

AN ABSTRACT of the THESIS OF

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Ten female survivors of physically assaultive domestic violence were interviewed three times each in a feminist, qualitative study designed to access their perceptions about their children's experiences in domestic violence. All participants had children living with them at the time of the abuse and were one to five years out of the abuse.

All women stated their children had been exposed to domestic violence. Women described their children's involvement in the following areas: legal (visitation, custody, child support); indirect involvement (witnessing effects of abuse) and direct involvement (feeling responsible, protecting parents); and direct child maltreatment. Child maltreatment rates measured by homes were: physical (50%); sexual (20%); emotional (90%); and neglect (70%).

No patterns were present regarding child involvement. That is, children's involvement did not progress in a clear pattern from indirect to direct.

While all women protected their children in the relationship, four turning points were identified in a continuum of women's protective actions: child

witnessed abuse to mom; mom saw signs in child; emotional abuse to the child; and physical or sexual abuse to the child. Turning points were the points at which the women recognized they could no longer protect their children within the context of the violent relationship. Unmarried women reached their turning point earlier while women whose church involvement dictated strict obedience to spouse and those who experienced the most severe physical abuse reached their turning points later. Turning points often corresponded with leaving the relationship and were related to both social context and individual variables,.

Perceptions of motherhood in domestic violence were also studied. Women cited their children as important influences in staying with, returning to, and leaving abusive partners. Women stayed in relationships because of socially conditioned beliefs about children needing fathers, beliefs about marriage and family, and perceptions of children's bonds with their fathers. Finally, women's perceptions of motherhood fell into four categories: protection of their children; conflict between roles as wife and mother; concern about meeting their children's needs; and guilt about mothering. The two women who prioritized the needs of their children over their abusive partners were spared some guilt.

Women's Perceptions of Their Children's Experiences in Domestic Violence

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Barbara L. Wood, Author

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WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is strongly linked to domestic violence (Bowker, Arbitell, & McFerron, 1988; Stark & Flitcraft, 1988). Even when children of battered women are not directly physically abused, they often suffer from behavioral and developmental problems as a result of exposure to violence between their parents (Wolfe, Jaffe, & Wilson, 1990). Children implicated in domestic violence have been called "yo-yo" children (Moore, 1975) because of the ways they are used as pawns in arguments by both parents. The purpose of this study was to explore the ways children were involved in domestic violence from mothers' perspectives.

Domestic violence is the systematic use of physical, emotional, psychological, economic, and sexual tactics by one member of an intimate relationship to control the behavior of the other (Walker, 1984). Domestic violence ranges from actions such as verbal intimidation and harassment to life-threatening physical aggression (Walker, 1979). It is estimated that 95% of all violence in the home is perpetrated by men against their female partners (Dutton, 1988) and that as many as 50% of all women will be victims of a battering incident at some point in their lives (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Walker, 1979). Occurring more frequently than stranger rapes, muggings, and automobile accidents combined,

battering is the most frequent cause of injuries to women (Dobash & Dobash, 1977-78). Domestic violence is estimated to occur in 3.8 to 8.7 million couples annually, and 28% to 33% of all couples reported experiencing some violence during their relationship (Koss, 1990).

Nationally, between 3.3 million (Carlson, 1984) and 10 million children (Straus, 1991) under the age of 18 witness violence between their parental caregivers each year. Children of battered women have been called the "unintended victims" (Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989). Children in homes with domestic violence are exposed in many ways and to many forms of violence including: direct child assault; legal issues with special attention to visitation, custody, and child support decisions; and other forms of indirect and direct involvement in violence. Indirect assault occurs when the child is not the intended victim but still suffers harm. For example, small children being held by their mothers receive blows intended for their mothers (Christian, Scribano, Seidl, & Pinto-Martin, 1997; Dobash, 1977). Older children, trying to interrupt the violence, are hit when they place themselves between parents during violence trying to protect their mothers during assault (Alsop, 1995; Dobash, 1977) or intervene in fights (Christian, Scribano, Seidl, Pinto-Martin, 1997). Children of all ages are hit by thrown objects (Wolfe, Jaffe & Wilson, 1990; Roy, 1988).

Children are affected by domestic violence whether or not they are injured directly. Children are exposed to the effects of domestic violence at least until the time their mother leaves the relationship. Many women only leave after they recognize their children are being harmed (Pagelow, 1982). If the typical patterns of

child involvement were defined, women would be able to recognize the harm done to their children prior to them being victims of direct assault. Care providers might be able to help women leave abusive situations sooner, minimizing the harm done to their children.

The ability to more adequately articulate the experiences of children may help in treatment and intervention efforts. Without the tools to assess and describe children's experiences, clinicians are simply probing in the dark for an understanding of children's experiences. Better information about children's experiences will aid in the development of tools and instruments to more accurately record events in these young lives. Such improved documentation will enable the field to develop better treatment materials that reflect more accurately the experiences and developmental processes of children. Finally, if it is possible to articulate a trajectory or typical pathway that occurs in the lives of children who experience domestic violence, better education, public policy and early intervention efforts can be developed. Child protection workers, medical and mental health professionals, educational professionals, domestic violence advocates, and others could be taught to identify domestic violence and its impact on children long before children become victims of direct assault. We, as a society, can begin to address this social problem before another generation has adopted unproductive problem-solving strategies.

