Women's Accounts of Abuse in Their Intimate Relationships

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master's of Science

in

Family and Child Development

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September, 1994
Blacksburg, Virginia

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(ABSTRACT)

The majority of research on wife abuse and dating violence neglects women's personal experiences and focuses on the extent and nature of physical abuse. Feminist researchers, however, stress the significance of both recognizing women's voices and acknowledging all forms of abuse against women. The purpose of this study was to enhance the understanding of women's personal experiences of being in an abusive, heterosexual relationship by asking women to write narratives describing their experiences.

Nine women, between the ages of 27 and 46 years and who had left their abuser, participated in this study. The relationships had become abusive within 2 weeks to 2 years of their beginning, though most became abusive within several months and one was always abusive. All but one of the women reported receiving help in leaving the relationship.

The themes that arose from the stories are important because they indicate what these abused women deem important or relevant to their experiences. While valuable, much of past research has neglected to focus on what abused women deem significant. The five themes that emerged from their stories are abusive aspects of relationships, characteristics of the abuser, respondents' reactions to abuse, abuse as a private act, and support and advice.

All of the women who participated were abused but they were not abused in the same way, nor did they perceive their abusive relationship in the same way. These narratives show the human side of abuse against women and compliment the statistics that signify the frequency of this abuse.

Acknowledgements

There are many people I wish to thank for helping me through the process of completing this study. I thank my committee members, Joyce Arditti and Sandi Stith, for their support and great suggestions that helped make this a better study. I thank my committee chair, Rosemary Blieszner, for her support, advice, and friendship. I thank my first feline muse committee member (as she likes to be called), Ann Weber, for making me laugh and for answering my questions. All of my committee members were available throughout this study and I greatly appreciate their help.

Thanks to Renee for always telling me I would pass; to Carol for going to the library with me; to Joni for telling me I could do this; to Brenda for keeping me somewhat sane; and to Jan, Troy, Susan, Katherine, Jim, Phyllis, Pam, Liz, and Toni for their constant support. I thank all of the kids in my life for giving me a break and for making me laugh. I especially thank Dawn, who went through this grueling process with me and who fully appreciates the art of procrastination. I didn't think we would ever finish, but here we are. A million thanks to my cats, Ellie and Billie, and to Dawn's cat, Lawrence, for providing hours of entertainment. Ellie and Billie kept me going in the wee hours of the morning and made many valuable suggestions to this study. Also thanks to Ann's cats, Nervie and Lucy, for providing funny stories for her to tell me.

Most importantly, I thank the women who participated in this study. It took a great deal of courage for them to share their stories and without them, this study would not have existed.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

WOMEN'S ACCOUNTS OF ABUSE IN THEIR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Researchers in the areas of wife abuse and dating violence have studied outcomes of violence (Brush, 1990), rationalization techniques of abused women (Ferraro & Johnson, 1989), sex role attitudes (Crossman, Stith, & Bender, 1990; Finn, 1986), alcohol abuse (Kantor & Straus, 1987), religiosity (Brinkerhoff, Grandin, & Lupri, 1992), patriarchal ideology (Smith, 1990), self defense (Saunders, 1986), and coping strategies of women (Bird, Stith, & Schladale, 1991; Harvey, Orbuch, Chwalisz, & Garwood, 1991). With only a few exceptions (see for example Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Emery & Lloyd, 1994; Kelly, 1988) the majority of research in this area neglects women's personal experiences. Studies tend to focus on quantitative analyses of the extent and nature of abuse and specify physical abuse, that is, who hit whom, how hard they were hit, and how often they were hit. Sexual abuse is often not explored, when in fact, some researchers have found rates of marital rape are higher than both stranger and nonstranger rape (Kelly, 1988). Further, Stets (1990) reported that there is little research on verbal aggression, although she found that almost everyone in her study who was physically abused was also verbally abused. Clearly, the realm of couple violence includes more than just physical abuse.

Feminist researchers stress the significance of both recognizing women's voices and acknowledging all forms of abuse against women (Kelly, 1988; Stanko, 1985; Yllö & Bograd, 1988). Kelly (1988) asserted that the difference between

"feminist research practice" and other forms of research are "the questions we have asked, the way we locate ourselves within our questions, and the purpose of our work" (p. 6). Previous work on wife abuse and dating violence has been dominated by the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS), developed by Murray Straus (1979) (For examples, see Gelles, 1988; Gelles & Harrop, 1989; Kandel-Englander, 1992; Stets, 1990; Straus & Sweet, 1992; Williams, 1992). The CTS examines ways families deal with various conflicts between family members (such as between husband and wife or parent and child). The scales focus on the use of rational discussion and agreement, the use of verbal or nonverbal hostility, and the use of physical force or violence in settling conflicts. Questions are asked in the context of an argument or disagreement and respondents rank each behavior according the number of times they have used this behavior (Gelles & Straus, 1988).

Such widespread reliance on the CTS is problematic from a feminist perspective because it ignores the context of the abuse, it ignores the outcomes of the abuse, it does not measure sexual abuse at all, it measures minimal aspects of psychological or emotional abuse, it ignores self-defense, it ignores verbal abuse, and it combines threats of violence, actual violence, and attempted violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Kurz, 1989; Shepard & Campbell, 1992).

The purpose of this study is to enhance the understanding of women's experience in abusive intimate relationships. Women were asked to write their own

stories or accounts about being in a destructive[1] relationship. Based on my experience as a Crisis Intervention Volunteer at a shelter for abused women, I expected that women would report a wider array of abusive behaviors than the CTS indicates. Women's real life experiences of abuse often encompass more than just physical abuse. For this reason, I did not define what is meant by a "destructive" relationship. Women who participated in this study used their own definitions.

Significance of the Study

There is no doubt about the prevalence of woman abuse in this society. One-fifth to one-half of women in emergency rooms are there because they have been battered (Campbell & Sheridan, 1989) and half of all women involved in dating relationships are victimized by their dating partners (Lloyd, 1991). Walker (1979) found 30% to 60% of wife abuse also involves sexual abuse and Finkelhor and Yllö (1985) reported that half of the women in their study had been sexually assaulted by their male partner 20 times or more. A study of college women found that more were raped by a dating partner than by a stranger (Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988). NiCarthy (1986) reported that emotional abuse was common in almost all instances of physical assault and Barnett and LaViolette (1993) cautioned that emotional abuse is often overlooked as a form of abuse because it does not produce visible signs of injury. Negative effects of violence include vulnerability and fear, nightmares, insecurity, loss of safety, distrust of men, self-blame, loss

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[1] The term "destructive" was used instead of abusive because abusive connotates physically abusive. My goal was to elicit a wide range of "abusive" relationships, so I used a more general term when locating participants. The two terms are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

of self-respect, and suicide attempts (Kelly, 1988). It is important in terms of women's psychological and physical well-being for them to be able to tell their stories and be believed (Bass & Davis, 1992). Although numerous studies dealing with rates of abuse have been conducted, more research focusing on women's experiences of abuse is needed.

In this study, I generated themes or categories from women's narrative accounts of being in a destructive, intimate relationship with a man in order to get a fuller understanding of how they experience abuse. Bass and Thornton (1991) and McNaron and Morgan (1982) found that providing women an opportunity to write about their experiences of being sexually abused as children gave them a sense of empowerment and helped alert others to the seriousness of child sexual abuse. Kelly (1988) and Emery and Lloyd (1994) both found that the abused women they interviewed said that talking about their abusive situations validated their experiences and helped them understand that they are not alone. In this study, women's lived experiences were explored with women as the authority on their own lives; women were asked to write from their perspective, using their own words. Relying on actual experience rather than strictly on statistical analysis provides a complementary view of what researchers and society already know about abusive relationships.

Chapter II

Literature Review

This chapter incorporates general research on violence against women, feminist research on violence against women, research on account-making and violence against women, and feminist methods. The latter three areas are the focus because of their direct relevance to the lack of understanding of women's personal experiences in violent relationships. Feminist researchers focus on women's experiences and stress the importance of giving women an opportunity to tell their story. Account-making is complimentary to this research in that it stresses meaning and understanding of events. Accounts are people's story-like constructions of reality and combined with feminist research provide a remarkable means to understanding women's reality of being in an abusive relationship. Feminist methods provide the passageway to find this reality. Before embarking on the research areas mentioned above, I will give a brief synopsis of other important findings on violence against women.

General Research on Violence Against Women

Past research on violence against women has covered many areas; researchers using both quantitative and qualitative methods have studied violence from many different perspectives. However, regardless of the methodology or theoretical underpinning, most of the research has contributed greatly to better understanding this form of violence. What follows is a summary of previous research on violence against women, focusing on quantitative studies that enhance the understanding of the environment surrounding and possible reasons behind abuse.

Attributions. Cantos, Neidig, and O'Leary (1993) studied the attributions 139 military couples, mandated by the military police for domestic violence treatment, made about violence in their marriage. They were asked two questions about the first violent episode and the latest violent episode in their relationship: (a) do they blame themselves for the violence and (b) do they blame their partner for the violence? Participants were also asked about the extent of injury received during the latest violent episode, about marital adjustment, and about their attributions for blame.

The researchers found that in most of the couples both husband and wife used physical agression, although women were more likely than men to receive injuries. Both spouses were more likely to blame each other than themselves for the first and latest violent episode, though husbands were more likely than wives to blame themselves for the latest violent episode and husbands were more likely to blame themselves for the latest episode than they were for the first.

Andrews and Brewin (1990) also examined attributions of responsibility in violent relationships. They used 70 women who had been in a violent marital relationship and who were part of a larger study in London. Women were interviewed about psychiatric disorders, life events and difficulties, childhood abuse, severity of marital violence, attributions of responsibility for marital violence, and social network involvement. Attribution of responsibility was measured by asking how far they blame themselves and how far they blame their husband for the violence. The women whose relationships were over were also asked if their attributions of blame had changed over time. Self blame decreased over time

for women no longer in the violent relationship and less than half of all of the women blamed themselves for the abuse. When women did blame themselves they were more likely to attribute the abuse to their behavior than to their character but when they blamed their husband, they were more likely to blame his character than behavior.

Patriarchal ideology. In Smith (1990), the researcher studied the relationship between patriarchal ideology and wife beating. Using random digit dialing to obtain the sample, his research assistants conducted 604 telephone interviews with currently or formally married or cohabitating women living in Toronto. They were asked questions about rates of wife abuse in their relationship, partner's patriarchal ideology, and their socioeconomic status. To measure wife beating, he used a slightly modified version of the CTS: interviewers asked follow-up questions anytime a woman gave an affirmative answer to questions about wife beating. Smith's reasoning was that the CTS alone gives no room for clarification about minor versus severe acts of violence. The example he used is the question asking if the respondent's partner ever slapped her. This is coded in the CTS as a minor form of violence, although there is a great difference, in terms of injury, between a slap that knocks a woman's teeth lose and one that causes no physical injury. Four women's descriptions of the abuse changed from minor acts of violence to severe acts of violence based on the follow-up questions.

Husband's patriarchal ideology was based on patriarchal beliefs and patriarchal attitudes. Questions asked included, "A man has the right to decide whether or not his wife/partner should work outside the home (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree)" and "Would your husband/partner approve

of a man slapping his wife if she won't do what he tells her to do (Yes, No, or Depends)." Socioeconomic status was obtained through questions about family income, husband's educational attainment, husband's occupational status, and husband's employment status.

Findings indicate that the greater the husband's adherence to patriarchal idealogy, the greater the chance of the wife being beaten. Additionally, men with lower income, less education, and in lower-status jobs were more likely to adhere to patriarchal ideology and were more likely to beat their wives.

