression (Almeida & Durkin, 1999; Almeida,

Woods, Messineo & Font, 1998; Almeida, et al., 1994; Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005). Sokoloff and DuPont focus on "the race, class, gender or intersectionalities perspective and the social structural perspective" (p.40), explaining, "We are of the opinion that one without the other will not provide battered women from diverse backgrounds with the kinds of personal and social change required for safety and growth at the individual and community levels" (p.40). Almeida and her colleagues (1994) state, "While violence by men of color towards intimates tends to be an expression of male domination, this violence is inextricably bound with other political forces that create polarizations of power and powerlessness, visibility and invisibility" (p.102). These scholars stress that the oppression and violence experienced by racially different men in their public lives, may cause men of color to try to exert control over women in the home, often resulting in violence. However, again, that there is an ethical responsibility among researchers who present this information to do so in an informed manner so that it is not abused by larger society. As Almeida, et al. (1994) point out, "Domestic violence enacted in response to public violence often is used as evidence by the dominant culture to support notions of the "other's" inherent inferiority" (p.102).

Scholars are also investigating multicultural differences that influence the ways in which women define, experience, and respond to abuse. The definition of violence or abuse is shaped by the individual's sociocultural background. For example, in Japan, overturning a dining table is considered an abuse and a challenge to the woman's legitimate role in the family and by some has been described as more abusive than pushing or grabbing. Similarly, African American women have been identified as having culturally specific definitions of abuse that differ from the majority. A recent study

involving nine African American women found that the women did not always judge physical aggression as violent, however, acts of racism were uniformly regarded as so (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005).

Multicultural contexts have also been found to influence women's response to abuse. Almeida et al. (1998) stress, "The intersection of gender, race, class, culture, and sexual orientation radically shapes the experiences of men who batter and women who are battered, whereby certain women and men are more entrapped within contexts of violence than others" (p.315). The long-standing, unjust, abusive treatment of African Americans in the United States is considered to play a significant role in African American women's responses to intimate partner violence. Historical events, such as slavery, coercive medical experiments (e.g. Tuskeegee), lynchings, police brutality and racial profiling, likely influence how contemporary African American women respond to intimate partner violence and their willingness to involve a criminal justice system that they experience as racist and abusive. African women fear that calling the police will subject their partners to racist treatment or will put themselves at risk of losing their children. They also fear that their calling upon the authorities will contribute to the racist stereotypes that Blacks are violent or cause them to be seen as traitors within their community (Sukoff & DuPont, 2005; Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004, West, 2004). In terms of help seeking from shelters, Kasturirangan et al. (2004) highlight that African American women are socialized to appear in control in the presence of Anglo Americans. As a result they speculate that it may then be difficult for women to seek help from shelters staffed by White women.

The literature also makes reference to the potential impact that historical patterns

of colonization and alienation may have on Hispanic or Latina women and their usage of White authorities. It is more common among Latina women to seek advice from the church than the medical field or justice system. Further, Latinas that have immigrated to the United States may depend on their abusive partners for companionship or connection to their native countries. They may not speak English fluently and therefore rely on their partners for translation or fear that they will not be understood by authorities (Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004). These additional factors compound the already dire circumstances that women among the majority population face.

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature on the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence against women and its impact on its victims provides powerful and alarming evidence to support the fact that intimate partner violence is a crime of epidemic proportion and a matter that demands serious attention.

Researchers have identified numerous factors that contribute to a woman's remaining in an abusive relationship. Gelles (1976) provides a sufficient explanation to account for the multitude of factors:

> The reason for this is that the factors influencing the reactions of an abused wife are tremendously complex. It is not simply how hard or how often a wife is hit, nor is it how much education or income she has. The decision of whether or not to seek intervention is the result of a complex interrelationship of factors…(p.667)

The literature supports this notion that the dilemma battered women face in determining whether or not to stay in the abusive relationship is complex and convoluted. Some researchers have elaborated on the identified influential factors and worked them

into theories related to the process of leaving. These theories tend to view battered women as active, persistent participants in the relationship and describe a gradual process of conscious recognition of the abuse and subsequent steps of action. A handful of these researchers have identified some of the catalysts that spur turning points in women's images of themselves, their partners and/or the relationship that ultimately result in actions taken to end the violence and in some cases terminate the relationship. However, no studies have yet charted the psychological shifts that transpire in relation to these catalysts and that lead these women to develop new realizations about, for example the self, the violent partner, their options, or the impact on their children. It has yet to be determined how identified catalysts, such as an escalation in violence or shifts in the type of abuse, signal to a woman that it's time to leave or lead her to identify herself for the first time as "abused." In addition, there is growing literature on the ways in which multicultural variables influence the ways in which women define, experience, and respond to intimate partner violence. In order to address the issues related to domestic violence, these considerations must be further explored and addressed.

Goal of Study

The purpose of this study is to continue to fill in this gap in the literature, namely to understand better and in more detail the final moment when women in violent relationships leave their abusive partners. As mentioned previously, the goal is to ascertain the nature of the dilemma that women in violent relationships face when determining whether or not to stay with their abusive partners and what ultimately influences their final decision to leave. The focus is on the psychological, emotional and relational sources of resilience, strength and resolve that these women engage in such that

shifts and new realizations occur and take precedence over the previous ways that they viewed the situation.

Statement of Hypothesis

In trying to keep with the principles of grounded theory research (expanded upon in Methods section), hypotheses were not contemplated in detail. However, it was expected that common themes would emerge within the data, providing a model that can account for the precipitating external events and psychological shifts that lead to a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship. Based on the literature review, two factors were most anticipated as being a reason for the women's decision to leave: (a) an escalation in violence, and (b) concerns about the children regarding both the effects from witnessing the violence and their personal safety. Through detailed interviews, the goal was to elucidate the shifts in thinking and emotion that allow these factors to gain force and enable women to leave.

CHAPTER 2

Methods

The Larger Study

This study used data from twelve already completed interviews from a larger study. The larger study was conducted as part of a program called Fresh Start, designed to help women survivors of domestic violence and their children make the transition from welfare-to-work. In the initial phase of this program, women were given a three to four hour interview that engaged them in questions about numerous subjects: the abusive relationship that led them to the shelter; their personal and family work histories; their feelings and concerns regarding work and time; and, finally, their thoughts about the program and what supports might help them negate this difficult transition. It is the first section of this longer interview that was used for this study.

Subjects

The women in the larger study were selected at random as they entered the shelter and then invited to participate in the project. The only criterion for participation was that they speak English. For the present study there were additional criteria for inclusion. The batterer must have been a male, intimate partner and the women must have made the decision to leave. There were no restrictions for selection based on age, race or ethnicity.

All of the women and their children were on welfare due to their having entered the shelter system. Seven of the women were Black; four were Hispanic; and one was White. Eight of the women were born in the United States. The others were native to the West Indies, Puerto Rico, and Guyana. The average age of the participants was 27.7 years. In terms of education, four participated in some high school; six had completed

high school; one had received her GED; and one had participated in some college. None of the women were currently employed, however, all had been employed previously at some point. Only one woman had been married to her partner, the others had been living together while dating. The mean number of children per family was two, with a range of one to three. The average age of the children was as follows: first children, 7.9 years (range one-21 years of age), second children, 5.3 years (range five months to 17 years), and third children, 3.9 years (range 11 mos-11 years). The average time the women had been away from their partners was four months.

The Setting

The women were interviewed at a Tier II domestic violence shelter for women and children located in the borough of Manhattan in New York City. The shelter has the capacity to house up to fifty women and their children. It is designed to serve as a stepping-stone between a Tier I emergency shelter and permanent housing. Women are allowed to spend up to three months at a Tier I shelter and up to nine months at a Tier II.

Procedure

Once women had been randomly selected for the larger study, they were called by a Fresh Start staff member and invited to participate in the project. If they expressed interest in the program, a meeting was set up during which time the women signed a consent form for the first part of the study, including the interview. After this meeting the interview was scheduled. To allow women to participate in the interview in the afternoon without interference in meal preparation, the family was provided with a pizza dinner. The women also received a 25 dollar stipend. Following the interview the women were asked to fill out a packet of self-report measures that targeted a range of adult and child

physical health, mental health, and family relationship variables. They were paid an additional 25 dollars for their time in completing the questionnaires.

Instruments

Demographics questionnaire.

This self-report questionnaire records demographic information about the participant (see Appendix A). It includes items on age, race, education, religious affiliation. This information provides an accurate and comprehensive description of the participants in the study .

The interview.

As mentioned previously, this study utilized data from one section of the long interview that was conducted in the Fresh Start program (see Appendix B). This section of the interview is composed of a series of broad, open-ended questions about the relationship (including positive and negative features), the evolution of the abuse and the processing around the woman's decision to leave, with a particular focus on the moment that she actually did leave and what made this moment different from others. The semi-structured approach allowed the interviewer to probe when necessary in order to elicit information specific to this study's specific areas of interest and to expand upon the line of inquiry based on prior interviews that have been conducted and coded.

Data Analysis

The analysis of this study was guided by the principles of grounded theory, a research method developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss in 1967. This model places priority on discovering the participants' meanings of their experiences and perceptions of reality. As described by Charmaz (1995):

> The interpretive tradition relies on knowledge from the 'inside'. That is, this tradition starts with and develops analyses from the point of view of the experiencing person…Such studies aim to capture the worlds of people by describing their situations, thoughts, feelings and actions and by relying on portraying the research participants' lives and voices. Their concerns shape the direction and form the research. The researcher seeks to learn how they construct their experience through their actions, intentions, beliefs and feelings. (p.30)

Each interview was audio taped. The principal investigator and other members of the Fresh Start research team then listened to the interviews and created both content and process codes from the women's responses. These first-level codes were then organized in terms of higher-level themes, or theoretical codes, which will later be presented and discussed.

CHAPTER 3

Results

The intensive transcript analysis revealed a number of important and interesting findings. In order to capture the comprehensive nature of the relationship and to demonstrate an appreciation for viewing the relationship in its entirety, the participants were encouraged to discuss both their positive and negative experiences in their relationships. The interview requested that the participants begin by describing their initial meetings with their partners and then step-by step explored their experiences as the relationships evolved from beginning to end. The data is organized into three sections: The Start of the Relationship, The Abuse and its Impact, and The Process of Leaving.

The Start of the Relationship

The Initial Meeting

The women of the study reportedly met their partners through several different pathways (see Table 1). Three of the twelve were introduced to their partners through their families or friends, who had the intentions of setting them up. One of these women felt pressured into the relationship by her family, despite her feeling no physical or emotional attraction toward him. The others met their partners independently, three through work or school, five from living in the same neighborhood or hanging out with overlapping crowds, and one, uniquely, through a chat line. More than half of the women described themselves as having a friendship with their partners before becoming intimate. One woman described the connection as “love at first sight.”

First Impressions

The women’s first impressions of their partners ranged from quite positive to

quite negative (see Table 2). Of the eight women who responded to this question, more than half reported positive first impressions, describing their partners as either "cool," "a good person," "crazy in a good way," or as having a "sweet personality," and good interpersonal skills. The others formed negative initial impressions, based on their perceptions of the men as having bad personalities or being womanizers and/or drug dealers. One woman explained, "…Cause he's, um, you know, he was on the corner and I knew that he sold drugs, and just that type of guy, and I didn't want to get involved with anyone like that." Of the women who described these negative first impressions, all of them referred to the men's persistent and strong solicitations as eventually swaying their willingness to date them. The twelfth woman spoke of the pity she felt toward her partner based on her perception of him as weak.

Participants' First Attraction to Partners

In terms of attraction, all twelve women were able to report something positive that attracted them to their partners (see Table 3). Half of the women referred to their partners' treating them well, making them feel good about themselves and having sweet personalities. Consistent with several other reports, one woman explained:

> I got to know him over the phone at first. So I guess his personality over the phone, you know, that's what attracted me to him. [Interviewer: What in his personality were you attracted to?] Just the way we talked and, you know, he listened to me and-, I never had that, you know. I never was really in a relationship where I had anyone to talk to before I had my daughter…And I was in foster homes and I really didn't have any one to talk to. So he just gave me that, you know, that time and, you know, he

spoke to me and that's what I needed. I needed someone to talk to.

A couple of women appreciated their partners' humor and reported having fun while out with them. One of these two women viewed her partner as similar to herself, which was also attractive to her. In terms of physicality, five of the women reported that they were physically attracted to their partners, as one stated, "He was the finest thing on the planet." Another five reported that they were not physically attracted to their partners and instead referred to the other qualities previously mentioned.

What Drew Participants to Partners

In terms of what drew the women to their partners, seven of the eight women that responded referred to the positive ways in which the partner treated them and their children, such as making them feel good about themselves, financially supporting them and their children, taking them out, listening well and making them feel important and loved (see Table 4). One woman added to her response the sense of hope that she developed as a result of her partner's positive treatment, inspiring her to believe that this partner would make her happy. Three women reported never having been made to feel in this special way before. A couple of the women were flattered by the assertive and persistent solicitations of their partners, yet a third reported that she liked that fact that her partner was shy and not aggressive in his approach of asking her out. As mentioned previously, one woman identified similarities between her and her partner, especially humor, and was strongly drawn to him because of this. As a unique response, in addition to her partner making her feel important, one woman reported being drawn in by her feelings of concern and pity for her partner.

Partners' First Attraction to Participants

In regard to what first attracted their partners to them, an overwhelming majority of the women initially had difficulty providing an answer. Two laughed and made self-deprecating jokes. Three others were simply stumped. Of the nine that did provide responses, five referred to the partner's physicality. The others referred to the friendship that they provided to their partners; they way in which they carried themselves; and their inner strengths, including being a good person. One woman explained how her partner took advantage of her positive attributes, "I'm a good person and he said, 'I'm gonna tie her down. That's the woman that's going to bear my kids.'" On similar lines, another woman believed that her partner was attracted to his perception of her as someone he could manipulate.

Description of Partner at Beginning of Relationship

Of the women interviewed, all twelve had positive things to say about their partners in the beginning of the relationship (see Table 5). Ten provided generally positive remarks, such as, "great," "very sweet," "good man" "wonderful" and "okay." Three reported that their partners provided financial support and said that they had fun when their partners took them out. Another three described their partners as being the first person in their lives to make them feel worthwhile and provide them with emotional support and meaningful material possessions. Specifically, one stated, "And usually, like, anything, like, if I wanted to do something, we just did it. You know, it was like pretty much my say." Two of the women also referred to their partners as good listeners. Another stressed the ways in which her partner helped out with her children.