Social pressures, such as family, finances, church, media, professionals, and others are important in understanding women's decisions and children's exposure to domestic violence. Their role as mother is important to understand because children are frequently central to women's decisions about their relationships. With

their children in mind, women make decisions to remain in, return to, or leave abusive relationships. Women's conceptions of motherhood in the context of domestic violence provide new understanding of internal conflicts faced by the participants in this study.

Clinical literature provides numerous anecdotal examples of the ways in which children are implicated in domestic violence including: involvement in legal disputes such as custody or visitation agreements; social pressures that keep women and their children living with abusive men; actual involvement in conflict; and direct physical assault. However, these issues have not been addressed empirically.

Because domestic violence is a social problem shrouded in secrecy, we have been unable to accurately describe or measure the types of violent experiences to which children are exposed. In this study, I surveyed women who are survivors of physically aggressive domestic violence to determine their perceptions about how their children have been implicated in domestic violence. Through the use of qualitative, feminist, in-depth interviewing techniques, I sought to answer four questions. First, how were children implicated in domestic violence? Second, how do the characteristics (of child, mother, or the abuser) relate to the ways children were involved in domestic violence? Third, do patterns of abuse relate to how children become involved in domestic violence? Finally, with the participants' stories, I explored the meaning of motherhood in the context of domestic violence.

CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Whether they are directly injured or secondary victims, children who are exposed to domestic violence show deleterious effects (Wolfe, Jaffe & Wilson, 1990). To date, the literature concerning children exposed to domestic violence focuses primarily on the effects of violence on the child's physical health (Westra & Martin, 1981); emotional coping (Hughes, 1988; Hughes & Barad, 1983); behavioral adjustment (Fantuzzo, DePaola, Lambert, Martino, Anderson, & Sutton, 1991; Holden & Ritchie, 1991); cognitive (Grych & Fincham, 1990), and social development (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986b); differences in development based on the child's age and gender (Moore, Pepler, Mae, & Kates, 1989); the effects of mother's stress level or coping ability (Holden & Ritchie, 1991); and the impact of shelter and other life crises (Davis & Carlson, 1987; Hilberman & Munson, 1977-1978). Research has shown a high correlation between domestic violence and child abuse (Bowker, Arbitell & McFerron, 1988; Start & Flitcraft, 1988), but little is known about the process of how that happens.

This literature review will focus on theories explaining domestic violence, and will focus specifically on a feminist analysis that includes social, political, economic, and historical contexts of domestic violence; the role of society and family in the continuation of domestic violence; children and domestic violence; the intersection between child abuse and domestic violence, and the four areas identified for examination in this research. Those areas based on a review of the clinical literature are: direct assault; legal problems including visitation, custody, and child

support; social pressures and motherhood; and involvement in parental conflict. The literature review will make obvious the need for more research into the process by which children become implicated in domestic violence.

Domestic Violence

In domestic violence one partner uses violence or the threat of violence to limit and control the behavior and actions of the other partner (Walker, 1979). In the vast majority of cases, violence is perpetrated by male members in heterosexual relationships, however, violence may also be exhibited by heterosexual females and by members in homosexual relationships (Renzetti, 1991). Domestic violence is manifest as physical expressions of control or violence, but other, less obvious tactics which may be harder to recognize by those external to the relationship are also used by abusive partners. Less obvious means of control include emotional or psychological abuse, financial abuse, and sexual abuse. The abusive partner's goal regardless of the methods used, is to control the behavior, thoughts or feelings of their partner (Walker, 1979).

Rates of domestic violence vary greatly and depend on the sample selected and the methodology used. One study found 16% of couples engaging in physical violence each year while the rate jumped to 28% if violence was measured over the course of the entire relationship (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). These same authors remarked that these statistics more than likely understate the problem for psychological and methodological reasons. First, they expect that for some families, a slap, push, or shove are so much a part of everyday life that they are

unremarkable. Second, on the opposite end of the spectrum, for some families there is so much shame attached to such behavior that they would be unlikely to report it. Finally, they surveyed only couples living together, not separated or divorced couples in which violence may be more likely. They also asked only about the current marriage, not about previous relationships. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) believe a more realistic estimate of actual relationship violence is between 50% and 60%.

Theoretical Framework

Domestic violence has been studied through psychological, sociological or family systems, and feminist theoretical perspectives. The theory used to explain and understand a social phenomena is important in the questions that are asked as well as the answers proposed for its resolution (Reinharz, 1992). Each perspective will be reviewed in this section.

Psychological approaches seek to understand domestic violence through examination of individual characteristics of men and women (Bograd, 1988; Roy, 1977). These approaches focus on personality traits and uses mental illness as an explanation of both parties' involvement in the violence. Violent men have been labeled passive-aggressive, infantile, and lacking impulse control. Battered women have been labeled masochistic, paranoid, personality disordered, and depressed. Such approaches are inadequate for two reasons. First, the focus on the individual suggests that violence is abnormal behavior. Estimates suggest that up to 50% of women will experience an episode of interpersonal violence at some point in their

lives (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). These rates suggest that domestic violence is less a function of abnormal behavior than most people would like to believe. The second reason psychological approaches are inadequate is that they ignore the social context of the violence. Men's relative advantage over women in most social institutions is not considered, nor are the structurally enforced institutions that serve to reinforce men's power advantage. Psychological approaches may be important in understanding the experiences of some abusive men and some battered women. In such cases underlying psychological conditions contribute to relationship dysfunction; however, the psychological approach alone is inadequate to understand and explain domestic violence.