Marital power. Colemen and Straus (1986) interviewed 2,143 cohabitating or married heterosexual couples about marital power, power norm consensus, marital conflict, and marital violence. The final sample comprised 1,183 women and 960 men. Marital power was measured using questions from the work of Blood and Wolfe (1960) and include the following: "Who has the final say" in making decisions about buying a car and having children. Responses were coded as male-dominant, female-dominant, equalitarian, and divided power.[2] Power norm consensus was measured by asking each member of the couple who *should* have the final say in making certain decisions, marital conflict was assessed through questions about how often the couple agreed on certain issues, and marital violence was assessed using the CTS.

Most of the couples were divided power, there was a high degree of power norm consensus, marital conflict was low, and 16% of couples experienced minor

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[2] Equalitarian couples make decisions jointly and divided power couples divide the decision-making process so that each person has responsibility for a different issue.

acts of violence. Male dominate couples had the highest rates of conflict and higher rates of conflict, in general, indicated higher rates of violence, although violence and the power structure of the relationship were unrelated.

Interpersonal behaviors of batterers. Allen, Calsyn, Fehrenbach, and Benton (1989) studied interpersonal behaviors of 100 male batterers in an anger management treatment program for physically assaulting their female partners. The researchers used the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation-Behavior Scale (FIRO-B) to assess interpersonal orientation. Based on scores from the FIRO-B, men were classified into three general categories (inclusion types, control types, and affection types) and nine specific categories (loner, some outgoingness, cautious, rebel, some responsibility/control, dependent, pessimist, some intimacy, and cautious intimacy). Questions measured *expressed* and *wanted* desires for inclusion, control, and affection. The scores for these men were compared to two normative samples of nonbatterers.

The batterers' mean scores were lower on expressed and wanted inclusion and affection, that is, they did not like to be around others and were hesitant about initiating intimate relationships. In the inclusion area, batterers were more likely to be "loners" or "cautious;" in the control area, they were more likely to be classified as "rebels;" and in the affection area, batterers were more likely to be classified as "pessimists" and less likely to be classified under "cautious intimacy." Overall, they were more likely to be less outgoing, less intimate, and more cautious and they were more likely to be classified under "loner," "rebel," and "pessimist" than the normative samples of nonbatterers.

Self defense. Fifty-two battered women participated in Saunder's (1986) study. He asked women associated with battered women's shelters and a counseling agency to complete a questionnaire dealing with their abusive behavior and their male partner's abusive behavior. A modified version of the CTS was used to assess relationship violence. Women answered questions about the frequency of minor and severe violent acts committed by themselves and by their partners. In order to assess the extent of self-defense, the researcher included three questions about motivation after the section on minor acts of violence and the section on severe acts of violence.

Most of the women had used some sort of nonsevere physical violence against their partners and very few women used the most severe forms of violence. Forty percent of the women who used severe violence and 30% of the women who used nonsevere violence indicated that it was in self defense. In general, most of the women who used any form of violence were either fighting back or acting in self defense.

Coping mechanisms. Herbert, Silver, and Ellard (1991) surveyed Ontario women who had been in an abusive relationship with a man. Abuse was defined as any violence or conflict in a relationship. Women were recruited through public service announcements and, if interested, were mailed a survey that mainly dealt with how they coped with being in an abusive relationship. One hundred and thirty-two women returned completed questionnaires. Survey questions measured psychosocial adjustment, positive aspects of their relationship, the use of downward comparisons, attributions for positive behaviors, negative changes in the relationship,

attributions for the abuse, frequency and severity of abuse, and past experience with violence.

Most of the participants had left their abuser, although 34.4% indicated they were still in the relationship. The women who remained in the relationship coped by using cognitive strategies to view the relationship in a positive manner. For these women, viewing the relationship in a positive light was unrelated to whether they had left their abuser in the past and to severity and frequency of moderate or severe physical abuse. Frequency of verbal abuse, however, decreased the likelihood of the woman viewing the relationship in a positive light. Surprisingly, there was no difference in psychosocial adjustment between the women still in the abusive relationship and the women who had left their abusive partner. Seventy-eight percent of all of the women experienced both physical and emotional abuse. "Of these, 76.7% felt that verbal/emotional abuse was either just as difficult or more difficult to deal with than physical abuse" (p. 318).

Psychological abuse. Kasian and Painter (1992) conducted a survey of 1,625 college students (868 female and 757 male) about psychological abuse in their current or most recent dating relationship. Students were asked questions assessing the positive and negative aspects of their relationship and the frequency they occurred. One hundred and seventy-nine students returned incomplete questionnaires and their data were not included in the analysis. Researchers found that, in general, women reported more positive and less abusive behaviors than men, although women in formally committed relationships reported more abusive behavior than men. In addition, psychologically abusive behavior tended to lower

relationship satisfaction but dissolution of the relationship was attributed more to the absence of positive behaviors than to the presence of negative behaviors. The authors maintain that "it could be hypothesized that the presence of positive behaviors maintains a relationship regardless of the level of negative experiences" (p. 361). Therefore, women in abusive relationships may continue to stay with their abuser as long as there are some positive aspects of the relationship.

Stets (1990) studied verbal and physical agression in married couples interviewed for the 1985 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), a nationally representative telephone interview of 6,002 people. Verbal agression data are from 1,461 men and 1,909 women and physical agression data are from 1,089 men and 1,547 women.

The CTS was used to measure verbal and physical agression, with each partner asked how often a particular act had been committed by themselves and by their partner. Other measures include race, age, education, income, occupational status, frequency and quantity of drinking, experiencing and witnessing agression in their family of origin, approval of agression, and use of agression outside the family.

Results of the data show that women initiate more verbal agression and more severe physical agression against their husbands, verbal agression can occur without physical agression but physical agression rarely occurs without verbal agression, and black respondents were more likely than white respondents to engage in both forms of agression. Of those who display agression, most are only verbally aggressive, that is, verbal and physical agression, it seems, do not have the same cause. The researcher offers a caveat for the finding that women initiate more

agression than men: men are, on average, physically larger and stronger than women and more likely to inflict injury.

Straus and Sweet (1992) also used data from the 1985 NSFH. They examined verbal/symbolic agression in 5,232 married or cohabiting men and women. Their variables include verbal/symbolic agression (CTS), gender, age, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, number of children, and alcohol and drug use. Findings show that (a) there is a positive relationship between drug and alcohol use and verbal agression, (b) verbal agression decreases with age, (c) there is a negative relationship between verbal agression and number of children, and (d) rates of verbal agression are similar for men and women.

Alcohol. Other studies have also found a relationship between alcohol and marital violence. Kantor and Straus (1987) found that alcohol and wife abuse were positively associated; however, there were other mitigating variables such as approval of violence and blue-collar status. They also used data from 5,195 men and women interviewed in the 1985 NSFH, though they focused more specifically on alcohol use than the previously described studies. Variables included the drinking index (how often and how much alcohol is consumed), drinking at the time of violence, approval of violence, frequency of violence (using the CTS), and occupational status.

Kantor and Straus (1987) found a linear relationship between the drinking index and rates of wife abuse, although the authors caution that a substantial number of nondrinkers also abuse their wives. For the majority of the couples, alcohol was not a factor at the time of the violent incident, however, there were still a large

number of couples in which one or more were using alcohol at the time of the incident. To test their "drunken bum theory" (lower class drinking men are more likely to abuse their wives) the authors examined the husband's drinking pattern, approval of slapping a wife, class, and use of violence. They found that the combination of blue collar status, approval of violence, and drinking led to the highest likelihood of committing violence although 67% of these men did *not* abuse their wives.

Cycle of violence. Walker (1984) conducted extensive research to test the cycle of violence theory and the theory of learned helplessness. The cycle of violence is the belief that violence occurs in three cycles: the tension-building phase, the acute battering phase, and the honeymoon phase (no battering). Learned helplessness is the idea that early social influences which made women feel powerless led them to continued feelings of powerlessness in adulthood. Four hundred and thirty-five women were interviewed about their experiences of being in an abusive relationship and 403 were used in the final analysis. These women were recruited in a variety of ways: professional agencies, battered women's shelters, a prison, church groups, magazines, newspapers, public service announcements, hospitals, attorneys, judges, and community groups. Both theories were supported. Other conclusions include being pregnant put the women at high risk for being abused, marital rape was common, they were more isolated when living with their batterer, the violence got worse over time, and most of the batterers abused alcohol.

Feminist Research on Violence Against Women

Although some of the above studies were conducted from a feminist standpoint

(eg., Saunders, 1986; Smith, 1990), the studies described below are those which are more similar in methodology to my study. Researchers were not claiming to generalize about all women in abusive relationships; they wanted to describe the women in their particular sample.

Feminist researchers have contributed greatly to understanding violence against women in the context of a patriarchal society. Kelly (1988) and Dobash and Dobash (1979) conducted qualitative studies about women's experiences of violence. Kelly focused on sexual violence: incest, nonmarital rape, marital rape, child sexual abuse, and sexual harassment. She interviewed 60 women about their experiences in these areas and used their words to conceptualize her findings. Kelly concluded that sexual violence occurs on a continuum; most women have experienced some sort of sexual violence, yet it cannot necessarily be divided into the categories developed by researchers, society, and the legal system. Her definition of continuum incorporates two areas: (a) common attributes underlying events and (b) many events that cannot be distinguished from one another. The common attributes underlying all forms of sexual violence are "abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threat and force" (p. 76). The second component signifies that forms of abuse cannot be classified into discrete categories; they are all enmeshed.

Dobash and Dobash (1979) interviewed abused women living in Scotland. With the help of two research assistants, they interviewed a total of 137 women about their abusive marriage in the context of their entire marital relationship. These women were either in a battered women's shelter at the time of the interview or they had recently left the shelter. The interviews were structured, yet open-

ended and interviewers used probes when clarification was needed. Women were asked to describe the first physically abusive incident in their marriage, the worst physically abusive incident, and the last physically abusive incident. They used the patriarchal structure and ideology of society as their theoretical underpinning. Patriarchal structure is defined as "the hierarchical organization of social institutions and social relations, an organizational pattern that by definition relegates selected individuals, groups, or classes to positions of power, privilege, and leadership and others to some form of subservience" (p. 43). Patriarchy is exemplified by the higher status of men in society; additionally, women, especially in marriages, are expected to be submissive to men. Early laws reflected this belief as women were legally considered men's property by many states (Hirsch, 1981). Access to privileges in society is typically based on ascribed status (being male), not on individual achievements (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Patriarchal ideology legitimizes such a structure. This ideology for wives consists of "obedience, respect, loyalty, dependency, sexual access, and sexual fidelity" (Smith, 1990, p. 258). Dobash and Dobash (1979) found that most of the women they interviewed said their husband abused them when they perceived their wives were not living up to these patriarchal ideals.

Stanko (1985) contended that "to be a woman--in most societies, in most eras--is to experience physical and/or sexual terrorism at the hands of men" (p. 9). Patriarchy operates under the segregation between the private sphere and the public sphere. Stanko has written extensively about the separation of the public and private spheres and its effect on violence against women. Because the family is part

of the private sphere, what goes on inside the family is supposed to stay within the family. Unfortunately, this belief is seen in the legal system and by law enforcement agents who oftentimes refuse to acknowledge the seriousness of wife abuse (Stanko, 1985). This occurs despite that fact that Dobash and Dobash (1979) determined that women are more likely to be beaten, raped, or killed in their own homes by their husbands or boyfriends than on the street by strangers.

Stanko (1988) also examined the notion of fear of crime and found that criminologists who study fear of crime usually focus on crime outside the home while ignoring the existence of violence within the family. This strategy invalidates women's experiences because they might be in more danger inside their homes than outside. Russell (1982) reported similar findings. Of the ever-married women in her random sample of 930 San Francisco women, 21% had experienced some form of abuse from their husbands.