Two of the woman also referred to negative qualities that their partners

demonstrated early on in the relationship. One referred to her partner's being a womanizer and the other described her partner's controlling ways:

> Everything is okay until you [don't] do what he says. If you don't do what he says then he get mad and then it's a problem. So my son, my daughter they're nice. They tried to be respect and everything, so we never have problem. Now if he say, "Don't use pants," I don't use it. If he say, "Don't cut your hair." I don't cut it. You know, and everything was okay."

Another woman explained, "My mind has to be his mind. We're supposed to be equal but I'm not really allowed to think what I think…If you want to be with me then this is how we got to do things. That's it."

A final participant was able to provide an integrated portrait of both her positive and negative experiences within the early phase of the relationship:

> He was nice. He had an attitude but, his father's like that. So he gets it from his father. So I learned to, you know, cope with that. He didn't open up to me. He would always keep stuff inside, and then just explode at the littlest thing. And, that-, I didn't like that. So, he was okay though, when he wasn't upset. When he didn't get upset and then more things piled on top of that, and he took it-, you know, he screamed at me or whatever, but other than that he was fine…[Interviewer: And so that was present from the beginning?] Yeah. [Interviewer: And what was he like when you say he was fine or nice?] He was nice. He would do stuff for me. [Daughter's name] was an infant. He would rock her to sleep. He would give her a bottle. He would make a bottle for her. You know, do all the nice things.

> He would go to the store. Bring me something to drink. You know all these things that I didn't have before. So-, and then the fact that he accepted me with a child, that I really appreciated.

Description of Self at Beginning of Relationship

The women were asked to describe themselves early on in the relationship, as well (see Table 6). Six women described themselves positively, such as "confident," "energetic," "intelligent," "relaxed," "spontaneous," "mature,' and "loving." One of the women reported feeling for the first time in her life like she might "become someone." Importantly, the women linked these feelings to their partners' positive statements about them and the ways in which their partners positively treated them.

Four women provided responses from the other end of the spectrum, such as "lonely," "too nice," "easily detoured by others" and having "difficulty asserting myself." These women linked these qualities about themselves to their complacency and dependency on their partners. One of these women described her tendency to avoid conflict:

> I was scared to-, I didn't want no problems. That's why I did everything he wants, because I want to have-, I have second marriage-, I didn't want to get divorced and a change again, again, again. So I was like if I do this, and he like it, and it doesn't bother me, I will do it, you know. We've been have a family like that. It doesn't bother me to do what he wants. It's still-, it's not something bad, you know. …Everything's okay and that's okay. And we didn't fight. We didn't have-, we didn't' try to fight.

The Abuse and its Impact

The Onset of Abuse

The point at which the abuse began in each relationship varied across the relationships (see Table 7). Determination of when the abuse began depends upon each woman's definition of abuse and her ability to recall the first incident of abuse. Three women reported that abuse was present from the beginning, particularly emotional abuse. Four others reported that it started within the first year, and yet another considered it to have begun within the first and second year. One woman uniquely reported that the abuse did not begin until many years into the relationship. Four of the women described events in their lives as markers of the onset of abuse. Four reported that physical abuse began while they were pregnant, with a fifth woman reporting its start just after her child was born. One participant described the abuse as beginning after she and her partner moved in together, while another stated that it began after she moved farther away from her partner. A final participant reported that the abuse began after she and her partner became engaged.

Shifts in Perceptions regarding Partner after Initial Abuse

When asked how their feelings and perceptions regarding their partners changed after the initial abuse, four reported that they experienced dramatic changes (see Table 8). Three of them reported feeling anger and disgust, as one participant stated:

> From that point on, I mean … anything could make me sick. Literally, sick to my stomach. To see his face, to know that he is lying next to me….It was literally like, I just use to look at him like. I just use to stay up and lay in the bed and look at him, and be like, I was so disgusted.

Two women described themselves as developing a fear of their partners, one having stated:

> I was trying to tell him to stop, but he-, he like-, I'd never seen him like that. He blanked out, like his eyes, I was like, you know, 'He's gonna kill me.' I felt really, really scared. I was shaky. Even after that I was scared to sleep next to him because I thought he was going to do something to me.

Another stated that she lost trust in her partner.

One participant confessed that, regardless of her feelings, she thought she could do no better than her partner. Another, though disgusted, offered a brief explanation on how she could tolerate her new feelings, "I couldn't stand him. But, you see, alright, I'm not trying to justify him, but, I didn't get beat everyday. Not even once a week. But when he would-, I would get beat bad, like the last one…" Another woman explained her concurrent love and hate for her partner, while a final participant uniquely reported no changes in her feelings or perceptions of her partner.

Shifts in Perceptions regarding Self after Initial Abuse

Five of the women described negative changes in their perceptions or feelings of themselves following the initial incident of abuse (see Table 9), for example, "I thought I was a jerk". Three referred to the self-blame that they developed, as one stated, "I was thinking more to myself that I must have done something. I must have said something. I must have pushed a button or something." Another shared, "When he used to tell me things, you know, I used to say,…'a hoe? How can he say these things? Probably they are true about me, these ways you know, I probably-, I am like that!...I have to be looking like a hoe, I have to be acting like a hoe for him to be saying these things.'"

Two women reported diminished self-esteem, for example, “You know like some people will say you have low self-esteem. I just say I have none. Low is too good. I have nothing, nothing, nothing.”

Description of Partner after Onset of Abuse

Of the nine women who provided descriptions of their partners after the onset of abuse, all referred to their partners as controlling (see Table 10). This control was exercised through their demands on what the women could wear; whom they could talk to; how they should parent their children; if, and when. they could see their friends and family; etc. One woman described her partner while they were living apart: “So he was like, coming all the day, seeing what I was doing, where I was going, and then going back to his mother’s house.” The similarities in the women’s portrayals of a relational, hierarchical dynamic were remarkable, as described here: “As long as he-, he always want to be up here and wants you to be down there. So if you’re more dependent on him-, as long as you’re dependent on him, he’s fine. As soon as you go off and do your thing, it’s always a problem.” Often when the women talked about their partners’ controlling behaviors, they described their partners as jealous of the attention others received from the women, including other males, friends, family, and their own children.

Three of the women reported that their partners accused them of cheating on them though there were no foundations for their concerns. Four women reported that their partners were lying about their own actions and infidelities during this period of the relationship.

Four participants referred to their partners as different people when they became abusive: “I didn't really believe him, because I mean he was very strange, he was not the

same man." These reports were similar to those made by the participants about the abrupt changes in mood that they witnessed in their partners: "For a moment, you see, the trouble is, for a moment he could kill you, and for the next moment, he be like it nothing-he normal as ever, nothing wrong." More than half of the women reported that their partners became more aggressive as time passed in the relationship.

The following quote depicts a few of the themes that were represented in this category:

> He changed every-, every way, you know? Every way he was starting to be more aggressive. You know? Just anybody could be aggressive, but I mean, he started becoming a lot more aggressive. What I use to wear when I met him: "You can't wear it no more 'cause I'm, you're with me." I mean, what is the-, you met me, I have a skirt, now I have to wear pants. You know? He started becoming that way and when I used to go to school. On campus, when I was in college, somebody would drive him up, like to come and get me, and surprise me. And one time, he'd seen me in umm, in the lot, walking through, it was cold, and I was walking through, and I was like [talking to a male friend about a math test]…And [the male friend] was like, "Good luck," and he gave me a hug. But see, from where [my boyfriend's] standing, I guess he sees it as a hug, and he don't know why we were hugging. So, he was like pissed. He was like-, he didn't want me to go to school. He didn't want me to go to work. He didn't want me to be anywhere with anybody else. That's how it was. He didn't-, he just wanted to lock me up in his own little world and when he's ready for me

> to come out, then … go out. But, other than that, he didn't want any, anybody else, even when I was pregnant. … started growing out of my clothes, and stuff started getting a lot shorter, and a lot tighter, he use to have a heart attack. "I see how that man was looking at your butt." I'm like, "I'm pregnant. I mean, come on, you know? It's just little things.

Description of Self after Onset of Abuse

When asked to describe themselves during the abusive relationship, the women offered a range of responses (see Table 11). Four referred to themselves as being a naïve or ignorant and not aware of what was going on in their relationship. One such woman referred to herself as a "fool." Another explained:

> In that time I didn't feel it so hard. I feel it more when I came here [to New York from Puerto Rico] for the vacation, and I see that I can't have a life. You know, it was like all the time I was feeling for him…in that time when I came here to vacation that I stayed two months, I said, "Why I have to live the way I was living?"- that I feel like a slave, that's the way you say it? When I can't have a life? Because it was not-, I think the love changed for something else, I don't know, because I was living for him but I was not living my life. I was not doing what I like to do. I was trying to do what he likes me to do.

This woman went on to expand upon her sense of having no life of her own, of only living for her husband and living to comply with him. Similar to her experience, another woman referred to her need to "walk on egg shells" around her partner and, again, having

to constantly comply. Two women talked about the sense of being trapped, particularly in terms of their need to hide the abuse from their families, as one explained below:

> I felt like I had no way out. You know, I felt trapped there. And I was like, you know, this is my family, I don't have my family. They don't want to see me, you know, I don't even know how to pick up the phone and tell my mom, 'Mommy, I want to go back home. You were right." 'Cause I didn't want them to look at me like, "See I told you." I didn't want them to tell me that. Because I really didn't want to hear it, you know.

Six women talked about themselves as confused, depressed or having low self-esteem. One woman described herself as often crying and waiting around for her partner.

From the other extreme, three women reported that they were not afraid of their partners. Two of these women described themselves as physically aggressive, as one shared:

> I was like an animal. I was really like, people literally scared of me, 'cause they never knew how I was gonna react. I mean, they see me, " Hi, good morning, how are you"? Next minute, they see me … with a chair … knock somebody's head off because he may have choked me, he would choke me, or he would constantly put me in a headlock, and I don't know what he did… it was, it was like, WWF. And, then I got tired of it…sometimes we use to get into fights, and my body would be so sore. You know what I mean? But it…you know? I was like you hit me, I'm going to hit you back. That's how it was.

Types of Abuse

When asked about the types of abuse that they experienced, ten of the women reported a long list of physical violence such as slapping, cutting, punching, burning, pushing, beating and choking (see Table 12). Six of these women reported that the violence took place while they were pregnant.

All of the women reported verbal and emotional abuse. The large majority of the women referred to the emotional abuse as more hurtful than the physical. One provided an example of such abuse, "You're worthless. You're no good. I don't know how I chose you to be my kids' mother." The women referred to verbal insults in regard to (a) their character, e.g. untrustworthy, sexually promiscuous; (b) their self-worth, e.g. worthless, good for nothing, stupid; (c) their abilities as a mother; (d) their abilities as an intimate partner; (e) and their family and friends. In addition the men often blamed the women for their own aggression, stating that it was only because of the faults or infuriating actions of the women that they became aggressive. Four reported that their partners would make disparaging remarks about them in front of others, including family and friends. This was described as being extremely embarrassing and damaging. Seven of the women referred to their partners' controlling demands as abusive. Three stated that either their own lives or the lives of their families were threatened by their partners. This caused the women to feel trapped and in need to comply with their partners. One woman was able to describe how her husband's control impacted her relationship with her children:

> What am I doing with my life? You know? Being with a person that I have to do what he says because if I don't do it, he get mad and I get in problems. It damaged my son and my daughter, sometimes they wanted

> "Mommy, let's go to a movie!" "No, no, I can't because you know that he don't like it."…He was putting him before my- son and my daughter. And sometimes I know that my son and my daughter get real mad about that.
>
> [Int.: So you felt like it was affecting your relationship with your kids?]
>
> Yeah, a lot.

Reactions to the Abuse

When asked about their reactions to the abuse, three women reported that they initially were not afraid (see Table 13). Two of these women however stated that fear set in soon thereafter. One of them explained that she initially verbally challenged her partner asking, "What is wrong with you?" However after he beat her a few times, she stopped with the questions: "Don't ask no questions, just leave it the way it is." Five of the women reported immediately feeling afraid following the initial physical abuse. Two women reported that they blamed themselves and experienced rapidly decreasing senses of self. Another two reported feeling emotionally drained.

As an active response to the abuse, five reported that they responded with physical aggression. One reported that through her physical aggression, she was able to instill fear in her partner. Her partner came to view her as volatile and dangerous. Another reported that she had fantasies of physical aggression against her partner, but that she was not able to act upon them. Another woman reported that she "used [her partner] back" and was deceitful toward him. Three women also reported withholding sex from their partners, as one stated: "…when he left to his mother house, I never accept him like a man. You understand what I'm saying? I say, 'You still my husband, but you not gonna come here, use me, and then go out.'" However one of these women reported that she was

consequently further abused for her abstinence. Only two referred to using threats, such as having the partner arrested or using a weapon to threaten his life. One reported having her partner arrested only to frighten him and then dropping the charges. Another explained that in the moment, she did not feel strong enough to call the police, but that afterward she would continuously question herself. Rather than calling the police, nine women reported that they left or attempted to leave the relationship, but that they eventually returned. Still a couple others reported that they ignored the abuse, didn't take it seriously, or avoided identifying the behavior as abusive, so as to avoid the reality of the situation.

Factors that Put Self at Risk of Abuse

Though not asked directly, half of the women spontaneously introduced and reflected upon the self-attributes and life events that placed them at risk for becoming involved in an abusive relationship (see Table 14). Four of them referred to themselves as being young and naïve and as having low self-esteem. One of these women reported that a previously abusive relationship had caused her to respond positively and strongly to her partner's solicitations, which later evolved into yet another controlling, abusive relationship. This woman was also able to describe in detail how the abuse she suffered from as a child by her family-of-origin left her vulnerable and normalized the experience:

> They [sisters and mother] have to hurt my feelings in order to feel good, I don't know why. [My partner] have to hurt me to feel good… them is the same thing, I don't know why them have to make my life miserable in order to feel good…it's not one abuse I get to know. You know, it's not one relationship, it's since I small growing up. You know, so, it's hard.