The sheer number of wife abuse cases leads to consideration of larger sociological factors that help explain domestic violence. Sociologists have proposed theories of social inequality as explanations for violence within family arrangements (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Two problems exist with these approaches. Often sociologists and family theorists are gender neutral in their examination of domestic violence. Both parties are seen as having equal power and equal roles and responsibility in the instigation and perpetuation of violence. A gender-neutral approach ignores facts that consistently demonstrate that women are by far the most frequent victims of domestic violence. Also, explanations based on a gender-neutral stance often hold the victim accountable for her abuse. Further, such explanations ignore the fact that most family relationships are structured along the same lines of gender and power as larger society, i.e., that men control more power than women

in society. To ignore the importance of power in an analysis of violence leads to an incomplete understanding.

When sociologists view the family as a social institution, wife battering is often attributed to the breakdown of family functioning. This breakdown may be explained by stress or changing cultural norms. An explanation of stress might adequately explain violence if the prevalence of violence were the same for both genders. The stress argument also fails to acknowledge the reality that abusive men can control their behavior in environments where the cost of violence is higher, e.g., at work or with the police. And that violent men use violence in situations where it achieves the desired result and they can get away with it, i.e., with their female partners.

Changes in social norms are often blamed for domestic violence (Bograd, 1988). In part this explanation is correct. However, the sociological perspective stops short of considering the inequalities in the social system as explanation for men's use of violence against women. In an attempt to remain value-neutral, the status quo is reinforced and women striving for more equality are blamed for the violence done to them.

In contrast to more purely sociological perspectives, feminist theoreticians explain domestic violence as a natural extension of sex roles, acted out in the home, which are supported institutionally by the larger society (Bograd, 1988; Yllo, 1988). A feminist analysis of domestic violence considers not only the individual act of violence, but the social, political, economic, and historical contexts that underlie violent acts. A feminist analysis recognizes the magnitude of the problem of

domestic violence. Domestic violence is widespread, cuts across socio-demographic variables, and is predominately experienced by women as perpetrated by their male partners. Further, a feminist analysis considers the responses of social, legal, and support systems for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. In the next section a feminist perspective will guide an examination of the social, political, economic, and historical contexts of domestic violence.

Contextual Analysis

It is important to consider the context surrounding domestic violence, for both the individual violent act in a single family unit, and society's response during a macro analysis of the problem. As Harway and Hansen (1994) stated, "To explore social problems devoid of their contexts is to promote inequality." For example, when considering a possible police response to a domestic violence call in which the woman fought back out of self-defense, if she has left a mark on him, she will be the one arrested if the investigating officers fail to adequately understand the individual and historical context of violence in that relationship.

Taking this example further, to ignore the larger social context further compromises the woman's position. This same woman is often criticized for not leaving the relationship. Without recognizing the social, political, economic, and historical realities as well as men's relative advantage to women, it is nearly impossible to understand why she stays, therefore, making it easier to blame her for the violence she suffers. Understanding the larger socio-political issues of women and violence, as well as a historical perspective, places the problem of domestic

violence within its context (Reinharz 1992). Therefore, studying domestic violence through a feminist view is appropriate (Maguire, 1987).

Viewing the social context in relation to gender and power is especially important to understanding domestic violence. Sex-role stereotypes may maintain battering as the problem it is today (Harway & Hansen, 1994). Miedzian (1995) defined the "masculine mystique" as a set of values centered on toughness, dominance, extreme competitiveness, eagerness to fight, repression of empathy, and argues that these values are still central to the socialization of boys in this society.

Differences exist in society's tolerance for violence depending on one's gender. As explained by Harway and Hansen (1994), men's violent behavior is tolerated in society much more easily than women's violence.

Expressions of aggression by a batterer toward his wife (even those stemming from a loss of control) fail to be condemned by society because they are role congruent, while fighting back (usually in self-defense) by the wife would be condemned because it is incongruent with the female role (p. 5).

Dobash and Dobash (1979) explain that men's use of violence against women is culturally prescribed.

Men who assault their wives are actually living up to cultural prescriptions that are cherished in Western society—aggressiveness, male dominance and female subordination—and they are using physical force as a means to enforce that dominance (p. 24).

Recognition of different levels of acceptance of violence depending on the gender of the perpetrator explains in part, society's myopia with regards to domestic violence.

The content of domestic violence is also important as the fights are often based on gender issues such as sex, housework, childcare, women's right to

money, and wage work (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Violence is directed at a woman's gender identity including her sexual identity (Hilberman & Munson, 1977/78).

The larger social system response to domestic violence, from medical and clinical interventions to legal standards, often holds the victim responsible for her abuse while the abuser is not held accountable (Stark & Flitcraft, 1988). In domestic violence cases that come to the attention of child protection agencies, mothers are placed in the unenviable position of "failing to protect" their children and further blamed for their abuse (McKay, 1994).