Rosen and Stith (1993) investigated violence in dating relationship. Eleven women, who responded to public advertisements, were interviewed about their experiences in an abusive dating relationship. After these interviews, researchers chose six women to study more indepth in order to build on significant themes in the data. During the first interview participants were asked to talk, in general, about their violent relationship. During the second interview, participants were asked to describe more fully coping strategies they used; the relationships between themselves, their partner, their family, and friends; help-seeking behaviors; and leaving the relationship. Relationship-maintaining themes that emerged were romantic fantasies, her own survival tactics, her illusion of control, seesaw

coupling, and peer and/or family collusion. Processes that helped women end the relationship were seeds of doubt, cognitive reappraisals, and self-reclaiming actions. Rosen and Stith used data from this study to develop an intervention program for therapists whose clients are in violent dating relationships. The three main goals are to help the client keep herself safe, gain perspective, and empower herself to develop appropriate boundaries. This study helped the researchers better understand some of the reasons women remain in abusive relationships and knowing these reasons is the first step to help women get out of an abusive situation.

Emery and Lloyd (1994) interviewed 17 women about their experiences of violence in dating relationships. All of the women were white, the length of their relationships ranged from 9 months to 14 years, and 16 were no longer in the relationship. Ten women used physical agression against their male partner; nine of them used it after their partner had started it. Overall, men's use of agression was more frequent and more severe than the women's. Emery and Lloyd explored possible reasons for women using physical agression and found that the most common were they hit back out of frustration or anger and to regain their sense of control. They did not just assume that women were as violent as men, as other studies have indicated. The interviews allowed them to understand the abuse from the women's perspectives and gave the researchers a clearer understanding of the dynamics in these relationships. Additionally, when the women did hit back,the extent of injury to their male partners was not nearly the same as the injury to women caused by male perpetrators of violence. Other researchers have found that men use violence to establish control (Kelly, 1988; Stanko, 1985) whereas women typically use it in

self defense (Makepeace, 1986; Saunders, 1986). That is, men initiate violence whereas women use it as a form of protection.

The feminist research discussed above focuses on how particular women experience violence in their relationship; whereas, the general research examined previously focuses on the widespread causes behind and effects of violence against women. Because the focus of this study was on a particular group of women, I advocate using a feminist theoretical perspective which will be described later. First, I will summarize related research on account-making and address ways of incorporating feminist methods into research.

Account-Making Research on Violence Against Women

Research using account-making procedures involves investigating people's story-like constructions of their reality. Applied to the topic of violence against women, this open-ended technique generates new and important themes in women's experiences of being in an abusive relationship.

Several researchers have examined abusers' accounts or explanations for using violence (for examples, see Bograd, 1988; Gilgun & Connor, 1989; Scully, 1990), but because this study focuses on women's accounts of abuse, I will limit the review to studies that address women as recipients of violence. Harvey, Orbuch, Chwalisz, and Garwood (1991) examined the relationship between account-making and coping with sexual assault. A total of 36 people responded to a newspaper advertisement requesting people to take part in a study about nonconsensual sexual activity. Twenty-six questionnaires (25 women and 1 man) were returned but only 25 were used in the analysis because the survey returned by the male was

incomplete. The survey contained open-ended questions about the relationship between the perpetrator and victim, an account of the assault, whether or not the victim told anyone about the assault, how she coped with the assault, how the assault affected her, and how she currently feels about the assault. There was also space for any additional comments the participant wished to make. Researchers found that account-making and confiding were positively related to successful coping with sexual assault and suggested that account-making served as a way for survivors to deal with the effects of being abused.

Orbuch, Harvey, Davis, and Merbach (in press) replicated the Harvey et al. (1991) study with a slightly larger sample (21 women and 7 men) in a different part of the country. Advertisements for this study were placed at rape crisis centers. Twenty women and men responded and returned the questionnaire. This survey contained similar open-ended questions as the first study, but included more structured questions. They also found that account-making was positively correlated with successful coping.

All of the respondents in the second study "provided extensive commentaries on the open-ended and initial account questions..." but some "provided incomplete answers on the structured items" (p. 9-10). The authors concluded that this was because the open-ended questions were more sensitive to actual experiences than the structured ones. They maintained that "open-ended measures...[give] a much clearer appreciation of the depth of impact for continued suffering of survivors..." (p. 17).

Croghan and Miell (1994) interviewed 53 women in Great Britain about abuse in their personal relationships. Women were recruited through local agencies

and informal contacts and 20% of the participants were of mixed race. Interviews were focused on the meaning the women gave to their relationship and their interpretation of the abuse. Researchers also wanted to determine to whom the woman attributed responsibility for the abuse. They found that developing causality for abuse was an important part of the healing process

> since abuse in close relationships creates a pressing need for the abused to construct an account which provides them with a reasonable theory of causality and which thus enables them to repair their sense of self-worth and personal meaning (p. 1).

The purpose of their study was to determine whom the women blamed for their abuse and which factors affected the abuser's responsibility. Overall, the accounts focused on personal or relational aspects of the relationship, that is, the women believed they were abused because their partner was sick or drunk or because dinner was not ready on time.

Riessman (1989) conducted a case analysis of a narrative account from a woman (Tessa) who had been in a violent marriage. In her story, Tessa told how she came to define her marriage as rape and how she decided to leave her husband. As Riessman pointed out, readers of her narrative learn that the main reason Tessa divorced her husband was because he raped her three times. However, at the time, marital rape was not illegal. Tessa was a victim of her husband and of the legal system. Riessman found the interview to be "particularly well-suited to understanding the victim to survivor process, for it lays bare the interpretive process that individuals go through to make sense of difficult events in their lives"

(p. 233). As shown by these research examples, open-ended methods such as written narratives can provide benefits of healing to those who have experienced relationship violence as well as useful data for researchers and practitioners.

Feminist Methods

Qualitative methods are particularly helpful for describing experiences and understanding processes (Rosen, 1992). Although previous studies have documented the extent of violence against women (Coleman & Straus, 1986; Gelles & Conte, 1990; Lloyd, 1991; Lockhart, 1987), other dimensions of abuse remain under-explored. One of the major advantages of employing qualitative research methods is being able to study more thoroughly, areas that might not be conducive to quantitative studies (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A structured survey about abusive relationships may or may not reflect a woman's true experience, whereas providing the opportunity for her to choose the words and topics of her report might yield a more thorough indication of her experiences. Additionally, qualitative research is often better at dealing with sensitive topic areas than quantitative research (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993).

Daly (1992) associated qualitative methods with Weber's concept of *verstehen* or understanding. "...Qualitative methods are suited to understanding the meanings, interpretations, and subjective interpretations..." (p. 3-4). Society, in general, apparently knows very little about how women experience violence. Much of society still believes a woman must enjoy it if she stays in the relationship (Hirsch, 1981; Kelly, 1988) and Sheffield (1989) found that many men think it is their right to discipline their wives, even if it means hitting them. Abused women

even blame themselves. One woman said that after her husband hit her she felt ashamed and thought if she could change something, such as learn to cook better or improve her looks, he would stop (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993). The use of qualitative methods gives others the opportunity to learn more about violence against women from those who know it best--women in these relationships.

A key component of feminist research is to understand the reality of those being studied. Thompson (1992) addressed three areas for feminist researchers to carefully consider: agenda, epistemology, and ethics. Feminist agenda deals with what is done with the research results, focusing on the difference between research *on* women and research *for* women. Research *on* women can affirm the sexism in society by attempting to fit women into existing categories or images. Research *for* women, on the other hand, focuses on emancipating women. First, concerning agenda, Thompson (1992) identified several goals of research for women. It should (a) help women connect the personal and the political, (b) exemplify the daily struggle many women face in oppressive family situations, (c) create an image of a nonoppressive family, (d) recognize diversity among women, and (e) challenge the prevailing assumptions in a discipline. Second, epistemology is studying how people know what they know. Researchers should give careful consideration about choosing the method of research and how to conduct the study. One truth does not exist and absolute objectivity can never be achieved. Finally, two major ethical concerns addressed by Thompson (1992) are that research should empower rather than exploit its participants and research participants should not be objectified. Empowering women is a major tenet of feminist research.

The ethical concerns identified by Thompson (1992) were addressed in this study by giving women the opportunity (a) to choose the aspects of their abusive relationship to write about within the context of their own definition of "destructive relationship," (b) to stop participation at any time if they wished, and (c) to write authoritatively about abuse. I assumed that women would choose to participate only if they felt they were able to withstand any undue psychological or emotional burdens inherent in describing their experiences. Instead of asking them questions or asking them to fill out a survey that may offend or upset them, my intention was to make this exercise as helpful as possible by letting them choose the focus. Harvey et al. (1991) found that account-making and coping were positively correlated, that is, respondents who had developed an account or story for an event had an easier time coping with the event. Also, the procedures of this study acknowledge that the participants are the authority on their own lives. Because I have never personally experienced an abusive, intimate relationship, I cannot claim authority on this topic. Because the women in my study have had such experiences, I regard them as experts.

Another advantage of employing a research design that is closely associated with feminist methodology, is the potential of uncovering multiple "truths" that reflect the complexity of violence in women's intimate relationships (Krieger, 1991). By giving women the opportunity to write about any aspect of their relationship, the potential exists for previously unknown or sparsely explored topics to be uncovered. The participants, to some extent, control the research project.

Krieger (1991) reflecting on the stance of the research community stated

that, "some of us have become increasingly dissatisfied with the tone of remote authority commonly used in the writing of social scientists and with the way the personality of author gets lost in social science texts" (p. 29). Scholars are taught to leave their "selves" out of academic writing. Feminists such as Krieger argue that the self should be a major component. It is important to understand how the researcher fits into the research without making the researcher the sole authority. I am connected to this study because I was sexually abused as a child; I know what it is like to be betrayed and violated by someone I trusted. I have that experience in common with the women in the study, however, they are the authority on their own situations and I do not claim to be an expert on their form of victimization. My personal experiences guided my decision to do this study in the way that I am doing it.

Because I have a broad knowledge of the literature on woman abuse, I am aware of what research has and has not been conducted. Most researchers have focused on the cause or extent of wife abuse or dating violence and few have focused on the experiential aspects of abuse. I thought it was time for more experiential research because in my own healing process, what I found to be most helpful and informative was personal accounts of abuse. My experience guided the way this research project was structured. Throughout the process of deciding what to include in the packet and on the questionnaire sheets, I thought to myself, "would I want to answer this question about my own abuse experience?" I did not want to ask someone else to do something I was unwilling to do. My volunteer work at the Women's Resource Center helped me see both the plurality and commonality in women's experiences. All of the women there and in my study have in common their abusive

relationship but "abusive relationship" means something different to everyone. It is important not to group everyone's experience together as if it were the same.

Account-making provides a positive way for individuals to "understand" their experiences of abuse and, coupled with a feminist framework, advances the understanding of abuse from the victim's perspective. In examining abuse, these perspectives together can help researchers and others understand women's experiences of abuse.

Theoretical Framework

The account-making framework and symbolic interaction theory compliment the postmodern feminist perspective in the theoretical framework guiding this study. As indicated previously, account-making provides a framework for story-telling. A focus of postmodern feminism is women's personal stories or experiences at the private and public levels. In turn, key principles of symbolic interactionism, namely meaning and understanding, provide an insight or connection to postmodern feminism. Thus the theoretical framework is composed of a combination of ideas from postmodern feminism, symbolic interactionism, and account-making.

Postmodern Feminism

This study developed from and was conducted in the context of a feminist framework. Although many types of feminist theory exist, including liberal, socialist, Marxist, radical, and postmodern, Osmond and Thorne (1993) identified five emergent themes in all of them. Researchers using a feminist theoretical perspective recognize the validity of women's experiences, focus on gender as the fundamental construct, are cognizant of different cultural and historical time

frames, view the family and other close relationships as diverse, and advocate social change. Using these ideas as the basic premise of this study, I expected to generate a better understanding of women's experiences in destructive, intimate relationships by focusing on their lived experiences.