Two other women also talked about the ways in which exposure to violence and abuse during childhood normalized or minimized the abuse that they later were subjected to by their partners.

Another participant referred to the ways in which her financial struggles and her hesitancy to involve her family made her vulnerable:

> Like, I did not need his money. I mean it helped me for the-, for that time, but was it worth it, you know? And, it wasn't worth it. I could have asked my mother for help, but I'd, you know, my pride was getting in the way, and I said, you know, I was doing ok with these kids and now I'm gonna get evicted from this place and you know, I'm not gonna-, I'm not gonna ask my mother for no help and she, Oh, she saying, "[participant] is struggling. Why is [participant] the one that's always coming and asking me for something, but [my] other children aren't?" So I said, "I'm not gonna ask then," you know? "No one's going to know that all of this is happening." So with me trying to hide that, and then my husband being away, you know, and he, it's not like he can help because when he was out, he did help with the kids, but he was in jail. So, that's what pushed me closer to [my partner], you know, knowing that I know he has money, he sells drugs, and I could get whatever I could get from him. I'll go that way. That's the direction I'm going to take.

Another participant explained that this was her second marriage and that she refused to allow this relationship terminate as well. "Yeah. Because…it was my second marriage. I get married with him. I have a son with him. I don't want to change and

change and change, you know. If I'm doing what he wants and everything's okay, we can be happy like a family because it doesn't bother me."

Another participant described her sympathetic and forgiving traits as causing her to be susceptible, "I'm a really sympathetic person, you know? He didn't finish school. He didn't have a job. He didn't have a place to live. I said, 'Go get yourself together. Don't worry, I'll do it, you know?' Then he came back around, you know?"

Another woman was able to explain how her dependency on her partner and her fear of his leaving, left her vulnerable to his abuse:

> There was a point where I never wanted to leave him. I would do anything- if I had $15, I would give him $10. If I had $2, I would give him $1.50. That's how bad it was. And I did all of that because I didn't want him to leave me. And it was like, he knew I was doing it for that purpose and he would use me for that purpose. And it was just like, 'You got to wake up.' And sometimes I would cry and say '[self] you can't call him. Don't call him. [Self] you can't do this to yourself.' And I would really talk to myself out loud. And he would call and we would start talking and it was just like I didn't say anything. Like he would just take over me, you know?

Importantly, the woman who referred earlier to her financial susceptibilities was also shocked that she had become involved in an abusive relationship, reporting, "I thought I was-, I just didn't think I would end up in a situation. I thought I was like, a strong person where when he hit me the first time, I'd be like, 'Oh no, can't deal with him no more.'"

Factors that Made Partner Susceptible to Being Abusive

In regard to what made their partners susceptible to being abusive, one woman referred to her partner's inability to manage stress and verbalize his feelings:

> He was a sweet person. He definitely was, but I feel that you know? The way some people handle their emotions and their stress can affect the way they deal with other people. You see what I'm saying? Cause a lot of people like they may have things that they're going through per say, and they don't know, they know it in their body… upset right now, but to translate it into like perceptively, throw it out there, they may not know how to push their feelings out. They may start cursing, or they may start drinking, or whatever, but, I don't think he know how to handle his emotions really.

Another referred to her partner's earlier experiences of being indulged and allowed to do whatever he pleased: "I think every time he was like that. It was that-, like I say before, always doing what he wants, everything was okay. But I think every time he was… like that because he grow-up like that." In other parts of the interview, some women referred to their partners having been exposed either directly or indirectly to physic abuse in their childhoods (see Table 15).

Influence of Family of Origin

Six of the women were able to reflect on the ways in which their families of origin and the families of their partners played a role in the relationship (see Table 16). As stated above, three women referred to the abuse that was inflicted upon them by their own families or that they were exposed to as children as normalizing the abuse or causing

them to be susceptible to an intimate, abusive relationship. Another reported that her parents' giving up on her as a teenager caused her to feel that her partner was her only family and the only person with whom she could love and depend upon. Two women talked about the influence of their in-laws through verbal messages, such as "A woman should stand by her man" and "He will change. He loves you so much." One described the influence that her mother-in-law had on her:

> You know and that's one thing his mom used to tell me, you know, 'You're his wife. Anything he does to you, you got to eat it because you-, the man makes the-." She told me the woman makes the man. And I was like, you know, I was believing that because she went through it and, you know, her and her husband are still together and he changed but some people don't change, you know.

Another participant referred to her fears that her brothers-in-law would harm her if she filed charges, thus deterring her from having her partner arrested. Uniquely, one woman said that it was her sister-in-law who inspired her to leave by informing her of her partner's infidelity.

The Process of Leaving

Reasons Why Stayed

In terms of the question so many researchers have posited in the past, "Why do women stay?" the women in this study offered a number of explanations throughout the interview (see Table 17). The most common dilemma for these women was that they were often unable to perceive a way out of the relationship. They were not able to identify any alternatives. Five of the women referred to factors of reality, such as a lack of

finances or no alternative housing. These women shared their self-doubts in regard to managing on their own as single mothers, often with no money and no place to go. One participant shared:

> Yeah… in that time, I didn't know about no programs or nothing, so I didn't know where to go. A friend of mine tell me about [shelters] and I was trying to leave, but I say, "I'm gonna be…" I thought that I cannot do it by myself outside, so I went back again.

Other women expressed their unwillingness to go into the shelter system or unwillingness to move far away from their family-of-origin, as one woman explained:

> I thought about leaving him. If I could have just go to-, just pick up and go somewhere to another state and start fresh, I would've. But I couldn't, because I have a mother out there. You see, if I didn't have a mother, or we wasn't like that, I would be like, "I'll pick up and go to another state." A lot of people do it. Being that me and my mother's bond was so close, and so, like, emotional, I could not have just, just cut off all strings to her, and just leave her here in New York, and me somewhere down south, or Virginia, or Florida, or Hawaii maybe [laughter], you know? I couldn't do it. So I just stayed.

Other participants described their fears of the constant solicitations or potential dangerous repercussions that would be inflicted by their partners on them and their families for leaving. One participant explained:

> Even if I was like dating somebody else, I would still be dating him too. You know just-, it was more so he wouldn't put me through the headaches

> of the guilt trips and "Oh why-, Oh why you dating such and such?" And, "Why can't we get back together?" It's like he never leaves me alone….It's not like he would just let it-, we be separated. He kept coming over, like ev-. It's like he kept coming over so much, I'd be like, "Okay! I'll take you back, just please stop harassing me! You know...That's how we always ended up back together 'cause he never lets it be.

Another woman stated:

> I didn't want to leave while I was in a room with him, you know, in his apartment or, you know, and just say, 'I'm not going to do this anymore,' 'cause he would have probably beat me then…I think just, just being, truly just being afraid to leave. Just ending the relationship, you know what I mean? I don't… just knowing that maybe he would, you know, go to my mother's house and look for me and you know?

Other women spoke in terms of self-blame, their tendencies to minimize the abuse and their false hopes that either they or their partners could change for the better. One participant described her thoughts, "You know, so maybe he's having a bad week, and you know, I guess I do have to watch my mouth sometimes, and you know, the food wasn't ready today, and when he came in." Another explained:

> I figured it would stop, maybe it's him, he's going through some things, and, you know? If selling drugs and money doesn't-, 'cause sometimes money comes really quick and sometimes it doesn't. You know, so maybe he's having a bad week…but I didn't wanna leave yet. I figured, 'Let me just see, you know? Maybe it won't be as bad.

Another common response referred to the strong belief in family integrity and the woman's role in keeping the family intact. Two women expressed their thoughts about the importance of having a father in their children's lives. One shared:

> …I was sure that- I didn't, I didn't want to lose my family, my husband, because I have a son with him, and they were very together. I was not doing it for me only. I was doing it for my son. I was like, his father was everything for him. So I was like, "I can't support this, but he's with his son," you know?

Another participant verbalized her internal conflict and dialogue in reference to her decision to stay or leave:

> I really, I was just like, 'Oh well, I know he's stressed' and you know? 'I feel so sorry for him,' but yet my other parts telling me, 'Be mad at him, because if he did it the first time, he'll do it again.' That's how I've seen it. Cause when I speak to my girlfriends, and they've been through instances, 'Girl, listen. If he did it the first time, he'll do it again.' And it's like my other half is telling me that and my other half's like, 'Oh, forgive him.' You know? 'You have to make it work because you have a baby on the way,' and you know? 'The baby needs to be raised with his father,' you know?

Finally, one participant referred to the love that she felt for her partner and her strong attachment to him.

<u>First Thoughts about Leaving</u>

When asked about their first thoughts of leaving, the women had varying responses (see Table 18). Only one woman stated that she had always wanted to leave.

Four of the women stated that it was after the first incident of violence that they first considered it. A couple said their pregnancies and the birth of their children caused them to think about leaving, as one shared:

> 'Cause, actually I was, I was no longer blinded. I think at that point, after I had my son, I had been like this, this shield over me and I was just like in a cult. I was in his cult. Everything was …I was just like in another, I was in a trance, but I snapped out of it. I'm like, "Hold up". After I'd seen that baby, and realized who I was really here for, and how anything I do in this world is gonna affect him, and after I noticed that, and accepted that, I was like, "You know what? I don't need him. You know?

Two participants referred to escalations in violence as the precipitants that caused them to first think of leaving. One such incident involved the partner's bringing street violence into the house, which was inflicted upon a female friend. The other incident involved a near fatal beating by the partner against the participant. Finally, one participant referred to her own infidelity as the trigger that caused her to think about leaving, "If it went that far as to me being with someone else, then I didn't think that we should be together." Only one woman permanently left after the first time that she thought about leaving, stating that the severity of her partner's aggression and his additional threats made her realize that she was in grave danger.

Reasons Why Left

In regard to the final moments when they left, the women were able to describe in more detail what was different about this final moment that enabled them to leave (see Tables 19 and 20). Their responses can be grouped into four main categories: (a) the

impact of abuse on the children, (b) a shift in self efficacy, (c) an escalation of violence, and (d) partner's infidelity.

Impact of abuse on the children.

The most common response provided by eight of the women involved a concern about the impact of the abusive relationship on their children and their relationships with their children. One stated, "I think it was the kids." [Int: The kids? The kids seeing it?] "Yeah. And actually like responding to it." [Int: How did they respond?] "Like [son's name] was like, "Shut up!" And [daughter's name] was screaming and crying…" This woman was able to describe in detail the eruption of her thoughts as she watched her children cowering in the kitchen corner screaming and crying. Similarly, another participant described her children's reactions: "I didn't want to be there 'cause my kids were seeing that and my daughter would ball up in the corner and, you know, just cry and I didn't-, I didn't want her to see that no more. So I had to leave."

A third participant spoke of the impact the abuse was having on her son:

> Once I saw my son like that, that first time, I said I can't do this no more. I'm hurting my kid by letting him see what his father is doing to me. And my son, at one point, he didn't like-, his dad would talk to him and he didn't want to be near him. Like all the time he would see his dad yell, he would start, "Ahh!" shaking. Until one day my son…he [saw] people arguing on the streets and the cops being around and he starts screaming…That's when I could see it, you know, but this time I like really looked at him and I was like, "Wow! What am I doing to my son?" You know. And I couldn't-, I started crying and I took him and I was

> hugging him and [my partner] was telling, "You see what you're doing to your son?" And I'm like, you know, I'm looking at him and I'm like, "What's wrong with you?" You know? "You're the one yelling at me. You're the one hitting me. You're the one cursing at me."

Another woman spoke of her growing awareness that she could no longer hide the abuse from her children:

> But after all those weeks that passed and, you know, the burn marks and the black eyes, and truly me realizing that, "Ok, maybe before the kids didn't see any of this." Now, like I said, he would hit me before and I would have a bruise on my leg, but he'd never hit me in my face…I knew the kids didn't see the other stuff, but even then I knew when I got hit a lot of the times, the kids weren't there. Either [daughter's name] was in school or it was late at night when the kids were already in their bed by 9 o'clock. When I woke up that morning, I [saw] my eye closed shut and was like, "Oh my God, the kids are gonna see me," then I knew, "[own name], you have to get out of here, some how, some way, because now truly you're gonna affect the kids."

One participant spoke, in an almost inaudible voice from crying, of the way in which her fears of her daughter becoming a victim of intimate partner violence as an adult inspired her to leave:

> I do it for my daughter, not for me, because I'm worthy of nothing…I still say that, 'If not for my daughter-," because you know why? I just look at my daughter and say, "Oh God, if she go through this [type of abuse as a

> woman], I can't take it." You know so, it's really-, I get out the abuse because she-, you know, I don't feel I worthy of nothing, you know, to get out of it. You know, like some people say, "Oh you are strong to come out of it." I don't think so. I think I do it for she.

Two women also referred to their fears that police involvement in the relationship would result in their losing their children. In one scenario, a participant's partner was lying to the police about her being "mad" and her inability to mother her children. This woman expressed her sudden fear that the police would believe her partner's lies and take her children away. "I know that he could tell lies and get away and I wouldn't be strong enough to get him…The most important thing in my life is my children…The only good thing I have in this whole world is my two children, and I'm not about, after all these weeks of abuse [to lose my children]." Another explained, "The cops told me if they had to come back, they were taking my kids.' You're not taking my kids. I'll put your own gun on you. You're not taking my kids. Are you crazy?'"

One participant was concerned not just for her children but also for her family. Below she was able to describe her realization that the things her partner provided outside of the abuse were not worth the potential for serious harm to herself or to others:

> Because I know he coming and it was gonna be the same thing, and if I don't want it-, maybe it can be damage me, but it maybe can damage my son, or my family, my mother. Because, you know, that when you have family…somebody can get hurt. So I said, "It's better for me to get out, disappear out of his life so my family doesn't get [involved] nothing. And

> that's it. Even if I lose the house or the things that are in the house, it's something that I can get again. But my life, I'm not gonna get it again.

As stated above, it was the birth of one woman's child that inspired her to leave due to her wish to save him from potential harm from the relationship, "After I'd seen that baby, and realized who I was really here for, and how anything I do in this world is gonna affect him, and after I noticed that and accepted that, I was like, 'You know what? I don't need him.'"

Shift in sense of self-efficacy.