The response of the larger social system is also important to women's reactions to domestic violence. Economic inequality and limited access to education and jobs keep some women from easily leaving a violent situation. Further, legal remedies are inadequate for ensuring the safety of abused women. In most states temporary restraining orders are the only action women can take. Since temporary restraining orders can only be enforced if violated, they often do not keep victims safe. For their safety, and the safety of their children, fleeing the relationship and home may be the only solution. The result is that survivors of domestic violence are left to begin again with little social or economic support.

Finally, the historical context of domestic violence is important. Throughout most of recorded history, in many societies, women and children were the property of their fathers. When women married, their ownership was transferred to the husband. In the Middle Ages, priests directed male parishioners to beat their wives, and the wives to kiss the rod that beat them. Women and children were considered

to have no human rights. A medieval Christian scholar explained "Rules of Marriage" in the 15th century:

When you see your wife commit an offense, don't rush at her with insults and violent blows...Scold her sharply, bully and terrify her. And if this doesn't work...take up a stick and beat her soundly, for it is better to punish the body and correct the soul than to damage the soul and spare the body...Then readily beat her, not in rage but out of charity and concern for her soul, so that the beating will redound to your merit and her good (quoted in Davidson, 1978, pg. 99).

British common law later embraced, but limited, a husband's authority to assault wives by adopting the "rule of thumb," which permitted a man to beat his wife "with a rod not thicker than his thumb" (Davidson, 1977). Although there is no jurisdiction in the United States that permits a husband to strike his wife, the reality is that men still use violence against wives without fear of reprisal in many jurisdictions (Hart, 1993).

In summary, a feminist perspective that incorporates social, economic, political, and historic contexts is important in understanding domestic violence. Also important is the role of larger society and family in domestic violence. These will be addressed in the next sections.

Societal Role in Continuation of Violence

Much evidence confirms the notion that American society supports violence. Some even argue that our culture socializes children to accept violence (Miedzian, 1995), giving as examples young boys' heroes and role models, violence in film and television, music and music videos that glorify violence (especially violence against women), fighting at and in sporting events, and violent toys such as guns and

knives. Many children are left to the care of television because economic conditions dictate that both parents must work to support the family. Violence in television programming is based on economic gain as opposed to what is good for children (Miedzian, 1995). These conditions give children from violent homes a double dose of violence (Wolfe, Jaffe, & Wilson, 1990).

Marriage and family as social institutions support the use of male violence against women. Certainly not all families are violent, but when violence exists, there is some cultural sanctioning for power and dominance, especially when used against women and children. Power inequalities within marriage and families are reinforced by societal norms. Bograd (1988) states, "The social institutions of marriage and the family are special contexts that may promote, maintain and even support men's use of physical force against women" (pg. 12).

Role of the Family in Domestic Violence

Family structure in modern society has supported the sexist roles between men and women, thereby teaching children early sex-role socialization (Walker, 1979). Harway and Hansen (1994), discussing the meaning of "family" and its support for sexist roles between men and women, note that,

...the traditional family is a system where the balance of power is inherently unequal, mimicking other relationships of men and women, where men have usually held the power and women have been subservient to those in power over them (Harway & Hansen, 1994, p. 4).

Although violence in families is often viewed as rare or deviant, in fact it is a predictable and common dimension of family life as currently structured (Bograd,

1988). Feminist theoreticians see historical patterns of wife abuse continued with the development of the isolated nuclear family in a capitalist society, the division of the public and private/domestic domains, the specialization of *appropriate* male and female family roles, and the current position of wives as legally and morally bound to husbands (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Martin, 1976; Schechter, 1982).

However, today wife abuse is not seen as a "normal" part of life. When domestic violence occurs, both parties are often pathologized by society at large (Lloyd, 1991). For many people, it is easier to believe that domestic violence is the result of some characterological disorder, due to the abuse of alcohol or drugs, or caused by mental illness. Yet no typical psychological profile has been found for either batterer or abused woman (Harway & Hansen, 1994). In contrast, the feminist view sees domestic violence as the logical extension of a sexist society in which one gender has more power than the other (Walker, 1979). Violence is only one of many options for those in power to insure consistent control over their property (Hart, 1990).

In addition to the sexist roles of parents, which are modeled to the children, the American family may actually promote the possibility of violence as well. In discussing child abuse, Stacey and Shupe (1983) outline three reasons for this. First, the cultural pattern of self-reliance often plays itself out in the form of control, with the man as head of the household. Second, parents have the legal right to use force in discipline. Finally, people have limited time and energy for managing disagreements and conflict. Physical discipline is likely to result in the desired behavioral change, at least in the short run.

A positive family environment is critically important for children's healthy development. Emotional development of children "is intimately connected with the safety and nurturing provided by their environment" (Van der Kolk, 1987, pg. 14). In a home with domestic violence, the children's safety, nurturing needs, and development are often overlooked. At best, these children may be victims of neglect, and at worst, victims of fatal child abuse.

The significance of the relationship between abusive male partner and children in the violent home is unknown at this time. What is clear, is that when abuse is directed at the children, they are at risk of physical injury and emotional harm. The legal system limits some actions of the batterer in the case of non-biological children and the batterer is unlikely to gain custody or visitation of children who are not his own (Cahn, 1991).