American postmodern feminists "deconstruct" much of what society takes for granted. For example, they assert that knowledge that is supposedly universal is often based only on male experience. Thus, postmodern feminists focus on women's experiences and expose the multiple realities of cultural diversity. They recognize that although women, as a group, are oppressed by patriarchy, not all women are equally oppressed. Differences based on age, class, race, and sexual orientation are important aspects of postmodern feminism (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Baber and Allen (1992) asserted that a basic assumption of postmodernism is "that one's sense of self and relations with others are constructed and reconstructed through social interaction--always changing and reconfiguring" (p. 12). All women do not have the same reality. Applying these concepts to the present research leads to acknowledging specifically that every woman in this study experienced her relationship in a different way. Whereas there was some similarity in the circumstances surrounding the abuse emerged, each woman described her relationship in her own words and gave it her own meaning. "Where narrative's power of specifying combines with theory's power of generalizing, ever more inclusive and multiplistic standpoints for knowing become possible" (Helle, 1991, p. 63).

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism focuses on meanings and symbols people attribute to

situations, that is, their view of reality (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Ritzer (1988) described the relationship between words and symbols from a symbolic interactionist perspective. He asserted that

> words are symbols, because they are used to stand for things. Words make all other symbols possible. Acts, objects, and other words exist and have meaning only because they have been and can be described through the use of words (p. 302).

The words women use to describe their relationships will be symbols of their overall meanings.

Symbolic interactionism reflects three themes: the importance of meaning, the importance and development of self concept, and the importance of the relationship between society and the individual. Meanings are developed through interaction with others, meanings can be modified depending on the situation, and humans act on things based on the meanings they have; self concept is learned through interaction with others and can serve as a motivation for behavior; and individuals are influenced by society and society is influenced by individuals (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). This framework offers ample opportunity to understand abuse because of its underlying focus on both individual and societal influences on the development of meaning.

Account-Making

Accounts, like words, are symbols. Accounts are "people's story-like construction of events that include explanations, descriptions, predictions about relevant future events and affective reaction" (Harvey, et al., 1991, p. 516).

Accounts can provide perspective, give meaning to life, and help researchers understand people's reactions to and descriptions of events. They create their stories through words which become meanings for events.

Account-making can include cognitive processes such as remembering, analyzing, and searching one's mind; developing emotional and behavioral responses; and discussions with others, regardless of the existence of the need to get their feedback or reactions. Accounts can be developed for certain time periods in one's life, for certain events in one's life, for relationships, or for anything else. Accounts come in many forms and can be

> sharply etched, dramatic, powerful, highly coherent, and complete. But sometimes they are like meanderings, erratically pieced-together fragments of meaning regarding central events and people on our psychic stages. Yet they are all we have in terms of our own life-stories... (Harvey, Weber, & Orbuch, 1990, p. 7)

Account-making can help the individual forming the account better understand an event. Writing, in particular, may serve as an emotional release and serve as a method of coping with a traumatic event. Furthermore, "accounts may serve as the sliver of immortality each person leaves behind in influencing how others make sense out of their lives" (Harvey, Agnostelli, & Weber, 1989, p. 41).

Account-making has been extensively researched by John Harvey and his colleagues (see, for example, Harvey, et al., 1991; Harvey, Orbuch, & Fink, 1990; Harvey, Orbuch, & Weber, 1990). Women in abusive situations are often searching for answers and an outlet for their compressed feelings. Accounts can give them that

release; in this study a release was possible through writing narrative accounts of their abusive relationship experiences. Accounts can also make others aware of the experiences of the story-teller or account-maker. "Accounts have great potential to affect all of us in salutary ways and help us connect better with a world of suffering that is always right at our doorstep" (Harvey, Orbuch, & Weber, 1992, p. 14). By telling their story, women may help others in similar situations or alert those not in abusive relationships to the problems of abuse. Furthermore, as indicated previously, such accounts can yield a rich source of data for generating and testing theory, developing structured survey schedules, framing intervention programs, and advocating social policy enactment.

Chapter III

Methods

The focus of this chapter is on the methods used to conduct this study. I begin with the research questions which directed the study design, the analysis, and everything in between. These questions were developed from the three guiding frameworks of this study: postmodern feminism, symbolic interactionism, and account-making. This study has a broad focus because my goal was to uncover previously hidden aspects of woman abuse. The study design was developed to accommodate the research question. I used a qualitative approach and asked women who had been in abusive relationships to write accounts of their relationship. Women were recruited nonobtrusively, that is, they had to call me if they were interested in participating. I did not approach anyone or mail information packets, until I had their permission. Similarly, Dobash and Dobash (1979) interviewed abused women who responded to public advertisements. They wrote that

> interviews of this nature, carried out with women who had decided to make their personal troubles public, are more likely to lead to an explanation of the processes involved in violent episodes and marriages than are research efforts that attempt to establish the distribution of violent events or families in the general population (p. 259).

Research Question

The following research questions were used in analyzing the stories: What accounts do women use to describe their abusive intimate relationships; how do they define their abusive situation; and what kinds of abuse did they experience? These

questions incorporate ideas from the three theories or perspectives described in Chapter II. That is, the focus is moved toward understanding how women account for and give meaning to violence in their intimate relationships.

Design of the Study

This study is a qualitative investigation of women who were in destructive, intimate relationships with men. An intimate relationship is a heterosexual relationship between two adults both age 18 or older. The focus is on heterosexual relationships because they reflect the power dynamics played out in male-female relations in United States society. Although women are abused in lesbian relationships as well, my focus was on women abused by men due to the increasing rates of abuse, the power issue in society, and the potential helpfulness to other women and to researchers of women relating their story to others.

This study addresses violence occurring in both marital and nonmarital relationships, or "close relationships." Scanzoni, Polonko, Teachman, and Thompson (1989) criticized the prevailing paradigmatic view of the traditional, nuclear family and suggested that researchers should focus on the sexually based primary relationship (SBPR) instead. This is a more general definition of families and close relationships and is more inclusive of the diversity that exists in contemporary society. For the purposes of this study, abuse is abuse regardless of the legal status of the relationship.

Sample Identification

Participant recruitment began after the Human Subjects Review Board approved the study protocol (See Appendix A). Recruitment strategies included

hanging flyers (See Appendix B) in community buildings, commercial establishments, the local Women's Resource Center, and university buildings; placing advertisements (See Appendix C) in local newspapers; asking colleagues to make announcements (See Appendix D) in university classes; requesting referrals from professional therapists and local women's groups; and posting a call for participants (See Appendix E) over two electronic mail networks.

This sample is not necessarily representative of women in general, women residing in Southwest Virginia, or even of abused women. Study participants were probably more willing to write about the abusive relationship than nonparticipants. Not every abused woman can write about the experience, and some of those who can might not feel comfortable sharing their writing with a stranger. One participant (Melissa) verbally told her story to her therapist who transcribed it and sent it to me. In addition, women experience abuse under circumstances not addressed by this study, such as abuse by other women, by people under age 18, and when under age 18. Such situations, not examined herein, lead to questions that await future research: Do differences exist between women who are willing to write their stories and those who are not? Do women abused as children differ from women abused as adults? Do differences exist between women abused by men and those abused by other women? Important though these questions are, the central purpose of the present research is to uncover previously unexamined aspects of women's perceptions of their experiences of relationship violence, not to generalize to any population.

Study Participants

Potential participants were screened via telephone. In accordance with the definition of majority status under Virginia law, all participants were at least 18 years of age. Further criteria for inclusion in the study were that the caller was a female, involved in a destructive, intimate relationship in the past and/or present, with a male perpetrator aged 18 years or older.

I received about 20 requests for information about my study and distributed about 10 packets to women's groups. In total, I sent approximately 30 packets to potential participants. Everyone who expressed interest was eligible but not everyone returned the packets.

Securing participants was more difficult than I expected. In February, I placed advertisements in newspapers, hung flyers, and asked therapists for referrals. I received several phone calls from women who had seen the advertisements in newspapers, but only two packets were returned. In March, I displayed my flyers during Women's Week. In April, I asked colleagues who were teaching at Virginia Tech or Radford University to announce my study in their classes. Also in April, I put a call for participants announcement over an electronic network. I received a few mail messages but only one packet was returned. In May, I gave several packets to the Virginia Tech Sexual Assault Coordinator to distribute. Again, one was returned. Throughout the summer I continued asking therapists and people that I knew for referrals. Two participants eventually were obtained through their therapists. In July I put another call for participants over the same electronic network and another network. My final three participants were obtained this way. I

was surprised at the large difference between the number of phone calls I received and the number of returned packets I received. Three people returned consent forms but never returned their stories. One woman called to say it was more difficult than she thought but she would keep trying. I can only assume this was true for the other women who did not return their packets. I did not want this to be a difficult experience for anybody and hope that the other unreturned packets indicate that women stopped before it became too difficult. At any rate, those who did return their packet, for the most part, were women who were asked to participate by their therapist or by someone else known to the researcher. Perhaps this gave more credibility to the study.

A total of 9 women participated in this study. The range of sample size for qualitative research on relationship violence has varied from under 20 [Rosen (1992), 10; Emery & Lloyd (1994), 17] to 60 (Kelly, 1988) to over 100 [Dobash & Dobash (1979), 137]. Rosen (1993) suggested that a sample of up to 20 would be sufficient for a study such as this. The size of the sample in the present study thus approximates that of other investigations on the topic and is consonant with the data collection and analysis procedures.

Procedures

Flyers and announcements displayed a brief description of the study and the contact telephone number. Callers who met the study criteria and agreed to participate received an information packet by U.S. mail (See Appendix F).

The information packet included a letter thanking the participants for their help and reminding them that they could end participation at any time, a list of

possible topics to write about, a page of questions about the respondent's demographic characteristics, an informed consent form, information on area counseling agencies should they need professional assistance, and two stamped return envelopes. Participants used one envelope to return the signed consent form and the other to return their story and the background questionnaire. The list of suggested topics included questions relevant to the focus of the study, including some developed by Rosen (1992).

Data collection

Data were collected in the form of anonymous narratives written by women who were in destructive, intimate relationships. I considered anything the participants viewed as destructive to be abusive behavior. Their definitions and meanings were more important than a categorical definition I could use. Theoretically, this stance can add to the well-established conception that abuse consists mainly or only of physical abuse. Many studies, primarily those based on the CTS, are grounded on the definition of violence as physical abuse despite the fact that women experience other types of violence.

Once all of the stories had been collected, I carefully read each one several times before thinking about any analysis. It was important to get a general idea for what the participants included in their accounts before beginning the analysis of what they had written.

Description of Data

Length of story and content varied for each woman. Some focused on advice for women in similar situations while others focused on the details of their relationship.

One woman (Meg) sent an enormous amount of information: notes to herself, journal entries, letters to her friends, and letters from her abuser. In my analysis, I used the summary letter she wrote to me, a letter to her friend, and a journal entry about the major problems in her relationship; this was a total of three single-spaced, typewritten pages and 31 single-sided, handwritten pages. The fewest pages written were from Kate, Melissa, and Becky. Melissa chose to be interviewed by her therapist and I received a one and a half page single-spaced, typed transcript of their conversation. Becky sent one and a half pages and Kate sent one single-spaced, typed page. Taylor sent four single-spaced typewritten pages, Christina sent three, and Judith sent two. Pauline and Maya each sent handwritten stories four double-sided pages long.