The second theme that emerged involved a shift in the women's sense of efficacy in their relationships and a diminished sense of self and mental state that no longer enabled them to tolerate the abuse. The large majority of the women referred to their exhaustion: As one woman said, "I just couldn't take it any longer." Another explained, "Because I felt there was no more I could do in that relationship than I already did. And for him to turn around and do something like that and then actually say that I wasn't committed to him was really like a slap in the face. It was just like hitting me."

The following participant expressed her exhaustion and dislike of herself:

> I have to love me better than this, to…[let] this go on any further, you know? 'Cause that truly was the last straw. When that happened, I really thought, "I don't like me anymore," You know? "I don't like me right now." Now if I don't like me, who else is going to like me? You know? So that's when I thought about either committing suicide or you know, just leaving. Leave the kids, and just go crazy or-, you know? That's what was

> running through my mind, so I figured, "Nope, I have to go and I have to be strong…" So I knew, 'Ok [self], either you're going to kill yourself or you're going to get it together and get up, and do something about it." So, that's what I did.

Escalation in violence.

The third theme that emerged involved an escalation of violence, which caused the women to newly recognize the real potential danger of the physical abuse and realize that their partners did not truly care for them. One woman spoke of her feelings after her partner held her down as his friends gang raped her:

> He done-, he took everything. Him and his friends. And then I was pregnant, still pregnant. So he truly-, I know he didn't care about me at all You know? That's when I said, when I heard the door slam, I said, 'I gotta go, that's it…I mean, he was bad enough, you know, but then, that's when I knew, "What the hell are you sitting around here for because, no he does not care about you, and he doesn't even care about his own baby for that to happen," you know?

Other participants recognized the potential escalation of violence not just by their partners but by themselves, as one woman shared, "I realized I was either going to kill [him] or get killed."

Infidelity.

The fourth theme, which was expressed by a third of the women, related to the discovery that their partners were cheating on them. One woman shared her thoughts, "Okay. That's enough for me. I don't have to go through that, you know, verbal abuse

and you're doing whatever your doing outside with these kids that *you* wanted?"

Shifts in Perceptions of Partner that Enabled Women to Leave

When asked if their perceptions of their partners shifted during this final moment, three of the women reported no change (see Table 21). As one stated, "I still didn't like him." Six others, however, did report changes. Four reported that they developed a strong fear of their partner and a new understanding of the potential harm that they could cause. One of these participants came to view her partner as "crazy." Three shared that they were suddenly able to see their partner's from a more objective view point. One shared, "I was able to see his true colors" for the first time, describing her new perception of him as controlling and untrustworthy. Having discovered that her partner had been unfaithful to her, a second woman stated that she was suddenly able to identify the ways in which she was being abused just as her partner had abused his previous girlfriend, "And that was when everything came- 'Oh my god-' He was fighting with his first woman like that and that crossed my mind again, 'And he's doing the same thing to me.'" Finally, a third participant realized that her partner was not sympathetic to her needs or the needs of her child. She suddenly felt that she could no longer stand him and that she no longer cared for him. This caused her to feel that he was "no longer worthy of keeping around:"

> 'Cause he was just getting on my nerves. I just couldn't be around him, just couldn't really-, couldn't be around him. He wasn't, he wasn't sympathetic to me. I just had a baby and you know? When I woke up in the morning, I was ok, everything was fine. But then they-, I forgot that they told that my breasts was going to swell up. So, it's like 6 o'clock in the morning now, and I'm, you know, they're feeling like I have rocks on

> me and I'm like, "Can you go to the store for me? I need a breast pump." He's like, "No"…"I need a breast-, I really need, I really, really needed a breast pump." I had to run into the store, and then the aisle, looking for breast pump. My breasts feel like they're going to explode, and he wouldn't even go and get me a breast pump. You know? I was just mad. Just, that's when I was just like, "You know what? You're of no use. You, you don't take care of your child…You're not a good significant other and you can't even help me, so I mean, where, where do you come in?" You see what I'm saying?

Shifts in Perceptions of Self that Enabled Women to Leave

Of the women who responded to the question of whether their perceptions of themselves shifted in this final moment, two reported no change (see Table 22). Three others felt a positive shift, relating a new sense of strength and the sudden realization that they deserved more. "It gave me a little bit of strength." [Int: What do you mean?] "Knowing that I have the, um, the courage to walk away. Like finally do something about it. It made me feel a little bit better." Four others referred to negative shifts in self-perception, such as feeling sorry for themselves, viewing themselves as naïve, miserable and trapped, or feeling as if they were going "crazy." This latter fear caused them to worry about their own psychological states. Three were concerned that their mental states might lead them to inflict serious danger upon their partners.

Shifts in Perceptions of the Relationship that Enabled Women to Leave

Four of the women referred to their discoveries of their partner's infidelities as the catalyst for their leaving (see Table 23). This discovery caused a shift in the women's

perceptions of their relationships. Six women also expressed a feeling of resignation, resulting in their giving up on the relationship. Three stated, "I couldn't take it any longer." Five of the women who expressed the feeling of resignation referred to the impact of the abuse on their children as one of the catalysts for their leaving. Three women described a sudden and immediate awareness that the relationship was over, all three of whom referred to an escalation in violence as one of the catalysts to their leaving.

Shifts in Perceptions of Reality that Enabled Women to Leave

A number of the women's testimonies involved a shift in their perceptions of realties that led them to leave. As stated previously, eight women described their sudden concerns regarding the well-being of their children and the impact that the abuse was having on them. Two of the women were able to share their images of their children as they reacted to their witnessing of the abuse. Two women expressed their concerns that their children would be removed from them and shared their desires to provide a safer, more stable environment for their children. Two women also shared their concerns that their sons would grow up to be abusers or their daughters, victims.

Three women described shifts in their perceptions of reality through their sudden realization that they or their families could be more significantly physically harmed.

How Women Left

Having made the decision to leave, each woman then had to make the decision of how to do so (see Table 24). Three women left abruptly in the middle of the night, one of whom slept on a park bench. This participant then returned in the morning to her children to wait for placement in a shelter. Another woman described her decision to leave just after her husband and his friends had left the apartment:

> So I said, “Umm, we gotta go.” I woke the kids up and the boys didn’t know any better, you know? They’re tired, and, “Ahhh, I don’t wanna get up.” But, when I woke my daughter up, she knew. She knew it. She seen it in my face. She said, “We’re leaving, right?” and I said, “We leaving.” She knew it, because I never woke her up at 2-something in the morning, you know? So, she knew. And, at that point, I wasn’t even free yet. I wasn’t even gone. Didn’t even walk out the door and shut the door. But I knew I was gonna to be ok, because I had it already in me. I knew, you know, “Ok, the kids are up, we’re gone,” just like this. I didn’t take any clothes, we had pajamas on, we had slippers on, and I left. Just like that. Me and the kids.

This participant went on to describe the fears that she had and the ways in which she prepared her children as they left:

> I had both the boys in my arms, and just like this, and [daughter] was like this [smiling], you know? I said, “Stay close. Stay close, whatever you do, stay close”. And I said, “If you see him, run”. And I said, “I mean run, leave me and just run. And remember about yelling,” and then she said, “And know, after yelling say, “He’s hurting my mom,” you know? ‘Cause we had certain things planned out, you know? She said, “I already know, I’m gonna run and I’m gonna say, ‘My mom needs help, she’s down there and he’s beating her.’” You know? I said, “That’s all you do is keep running and you tell somebody,” you know? And she said, “Ok.” But we made it safe to the train, and we got on the train.

Seven of the women reported that they first went to friends' or families' houses before being placed in a shelter. The others stayed with their partners as they waited for placement. Seven of them called the domestic violence hotline to be placed. Nine of the women reported having to wait several days if not a week for placement.

Thoughts about Outside Systems and Supports

In terms of their thoughts about outside systems and supports, two participants reported not knowing about the services that were available; three stated that they knew of services but that they feared or were reluctant to use them; and a couple admitted that they knew of services but did not think that they needed them (see Table 25). Five of the women referred to their fears of getting the police involved, believing that they would likely worsen the situation, e.g. by removing their children. Only two reported that they thought the services would be helpful. In terms of their experiences, one woman reported that the police encouraged her to comply with her husband and stay with him and another expressed that she felt like a guinea pig while passing through the system.

Description of Partner in Light of All that has Happened

Two-thirds of the women described their perceptions of their now ex-partners in light of all that happened (see Table 26). The large majority of them first responded with a negative adjective, such as "Cruel," "Asshole," "Horrible," "Stupid," and "Low-life." Others expressed that they considered their ex-partners to be less of a man or as deserving no respect. One spoke about her recognition that her ex-partner will never change. Another reflected on her clinical impression of her ex-partner as depressed and suffering from low self-esteem. Another shared her belief that her ex-partner fooled her into having children in order to "tie [her] down." Of the nine women who responded only one woman

made a positive reference to her ex-partner, explaining that he still had a "good side."

Description of Self in Light of All that has Happened

When asked to reflect upon their images of themselves in light of all that has happened, the majority of responses referred to some dimension of self-esteem (see Table 27). The women's responses varied along both ends of the spectrum. Four women referred to themselves as continuing to suffer from low-esteem, to have a low self-image and/or to blame themselves for the abuse. One such participant stated, "It still makes me think, even though I shouldn't be thinking like that, it makes me think, 'What was I not doing?' He still has me thinking, 'What was I not doing?' Even though I know it's not my fault, you still think, 'What was I not doing? What I didn't do right? What happened?'" One referred to herself as "a wreck," and another expressed her fear of getting involved with another male for fear of becoming involved in yet another abusive relationship. These women had a difficult time imagining themselves in a better state. For example, one woman shared:

> There's nothing I have to look forward or nothing. Somebody was saying, "I think, you know, if I have a job, I could feel better." I don't think that would make me feel better. This wound is so deep. If I don't get it healed, nothing is going to be good for me. Nothing is going to be good. Even if I get a million dollars right now, still that's not good…It's very hard to imagine me in a happy place.

Yet on the other end of the spectrum, six of the women described themselves as feeling either stronger, better, or more confident about being able to take care of themselves. One participant stated:

> And I feel better. I feel better because I'm doing what I like to do. Nobody's telling me what I have to do or I have to have everything cleaned because he wants everything cleaned. If I clean I like to clean. If I do it, I do it because I like it, not because I have to do it because somebody's telling me, 'Oh if you don't do it he's gonna get mad.' No, I'm better. I'm better right now…My things changed. My mind has changed a lot. The way I was thinking before that I cannot be alone, now I think I can be alone and I don't care.

These women referred to themselves as feeling hopeful, having dreams for the future, and being more knowledgeable about life. One woman recognized that she was still in love with her ex-partner, but expressed that she now understood that the relationship would never work:

> I still feel the same way about him. I still love him and everything and I wish that we could be together, but I know that we can't, that we just can't because he won't-, he just won't change. He's just really jealous. And it don't matter who he gets with. I know he's gonna be that way.

Similarities between Partner and Others

When asked if their partners reminded them of anyone they've known, six of the women said no (see Table 28). Five referred to male family members, including fathers, uncles, brothers and mother's boyfriends. Two women reported that their partners reminded them of female family members, including their mothers and sisters. The women did not elaborate on the ways in which their partners resembled these family members.

Similarities between Relationship and Others

When asked if their past relationship reminded them of any relationships they have known, the majority reported no. However one referred to a friends' relationship and another to the relationship between her aunt and uncle (see Table 29).

Personal Strengths and Resources that Enabled Women to leave

Before terminating the interview, the women were asked about the personal strengths and resources that they derived from themselves and others that enabled them to leave their partners and their abusive relationships (see Table 30). The women provided both similar and different responses from those answered previously to the question, "Why did you leave?" Four major themes arose: (a) a realization that they and their children deserved better, (b) support and inspiration from families, (c) exasperation and a shift in self-efficacy; and (d) visions and fantasies. Interestingly, the women who gave responses that fit into the third and fourth categories, did not directly describe personal strengths, but instead referred to either a condition that no longer enabled them to stay or fantasies/visions that helped them to realize that it was time to get out.

Self and children deserved better.

The first theme had to do with the notion that the women, themselves, and their children deserved better. One woman stated, "I have to love me better than this." They shared their desires to give their children better lives and to protect them from the physical dangers and the potential harm from witnessing the abuse.

Inspiration from families.

The second theme, involved the inspiration that five of the women gained from their families. They referred to supports from their sisters and the words and wisdom of

their mothers, including that no woman should allow a man to raise his hands toward her. Three women referred to hearing their mothers' voices in their heads, two from the messages they received during childhood.

Exasperation and shift in sense of self-efficacy.

The third theme involved a number of responses related to exasperation and a shift in their sense of relational self-efficacy. Their recognition that they, in fact, could not change their partners or themselves enabled them to make the decision to leave. "Because I felt there was no more I could do in that relationship than I already did." As stated previously, this arose as a theme in the women's responses to why they left. Further, this response does not provide a personal strength, but rather a condition that no longer enabled them to stay.

Visions and fantasies.

Finally, two women described fantasies/ visions that indicated to them that it was time to leave. The first woman referred to her growing fantasy of beating her partner and subsequent refusal to go to jail for him as a result of the beating. Another participant referred to the vision of her life that flashed before her eyes as her partner nearly fatally beat her, causing her to recognize the potential danger that she was in.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

Findings

This discussion section focuses on the findings related to the study's core purpose: to identify, from the perspective of female survivors of domestic violence, the shifts that occur in their perceptions of themselves, their partners, their relationships and reality that contribute to the decision to leave. The interviews with the participants of this study brought to life the complex, evolving nature of their relationships with their partners, emphasizing not just the presence of abuse but also love, hope, attachment, and dependency. They also revealed the women's active roles (e.g. making great arrangements and maneuvering behaviors in order to reduce violence) and resilience as they coped with the complicated feelings, harsh realities and interpersonal dynamics of their relationships. While it has become widely recognized that leaving an abusive relationship is a process, within their discussions of this process, the women in this study were also able to identify the final moments that precipitated their decisions to leave and to reflect upon the relational factors and shifts in perception that influenced this decision.

Reasons for leaving

The respondents provided a range of reasons or catalysts that resulted in their decision to leave their batterers. From their responses, four main themes were identified. The first and most common response involved a concern about the impact of the abusive relationship on their children and their relationships with their children. The second theme involved a shift in the women's sense of efficacy in their relationships and a diminished sense of self and well-being that no longer enabled them to tolerate the abuse.