Women's family roles in domestic violence are unenviable and compounded by social pressures that exert enormous pressure on their thinking and decision-making. First, women often report staying with an abusive man because they believe that their children need a father (Walker, 1979). Second, women are often encouraged by friends and family members, as well as social service, religious, and legal systems, to endure violence in order to preserve the family relationship (Walker, 1979). Finally, when women attempt to access support from the legal and social service systems, they may be met with inadequate legal protection or worse. In some cases when children are exposed to domestic violence, women are actually forced by the child welfare system to leave the relationship or lose their children (McKay, 1994). In other examples, the abuser may make false reports to legal and

social service systems, further constricting a woman's options (Hart, 1993). Few resources are available to help women who are experiencing domestic violence, and in many jurisdictions, child protection systems hold her responsible for the abuse done to her children, regardless of who abused them (Stark & Flitcraft, 1988).

For example, when a domestic violence case comes to the awareness of the child protective services field, a mother's inactivity on behalf of her children is seen as evidence that she is a poor mother (McKay, 1994). In this way, the legal system colludes with the abuser, and children become the basis for holding the mother accountable for the abuse to her (Schechter & Edleson, 1995). She's told that she is a bad mother during countless arguments with him. She can't leave to protect her children and herself because the needed resources (housing, job, economic, social supports) are not available and she is unable to provide for her children's needs. In such interventions, the violent male's role is often given little or no attention.

Women may remain in the relationship longer than desired because she may also fear reprisal, with good reason. Women are in the greatest danger when they attempt to leave abusive situations (Hart, 1993). Rather than face this escalated danger, she may stay in the environment that is dangerous to her and to her children, in which her battering partner tells her again that she's a bad mother and continues to abuse her for it.

In summary, family structure, roles and expectations form the social context in which domestic violence is embedded. Family is where children are first socialized and learn what it is to be male or female and how to relate to one another.

Children living in homes where domestic violence occurs learn early on what it means to be part of violence.

Children and Domestic Violence

Nationally, between 3.3 million (Carlson, 1984) and 10 million children (Straus, 1991) under the age of 18 witness violence between their parental caregivers each year. In spite of parents' efforts to deny their children's exposure to domestic violence, children who live in homes with active violence actually see a great deal of the violence. One study reported that up to 80% of the children who had lived with domestic violence had witnessed violence between their parents (Sinclair, 1985). In a New York shelter for battered women, six out of seven children witnessed at least 1 weekly act of violence (Gibson & Gutierrez, 1991). Forty-one to 55% of domestic disturbances involving police intervention had children present (Hinchley & Gavelek, 1982). Further, children accounted for 50% of the witnesses called in domestic violence court cases (Dobash, 1977). In clinical reports, children are able to give detailed accounts of the violence inflicted upon their mothers (Elbow, 1982). If they fail to witness the violence, they may hear it through the walls, witness the aftermath by seeing the destruction of property or the bruises on their mother (Wolfe, Jaffe, & Wilson, 1990), and experience the emotional trauma done to their mothers (Carroll, Foy, Cannon, & Zwier, 1991).

Children suffer behavioral, emotional, and developmental consequences as a result of exposure to domestic violence (Wolfe, Jaffe, & Wilson, 1990). Although specific outcomes vary, higher externalizing and/or internalizing behaviors and lower

social competency scores characterize children who are exposed to domestic violence (Christopoulos, Cohn, Shaw, Joyce, Sullivan-Hanson, Kraft, & Emery 1987; Fulmer, 1991; Hughes, 1988; Moore, Pepler, Mae, & Kates 1989; Shepard, 1992; Wildin, Williamson, & Wilson, 1991; Wolfe, Jaffe, & Wilson, 1990; Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson, & Zak, 1985).

Age, gender, severity of violence, mother's emotional response, as well as other situational and demographic variables affect the impact of domestic violence upon children (Moore, Pepler, Weinberg, Hammond, Waddell, & Weiser, 1990; Wolfe, Jaffe, & Wilson, 1990). Children at various stages of development understand and cope with violence between their parents in different ways (Carlson, 1984; Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986). Coping is a function of their cognitive abilities and resources for adaptation (Arroyo & Eth, 1995; Wolfe, Jaffe & Wilson, 1990).

Compared to children who do not witness domestic violence, children exposed to domestic violence suffer many negative emotional consequences. The negative consequences include higher levels of anxiety (Forsstrom-Cohn & Rosenbaum, 1985; Hughes & Barad, 1983; Levine, 1975; Shepard, 1992), higher levels of depression (Christopoulos, Cohn, Shaw, Joyce, Sullivan-Hanson, Kraft, & Emery, 1987; Forsstrom-Cohn & Rosenbaum, 1985; Klingbeil & Boyd, 1984), greater incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (Arroyo & Eth, 1995; Baum, O'Keefe, & Davidson, 1990; Deblinger, 1991; Miller & Basoglu, 1991; Pynoos, Frederick, Nader, Arroyo, Steinberg, Eth, Nunez, & Fairbanks, 1987; Silvern & Kaersvang, 1989; Van der Kolk, 1987), lower levels of empathy (Hinchey &

Gavelek, 1982), and lower scores on measures of self-esteem and self-concept (Hughes, 1988; Hughes & Barad, 1983; Klingbeil & Boyd, 1984; Westra and Martin, 1981).