Content also varied. Meg focused on the events in her relationship and what led up to its dissolution. She wrote about specific types of abuse and ways it affected her. In her summary letter to me she briefly mentioned some of the ways she coped with her relationships and some advice for other women. Kate focused on her life after leaving her abusive husband and wrote about ways she has overcome this struggle. She also gave some advice to women in similar situations. Melissa talked about the people who helped her get out of her abusive marriage and about how much happier she is today. Becky focused on the emotional abuse she endured for years. Becky chose to participate because she believes emotional abuse is not "taken as seriously as it needs to be." She also wrote about the support she received while leaving her husband. Taylor wrote about her relationship from beginning to end. She wrote about specific instances of abuse and the way her boyfriend made her feel.

Christina, who, at the time, had only been out of her relationship for three weeks, described her relationship and how it affected her view of herself. She also mentioned the trepidations and uncertainties ahead of her. Judith focused on the relationship, itself, and the lack of support she received from her family and friends. Pauline also focused on the events in her relationship and also mentioned how grateful she was to the people who supported her. Maya focused solely on the events of her relationship and her recovery afterwards.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis and Results

Data analysis was based on careful readings of each story and the compilation of emergent themes. Five themes emerged from the stories: abusive aspects of relationships, characteristics of the abuser, respondents' reactions to abuse, abuse as a private act, and support and advice. A summary of each theme follows. Issues women wrote about under abusive aspects of the relationships include physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse; issues under characteristics of the abuser include alcohol, control, and inconsistent behaviors; issues under respondents' reactions to abuse include coping mechanisms, conflicting philosophies, losing control, and leaving the relationship; issues under abuse as a private act include isolation of women, silencing of women, and role of society; and issues under advice and support include support from others and advice to other women. Each theme is discussed in more depth later in the chapter, but before this is a description of the participants and their motivations for writing the accounts. The procedure for arriving at the above information is described below.

Data Analysis

I used qualitative data analysis techniques described by Allen (1989) and Bogden and Biklin (1982) to examine the written narratives. The analysis process involves four steps: careful and systematic reading of the set of nine narratives five times, identification of 75 broad coding categories (e.g., existence of physical abuse, blame and responsibility, abuser ignored her feelings, and abuse should be private), and refinement of initial categories based on frequency and commonality of

occurrence to the final five categories (abusive aspects of relationship, characteristics of the abuser, respondents' reactions to abuse, abuse as a private act, and support and advice). The final categories were developed by grouping together the original categories into a comprehensive synopsis of what the participants wrote. I did not begin the coding process with rigidly defined themes or categories, but instead I looked for words and phrases women used to describe their relationship and their experiences in it.

Background Information

Nine women participated in this study. Participants were between the ages of 27 and 46 years, most earned less than $10,000 a year, all were white, all but two were born in the United States, and their education ranged from grade school to the master's degree level (See Table 1). All of the women had ended their abusive relationship, from 3 weeks to 16 years ago. The relationships had become abusive within 2 weeks to 2 years of its beginning, though most became abusive within several months and one was always abusive (See Table 2). All but one of the women reported receiving help in leaving the abusive relationship. Professional therapy, self-help books, and advice from friends were the most helpful for these women (See Table 3).

Motivations for Accounts

According to Harvey, Weber, and Orbuch (1990) and Weber, Harvey, and Stanley (1987), motivations for account-making include protecting self-esteem, purging emotions, establishing a sense of control, searching for closure, and using accounts as an end in themselves. In order to determine the participants'

Table 1: Background Information

Participant	Age	Income	Education	Race	How found out about study
Becky	39	$60,000-$89,999	BS	White	Electronic Network
Kate	32	$10,000-$19,999	3 yrs. college	White	Electronic Network
Meg	37	Less than $10,000	Assoc. degree	White	Newspaper
Judith	40	$40,000-$59,999	MS	White	Electronic Network
Taylor	28	$20,000-$39,999	MA, MSW	White	Researcher
Pauline	27	Less than $10,000	13 years	White*	Therapist
Christina	30	Less than $10,000	MS, MA	White*	Electronic Network
Maya	43	Less than $10,000	Undergraduate	White	Newspaper
Melissa	46	Less than $10,000	Grade school	White	Therapist

** Pauline wrote that she is from a Western European country and Christina is also from a country outside the United States.*

Table 2: Relationship Information

Participant	Type of Relationship(s) Described	Still in Relationship	If YES, how long in If NO, how long was	How long before became destructive
Becky	Married	No	8 months	Several months
Kate	Living together, dating, and married	No	8 years	A few days
Meg	Married Living together and dating	No No	6 years (marriage) 2 years (living together)	2 years (marriage) 2 months (living together)
Judith	Dating and living together	No	16 years	2 months
Taylor	Living together	No	5 years	2 months
Pauline	Married	No	3 months	6 months
Christina	Living together	No	3 weeks	2 weeks
Maya	Dating and living together	No	6 years	It was always destructive
Melissa	Married	No	11 years	6 months

Table 3: Help information

Participant	Help received with the relationship	Who has been the most helpful
Becky	Therapy, talking with friends, and taking Women's Studies classes	Therapist validated feelings. A male friends, who is also a psychiatrist, reassured her that her needs and perceptions are valid and helped raise her self esteem.
Kate	Therapy	Therapist helped her regain her strength and a friend helped her define her problems.
Meg	Marriage: Self help books (Women who love too much), group therapy, family, and a women's shelter. Live-in: A friend and a women's shelter.	Self-awareness, books, and children.
Judith	Therapy, though wasn't helpful. Some friends were helpful. Time and her own efforts were helpful.	Writers of self help books
Taylor	Therapy and friends.	Best friend listened and did not tell her what to do. Trusted her to make good decisions, but was honest about her perceptions.
Pauline	Homeless shelter and women's shelter	Individual and group therapy. Helped her deal with her problem and let her talk about it. Gave her lots of support.
Christina	Therapy and talking to friends and family.	Therapy and being able to talk to and get support from friends and family.
Maya	None	
Melissa	Social worker and friend.	Social worker helped her get a divorce and friend gave her a place to live.

motivations for account-making in the present context, one of the background questions was, "Why were you able to write your story?" The women had a variety of reasons or motivations for participating in this study; their answers fall under one of the above categories of motivations. Kate, Taylor, and Maya wrote their stories as ends in themselves. Kate wrote that she is "able to see that destructive behavior as happening to part of myself that has now evolved into this new me who will never allow it to happen again." Taylor was able to write her story because she is in a "healthy positive marriage." Maya stated simply that she "likes to write." Whether she uses this as a form of emotional purging as an additional motivation is unknown. Melissa, in contrast, did share her story as a form of emotional purging. She told her story to her therapist and said that "I can tell her anything. Then I feel better."

Meg said she was able to write her story because "it's [destructive relationship] behind me now." This suggests a sense of closure and a desire to move on with the rest of her life. Pauline had a similar motivation. She wrote that she has "faced what happened to me and I dealt with it and started to heal my wounds that came from my abusive husband, and I am stronger and once I talked about it, it's easier to share it with other women who went through the abusive situation." Judith participated as a way of protecting her self-esteem. She said she "wanted to understand [the relationship]. I wanted to understand why I let it happen." Weber, Harvey, and Stanley (1987) asserted that protecting self-esteem as a motivation for account-making is not only a way of protecting oneself but a way of explaining oneself to others as well.

Christina wanted to understand her relationship in a different light, "to look at it objectively from the perspective of destruction." She wanted a sense of control over what happened. Becky used her account to gain a sense of control, but for different reasons. She was in an emotionally abusive relationship, "which can be very covert and easy to deny. I want people to know more about the phenomenon, as most discussions of abuse focus on physical or sexual abuse." She wanted to broaden the context of abuse in the information disseminated to others, that is, she wanted emotional abuse to be recognized as a legitimate form of abuse.

Regardless of their motivation, all of the women shared and expressed the emotional pains of their relationships. In some way, then, they all used their story as an emotional release. The rest of this section deals with their emotional and other reactions to their relationships, that is, the content of their accounts.

Destructive Aspects of Relationships

All of the women described at least some part of the destructive aspects of their relationship[3]. I did not provide criteria for a destructive relationship, thus enabling the women to use their own definitions. For example, Christina said that what she considers destructive "was the uncertainty and the agony of not knowing the future [of the relationship] and not being able to control anything." In contrast, Becky, who endured years of emotional abuse, wrote that "the assumption seems to be that if your partner is not physically battering you, it is OK." Emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and physical abuse were all mentioned in the accounts.

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[3] I have no previous knowledge of any of these relationships, therefore, statements I write are derived from statements made by the women in the relationships.

Emotional abuse. Pauline, Judith, Meg, and Taylor all said that their partners criticized them and called them names. Becky also wrote that her husband blamed her for everything that went wrong and ignored her needs and feelings. Taylor said that she had always enjoyed playing the piano but her boyfriend constantly criticized her, saying that she was no good and did not know how to play. Eventually, she stopped playing altogether. After leaving him, she found out that her friends enjoyed hearing her play and were sad that she had given it up. Judith wrote, "...he was destructive to my sense of self."

Words were not the only contribution to the emotional abuse these women endured. They lived with constant fear, worrying about what was going to happen next. Taylor described a particularly frightening event in her relationship. She and her boyfriend were staying at his parent's house and she had a nightmare. She went to his room and

> he was very nice to me and then tucked me back up in bed. About ten minutes later, a figure appeared in the doorway wearing a hood...The figure just stood there, I kept saying Rob stop it--I was pretty sure that it was him, but he would not stop. This went on for about 25 minutes. My nerves felt raw and I was shaking and crying. Finally, he started laughing and told me to take a joke and grow up.

Christina's boyfriend gave her mixed signals about their relationship. He was married but promised to leave his wife for Christina. He never did leave his wife but he often left town without telling Christina where he was going or when he would be back. She was in constant turmoil over where the relationship stood. There

was no physical violence but "the fact that he was unable to be honest with me and kept dragging on the process was emotional violence." The point is, emotional violence was just as hurtful as physical violence.

Physical abuse. The women also described many incidents of physical abuse such as having objects thrown at them. Pauline's husband often threw pots at her if dinner was not ready when he wanted it, Taylor's boyfriend also threw things at her, and Meg's husband rubbed spaghetti in her face one night at dinner. Pauline said that her husband began getting violent after they were married. "He got mad at nothing or little things. He throw chair's [sic] around and broke whatever he got a hold of. It really scared me alot [sic]."

Maya and Judith reported that their boyfriends hit them once. Pauline's husband stopped hitting her after their son was born but started again after they moved to the United States. Melissa's husband used to hit her and scare her so badly that she has problems with blood pressure and nerves. Meg was beaten by both her husband and boyfriend. "Once as I carried my 4 month old up the stairs, (my husband) kicked and pummeled me." In contrast to these accounts, Taylor wrote that her boyfriend "never hit me, which looking back sort of surprises me." None of the women wrote that they understood what led their partners to beating them or to physically mistreating them.

Sexual abuse. Kate wrote that she had survived a sexually abusive marriage but gave no further details. Taylor's boyfriend often ignored her wishes concerning sexual activity. Despite her protests he would make her take part in sexual acts with which she was uncomfortable. "I told him that I hated rear entry sex, because it felt

humiliating to me. He began to insist on that more and more despite that fact that it hurt me." Pauline said that

> as time went on, things got worse and worse, it got worse when he forced himself on me, the worse nightmare is when he raped me over and over again. He put a towel in my mouth to keep quiet. He told me that he would do it again when I told anyone. I never told anyone until the day he raped me and hit me after.

Meg's partner often made her participate in sexual acts against her wishes. He even wrote an ultimatum to her that "either I do what he demanded sexually or it was over."

Marital rape and rape between dating partners is not taken as seriously as stranger rape even though in Russell's (1984) study of completed rapes, she reported that husbands were the most common perpetrators of rape.