The third theme involved either an actual escalation of violence by their partners or the sudden recognition of a potential escalation of violence that would be initiated by either their partners or themselves. Finally, the fourth theme involved the discovery of their partners' infidelities. The first and third themes were hypothesized to be catalysts in the women's decision to leave. The second and fourth were unexpected, though the discovery of infidelity had been mentioned previously in the literature as a cause for leaving (Cambell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998; Stanton, 2003).

Psychological Shifts in Perception

While these reasons for leaving are consistent with many of those found in previous studies (Ferraro and Johnson, 1983; Cambell, Rose, Kub & Nedd, 1998; Short, McMahon, Chervin, Shelley, Lezin, Sloop & Dawkins, 2000; Fiorello, 2002; Stanton, 2003), this is the first study to explore in detail the ways in which these catalysts cause shifts in women's perceptions of their partners, themselves, their relationships and reality. These shifts in perception are identified as ultimately leading to the women's decision to leave.

Shifts in their perceptions of their partners.

When asked if their perceptions of their partners shifted during this final moment, three of the women reported no change. Several others, however, did report changes. Following an escalation of violence against themselves or their children, four reported that they developed a strong fear of their partner and a new understanding of the potential harm that he could cause. Three others shared that they were suddenly able to see their partners from a more objective view point following an escalation of violence or the discovery of infidelity. As one stated, "I was able to see his true colors" for the first time,

describing her new perception of him as controlling and untrustworthy. Having discovered that her partner had been unfaithful to her, the second respondent was suddenly able to identify the ways in which her partner was abusing her just as he had his previous girlfriend. The third realized that her partner was not sympathetic to her needs or the needs of her child. This caused her to feel that he was no longer "worthy of keeping around." Further she had a new sense of no longer caring whether he lived or died.

Shifts in their perceptions of themselves.

Of the women who responded to the question of whether their perceptions of themselves shifted in the final moment, two reported no change. Three others felt a positive shift, relating to a new sense of strength and the sudden realization that they deserved more, which in turn empowered them to leave. These three experienced this shift after being subjected to an escalation of physical violence. Four others referred to negative shifts in self-perception, such as feeling sorry for themselves, viewing themselves as naïve, miserable, and trapped, or feeling as if they were going "crazy." This shift arose also as a consequence of an escalation of violence, as well as the discovery of infidelity. The fear of going "crazy" caused the women to worry about their own psychological states. Three women were concerned that their mental states might lead them to inflict serious danger on their partners.

Six women referred to their exhaustion and a mental state that no longer enabled them to tolerate the abuse. This shift in perception was expressed in relation to all four of the main categories for leaving. The state of exhaustion and desperation that the women began to experience defeated their pursuits to maintain the integrity of the family and marriage. This pursuit is recognized by Kearney (2001) as a societal expectation that is

placed upon women, and by Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg, and Walker (1990) as part of a feminine identity that is passed intergenerationally from mother to daughter. Goldner et al. (1990) describe the way that stereotypical gender arrangements cause women to measure their self-worth through the success or failure of their attempts to connect with and provide care for others. With respect to domestic violence, they explain:

> …staying put is not about weak character, morbid dependency, or masochism, but is better understood as an affirmation of the feminine ideal: to hold connections together, to heal and care for another, no matter what the cost. As another woman client put it, "I stayed for twenty years, even though I knew after a week that it was a mistake, because "girls make it work." In these terms, staying is what gender pride and self-respect demand. (p.357)

Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) also refers to the role forced upon women by society and the ways in which gender roles create interdependence within male-female relationships. She uses the term "sexual arrangements" to reflect "the division of responsibility, opportunity, and privilege that prevails between male and female humans, and the patterns of psychological interdependence that are implicit in this division (p.4)." She explains that the specific nature of these arrangements often varies dramatically under varying societal conditions, but states that "Their general nature, however, stems from a core fact that has so far been universal: the fact of primary female responsibilities for the care of infants and young children" (p.4).

The coping strategies listed by Kearney (2001) that are often employed by women in abusive relationships, such as diminished sense of self, rationalization, and monitoring and adjusting behaviors according to potential outbursts, are all ways in which these

women actively worked to maintain the integrity of their relationships. For all of these women, the event that took place in their final moment, whether it was an escalation of violence, an involvement of their children, infidelity, or some other act by their partners, caused them to feel that they that they were no longer able to tolerate the abuse or that the goals behind their pursuits were not attainable. Their partners had crossed a line causing an irreparable violation to the women's personal integrity and the integrity of the relationship. The women's sense of self-agency was depleted and they finally determined that they had had enough. Goldner et al. (1990) remind us that this is not an easy position to achieve: "Thus, a woman who walks out must contend with the meanings and consequences of having claimed the male prerogative of putting herself first" (p.357).

Multicultural factors that contribute to a woman's feeling of obligation to maintain family integrity and/or protect her family from outside systems must also be considered. Nancy Boyd-Franklin refers to the importance of the "mother" role in Black families. "For most Black women…family is extremely important. Many Black women have numerous models within their extended families of strong, self-reliant women who have helped to keep family together" (Boyd-Franklin, 1989, p.70). Therefore women of the Black community may have even stronger pressures to maintain family integrity. This may also be true within the Hispanic community, especially for immigrants, who are motivated to keep their family together within a foreign country and to remain a part of their community. Multicultural considerations are further elaborated upon in terms of treatment below.

Shifts in perceptions of their relationships.

Four of the women referred to their discoveries of their partner's infidelities as the

catalyst for leaving. This discovery caused a shift in the women's perceptions of their relationships. Their commitment to the relationship and all that they tolerated for the sake of the relationship was affronted as they were abruptly forced to recognize that the devotion was not reciprocated. Though severe and irreparable, the physical and emotional abuse by their partners was likely to have been experienced as a sign of commitment to the relationship. It was an attention that, though negative, still involved energy that was maintained within the relationship. The need and deprivation of male batterers while they are abusive is illustrated in the following testimony from a male in treatment through the work of Goldner et al. (1990): "One thing I notice that I go through every time I hit her is my intense need for her…When things get to the point that I need her a lot and I can't get her, I want her. I want her, that's it. I want her love, I want her attention, and I'll get it. I'll get it no matter what" (p.361). This desire for her attention and love will be experienced by the female partner, whether consciously or unconsciously. It represents a commitment and desperate connection to her. This will then be reinforced during the aftermath, a phase widely recognized in the circle of violence, when the batterer is profusely apologetic and remorseful.

In terms of Kearney's theory of Enduring Love (2001), the discovery of infidelity for these women caused a shift from the second phase, in which the woman makes sacrifices and employs coping strategies in order to maintain the integrity of the couplehood, to the third phase, when the acts of abuse are no longer tolerated or viewed within the boundaries of love. One of the participants voiced this shift: "Okay. That's enough for me. I don't have to go through that, you know, verbal abuse and you're (referring to partner) doing whatever you're doing outside with these kids that *you*

wanted?" Through their acts of infidelity, the male partners stepped outside of the boundaries of the relationship and demonstrated that their commitment to the relationship did not exist.

Again, a number of the women expressed a feeling of resignation and giving up on the relationship. This can be accounted for by the discussion above about their loss of self-agency and the line that was crossed by their partners that challenged the boundaries of love.

Several of the women's testimonies describe a merged identity with their partners within their experience of their relationships, for example, "My mind has to be his mind. We're supposed to be equal but I'm not really allowed to think what I think…If you want to be with me then this is how we got to do things. That's it.'" This may be interpreted from quotes from several other participants, as well, such as, "So if you're more dependent on him-, as long as you're dependent on him, he's fine. As soon as you go off and do your thing, it's always a problem," and:

> "Why I have to live the way I was living?"- that I feel like a slave...When I can't have a life?...I think the love changed for something else, I don't know, because I was living for him but I was not living my life. I was not doing what I like to do. I was trying to do what he likes me to do."

Through the partner's force of control, the women were forced to live their lives according to their partner's existence. As this last participant stated she was no longer living with her partner out of love, but rather, perhaps, her sense of self that existed only through her parnter . For these women, their senses of selves were not only diminished, but, perhaps, non-existent. They lived in a merged existence with their partners, which

was then threatened and shattered by the final events of their relationship. As one woman stated after the birth of her son:

> 'Cause, actually I was, I was no longer blinded. I think at that point, after I had my son, I had been like this, this shield over me and I was just like in a cult. I was in his cult. Everything was …I was just like in another, I was in a trance, but I snapped out of it. I'm like, "Hold up". After I'd seen that baby, and realized who I was really here for, and how anything I do in this world is gonna effect him, and after I noticed that, and accepted that, I was like, "You know what? I don't need him. You know?

The birth of this woman's son broke her merged sense of identity with her partner and introduced a new purpose in life and a new relationship, that as the caregiver to her son. This enabled her to redefine who she was and what she was living for. For the other three women that described the sense of merged identity, two of them left due to infidelity. For these women, the introduction of a third person into their couplehood disrupted the unity between self and partner. The fourth woman stated that she was only able to leave for her daughter, stating that she did not feel a sense of self-worth valuable enough to leave, however, her concerns for her daughter were strong enough to overpower the lack of identity that she possessed.

Shifts in their perceptions of reality.

Though the question was not explicitly asked, another theme emerged that entailed shifts in the participants' perceptions of reality. Eight women referred to their sudden concerns regarding the well-being of their children and the impact that the abuse was having on them. Two of the women were able to share images of their children as

they reacted to their witnessing of the abuse. Other women expressed concerns that their children would be removed from them and shared their desires to provide a safer, more stable environment for their children. Some women also shared their concerns that their sons would grow up to be abusers, or their daughters, victims. These concerns represent a shift in their understandings and perceptions of the impact of abuse on their children.

The women's concerns are consistent with the literature, which as stated earlier, indicates that witnessing parental violence can have a dramatic impact on children, including higher instances of hyperactivity, aggression, and conduct problems, as well as greater anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms and fearfulness (Kolbo, Blakely, & Engleman 1996; Edelson, 1999). In addition, children who have witnessed parental violence have been found to exhibit lower social competence than children who have not. In terms of long-term effects, witnessing parental violence as a child has been linked to adult reports of depression, trauma-related symptoms, and low self-esteem among women and trauma-related symptoms among men (Edelson, 1999). In addition, as some women feared, there is evidence to support the notion of transmission of violence. For example male batterers are significantly more likely than others to have grown up in homes where adult domestic violence occurred (Edelson, 1999).

Also consistent with the literature, a number of women in the current study shared that their children initially served as a motivation to stay in the relationship, referencing their belief in the importance of father-child relationships. Stanton (2003) reported that seven of the nine women who were currently in an abusive relationship referred to their staying because of their children.

Of the four women in the current study that initially stayed because of their

children, two reported that their children later served as motivating factors to leave. While these two women did not speak directly about the change in their perceptions of what was best for their children, based on their testimonies, conjectures may be made. In the first case, the participant refered to the visual image of her daughter balled up in the corner crying following violence between the participant and her partner. The participant describes this experience of literally seeing the impact of the abuse on her daughter as the factor that made her decide to leave. This image likely overpowered any benefit that she viewed her daughter as receiving from living with the father. In the second case, the participant referred to her partner's physically hurting her son as the impetus in her final decision to leave. Again, this abuse likely offset all benefits that she may have believed her son to receive by being close with his father. The other two women who referred to their staying for their children stated that their partners' infidelities were the impetus for their leaving.

Three women described shifts in their perceptions of reality through their sudden realizations that they or their families could be more significantly physically harmed in the future. This is an accurate concern as the pattern in abusive relationships is that the violence increases over time. This sudden awareness and change in perception of the potential dangers enabled them to leave before greater harm would have likely been inflicted upon them and others.

Limitations of the Current Study

Before the clinical implications of these findings are discussed, the limitations of the study must be considered. The qualitative approach employed in this study allowed for an intimate, in-depth exploration of twelve women's experiences in abusive

relationships and their courageous pursuits to save themselves and their children from further harm. However, because of the small sample size, the results cannot necessarily be generalized to the population at large. The sample was of a specific population of women, namely urban women of color and low socioeconomic class, who found respite in a domestic violence shelter. As several theorists have recently stressed, the definition of abuse, the barriers that prevent a woman from leaving an abusive relationship, and the ways in which she experiences the relationship depend largely upon the contexts of race, culture, and class (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Field & Caetano, 204; Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004; West, 2004). Therefore these findings must be recognized as specific to this distinctive population.

In addition, the data came from the women's recollections of their feelings and experiences in the far and recent past. These recollections are not created in a vacuum. They are subject not only to common forgetfulness, but affected by motivated memory loss, especially given the traumatic nature of the events and the emotionally-laden material that they were asked to recall. Any kind of self-report, even an in-depth interview, is vulnerable to the power of intrapsychic defenses and other forces at play. One hope of this study was to get more of a visual representation of the final event; however, only two of the women were able to provide or recall imagery. The struggle with visual recall appeared to be substantially more difficult than with verbal recall for the women, suggesting a greater need to defend against the visual imagery.

As an additional influence on their recall, all of the women had been in both individual and group therapies since their arrival to the shelter. Insights provided by clinicians regarding motivations behind behaviors, stories from other women relating

their experiences and perceptions, and developments in their personal understandings of their experiences through treatment likely had altered their perceptions and memories of what transpired while in the throws of their relationships.

In a study of verbal reconstructions of intimate violence among male and female cohabitants, Eisilovits & Winstok (2002) found that the breadth and intensity of violent memories corresponded to the self-reported context of the relationship, e.g. the individual's willingness to be in the relationship. In other words, the recollections by both men and women were influenced and constructed in a manner meant to achieve coherence with the appropriate context. The authors interpret their findings as evidence that "…memories of violence are constructed in a manner which, at any specific point in time, will preserve the coherence among past events as recalled, present reality, and future expectations" (p.685). In simple terms, their study is a reminder that memories are embedded in various contexts.