In addition, children who are exposed to domestic violence suffer higher levels of psychosomatic illness (Gayford, 1975; Hilberman & Munson, 1977-78; Shepard, 1992), more disorders in cognitive and emotional development (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986a), more hearing and language disorders (Westra & Martin, 1981), lower verbal, cognitive and motor abilities (Westra & Martin, 1981), and higher rates of learning problems (Shepard, 1992). In addition, the "subtle symptoms" of exposure to domestic violence include errors in assigning responsibility for violence, learning violent responses and attitudes about conflict resolution, and lack of knowledge and skills in dealing nonviolent responses to conflict (Jaffe, Sudermann, & Reitzel, 1992; Wolfe, Jaffe, & Wilson, 1990).

Intersection of Domestic Violence and Child Abuse

The higher incidence of child abuse in homes with domestic violence has been well documented – children living in homes with domestic violence are at greater risk of direct child assault. Rates of child abuse double for children whose mothers are beaten compared to mothers who are not (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Two-thirds of abused children are parented by battered women (Stark & Flitcraft, 1988). Over half of men who abuse their wives also deliberately abuse their children (Zorza, 1991). Rates of child abuse in homes with domestic violence have been estimated to be 35% (O'Keeffe, 1994; Walker, 1979), 40% (Jaffe, Wolfe,

Wilson, & Zak, 1986b; Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson, & Zak, 1988), 45% (Stacey & Shupe, 1983), 66% (Wilden, Williamson, & Wilson, 1991), 70% (Bowker, Arbitell, & McFerron, 1988), and as high as 91% (Jouriles, Barling, & O'Leary, 1987). In a recent meta-analysis reporting on the overlap between child maltreatment and woman abuse, the authors place the overlap rate at between 40 and 60% (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 1997).

The more severe the violence against the mother, the more severe the abuse toward the child (Bowker, Arbitell, & McFerron, 1988; Straus & Gelles, 1990). In fact, the ways children are abused have been found to be similar to the way their mothers are abused (Stacey & Shupe, 1983). In homes with extreme domestic violence, children are at greater risk of child fatality or severe injury (Oregon Department of Human Resources, 1993). Children, especially girls, are sexually abused at higher rates when men are physically abusive to their spouses (Stacey & Shupe, 1983; Walker, 1979). In many cases, abuse against children is a tactic used by abusive men to further control the battered woman (Zorza, 1991).

Despite the clear link between domestic violence and child abuse, it is less clear what happens in violent homes before the child becomes the target of abuse. The clinical and advocacy literature is replete with examples of the ways children are brought into the violence between their parents. Several general areas identified in the literature guided this study. These include: direct assault of children; legal issues with attention to visitation, custody and child support problems; societal pressures involving motherhood; and other forms of indirect and direct involvement in parental conflict.

Direct assault of children. Research into the effects of domestic violence on children has focused primarily on direct physical and sexual assault of children (Elbow, 1982). The intersection between domestic violence and child abuse has been well documented and is an important consideration for children living with domestic violence. However, there are other ways that children are directly harmed. The abuser, for example, may destroy favorite toys or hurt children's pets (Ascione, 1998; Elbow, 1982). Much less attention has been given to this area of child involvement. This study examined children's experiences with all types of psychological, material, and physical assault in the context of domestic violence.

Legal issues. Legal proceedings including visitation, custody, and child support, are frequent arenas for playing out parental conflict through the children. Circumstances involving children that have been documented in the clinical literature include withholding or delaying child support payments (Shepard, 1992) and threatening to obtain or obtaining custody of children (Elbow, 1982; Liss & Stahly, 1993; Shepard, 1992; Zorza, 1996). In some cases, the non-custodial parent acts in a way with the child that the custodial parent finds objectionable. Examples of these behaviors include taking the children places which are unsafe or harmful, becoming drunk when caring for the children, driving recklessly when children are in the car, or failing to provide adequate care during visits (Shepard, 1992). Some behaviors are clearly aimed at annoying the custodial parent. Examples include not arriving on time to pick up the children for a visit, demanding to see children without consideration of the custodial parent's schedule, or failing to return children on time following a visit (Shepard, 1992). Finally, visitation may be

used as an opportunity to continue direct victimization of the abused woman, including using visitation as a way to check up on the abused spouse, making abusive statements during visitation, or being physically abusive during visitation (Shepard, 1992).

In too many courts, custody decisions are made with issues other than the child's safety in mind (Zorza, 1996). Sometimes, courts favor the position of the "most agreeable parent." In such cases, women risk losing their children all together if they do not agree to joint custody or unsupervised visitation (Cahn, 1991). Zorza (1996) argues that economic conditions are given higher importance than either the child's or ex-wife's safety. Finally, in many jurisdictions, spouse abuse is not considered in custody or visitation cases in spite of the evidence of its harm to children (Cahn, 1991; Hart, 1993).