Characteristics of the Abuser

Another major theme of the accounts written for this research was characteristics of the abuser. Respondents provided descriptions of their abusers and speculated about motivations for the abusiveness. Three categories emerged from these descriptions: the role of alcohol, men's desire for control of all aspects of the women's lives, and inconsistent behaviors of the abusers.

Alcohol. For some of the relationships, alcohol seemed to have played a factor in the abuse. Pauline, Melissa, Meg, and Maya all mentioned that their partner drank a lot or became abusive after drinking. The first time Meg was hit, her boyfriend had been drinking. Pauline said her husband was very nice until one day,

after they had been married, he came home drunk and late and hit her because supper was cold.

Other researchers have found similarly that alcohol is not an uncommon factor in abusive relationships. Kantor and Straus (1987) reported that a combination of alcohol, attitudes condoning violence against women, and lower socioeconomic status led to higher rates of physical wife abuse. Gelles and Straus (1988) likewise stated that increased alcohol consumption and drug usage can and often does lead to a higher amount of violence against women. The authors of both studies emphasized such findings do not mean that alcohol is the cause of abuse. Such a claim would be problematic because it leads to the false notion that "curing the drug or alcohol problem would eliminate the violent behavior" (Gelles & Straus, 1988, p. 48). The women in this study know that alcohol is not the only or even primary cause behind their abuse. They mentioned many other factors and characteristics of their partners.

Control. According to some participants, the abuser's high need for control was another major factor leading to abuse. Becky's husband, a minister, "was controlling and rigid and manipulative and denies it to this day." Meg described her boyfriend, Andrew, as a former military veteran who needed to be in control of everything. He liked orderliness and rules. Once when Meg and her two children began eating in the car, her daughter offered some food to Andrew. He lost his temper and yelled at her. Meg said his attitude was, "How dare she try to tempt him and get him to break a rule (of eating in the car)." Meg wrote later in the account that "he is a diagnosed sociopath, with grandiose paranoia."

Andrew also wanted to control Meg's body. He did not like it when she went to the gynecologist and accused her of having an affair with her doctor. Once she even had to take him with her to show him her medical records to prove that she had not had multiple pap smears. He still did not believe her and said that the staff had developed fake records and the real ones with the pap smear reports were being hidden from him. At the same time, he expected her to abide by his sexual wishes by fantasizing about gynecological exams during any sexual activity with him. Rob, Taylor's boyfriend, had a similar avoidance-prone attitude toward the medical profession. Once when Taylor developed a temperature of 105° Rob refused to take her to the hospital. As it turned out, she had a PID infection and her pregnancy ended in miscarriage. Another time when she was sick, he refused to take her to the doctor so she had to walk about 2.5 miles in 102° weather.

Another example of attempting to control the woman's contact with others was provided by Pauline. Her husband never let her go anywhere alone, except to church. After a while, even that was a problem because he accused her of cheating on him while she was at church.

Ignoring their partner's feelings or desires was another commonality among the abusers. Judith said her boyfriend made many promises to her but failed to keep them. He promised to move with her after college, but did not. He promised to build her a desk for Christmas but said he did not have time and gave her gloves instead. He said he loved her but made no attempt to include her in his life. Christina's boyfriend constantly promised to leave his wife so they could have a life together. He never did, though. He frequently left town without telling her where he was going or

when he was coming back. After a while this became an endless cycle:

> then he would come back and swear that he would not leave again, and guess what, just when I - again - thought we were getting closer, he would take off again, sometimes even lying about where he was.

His own happiness was more important to him than hers was. Similarly, Becky's husband always put his needs before hers. "If he did not get his sexual needs met, he would sulk. If I was upset about something, I was overreacting..." Ignoring their partner's needs is a form of control over the relationship. For example, Christina's boyfriend left her in a constant flux about the state of their relationship. When he wanted to be with her, he was, but when she wanted to be with him, she could not be, unless he wanted her to be.

Inconsistent behaviors. Pauline said that her husband was very nice in the beginning. "He was so kind and loving." Melissa also said that her husband was okay when they first met but eventually, "he just changed and got mean." Taylor said that when they first began having sex, her boyfriend, Rob, was very concerned about hurting her. Later, however, he refused to listen to her when she talked about her preferences concerning sexual activity and he began sexually abusing her. One night after raping her, "he got up and got a washcloth and cleaned me up. I think that that was worse than the act itself. I felt like a helpless infant and his 'kindness' confused me."

Pauline and Taylor said their partners apologized or acted as if they were sorry after abusing them. Pauline said her husband once told her he was sorry after beating her and said he would never do it again. This was an empty promise,

however, because he did beat her again. She said she often prayed for strength while he hit her but this made him hit her harder. He sometimes hit their son and once kicked a kitten because she (the kitten) would not let him hold her. On other occasions, he apologized and bought her presents. When she tried talking to him about why he continued hitting her, "he [said] he love[d] me and I deserve[d] to be hit."

As described previously, Taylor's boyfriend, Rob, once cleaned her up after raping her. In the beginning of their relationship, he seemed very concerned about her during their sexual activity because she had once been raped. He was careful not to hurt her. However, he eventually began to ignore her needs completely and to abuse her sexually. When she broke up with him, he was shocked and claimed she would come back to him because she needed him. These inconsistent behaviors led to shock and confusion

for the women in the relationships they never knew where they stood or what might happen next.

Respondents' Reactions to Abuse

Participants described an array of reactions or responses they had to the abuse. Responses they described were their coping mechanisms, their attitudes, losing control with their abuser, and the processes of leaving the relationship. This sections deals specifically with women's perceptions of their relationship.

Coping mechanisms. Study participants reported a variety of strategies used in an attempt to reduce or cope with the abuse they experienced. They wrote about self-blame, silent acceptance, attempts to change themselves, and efforts to please

the partner. For example, "I never wanted to be in a [sic] abused, violent relationship," wrote Pauline. She didn't think there was any way out because she had just gotten married when the abuse started. She began going to church more frequently because this made her happy. Seeing her happy made her husband angrier so he hit her even more. In an attempt to decrease the hitting, she tried to please him by doing everything he wanted her to do but this did not stop the abuse. She started blaming herself and still feels unclean and unworthy because of what he did to her.

> The way my husband treated me and what he done to me, either it's hitting or sexual, I did not seen it as abuse, I thought it was my duty to obey my husband and do what he wants me to do, he done what he did because I am not good for him [sic].

Meg also blamed herself when her husband was abusing her. While he was beating her she tried to do whatever he said and agreed with him when he told her she deserved it. Later, after leaving her husband and moving in with another man, she tried to change herself so as not to be like the names he called her. She began to lose her individuality and to let him control her.

When Judith's boyfriend criticized her in public she "was silent; sometimes I'd grin and apologize." She tried to act as if she did not care. She thought there was something wrong with her that was changeable so she did not leave. Eventually, she began to see herself as unattractive and orally inept. She still has trouble speaking in social situations. Christina frequently cried over the state of her relationship because her boyfriend kept leaving her and then coming back. "I felt like the world [was] closing in on me whenever we talked and saw each other....This relationship

took away my self-respect." Throughout her abuse, Kate kept thinking, "Just survive. Someday you'll die and it'll be o.k."

Taylor was also expected to give up parts of herself. After she had a miscarriage, she felt sad and confused. Rob told her to stop whining because she would have had an abortion anyway.

> That shocked me, because I really did not know what I would have done. I told him that and he just said-the decision was made-you would have had an abortion. It scared me that he did not think that I should have some input, but I was afraid he would leave me so I remained silent.

Another time, she was supposed to study abroad but because Rob did not want her to go, she did not go. She was not angry at the time, but says she is now. She is also angry about his constant criticism of her piano-playing. He silenced that too and she is still a little reluctant to play. Meg said she was "very intelligent and strong, but when in these two relationships I grew to be weak and frightened of being alone." The women in this study used many strategies to stop their abuse. Although the abuse did not end until they left the relationship, their strategies were successful because they survived the relationship.

Conflicting philosophies. The relationship abuse also affected participants' ideologies. On the one hand, two women wrote about the struggle between their political ideology and their private life. Taylor is a feminist and wrote that "the contradictions between my ideology and my life were difficult to reconcile, so I lied about Rob to my friends and to myself." Christina had the same ideological conflict. "I am a feminist which makes it even more difficult to justify being in a powerless

situation like this." On the other hand, Judith had a different problem. Her attitude toward men throughout her life had been negative and "for years I thought it was okay to be thoughtless about men's feelings because they really didn't feel." She still finds herself getting overly angry at men, but now she is better at controlling her anger.

Losing control. Only a few of the women physically lost control with their abusers. Taylor said she lost her temper once after her partner refused to stop tickling her. She pushed him against the wall and told him not ever to do that again. He started to hit her but stopped. Meg said she hit back once. One of the last times her partner hit her, she told him if he did it again, she would leave. "A few days later he hit me. I got up and said. 'That's it. It's over.' I hit him back and later that week I left...for good." Pauline said that when she lost control of her anger, her husband beat her more. Judith never lost control with her boyfriend--she ran off and hid instead.

Leaving the relationship. Some of the women described issues surrounding leaving the relationship. Becky said "when my 'gut' got loud enough to drown out the 'oughts and shoulds' in my head, it was time to leave." Meg left her husband after being empowered by a self-help group and she left her boyfriend after developing new ways of thinking and taking control of her own life.

> My healing changes came from within. I sought out ways to improve my self-esteem. I took control of my life and made necessary changes to incorporate new patterns of thought. No one helped me but myself. After all, the victim must first be willing to see that she is a victim, and then she, and only she can

determine how to change that.

Becky said that leaving her husband "was the best decision I ever made, and although there have been some tough times since then, I have never regretted it." Taylor is "very proud that I never went back to him or got into another abusive relationship." Pauline is "healing and on my way to go out and have a life with my son." Kate is better and is building a life for herself and her daughter and Maya is doing better since she started working on substance abuse and co-dependency issues with others suffering from the same problems.

Abuse as a Private Act

Typically, abuse is considered to be a private matter. The home is allegedly a safe haven, therefore, people typically do not get involved when a man attacks a woman in the privacy of their home (Okun, 1986; Stanko, 1988). Many of the women described ways in which they were silenced or isolated from others. Some talked about the role of society in preventing the recognition of abuse.

Isolation of women. Most of the women in this study did not tell anyone about their abuse until they were getting ready to leave or had left the relationship. They isolated themselves physically, as in not being around other people, or mentally, as in believing they were alone in their suffering. Becky said that she felt alone until she read some self-help books on verbal abuse. After she read the books, she felt that her feelings had been validated and she realized that others had gone through similar experiences. This made her feel better about herself. Taylor started isolating herself from others because it was too humiliating to be around other people, including her friends, when her boyfriend called her names. Because of her

isolation, "no one really knew how bad things had gotten." Judith stayed in her relationship because she thought there was something wrong with her. She did not tell anyone about the verbal abuse she endured. Pauline's husband isolated her from other people by making her stay home. The only time he let her go anywhere alone was to church, and eventually he prevented even that outing.

Silencing of women. Meg's boyfriend was very paranoid about outsiders knowing family information. Once Meg had a conversation with another parent about their children getting lice. Her boyfriend yelled at her for telling that to a stranger. He was worried about what other people would think. Pauline's husband told her that she did not have any rights and that no one would help her or believe her when she left. Taylor was kept from studying abroad because her boyfriend, Rob, did not want her to go. She did not tell anyone this, though. She told them she could not go due to health reasons. After her miscarriage, he told her to stop whining because she would have had an abortion anyway. She was scared that he thought he could make a decision about this but did not say anything because she feared he would leave her. Rob also silenced her piano playing by constantly criticizing her until she believed she could not play well.