Clinical Implications

The literature on domestic violence provides powerful and alarming evidence to support that intimate partner violence is a crime of epidemic proportion that demands serious attention. It further provides sufficient evidence to argue that because of the irreparable harm caused by intimate partner violence and the tendency for violent men to repeat and escalate the severity of the violence over time, women and children are better off leaving the abusive relationship. Yet professionals must respect the women's right to choose. As the data from this study demonstrates, for each woman the decision of whether or not to stay is an intricate and unique dilemma involving numerous factors. In addition, women who leave and are then estranged from their husbands are more likely to

be killed (Fleury, Sullivan & Bybee, 2000) and 6 times more likely to be victimized by their ex-husbands than those who remain in their marriages (Fraenkel, 2000/2001). Therefore it is imperative that this difficult decision involve careful consideration and safety planning, if a woman does decide to leave, in order to ensure that the decision is carried out successfully and safely.

The position of outside systems

There is debate within the literature regarding the ways in which outside systems should get involved in a woman's decision to leave. For example Linda Mills (1999) argues that mandatory arrest policies are detrimental in that they disempower women. For the purpose of the present discussion, the perspective will be that women and their children are better off leaving abusive relationships. This position must be carefully contained within a collaborative, supportive approach that respects the woman's right to choose and the difficult nature of this decision. Stanton (2003) emphasizes the danger of pressuring patients to leave:

> …there should be a collaborative goal of support between the therapist and woman so she does not feel pressured to end the relationship. The concern is that she would leave therapy because leaving the abuser may seem unobtainable to her and there could be a sense of shame of disappointing her therapist." (p.117)

In addition, it is imperative that professionals have knowledge of the ways in which multicultural differences influence a woman's choice and the coping strategies that she employs, as stated below.

Treatment Approaches

In their treatment approach with couples in abusive relationships, Goldner et al.

(1990) stress the importance of recognizing the full, complex nature of the relationship. Based on their work, they "found that, for these couples, abuse and coercion co-exist with understanding and friendship in a unique and painful way" (p.363). They state that reaction to only the violent aspect of the relationship denies the power of the bond that fully possesses the couple. They cite the danger of this position: "Thus, unless this powerful bond is given its due, the relationship will not be visible in all its aspects, and the couple's bond will become a secret coalition against all outsiders, including the therapists" (p.359). The authors emphasize that neither partner of an abusive relationship is going to talk openly about their attachment or their feelings for the other when their experience is that the relationship is being uniformly stigmatized by others.

In addition, Goldner and her colleagues (1990) stress that helping female survivors identify the positive, active roles that they assume in their relationships enables them to assume more self-respecting explanations for why they have initially chosen to stay, as opposed to the more popular, pathologized societal explanations. This sense of dignity, which challenges the diminished sense of self, may then empower the women, enabling them to eventually leave or stay on different terms. While the aforementioned paper focuses on couples treatment, which is not the focus of this discussion, the principal of acknowledging the complex nature of the relationship applies to individual treatment as well.

This approach should help counteract some of the active defenses that are at play in women's recall of their experiences. The data from this study made evident that some forms of recall were not available to them, e.g. visual recall, as well as some verbal recollections. While these barriers to recall may interfere with women's understanding of

the damaging nature of the relationship, they also serve to protect the women from extraordinary psychological pain and from further physical abuse from their partners by influencing their behaviors. As noted by Kearney (2001) women in abusive relationships rationalize abuse and maneuver their behaviors in order to reduce the risk of provoking their partners. The women may need to keep these defenses and strategies active in order to continue to survive within the relationship until they are ready to leave. Pushing these recollections upon them or the realities of their situations may cause them to behave rashly or in dangerous ways that will provoke further violence from their partners. This must be carefully weighed into the clinical approach.

With these considerations in mind, the therapist may be able to use the data from the current study by helping women to anticipate the potential events that could cause shifts in their perceptions and ultimately influence them to leave. The data may be helpful in alerting the women to the dangers that lie ahead and the likely pathways of the abuse and its impact on the women and children. For instance, it may be useful to share, in a psychoeducatonal way, that research has shown that: (a) partners tend to become more rather than less violent over time; (b) that children often eventually witness their mothers being abused; and (c) that partners may eventually engage in other activities, such as affairs, that compromise women's feelings toward their partners. Such sharing of information from research may serve as a kind of "virtual group" of the survivors community for an individual patient, providing an opportunity to see her story reflected in the stories of others and feel support for leaving. Using such information to challenge women's reasons for staying and their current perceptions while they are involved in abusive relationships may be helpful in enabling them to leave before further abuse takes

place.

As stated by Goldner et al. (1990), introducing women to a greater sense of self-worth and opportunities for personal agency can be empowering. Kearney (1991) found that, in order to preserve their hopes for their relationships, women often develop a diminished sense of self to justify and tolerate the abusive nature of the relationships. As a result these women often forgo once-valued parts of their identities, including their profession, physical attractiveness, intelligence, and membership in their family of origin or community. This coping strategy also involves repressing one's emotional responses "in order to avoid flare-ups, perform unwanted tasks, or accept undeserved punishment" (Kearney, 1991, p.276). Nearly all of the women in this study described a diminished sense of self and self-esteem while in the throws of the abuse relationship. Providing treatment conditions in which women can recover and build upon their more positive notions of self may promote earlier shifts in their perceptions of self similar to those that led a few of the participants in the current study to decide that they "deserved more." These more positive notions of self, along with an understanding of the proactive roles that they, themselves, play in their relationships may help to shift women's views of themselves, changing them from weak, compliant and dependent to strong, worthy and capable. This building up of the self may also curb the self-doubts of being able to cope as a single mother, doubts that were described by the participants as preventing them from leaving earlier.

For some women, recovering and building upon pre-existing positive self-images will be more complicated. This is predicted from the reports of several participants in the current study that described them as having low self-esteem and poor self-images when

entering their relationships. This diminished sense of self was typically viewed as a consequence of prior abuse by either their families-of-origin and/or previous boyfriends. In this circumstance the therapist will have to appeal to the positive sense of self that the participants were able to achieve in the beginnings of their relationships and encourage them to hold onto these images, despite the damage that their partners later caused. Long-term psychodynamic treatment that provides the opportunity for examining the enactment of negative self image in the transference, and for corrective emotional-relationship experiences, may also be necessary.

Challenging women's coping strategies of rationalization and anticipatory maneuvering, as described by Kearney (2001), may also induce earlier shifts in their perceptions of their partners. By recognizing the ways in which they rationalize the abuse and maneuver their behavior in order to reduce the risk of provoking their partners, women in counseling may come to develop a more objective perspective of their partners as controlling and abusive, and to shift the blame for the abuse from themselves to their partners.

The role played by societal expectations and the strong convictions of women that it is their responsibility to maintain family integrity at all costs, described previously by Goldner et al. (1990) and Kearney (1991), was substantiated in the testimonies of the women in this study. These beliefs and expectations need to be challenged in treatment by exploring with the women the cost to their own well-being and that of their children of maintaining the family's integrity in the face of partner violence. Women should also be encouraged to openly explore the roots and history of this expectation, as well as their anticipated thoughts about how they might experience their "failures" to keep the family

in-tact. They may then come to realize or obtain reassurance from others that their choice to leave may be an even better exemplification of their role as a protective, caring and competent woman and mother.

In their therapeutic intervention, Almeida, Woods, Messino, & Font (1998) stress the importance of empowering women through the expression of a broader range of feelings and by relinquishing their sense of guilt:

> For women...the therapeutic intent is to empower them and to increase the range of felt and expressed emotions- in particular, to sanction anger as an appropriate emotion and form of social justice. Their typical pattern of overfocusing on their guilt is discouraged. They are encouraged to take less responsibility for the overall well-being of their families. Contributing to family life in more balanced ways also helps them modify the intensity of their guilt and responsibility for others. (p.422)

The therapist may also work to help women in abusive relationships anticipate and sooner accept the impact of the abusive relationship on their children. Nearly all of the women in the study referred to their considerations of the well-being of their children, whether it caused them to stay or leave. These women recognized and courageously accepted their roles in protecting their children. As a result focusing on this role may be the most effective way in helping women to make the most informed and beneficial decision for their children, which is to leave the relationship. Educating them about the insidious impact of abuse on children may help them to reach this awareness sooner. Community-based preventive education programs on the impact of parental abuse on children will also help to heighten women's awareness.

Women in treatment may also benefit from education about the impact of abuse on themselves. Several of the women in the current study described ways in which they minimized and normalized the abuse. Education on the impact of abuse on employment, education, psychological well-being, and relations outside of the abusive relationship, e.g. with family and friends, may resonate with women and cause them to develop a more objective perspective of the relationship and its negative impact on them. A curriculum based on this study's findings could be implemented both as a preventative program, reaching out to communities about warning signs of abusive relationships, and in shelters after women have left, educating them on the comprehensive, insidious impact of abuse and the risks of re-entering abusive relationships.

For those women who are not able to perceive "a way out," as many of the participants in the current study described themselves, it may be helpful to challenge this perception by encouraging them to explore step-by-step how they might leave and what resources may be available to them, both internally and externally, in order to create a plan of action.

One final recommendation for treatment, based on the participants' reports of social isolation as a result of their partner's coercions, is group therapy. This form of treatment could provide a support network that would validate the women's experiences, which are otherwise rejected by their partners. This validation and the stories from other women may lead to more objective views of their partners and their relationships, which were identified by the participants of this study as impetus for leaving.

The core therapeutic goal behind all of the aforementioned strategies is to identify the psychological shifts in perspectives of the self, partner, relationship, and reality that

enabled the women in this study leave their abusive relationships. If therapists are able to encourage these shifts in thinking in a safe, supportive environment, women and children involved in domestic violence may be able to find respite and rescue earlier, in order to avoid inevitable, escalating physical and psychological abuse. In addition to individual and group treatments, community-based preventive educational programs that focus on heightening women's attention to the relational significance of abuse and its insidious impact on women and children, as well as on the kinds of shifts that can signal the need to leave, would be beneficial. Again, with all of these approaches, it is imperative that the women's fears of leaving in regard to escalated harm and violence are recognized as justifiable. They must be informed that leaving an abusive relationship is an involved process that requires a thoughtful and safe plan of exit.

Multicultural Considerations

It is imperative that therapists are aware of the ways in which multicultural factors influence how a woman defines abuse, the barriers that prevent her from leaving an abusive relationship, and the ways in which she experiences the relationship. As always, therapists must also be aware of their own sexist, racist and classist assumptions within the clinical relationship and recognize their assumptions and pre-judgments about intimate partner violence.

As mentioned previously, in addition to cultural beliefs and customs, the historic and current treatment of minorities in the United States influences the degree to which women of minority groups value outside systems for intervention and support. When working with female survivors of intimate partner violence it is important to consider the intersectionalities of race, class, culture, and gender. As previously stated, Sokoloff &

DuPont (2005) emphasize that recognizing the combined impact of these factors on the experiences of women in abusive relationships is necessary in order to "provide battered women from diverse backgrounds with the kinds of personal and social change required for safety and growth at the individual and community levels" (p.40).

Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger (2004) urge professionals who operate from a White cultural paradigm to be careful of their judgments of particular coping styles as weak or overly dependent. In contrast to this view, a woman's culturally congruent coping style may play an important role in her sense of mental well-being. A culturally congruent coping strategy may also reflect a more realistic style of defense considering her minority status. As mentioned previously, Black women's willingness to involve the police in a domestic dispute may be compromised by their views of the criminal justice system as racist and oppressive against Blacks. Women from the Black community often realistically fear that calling the police will subject their partners to racist treatment or put themselves at risk of losing their children. They also fear that calling upon the authorities will contribute to the racist stereotype that Blacks are violent or cause them to be seen as traitors within their community (Sukoff & DuPont, 2005; Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004; West, 2004). This was corroborated by the participants' testimonies. Several stated that they feared calling the police, believing that they would worsen the situation. The one African American who did call the police reported that they were of no help. Therefore Black women's resistance to calling the police can be a realistic and effective coping strategy.

Hispanic women are also subject to the prejudices of society. As stated previously, Latinas that have immigrated to the United States may depend on their abusive partners

for companionship or connection to their native countries. They also may not speak English fluently and therefore rely on their partners for translation and may fear that they will not be understood by authorities (Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004). This was corroborated by the participant's testimonies, as one of the Hispanic participants expressed a fear of calling the police. Another who did call the police reported that she was encouraged to comply with her partner. Another participant who had immigrated to the United States and spoke limited English shared her frustration that the police spoke only to her husband and she began to recognize the disadvantage that this caused her. Other participants stated that they were not aware of the supports available to them as a result of their lack of knowledge of supports made available within the U.S.

Women from minority communities may experience other professionals within the domestic violence support system to be racist and judgmental as well. Again, therapists must be aware of their own racist and classist assumptions and the ways in which they may be perceived by the women with whom they are working.

Kasturirangan et al. (2004) discuss the ways in which differing world views influence how individuals interpret daily experiences. They refer to the two major world views that are often discussed within the context of the United States, namely the linear and relational worldviews. They define the two views as the following:

> The linear worldview, predominant in mainstream American society, is characterized by a firm belief in cause and processes that progress in a logical, forward moving manner. The relationship worldview, often attributed to racial and ethnic minority community members, emphasizes the need to balance various forces- for example body, mind, and context, all of which are considered

> interdependent. (p.321)

Correlated with these worldviews are the philosophies of individualism and collectivism, respectively. The authors describe individualism as having an emphasis on personal autonomy and collectivism as being associated with group loyalty and interdependence. Therapists must understand these differences in philosophies of life when considering women's choices and recommending interventions. If a woman does not feel understood she will not be motivated to share her story or seek out support. White therapists must not take for granted "take-control" methods of coping, e.g. pressing charges, seeking counseling, talking directly to the family, which may not be considered by women of minority cultures. While these methods are often effective for the White middle-to-upper class communities, they may not be beneficial to women of minority backgrounds, as (a) the police may not respect or listen to a woman from a minority culture, (b) there will likely be few resources available to her for financial support, and (c) her family and community may identify her as disloyal (Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004).

Almeida et al. (1994) criticize traditional family therapy theory as tending to focus primarily on the private oppression of white women and to "ignore the more public forms of abuse that contribute to domestic violence in the racially different or sexually different" (p. 103). As a result, they assert that the traditional interventions within family therapy theory fail to address the greater complexities that surround women of color and other communities due to the context of not just gender oppression, but also: racism, colonialization, classism, heterosexism, and homophobia. They state:

> Lastly, while the public illumination of private lives has proven to be powerful experience of empowerment for white women trapped by intimate violence, it is

> less useful in authorizing the lives of heterosexuals of color and homosexuals of all races. The largely heterosexual public offers "legitimized" safety for the white heterosexual women in a domestic violence situation...For her, the public world is less ambiguous. For heterosexuals of color and homosexuals, however, transforming the private to public, making the *invisible visible*, means confronting various public oppression and privileges, while simultaneously relocating the dimensions of power and control. (p.122)

These authors insist, "To succeed in altering patterns of violence among intimates, we cannot attend exclusively to their private experience. Recognizing the degree to which experiences of oppression toward men and women of color, gays, and lesbians normalize public violence is critical to eliminating violence within family life" (p.122).