The legal arena is a major avenue wherein conflict between parents can affect their children. Despite efforts to reduce the adversarial nature of court processes through mediation, legal procedures continue to involve children. Examples of legal problems discussed in the literature include making important decisions about the child without the other parent (Shepard, 1992), threatening to kidnap or kidnapping the children (Elbow, 1982; Hart, 1993; Liss & Stahly, 1993; Shepard, 1992), threatening custody or kidnapping to force a spouse to return (Liss & Stahly, 1993; Shepard, 1992; Zorza, 1996), and making allegations of child abuse or neglect (Goldman, Ward, Albanese, Graves, & Chamberlain, 1995). In addition, some parents (usually mothers) go into hiding because they believe that court orders fail to protect their children or because batterers win joint custody or full

custody or unsupervised visitation of children in spite of evidence of physical or sexual abuse of the child (Liss & Stahly, 1993).

Societal pressures and motherhood. The clinical literature also details the ways in which batterers use social pressures regarding motherhood to keep women in their abusive relationships. For example, some abusers tell women they are bad parents and that they will lose them should she attempt to leave the relationship (Shepard, 1992). Some women report returning to the children's father due to financial dependency (Elbow, 1982; McKay, 1994). Others report returning because of the children's loyalty to their father or because they believe any father is better than no father (Elbow, 1982; McKay, 1994).

Societal pressures based on "appropriate" gender roles can be maintained by an abusive man in an intimate relationship. The abused woman is caught between conflicting expectations based on being a good mother. Motherhood is central to the identity of women who have children. Whether it is a biological or socialized response, the best interests of their children are often central to the mothers' life choices. The presence of domestic violence in women's lives and, therefore the lives of their children present women with difficult choices with regards to motherhood. They are faced with keeping themselves safe but also protecting and providing for their children. Women are abused for choosing their children over their partners or husbands. When women place their partners' needs over their children's they may be further criticized by their partners for being bad mothers and be held responsible by a punitive child welfare and legal system.

Further, the victimization of women limits their abilities to mother. As stated by Wolfe, Jaffe, and Wilson (1990), "Battered women's role as parents is radically demeaned through their victimization, because the dysfunction and (resulting) disorganization offer little opportunity and resources for nurturance, support, or supervision of children."

To date, there has been no exploration of women's perceptions of motherhood in the context of domestic violence. Women's views of motherhood in the context of domestic violence as a specific social pressure was explored as a part of this study.

Involvement in parental conflict. Domestic violence affects children when they become directly involved in parental conflict. For example, parents may say negative things to the children about their spouse (Shepard, 1992). Abusive partners may also use guilt and manipulation of the children to apply pressure to the abused spouse. Abusive partners frequently force children to watch abuse (Rosenberg & Giberson, 1991). Because such direct involvement of children in domestic violence has not been systematically examined to date, little empirical information exists in the literature. One purpose of this study was to more adequately describe the ways in which children are brought into the conflict between parents.

Language Use and Terminology

The use of language and terminology is important in this study of domestic violence. In this paper, "domestic violence" will refer to violence committed by men

against their female partners. "Domestic violence" and "wife abuse" will be used interchangeably, however; it is understood that it is not only wives or married women who are victims of domestic violence (Koss, 1990). In this study I will not use the terms "family abuse" or "family violence" because those terms collapse the distinctions between husband-to-wife abuse, wife-to-husband abuse, same-sex abuse, incest, child abuse, and elder abuse, serving to obscure the role of gender and power in violent family relationships (Bograd, 1988).

Much of the research on children implicated in domestic violence has been focused on child "witnesses." Even when children never actually "witness" violence between their parents, they are still aware of the coercive patterns of behavior and the use of power and control in their home. In this study, I choose to use the terms "implicated in" or "exposed to" domestic violence because these terms are more inclusive of the experience of children. The environment where the children are exposed, by virtue of the presence of domestic violence, is harmful to children's development (Wolfe, Jaffe, & Wilson, 1990).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the need for further research exploring children's roles in domestic violence. I have explained my rationale for choosing a feminist contextual analysis of the social problem of domestic violence. The next chapter explores the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER III METHODS

Research that examines violence against women through women's eyes may move us closer to understanding the point of view of the victimized. Feminist research methods are appropriate for studying social problems affecting women (Reinharz, 1992) because feminist research methods prioritize listening to the voices of women as they describe their experiences (Maguire, 1987).

Feminist Research Methodology

Qualitative, feminist research methods incorporate the philosophy of feminism into the full process of research, from the questions asked to the methods used to the form of results (Reinharz, 1992). Feminism analyzes the social and structural power *vis a vis* systems of oppression within individual research projects as well as the field of research in general (Lather, 1988). It opposes the maintenance of the status quo, especially concerning systems of oppression, including sexism, racism, and classism (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982; Nebraska Feminist Collective, 1983). One of the goals of the feminist movement is to value and empower women (Lather, 1988). By viewing women from a priority position in a world where they are often marginalized, feminism aims to re-see the world through the eyes of women (Nielsen, 1989). Because domestic violence is a social problem of gender and power, feminist methodology is appropriate for its study (Edwards, 1990; Maguire 1987).