Role of society. Some women expressed concern about society condoning violence and others expressed concern about people in their lives not saying anything about the violence. Meg said that while she and her husband were living with his parents, he dragged her outside in the middle of the night and yelled at her and hit her over and over. "I never could understand why the next day his parents pretended like my face was normal!" Taylor said their friend Bob lived in the apartment next

door and Bob told her that

> he could here me crying and Rob throwing things and screaming at me. Bob said that he almost called the police because he was afraid I might get hurt, but he did not because he did not want to interfere. Our culture condones abuse by insisting that male violence is a private matter.

Judith said that she "think[s] society encourages women to be silent, accepting, giving..."

In their accounts, the participants illustrated the common belief that abuse is a private manner. They described how they felt isolated, how they were silenced, and how society contributed to this. In the next section, support and advice, and potential ways abuse can be publicized are addressed.

Support and Advice

All of the women mentioned receiving some support in coping with the abuse and it's aftereffects. Regardless of whether it was from a friend, a therapist, or themselves, they stressed the importance of the support. The participants were even more willing to share "words of wisdom" with other women in abusive relationships and, in addition, gave advice to friends and family members

Support from others. Becky mentioned two books that were instrumental in enabling her to leave the abusive relationship: *The Verbally Abusive Relationship* and *Verbal Abuse: Survivors Speak Out,* both by Patricia Evans. She recommends them to anyone. After reading the first one she was able to identify what was wrong with her marriage and she developed the strength to leave. Unfortunately, her husband talked her out of leaving at that time, but a year later when she was ready to leave again,

she read the second book and left. Christina said that reading self-help books made her realize that other "intelligent and educated and independent" people have been in similar relationships.

Becky and Pauline found strength through their therapists and friends. Becky's therapist validated her feelings, thus empowering her, and one friend in particular helped to raise her raise her self-esteem and confirmed that her opinions matter. Pauline said that a friend helped her leave her home and if it had not been for that assistance, she believes she would still be in the relationship. Because she was not a United States citizen, she thought she did not have any rights. Friends told her that being in an abusive relationship was not good regardless of where she was from and friends from her church were very supportive. "They love me for whom I am, not the way they want me to be. They care about me a lot." Pauline also credited her counselor for helping her "more than anyone can imagine." Maya found help in others with similar problems. She met some people with similar alcohol, drug, and co-dependency problems and they have all been working together. Maya has been able to avoid drugs and alcohol and now describes herself as a nonpracticing co-dependent.

Meg said she helped herself. "The victim must first be willing to see that she is a victim, and then she, and only she can determine how to change that." She took advantage of community resources and said some were helpful and others were not. She thinks the ones whose philosophies teach women to become "blamers" and angry bitter women are not helpful, although she did not specifically name any. Writing in a journal was also very helpful to Meg. She wrote about everything that went on in

her life; this was helpful at the time because it served as an emotional release and it has been helpful to her since to be able to look back and see how far she has come.

Advice to other women. Judith, Kate, and Pauline offered advice to women in similar situations and to their friends and family members. Pauline and Kate suggested taking advantage of the available community resources. Judith said she'd

> encourage a woman in a similar situation to get in touch with how she feels, to listen to herself, to sort out what she feels she deserves. Perhaps she has hit bottom emotionally anyway, if that was how she'd been treated as she was raised. It takes a lot to go against your upbringing.

Pauline urged women in similar situations to get out of the relationship before it is too late, if not for herself, then for her children because "nobody deserves to be hit on from anyone." Kate suggested leaving the relationship and relying on a friend for support:

> Misery is optional. You can change your life--it's up to you. Decide you have nothing to lose, so why not strike out for something better? Allow yourself to rely on at least one friend you can call when you really need to talk. Distance yourself from the abuse and the abusers.

She also suggested that women congratulate themselves for every achievement, no matter how small. Even though "it takes alot to drag yourself from the quicksand, ... it's ALWAYS worth it! And you can do it."

Advice to family and friends. Judith would have liked her family and friends to have spent time with her. She described herself as "like a running woman on fire. Everybody could see something was wrong, but they didn't want to get burned." She

suggested to the family and friends of other women that they

> help her with her strengths. Help her to listen to what she wants, what she feels, what she likes, but berating him will only push her to defend him. She'll feel ashamed of putting up with his abuse and try to make the story milder.

Similarly, Pauline advised that family and friends to "stand by the person...be supportive...love them, [and] pray for them. Be there for them always." In other words, help them get to a safe place and let them know you are there for them. This is all excellent advice because it comes from women who have experienced abuse in intimate relationships. These are their suggestions and in the next section, possible interventions are given for putting their ideas to work.

Chapter V

Interpretation and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to improve the understanding of women's accounts of abusive intimate relationships. This purpose was satisfied as shown by the results in the previous chapter. Women experience different types of abuse ranging from emotional to sexual to physical. Kelly (1988) found that sexual abuse exists in many different ways. What is considered sexual abuse to one person may not be sexual abuse to someone else; what is important is each individual's definition. The women in this study did not experience sexual abuse in the same way. Meg's husband made her participate in sexual fantasies she did not want to be a part of, whereas, Taylor's partner made her participate in sexual acts she did not want to be a part of. Both women were sexually abused but not in the same way.

Dobash and Dobash (1979) and Smith (1990) found patriarchal ideology to play an important role in wife abuse. Pauline wrote that when her husband first began abusing her she did not see it as abuse because "it was my duty to obey my husband and do what he wants me to do..." Furthermore, Stanko (1985) reported that the patriarchal system operates by separating the private from the public. Abuse is a private matter. Taylor mentioned that her next door neighbor heard her crying and screaming but did not try to intervene. Meg was hit by her husband one night while staying with his parents. They did not say anything the next day even though her face was swollen.

Thompson (1992) addressed three considerations for feminist research: agenda, epistemology, and ethics. As will be discussed later in this chapter, I have

suggested disseminating the information learned in this study to women's shelters and women's centers. Learning about how women survive abuse is pointless unless the information is used to inform the public and especially other women about women's experiences. Similarly, the way the information is collected has a bearing on its purpose as a source of community information. To educate people about women's experiences of abuse, researchers need to ask women about their experiences in greater depth, and not only about how many times they were hit last month. All women do not have the same reality. This tenet of postmodern feminism is echoed throughout this study. All of the women who participated were abused but they were not abused in the same way, nor did they perceive their abusive relationship in the same way. For example, Maya perceived her relationship as abusive because she and her partner abused drugs and alcohol and never developed an agreeable definition of their relationship. In contrast, Taylor perceived her relationship as abusive because her partner raped and emotionally abused her.

A plethora of information was gathered from the stories collected in this study. Nevertheless, there is always room for more. The following are some examples of future research suggestions and interventions.

Future Research

Results of this study corresponded with the motivations for account-making identified by Harvey, Weber, and Orbuch (1990) and Weber et al. (1987). More research could be done specifically addressing motivations for account-making. Do women who experienced a particular form of abuse have different or similar motivations for forming accounts? All of the women in this study had left their

abuser. Would results concerning motivation to write the accounts differ for women still in an abusive relationships as compared to those who left?

Harvey, Weber, and Orbuch (1990) asserted that "accounts are often developed most fully after the problematic event is over or after its early impact, if its effects continue" (p. 17). Again, all of the women in this study had terminated their abusive relationship. Would reports of abuse experiences differ across "stages" of an abusive relationship? For example, would a recently wed woman whose husband raises his voice and calls her names describe her marriage in the same way as a recently separated woman whose husband had verbally abused her throughout their marriage? The two women are at different stages of realization about their relationship and it would be interesting to document the differences in accounts at different stages.

The five themes identified in the accounts written for this study are characteristics of abuse, characteristics of the abuser, participants' reactions to abuse, abuse as a private act, and advice and support. Would the same themes emerge in other research with larger, racially and ethnically diverse samples? Would they appear in the accounts of women currently in abusive relationships?

Interventions

Results of this study suggest many possible interventions. Most important, in terms of helping women in similar situations, is the information on advice to other women and to friends and family. All of the women, except one, mentioned a friend or friends as helping them during and after they were involved in the abusive relationship. A few mentioned that their family of origin was supportive but three

stated that they received no help from their family. Is this common for abused women? Do they turn to their friends rather than to their families? Could social programs successfully be adjusted to incorporate friends rather than families?

Other interventions include disseminating the information learned, such as the range of abusive behaviors experienced and the isolation the women felt, to women's shelters, women's centers, and other community service organizations. This is especially true for the advice the participants had for women in similar situations. It also would be helpful to disseminate the information the women gave about what helped them. Others may find this useful in terms of knowing what to do to help someone in an abusive situation.

The information learned about the abusers could be more useful, once additional studies are done, to better understand the abuser from the woman's perspective. This would be important in terms of conflict management strategies for couples in abusive relationships who want to remain married.

Women have different, yet similar experiences in abusive relationships; different in that each experience is unique and similar in that some underlying themes of abuse exist in all of their relationships. Abuse against women is common in United States society and it is important to remember that the statistics on abuse are not just abstract numbers, they represent real people. The "personal is political" is the belief that what happens to an individual is important because everyone's personal experience forms the political reality of society (Berkeley-Oakland Women's Union, 1979). In this study, women's personal accounts of abuse in their intimate relationships were examined and it is important that the results of

this study do not end on paper because "nobody deserves to be beaten and raped or killed" (Pauline).

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Appendix A

Virginia Tech
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Research Division
306 Burruss Hall
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0244
(703) 231-6077 FAX (703) 231-4384

MEMORANDUM

TO: Leigh A. Faulconer
Family and Child Development

FROM: Ernest R. Stout
Associate Provost for Research

DATE: February 8, 1994

SUBJECT: IRB APPROVAL/"Women's Accounts of Abuse in Their Intimate Relationships"
Ref. 94-021

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your request for the above referenced project. We concur that the experiments are of minimal risk to the human subjects who will participate and that appropriate safeguards have been taken. Therefore, the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects approves your request.

This approval is valid for 12 months. If the involvement with human subjects is not complete within 12 months or there is a significant change in the protocol of the project, the project may be resubmitted for extension or approval.

Best wishes.

ERS/php

Appendix B

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN AN ADULT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP THAT WAS DESTRUCTIVE?

A graduate student researcher in the Department of Family and Child Development at Virginia Tech needs volunteers for a study of how women deal with destructive relationships.

If you are female, 18 years or older and have been or are currently in a destructive relationship with a man, please consider sharing your story.

Please call for more information:
Leigh (graduate student in Family and Child Development) at 231-7818
Phone mail available for messages. Leave first name only.

This research has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for projects involving human subjects at Virginia Tech and by the Department of Family and Child Development

Appendix C

Destructive Relationships. Graduate student researcher at VA Tech seeks women 18 or older who are/were in an adult romantic destructive relationship with a man. Participation is confidential. Call Leigh at 231-7818.

Appendix D

Please announce the following in your class:

1. Write my name and phone number on the board (Leigh 231-7818)

2. Ask everyone to copy it down

3. Read this: A graduate student in Family and Child Development needs volunteers for a study on how women deal with destructive relationships. If you are female, 18 years or older and have been or are currently in a destructive relationship with a man, please consider sharing your story. There will be no interview or survey. Women will write about their relationship, focusing on anything they feel comfortable sharing. Please call Leigh if you are interested.

THANK YOU!

Appendix E

To: VTWOMEN

From: Leigh A. Faulconer, Master's Candidate, Family and Child Development

Subject: Seeking research participants

Date: April 12, 1994

PLEASE HELP!

I am looking for volunteers for my thesis study on how women deal with destructive relationships. If you are female, 18 years or older and have been or are currently in (a) destructive relationship(s) with a man, please consider sharing your story. Anything you define as destructive is appropriate for my study. I want your perceptions. There will be no interview or survey. I am asking women to write about their relationship, focusing on anything they feel comfortable sharing.