Additional theorists also argue that intervention should take place within the larger community and take into account those factors that are contributing to the higher rates of intimate partner violence in minority communities. Field & Caetano (2004) believe that the scope needs to be larger, e.g. at the governmental level. They stress that policies targeted toward reducing poverty and promoting social cohesion and organization in minority communities will be effective in combating intimate partner violence. Sokoloff & DuPont (2005) believe that strategies to reduce violence *within* communities, i.e. domestic violence, must be linked with strategies that are targeted to reduce violence *against* communities, i.e. police brutality, prisons, racism, etc. They stress, "One without the other is inadequate; for battered women on the margins of society, the two are intimately connected" (p.52).

Future Research

Literature is beginning to emerge on the reasons why female survivors of intimate partner violence leave abusive relationships. However, due to the enormity of this societal epidemic, it is imperative that this research continue. The majority of studies that have been conducted on the process of leaving have entailed a qualitative research approach, involving in-depth interviews with individuals and focus groups, in order to collect first-hand data from female survivors themselves about their experiences with intimate partner violence. The grounded theory approach, employed in the current study, focuses "on portraying the range of influences on human action and the process of change in response to context" (Kearney, 1991, p.271).This type of approach is well-suited to the study of intimate partner violence as the complexities of the relationship and the intersectionalities of gender, sex, race, and culture involve detailed analysis for understanding. Future studies should continue to employ a qualitative approach in order to continue to grasp an understanding of the intricacies of the relationships and the multiple factors that contribute to the difficult process of leaving. We must continue to view these women as the experts and learn from their experiences.

However, as previously noted, the degree to which participants can consciously process all of their motivations and conflicts is hindered by psychic defenses at play. A study involving projectives, designed to elicit conflicts between staying and leaving may provide additional insight into the complicated dilemma. Interviews with women at varying stages of their recoveries, i.e. immediately following their leaving, one year after they have left, etc., may also elicit differences in their recollections and their understandings of the conflicts and the motivations that enabled them to leave.

While this study is the first to capture descriptions of women's final moments in abusive relationships and the psychological shifts in perception that enabled them to leave, it was conducted on only a small sample of women. The results of this study need to be tested among a larger group of women in order to investigate the applicability to the general population. Once a number of shifts in perception are identified, it may be worthwhile to conduct a Q-sort methodology in order to identify the hierarchy of these shifts within the decision to leave.

In addition, the women interviewed for the current study were primarily from a specific sub-group, namely, urban women of color and low socioeconomic class who found respite in a domestic violence shelter. As has been discussed, cultural factors play a significant role in a woman's experience of intimate partner violence and the conflicts that she faces in the decision to leave. Therefore this type of study must be conducted with women from varying racial, class and cultural backgrounds. The results across these sub-groups can then be compared to identify similarities and differences. As stated by Carlson (2005):

> We have known for some time that culture matters when trauma is concerned; however, we need to fine-tune our knowledge of how culture matters in the definition of what is experienced as traumatic or abusive as well as the processes through which traumatic events are experienced and either accommodated or not." (p.123)

Added to this notion must be a fine-tuned knowledge of how multicultural factors play a role in a woman's decision to stay or leave. Kanuha (1996) is particularly critical of the inappropriate use of generalizations, stating, "The suggestion that domestic violence

affects ‘every person, across race, class, nationality, and religious lines’ equally is not only a token attempt at inclusion of diverse perspectives but also evidence of sloppy research and theory building” (p.40, cited in Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005, p.41).

Due to the higher rates of intimate partner violence within minority communities and the greater risk of harm to the women in these communities, due to racism, classism and other oppressive forces, several researchers emphasize the need for focused research within this domain. Field and Caetano (2004) stress:

> Further studies are needed to determine why the prevalence of IPV varies significantly among different racial and ethnic groups. The available evidence suggests that it is important to take ethnic differences into account, and continued investigation is required to help explain why these differences emerge and what approaches might be helpful for reducing the increased risk seen among ethnic minority groups. These studies should further investigate the impact of individual-level risk factors, including alcohol and sociodemographic characteristics, as well as community-level risk factors, such as neighborhood characteristics. (p.314)

West (2004) and Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger (2004) also reference the importance of within-group differences within minority communities. West (2004) includes in her argument the need to investigate the impact of social and economic class, age, relationship status, religious affiliation, and other factors on rates of domestic violence within minority communities. Kasturirangan et al. (2004) emphasize that “researchers must begin to accept the heterogeneity of groups who have been artificially lumped into designated racial/ethnic categorizations” (p.330).

In addition to this research, West (2004) emphasizes the need to compare and

contrast patterns in intimate partner violence across race and ethnicity:

> …we now know that violence in ethnically diverse families is very similar and, at times, vastly different from the violence experienced by their white counterparts. However, our work is not complete. The next research challenge is to investigate racial similarities without negating the experiences of people of color, while simultaneously highlighting racial differences without perpetuating stereotypes about the inherent violence of some ethnic groups. (p.1491-1492)

Sokoloff and Dupont (2004) also stress the importance of research in both individual and cross-cultural analyses. They warn:

> …for scholarship on domestic violence to remain emancipatory, it must emphasize both individual and structural analyses of race, class, and gender inequality and marginalization in culturally diverse communities. In this way, the pursuit of both equality and safety is more possible in battered women's daily struggles for survival for themselves, their children, the men in their lives, and their communities (p.60)

They also warn researchers about the tendency to present the role of culture in domestic violence as a negative one, and stress that the cultural practices and beliefs that serve to protect female survivors must be recognized as well.

Concluding Statement

The amount of research that remains before we can fully address the complexities of intimate partner violence is overwhelming. However each personal story that is shared by a female survivor has value and contributes to our knowledge and understanding. Through my research, I was struck by the richness of each participant's story and her

willingness to share such intimate and painful details of her life. The participants' abilities to share their stories opened up for me a new understanding of domestic violence and the subtle, insidious ways in which abuse creeps into a relationship and harms all of those involved. It was remarkable to witness with each additional interview the emergence of distinct patterns of abuse and its impact on all of those involved, despite the unique histories and qualities inherent in each relationship. Further, the participants' willingness to reflect upon their experiences provided, for the first time, illuminating data on the psychological shifts in perception that enabled them to leave their abusive relationships. This can in turn be used to benefit other women and their children.

During my time at the shelter, I was continuously inspired and moved by the strength and determination that the women possessed. They demonstrated immense courage in their devotion to create better lives for themselves and their children, despite the constant struggles that they faced everyday, including housing, unemployment, fears, childcare, etc. In addition to the research regarding the intricacies and conflicts within abusive relationships, we must also identify more effective ways to support survivors after they have left their relationships. In our methods of research, we must continue to look to the women who have lived and survived intimate partner violence for knowledge, guidance and inspiration. Hopefully further research will empower more women to leave abusive relationships and, more importantly, leave earlier before the abuse is able to have an even greater impact the women and their children. Further research will also hopefully guide us in providing the necessary provisions and supports that will enable survivors to continue in their courageous steps toward independence.

Appendix A. The Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Information About You

1. Current relationship status (Please check all that apply): ____Single

   Have a Boyfriend: ____Not living together ____Living together

   Have a Girlfriend: ____Not living together ____Living together

   ____Married ____Separated ____Divorced ____Widowed

   a. If married or living together, for how long: _____
   b. If separated or divorced, for how long: _____
   c. If widowed, for how long: _____
   d. Number of previous marriages: _____

2. Date of birth: _____ 3. Sex: ____Male ____Female

4. Place of birth: _____
   City State Country

5. Country of citizenship: _____

6. Education: ____Grade school ____Some high school ____High school grad/GED
   ____Some college ____College grad ____Some grad school ____Grad school grad

7. Religious affiliation: _____ Active? ____Yes ____No

8. Ethnicity: ____Asian or Pacific Islander ____Black ____Hispanic ____Native
   American ____White ____Other:_____

9. Primary language? ____ English ____Spanish ____Creole ____French ____ Other

10. Date left last permanent residence? _____

11. Date first entered shelter system? _____

12. Date entered Bronx HELP-Harbor? _____

13. For how many years and/or months total have you worked since you were18? (Please do not count time in which you were not employed between jobs) _____

14. Are you currently employed? ____Yes ____No

If yes, start date? _____ Where? _____

Hours/week? _____ Hourly wage? _____ Medical benefits? ____ Yes ____No

If no, date of last employment? _____

Are you currently interested in obtaining employment? ____Yes ____No

15. Are there any current barriers that you believe might prevent you from working or finding employment? ____Yes ____No

If yes, which of the following? ____Childcare issues ____Substance abuse

____Lack of work skills ____Physical health or disability ____Mental illness

____English deficiency ____Domestic violence ____ Felony Conviction

____On Probation or Parole Other: _____

16. What do you consider to be your most positive qualities and strengths as a person?_____

_____

Appendix B. The Interview

HELP-Harbor Families and Employment Interview

NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: Instructions to you are bolded. All other sentences are questions to ask interview participants.

Begin by providing the interviewee with an overview of what to expect, for example, "We are going to first spend some time talking about how you came to live at HELP harbor and about the relationship that brought you here. Then we will talk a bit about your employment history and your family…" NOTE: Do not mention the topic of 'time' in the overview. We do not want to influence their responses to questions that are raised prior to the time section.

ADULT QUESTIONS

1. First, before we talk about your experiences with work, we wanted to ask: How did you come to live at Help Harbor?
   Inquire about the steps that she took to come to the shelter, e.g. EAU to other shelter to Harbor: (Be sure to get the dates of when she left her batterer, entered the system- typically starting at the EAU/tier 1, and came to the shelter.)

   I am interested in hearing a little bit more about your relationship with _____ **(find out how interviewee would like to refer to her ex-partner)**, how did you two first meet?

   What first attracted you to him? What do you think attracted him to you?

   Thinking back, before the intimidation or violence began, how would you have described _____ back then? How would you have described yourself?

   Where did your relationship go from there?
   Probe for *both* positive and negative associations and episodes/ memories.

   Thinking about the first time or times that he was violent or intimidating with you,
   What did you think and feel?
   How did it affect your feelings and thoughts about _____, if at all?
   How did it affect your feelings and thoughts about yourself, if at all?
   Did it lead you to think about leaving?
   If yes, what was it that led you to think about that?

If no, remembering the 1st time that you thought about leaving, what was it that led you to think about it that time? **Probe for what made this time different from other times.**

Was there a final event that led you to leave?
If yes, tell me about that event.
If no, what happened that enabled you to leave?

Describe in as much detail as you can what you see as you remember.
Probe for setting, his/her own facial expressions, what wearing, etc. Really work for visual image/ picture.

What made this moment/ time different from the others?
Probe for emotional, cognitive and relational shifts.
Probing questions:

In what ways, if any, did your perceptions (thinking) about your relationship with _____ change?
In what ways, if any, did your perceptions (thinking) of _____ change?
In what ways, if any, did your perceptions (thinking) of yourself change?

In what ways, if any, did your feelings about your relationship with _____ change?
In what ways, if any, did your feelings about _____ change?
In what ways, if any, did your feelings about yourself change?

What allowed you or helped you to leave at that time?

Putting yourself back in that moment, what were your thoughts about outside systems or services that were available to you and your feelings about whether they'd be able to help you? **Probe for thoughts/ experiences with legal services, police, social services, medical services, welfare, etc.** What messages did you receive them, if any? Did you know what was available to you?

Thinking about your experience with _____ from beginning to end, how would you describe him now?
How would you describe yourself now?

Does your spouse remind you of anybody?
Does your spouse remind you of anybody in your family?

Does your relationship with _____ remind you of any other relationship?
Does your relationship remind you of any relationship in your family?

What personal strengths and resources in yourself and/or from relationships with others did you use to leave?