I am interested in how women, themselves, perceive their relationship. I believe it is time for us all to better understand how women are affected by destructive relationships. Stories can be written by hand, on a computer, on a typewriter, with a crayon, through e-mail, or whatever. I am not interested in correct spelling or correct grammar; write in any style or method you choose. If you prefer, you can orally tell your story and send me a cassette tape.

If you are interested or you know someone who might be interested, please call me (231-7818) or bitnet me (LEIGHF@VTVM1) or have the person get in touch with me. I will send participants a packet of information which will include a consent form, a page of demographic questions, and a list of counseling agencies. For those of you who prefer the computer, I can send everything through e-mail.

Thanks!

Thesis committee chair: Rosemary Blieszner

This research has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for projects involving human subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and by the Department of Family and Child Development.

****DO NOT HIT THE REPLY (F5) KEY. RESPOND TO ME DIRECTLY.****

Appendix F

Virginia Tech
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Department of Family and Child Development
College of Human Resources
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0416
(703) 231-4794 or (703) 231-4795
Fax: (703) 231-7012

Thanks for agreeing to participate in my study on women in destructive intimate relationships. I want to emphasize that this is completely confidential and no one will ever know your name. If you have changed your mind about taking part in the study, you do not have to participate. You can stop at any time.

I am interested in your perceptions of being in a destructive relationship. This happens to so many women that I believe it is important for us all to better understand how women are affected. You can send me your story written by hand, on a computer, on a typewriter, with a crayon, or whatever you feel most comfortable with. Don't worry, I am not interested in correct spelling or correct grammar. Please write in any style or method you choose.

I have included some questions for you to think about. These are only suggestions; you can write about one of these or anything else you wish. You will also find a page of background questions. Please answer these questions and return them to me. If you agree to participate in the study, please sign the inclosed consent form. This is required for all research involving people.

I have enclosed 2 self-addressed stamped envelopes. Please mail the signed consent form in one envelope and your story and the background questionnaire in the other. When I receive this information, I will separate the signed consent form and your other material so that your name will not be associated with your story. If you are interested in receiving a summary of the results of this study please write your name and address on a piece of paper and include it with your signed consent form.

If you find that this becomes difficult for you and you would like to get some help, I have enclosed a list of counseling agencies in the area. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to call me during the day at 231-6630. Please return your stories to me before <DATE>. Thanks again for your participation.

Sincerely,

Leigh A. Faulconer
Master's Student

Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Title of Project: Women's accounts of abuse in their intimate relationships

Principal Investigator: Leigh A. Faulconer

Purpose of this research project

You are invited to participate in a study about women in destructive relationships. The purpose of this investigation is to better understand how women deal with destructive relationships.

Procedures

I am asking women who have been or are in destructive relationships to write about their experiences in these relationships. I have enclosed a list of questions you may use if you cannot think of a specific area to write about. These are only suggestions; you can write about these or anything else you wish. Your time commitment entails writing your story and returning it to me.

You can stop writing at any time and it is okay for you to decide not to participate.

Risks of this project

Your participation in this project may be emotionally difficult for you. A potential risk of participating in this research is that it may trigger negative or troubling feelings for you. If it becomes too difficult for you to continue with this project, you may withdraw at any time. I have enclosed a list of area counseling agencies should you need outside help.

Benefits of this project

No benefits are guaranteed to you. Your participation in this project may help you better examine your views about your relationship. Some people find it helpful to write about bad experiences and this may help you rectify unresolved feelings. You will also help researchers better understand how women deal with and explain their destructive relationships. Many women are abused by the people they love and it is important for women to speak out against this abuse. You will help us understand what we can do to help people in this type of situation.

Extent of anonymity and confidentiality

Your story will be kept in a locked file cabinet. At no time will the researcher release the stories collected to anyone. I will remove your name from any information you send me and I will not release your name to anyone.

In the rare circumstance that you provide identifying information, that indicates you or someone else may be in danger, I will have to break confidentiality. Please do not include your name anywhere on your story or background questionnaire.

Freedom to withdraw

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

Approval of research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for projects involving human subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and by the Department of Family and Child Development.

Participant's responsibility

If you would still like to participate in this study, please sign your name below and return the bottom half of this form to me in one of the enclosed envelopes.

If you have further concerns about this research or its conduct please contact:

Leigh A. Faulconer (Investigator)	231-7657
Rosemary Blieszner (Faculty Advisor)	231-5437
Ernest R. Stout (Chair, Institutional Review Board)	231-6077

Tear here and return this half to me.

I have read and understand the above information and any questions I have have been answered. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

_____

Signature

Questions

The following are questions you might want to think about. You can write about one of these or anything else you wish.

- Describe the first signs of your destructive relationship.
- How do/did you deal with this relationship?
- Describe different types of humiliating events in your relationship.
- How did/does you partner react after these incidents? How do/did you respond to his actions?
- Has this relationship affected the way you view yourself? Has it affected the way you view relationships? Has it affected the way you view men? If so, how?
- What message does society give about violence against women?
- Are there times when you have lost control or lost your temper with your partner?
- What advice would you give to someone in a situation like yours?
- What advice would you give to the family and friends of someone in a situation like yours?
- What would have been helpful for you from your family and friends?
- How, if at all, did drug or alcohol use affect your relationship?
- Have you had more than one adult romantic relationship that was destructive?

Again, you do not have to answer any of these questions. I am very interested in your story and how you choose to tell it.

Background Questionnaire

These questions will help me describe the characteristics of the women in my study. Again, you may stop at any time and are not obligated to answer any of these questions.

How old are you today?

_____ years.

Which best describes your total household income? (Choose one)

A. Less than $10,000
B. $10,000 to $19,999
C. $20,000 to $39,999
D. $40,000 to $59,999
E. $60,000 to $89,999
F. More than $90,000

What is your highest level of education?

_____

What best describes your race or ethnicity?

_____

What type(s) of relationship(s) did you describe in your story?

A. Living together
B. Dating
C. Married
D. Other:_____

Are you still in this relationship?

If YES, how long have you been in it?____
If NO, how long have you been out of it?__

How long had you been in this relationship before it became destructive? (Please answer below)

_____

How did you find out about this study?

A.Flyer (Location:_____)
B. Newspaper ad
(Newspaper:_____)
C. Class
(Which class_____)
D. Therapist
E. Other
(Specify:_____)

What kind, if any, help have you received with the relationship(s) you described? (for example, therapy, talking with friends or family, hotlines, women's shelters)

Who has been the most helpful for you and what kind of help did they give?

Not everyone who has been in a destructive relationship is able to write about it. Why were you able to write your story? (Please answer below)

(Please return this page to me)

Area counseling services

24 hour crisis hotlines	
Women's Resource Center	639-1123
RAFT	
Radford	639-1738
Montgomery County	382-1738
Pulaski	674-1738
Floyd	745-2333
Giles	921-1738
Dr. Dorinda Miller Blacksburg •special pay arrangements available	951-9601
Psychological Services Center (Ellie Sturgis or Peg Warren) Blacksburg •sliding scale	231-6914
Center for Family Services Blacksburg •sliding scale	231-7201
Cooper House Blacksburg •sliding scale	552-3046
Psychological and Counseling Services (Ellie Sturgis) Roanoke	344-4339
Rev. Janet L. Ramsey Roanoke	772-1872
Mental Health Services of the New River Valley •sliding scale	
Radford Clinic	831-5904
Montgomery County Clinic	381-1516
Pulaski Clinic	980-0660
Floyd Clinic	745-2047

VITA

Leigh A. Faulconer

Home Address
107 Buckingham Place
Blacksburg, VA 24060
703-552-9465

Office Address
Liberal Arts and Sciences
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
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Blacksburg, VA 24060-0122
703-231-6630

Education

M.S. in Family and Child Development-Family Studies (December 1994)
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060-0416

Graduate work in Sociology August 1991-May 1992
State University of New York at Buffalo
Buffalo, NY 14260

B.S. in Sociology May 1991, Cum Laude
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, VA 24060-0137

Employment

June 1994-Present
Academic Advisor, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Research and Teaching Experience

October 1993-June 1994
Graduate Research Assistant for William J. McAuley, Associate Professor of Family and Child Development; Director, Center for Gerontology, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

October 1993
Guest lectures on domestic violence in two sections of Introduction to Sociology at Radford University, Radford, VA.

August 1992-October 1993
Graduate Assistant for William J. McAuley, Professor of Family and Child Development; Director, Center for Gerontology, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Spring 1992
Graduate Teaching Assistant for "Medical Sociology" under Tai Kang, Associate Professor of Sociology, State University of New York at Buffalo.

August 1990-May 1991
Undergraduate Research Assistant for Terry Miethe, Associate Professor of Sociology, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Professional Activities and Presentations

Faulconer, L. A. (1994). In the best interests of children? Family Relations, 43, 261-263.

Roundtable presentation: Feminist perspectives on caregiving, A. D. Hensley & L. A. Faulconer, 15th Annual Southern Gerontological Society Meeting, Charlotte, NC, April 1994.

Abstract Reviewer for Feminism and Family Studies Section of the National Council on Family Relations Annual Meeting, 1994.

Abstract Reviewer for Association for Gerontology in Higher Education Annual Meeting 1994.

Program Committee, Association for Gerontology in Higher Education Annual Meeting 1994.

Reviewer for Canadian Journal on Aging, 1993.

Reviewer for Psychology and Aging, 1993.

Paper presentation: Exploring new frontiers in friendship and well-being, R. Blieszner, R.G. Adams, & L. A. Faulconer, 14th Annual Southern Gerontological Society Meeting, Richmond, VA, April 1993. (Presented by Blieszner).

Roundtable presentation: Encouraging and Maintaining Friendships Among Older Adults, 14th Annual Southern Gerontological Society Meeting, Richmond, VA, April 1993.

Roundtable presentation: A theoretical appraisal: Theories of crime explaining violence against women in intimate relationships. American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Miami, August 1993.

Abstract Reviewer for Southern Gerontological Society Annual Meeting, 1993.
Program Committee, Co-Chair, Southern Gerontological Society Annual Meeting, 1993

Family Violence, Roundtable Organizer, American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, August 1992.

Roundtable presentation: A Feminist Critique of Family Systems Theory: The Case of Incest, American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, August 1992.

Paper presentation: A Feminist Perspective on Wife Abuse: How it is Perpetrated By Society, Contemporary Research: Developing a Sociological Imagination Symposium, Buffalo, New York, January 1992.

University and Related Activities

March 1994-Present
Advanced Crisis Intervention Volunteer, Women's Resource Center, Radford, Virginia.

January 1994-Present
Rape Crisis Companion Volunteer, Women's Resource Center, Radford, Virginia.

September 1993-September 1994
Graduate representative to the College of Human Resources Computer Committee, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

June 1993-March 1994
Crisis Intervention Volunteer, Women's Resource Center, Radford, Virginia.

September 1992-May 1993
Senator, Graduate Student Assembly, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

September 1992-May 1993
Member, Family and Child Development Graduate Student Association, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

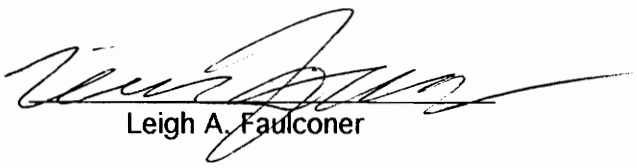
September 1991-August 1992
Assistant Editor/Writer, *The Graduate Quill*, State University of New York at Buffalo.

Spring 1992
Steering Committee for proposed Women's Center, State University of New York at Buffalo.

Professional Memberships

American Sociological Association: Sex and Gender Section, Family Section, Aging Section
Honors Program Student Association of the American Sociological Association
National Council on Family Relations: Feminism and Family Studies Section
Southeastern Council on Family Relations
Southern Gerontological Society
Gerontological Society of America: Behavioral and Social Sciences Section

References Available Upon Request



Leigh A. Faulconer