Appendix C. Tables

Table 1. The Initial Meeting

Family introduced
Friends introduced
Through school
Through work
Lived in same building
Coincidental meeting
Chat-line
Hung out in same neighborhood

Table 2. Initial Impression of Partner

Never liked him
Pitied him
Strong negative feelings toward him
Didn't want to get involved with someone *like* him
Weak
Partner dealt drugs
He had a sweet personality
Thought he was a good person
Good interpersonal skills
Bad personality
Womanizer
Crazy in a good way
He was shy
Cool

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 3. Participants' First Attraction to Partners

Pity
No physical attraction
Treated subject well
Substituted for inadequate love from family
His Looks/ physicality
He had a nice/ sweet personality
Subject and partner had fun together
Subject thought partner was "the finest thing on the planet"
Made subject feel comfortable
Partner just like subject (in personality)
Made subject feel good about herself
Shy personality
A lot of fun
He was caring
Good listener

Table 4. Partners' First Attraction to Participants

Subject found question difficult to answer
General comment about her own low self-esteem
Self-deprecating laughter
Made joke
Subject's looks/physicality
Subject minimized quality that partner was attracted to
Way subject "carried herself"
Viewed subject as a good person
After Probe: Saw me as caregiver/ maternal figure
After Probe: Saw me as someone he could manipulate
After Probe: Partner unable to see others' positive qualities b/c only focused on how to use/ manipulate them
After Probe: Physicality
After Probe: Beyond physical, partner saw inner strengths
After Probe: Her friendship
After Probe: Viewed subject as good person

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 5. Description of Partner at Beginning of Relationship

Pushy
Took advantage/ used me
Like a son (to subject)
"Sent from God"
Generally positive description
Listened to subject
First person to make subject feel worthwhile
Took subject places
Provided financial support
Bought her gifts
Heroic figure
He was Perfect
Positive physical description
Nice as long as subject was compliant/or wasn't upset
Controlling
Good interpersonal skills
Made subject feel good about herself
Caring/ Loving
Hardworking
"Wasn't so crazy"
Womanizer
Crazy in a good way
Quiet
Gave subject a lot of say in relationship
Had an attitude
Explosive
Helpful
Accepting of fact that subject had a child
Provided things that subject didn't have before
Loved the kids
Nothing bad about him
Fun

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 6. Description of Self at Beginning of Relationship

Feeling positive about own life
Saw potential for becoming someone/something
Difficulty asserting herself
Intelligent
Allowed actions to be easily detoured by others
Compliant in order to keep relationship in tact
Subject's sympathetic nature caused her to be tolerant
Thought of self as mature
Shy
Loving
Friendly
Relaxed
Self-confident
High self-esteem
Wild/ Partier
Liked to go out
Spontaneous
Out-going
Had a lot of friends
Same as now
Low self-esteem
Wonderful
Physically damaged
Too nice
Lonely when they met
Thought possessive type behaviors were cute

Table 7. The Onset of Abuse

After a few months
From the beginning
During pregnancy
Really escalated after got engaged
Really escalated during pregnancy
Within a year
After 1 ½ years
When moved in together
After sub moved farther from partner
Many years into relationship
Soon after child was born

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 8. Shifts in Perceptions regarding Partner after Initial Abuse

Subject felt "disgust" for partner
Subject felt partner had changed dramatically
Felt like she couldn't get anything better than partner
Loved and hated him simultaneously
Became afraid of him
No change
Felt angry with him
Lost trust

Table 9. Shifts in Perceptions regarding Self after Initial Abuse

General negative description
Blamed self for abuse
Diminished self-confidence
Diminished self-esteem
No change

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 10. Description of Partner after Onset of Abuse

Drank a lot
Flirtatious with other women
Beat her frequently
Partner unable to see other's positive qualities b/c only focused on how to use/ manipulate them
Partner scared subject
Partner's power enabled him to control subject
Took advantage of subject's weaknesses
Partner started lying to others, including authorities
Partner's persona would abruptly shift in the moment, e.g. abusive to "normal"
Moody (perhaps can be grouped above)
Partner needed to abuse her to feel good
Partner became different person in relationship
Negative description about general character
Gang member/ Involved in street violence
Partner was/became possessive/ controlling
Partner became more aggressive
Needed to dominate and have subject dependent on him
Partner put his own needs before subject's children
Partner constantly complaining about subject's perceived inadequacies/ involvement in relationship
Jealous
Would take out aggression on others
Accused subject of cheating
Never/ hardly worked
Partner did not accept subject questioning him about decisions/ actions, etc.
Changed so fast (when abuse began)
Due to pregnancy, partner thought he owned subject
Accused fetus/child of not being his
Partner lied to subject

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 11. Description of Self after Onset of Abuse

Confused sense of self due to history of abuse and oppression
Unable to predict imminent abuse as others were able to
No self-esteem
Believed verbal criticisms & degradations
Would speculate about what self-attributes caused or deserved abuse
Not able to assert herself
Initially not afraid of partner
Subject took efforts to hide abuse from others
Subject describes herself as an "animal"
Aggressive/ violent herself
Others feared her
General negative description
Not having a life for herself
Felt trapped
Felt as if "walking on eggshells"
Waiting around for him to call/ make decisions
Cried a lot
In retrospect, considers herself to have been a fool
In retrospect, views herself as having been naïve
In retrospect doesn't know what she was thinking- should have left
Not afraid of partner

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 12. Types of abuse

Verbal
Emotional – decreased self-esteem
Put her life in danger
Cut her
Hit/ slapped her
Deprived her of food
Beat her in front of others
Beat her
Cheating on her
Physically abused subject while pregnant
Turned family against her
Controlled who she was allowed to see/ interact with
Choked her
Controlled how to parent children
Controlled where she could go
Punched her
Threw subject down a flight of stairs
Burned subject
Deprived subject of access to personal property
Deprived step-children of access to personal property
Stalking her
Threatening her life
Threatening her family's life
Used subject
Kept subject from going to school
Pushed her
Partner allowed his own family to verbally abuse subject
Pulled Hair
Aggressed against objects
Partner would leave for days at a time
Raped subject
Allowed friends to rape subject

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 13. Reactions to the Abuse

Unable to predict imminent abuse as others were able
Became afraid of partner
More pained by verbal abuse than physical abuse
Believed verbal criticisms & degradations
Prayed
Accepted it
Unable to see way out
Would speculate about what self-attributes caused or deserved abuse/ Blamed self
(Became) Emotionally drained
Not able to call the police in the moment of abuse, but would question self later
Initially not afraid of partner
Subject avoided identifying partner's behavior as abusive
Withheld sex from partner
Instilled fear in partner
Physical aggression
Subject used partner back
Subject was deceitful to partner
Subject thought of abuse as minor/ not so bad
Had aggressive fantasies against partner
Had partner arrested
Felt as if "walking on eggshells"
Threatened partner with weapon
Somewhat able to decrease partner's physical abuse with threats of having partner arrested
Stopped arguing/ fighting back
Ignored it
Didn't take it seriously

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 14. Factors that Put Self at Risk of Abuse

Ideas about why not assertive: Believes not assertive b/c was punished as child for not being nice
Inexperience in intimate relationships made her vulnerable
Fear of men made her vulnerable
Sees self as easy target
Low self-esteem
Subject's wish to hide financial problems from family pushed her to turn to partner
Subject surprised that she got involved in an abusive relationship
Subject's desire to keep relationship/ family in tact caused her to tolerate partner's Dominance
Subject was young (implying naïve)
Subject's sympathetic nature caused her to be tolerant
Fear of losing partner/ being alone
In retrospect views self as having been naïve
In a vulnerable position financially
In vulnerable position emotionally
Stayed in relationship because it was familiar and comfortable.

Table 15. Factors that Made Partner Susceptible to Being Abusive

Inability to manage emotions
Stress caused partner to abuse
Abusive/ controlling behavior is part of his personality
Control freak
Once he got a taste of control, he couldn't give it up

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 16. Influence of Family of Origin

Abuse and rejection by FOO caused subject to be more responsive to partner's attention and Encouragement
Family's abuse influenced partner's viewing subject as target of abuse
Abused throughout childhood and adulthood by FOO
Experience of abuse was normalized by FOO
Long term abuse by FOO caused her to feel that she had no power to change her situation
Family sided with partner
Noted similarity between both family and partner needing to abuse subject in order to feel Good
Hard to find self-worth due to long history of abuse
Subject had witnessed male family member physically abuse women when young
Subject's knowledge and witnessing of family member's violence normalized violent behavior for subject
Subject's witnessing verbal abuse thatmother sustained during childhood determined subject to not ever allow a man to *verbally* abuse her
Parents giving up on subject as a teenager led subject to feel that partner was only family and only person to live with
Taught by mother-in-law that the woman should stand by the man regardless of abuse
Encouraged by in-laws that men can change
In-laws would tell subject after abuse, how much partner cared for her
Sibling in-law warned subject about partner, which led subject to leave

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 17. Reasons Why Stayed

No one else to make her to feel good about herself (despite abuse)
Not able to leave for self
Low self-esteem/ Not worthy enough to leave
Not able to assert herself
Long term abuse by FOO caused her to feel that she had no power to change her situation
Unable to see way out
Partner wouldn't let her leave
Accepted it
Emotionally drained
No financial means
Didn't want family to find out
Maintained hope that he would change/ that it would get better
Felt self was partially to blame for abuse
Afraid of partner's reaction to her leaving, e.g. that he would become violent
Subject was pregnant
Subject felt sorry for partner
Different parts of subject telling her to do different things in terms of staying/leaving
Subject's need to stay in close proximity to family prevented her from leaving area and leaving Partner
Didn't want to go into shelter
Subject doubted that she could make it on her own
Wanted to keep children with the father/ Not wanting to break up family
Relationship felt comfortable to subject due to familiarity and length of relationship
Felt had no where else to go
Too attached/ in love to leave
Because she was married to him (Stand by your man)
Normalized abuse
Minimized abuse
Fear of being alone/ raising kids by herself
Afraid brothers/ex-partner would go after subject when found out

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 18. First Thoughts about Leaving

Always thought about leaving partner
Partner brought his street violence into the house (first time)
Partner threatened subject's friend's life (first time)
After first episode of violence
When subject had her baby
When subject was pregnant
Partner tried to kill her
After a significant escalation in violence
First time thought about leaving is when she left
When *subject* cheated on partner

Table 19. What was Different about Final Moment

Sudden realization that partner might get away with lies
Act of violence demonstrated to subject that partner in no way cared for her
Act of violence demonstrated to subject that partner did not care for their unborn child
Subject worried about own psychological state
Subject discovered that partner was cheating on her
Threatened to kill subject
Partner hit subject for first time (previously he was verbally abusive)
Concerned about impact on child
Children's response to parental violence
Escalation in violence

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 20. Reasons why left

Not because of physical abuse
Afraid going to lose children
Afraid of impact of witnessing violence on children
Partner started lying to others, including authorities
Didn't want kids exposed to violence anymore
Didn't want kids living in bad living conditions anymore
Couldn't take it any longer
Act of violence demonstrated to subject that partner in no way cared for her
Act of violence demonstrated to subject that partner did not care for their unborn child
Subject worried about own psychological state
(related to above) – Thought might hurt partner
Thoughts about self caused subject to realize it had gone too far and that she had to leave in order to save herself
Partner was not sympathetic of subject needs
Partner was not useful/ worthy of keeping around
Felt there was nothing more she could do to for relationship/ Developed sense of resignation
Found out partner was cheating on her
Fearing her own and family's safety
Others' actions/ words caused her to leave

Table 21. Shifts in Perceptions of Partner that Enabled Women to Leave

No change
Saw him as very different
Act of violence demonstrated to subject that partner in no way cared for her
Able to see partner and his treatment of subject more objectively
Subject realized that partner was not invested in relationship in the same was that she was
Thought partner was crazy
Saw him as controlling
Saw him as untrusting/ jealous
"Saw his true colors"
No longer trusted him
Couldn't stand him
No longer cared about him
Wouldn't care if he died
Subject became scared of partner

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 22. Shifts in Perceptions of Self that Enabled Women to Leave

No change
Subject realized that she needed to love and treat self better
Gave subject strength
Gained new understanding of herself in relationship- which was negative
Felt bad for herself
No longer willing to allow self to be treated like a caged animal
Felt like going crazy
Felt like she needed to become more alert
Wondered how she could have been so naïve

Table 23. Shifts in Perceptions of Relationship that Enabled Women to Leave

Partner's behavior indicated to subject that relationship wasn't as mature and committed as she believed
Knew it was over
Wanted out
Realized still loved partner, but that relationship couldn't be sustained

Table 24. How Participants Left

Confided in government/ community worker outside DV support system
Slept on the street
Left and returned to partner in order to wait for available shelter
Actively called resources for shelter
Did not follow original plans
Left in the middle of the night
Waited until next morning
Went to family member's house
Went to friends
Sought out lawyer for OP and divorce
Called/ Went to police
Took money from joint account/ Went shopping

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 25. Thoughts about Outside Systems and Supports

Felt there was no one to help her
Fear of authorities
Afraid of conditions at shelter
Used police as means to stop violence and to threaten partner, not to have him arrested.
Knew of services but didn't think she needed them
Knew of services but didn't want to use them
Felt like guinea pig for counselors
Criminal law community encouraged subject's tolerance/compliance within violent relationship
Nothing adequate available in native country
Services have helped/ thought services would help
Didn't know about services
Feared calling cops would worsen situation
Police were no help
Didn't think about them until she needed them- knew they were available
Didn't want to involve police (couldn't hear why)

Table 26. Description of Partner in Light of All that has Happened

Negative description
Selfish
His character has changed significantly
Described partner as engaging in corrupt behavior
Deserves no respect
Abuse is cyclical
Only good as friend, not as husband
Does have a good side
Less of a man
Recognizes that partner won't ever change
Partner's inability to change prevents the relationship from being able to work
Believes he is depressed
Assumes accountability for nothing- blames others for everything
No self-esteem
Controlling/ jealous
Believes partner forced subject to have babies in order to tie her down
Feels like he fooled her

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 27. Description of Self in Light of All that has Happened

Subject's role/being was determined by partner's needs
Subject hates men
Not able to find hope in future
I don't know yet
Still suffering from abuse
Still suffering from abuse, though feels shouldn't be
Frustration from feeling trapped by pain from abuse
Wanting new experiences in life
Hesitant to become involved in future relationship with male partner
Confident/ determined that she will not return to partner
Assured that she can take care of herself now
Sees self as a person of many wonders
Sees self as a person that has experienced a great deal
Sees self as a person who is stronger
Sees self as a person who knows herself
Determined to not be in abusive relationship again
Feels better
Better able to cope with stress
Enjoys doing things for herself now/ new sense of independence
Subject still blames self for relationship not working
Subject's view of self still negatively influenced by experience of abuse
Increased self-esteem/ self-confidence
Suffering from low self-esteem
Still in love with partner
Doing more now than she ever did with him
Doesn't do drugs anymore
No longer allows people to control her
Has dreams for future
Stressed out by being single parent
General negative description
Hopeful
Life is now entirely different
Knows more about life
Lost touch with a lot of her friends/ fewer friendships
Less of a social life

Appendix C. Tables (Continued)

Table 28. Similarities between Partner and Others

Don't know
No
Sisters
Subject's Mother
Subject's Brother
Mother's past boyfriend
Uncle
Partner's mother
Subject's father

Table 29. Similarities between Relationship and Others

No
Friend's relationship
Family relationship

Table 30. Personal Strengths and Resources that Enabled Women to Leave

Believes she deserves better
Having the shelter as a resource
Believes children deserve better/ Left for children
Children – give strength/inspiration
Desire to protect children
Couldn't take it any longer
Fact that subject wasn't in love with partner made it less difficult to leave
Wanted more
Fact that subject didn't have children by partner made it less difficult to leave
Strength of family member's words
Thoughts about self caused subject to realize it had gone too far and that she had to leave in order to save herself
Subject's Family
But, Questioned decision particularly b/c others questioned it
Partner's family
Benefits after having left reinforced her belief that decision was right
Friend
Fear of partner
Afraid that situation could be worse if others found out about abuse
Having life flash before her eyes motivated her
Felt like hurting him and not willing to go to jail for him
Angry feelings
Felt she had done everything she could in relationship

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