Feminist research relies on the theory of feminism to guide the nature and type of questions asked. Questions about gender and difference are included in feminist research methodology. Questions are continually revised in interaction with the research participants throughout the research process as more understanding of the problem/question is gleaned. The participants are included in all phases of the research process. Respect, sensitivity, and compassion for the "researched" is paramount.

Feminist research is concerned with bettering the lives of women and often is action oriented (Lather, 1988; Reinharz, 1992). Feminist research methodology aims to be emancipatory, to overcome obstacles, and to enable participants and researchers to learn from each other (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982). The research process is a dialogue between the researcher and the researched and attempts to equalize the unequal power distribution inherent in the positivist research tradition (Nielsen, 1989).

Feminist research methodology challenges the positivist assumptions that there is only one right way of knowing. Feminist researchers recognize the possibility of multiple and overlapping truths (Lather, 1988). Participants are thought to be the experts regarding their own experiences and are thereby included in the category of "knower" (Reinharz, 1992). Feminist research methods also differ from positivist methods in the collapse of the subject-object separation (Reinharz, 1992). The subject-object separation is challenged by elevating the knowledge of the participant in the research process.

In feminist research methods, the value system of the researcher is explicitly communicated throughout the process (Reinharz, 1992). Feminist researchers challenge the positivist notion of value-free research, stating that all research is value-laden and by explicitly stating their own values (Keller, 1978). Feminist researchers strive to select a problem and a population for emancipation from the constraints of structural and individual limitations. Feminist research includes an analysis of the social, political, and historical context surrounding the researched. Finally, feminist research is conducted by a self-identified feminist (Reinharz, 1992).

Although the validity of both qualitative and feminist research has been criticized (Lather, 1986), several research processes can be used to increase validity in qualitative and feminist research methods. For example, validity can be increased by confirming the meaning and content with individual research participants after qualitative interviews (Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Reinharz, 1992). Follow-up interviews can be scheduled to insure an accurate understanding of participants' words have been obtained. Participants can help with the construction of meaning by being involved in the process of theory development.

I conducted this study using feminist research techniques. I used a series of qualitative, semi-structured, and in-depth interviews to gain an understanding of women's perspectives of the ways their children had been implicated in domestic violence. Three interviews were conducted with each participant in order to develop rapport and trust. I invited the women to tell their stories, in their own words, and to help construct meaning from those stories. I attempted to equalize the power imbalance inherent in research in this interview methodology in

which believing and valuing the women's stories is prioritized. I conducted this research as a self-identified feminist and disclosed my value system with the research participants. Finally, participants were asked to review my interpretation of the stories they told.

Recruitment

Recruitment of participants was facilitated in part by my prior work experience as an advocate for women leaving abusive relationships and as the director of a project that examined links between domestic violence programs and child protection agencies. As a part of the latter program, I ran a therapy group for children exposed to domestic violence. Because of these professional experiences, I was known and trusted by colleagues in the field who helped with recruitment.

Participants for this research project were sought initially from support groups operating in conjunction with local domestic violence prevention programs. A friend and colleague who was the director of a shelter program, provided initial contact with domestic violence shelters. She wrote a letter to other "sister agencies" in the region introducing me. Letters of agreement from domestic violence programs are included in Appendix A. In one case, a shelter worker informed me that their agency does not usually allow researchers access to their program participants because they feel it to be exploitative. She said they had made an exception in my case because they knew of my work and the care I would bring to it. In addition to my work with domestic violence survivors

and their children, I also hold a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology that provided skills useful in conducting this type of research.

After the initial introduction to an agency, materials explaining the project and the requirements for participation were distributed. Interested women were provided with information about the study through a letter of introduction indicating how potential participants could contact me, the researcher. My experience with domestic violence survivors and their children as well as my counseling degree were both explicitly stated in the letter of introduction given to agencies and potential participants. I recruited five participants in this way. After 6 months of data collection, I began to seek participants from other sources. Knowing that the interview process was potentially very painful, I considered only participants who had easy access to support. One participant came by referral to me from a friend. Four others came from other professional contacts, including one participant referred from a therapist in my local community, and three from HeadStart following staff training sessions I conducted on children and domestic violence. A copy of my introductory letter to the participants is included in Appendix B.

When potential participants called, I determined each's appropriateness for the study. Criteria for participation included: (1) being a female survivor of physically aggressive domestic violence who had at least one child living with her during the abusive experience; (2) having lived outside the abusive relationship for at least 1 year and no more than 5 years; and (3) having a

willingness to be interviewed concerning domestic violence and her children's involvement in that violence.

All ten women who became involved in the project met the criteria to participate and, after a brief interview explaining the project, agreed to participate. One other woman who met the criteria decided not to participate.

I did not know participants before the interview process with the exception of Celeste. I had known of Celeste through my involvement in the local domestic violence shelter program. While I worked there, Celeste was a volunteer. One afternoon about 18 months before the research, we were both part of a six-person team preparing a newsletter for distribution. We talked about our knowing each other prior to beginning the research process and both felt that we knew each other so minimally that the research process would not be significantly affected.

My contact with participants outside the research process was limited to Jane. A friend referred Jane to me. Between the second and third interview we were both invited to this friend's birthday party. Jane attended with her son and her current boyfriend (not her abusive partner). I attended with another friend. We spoke briefly at the party and I experienced some discomfort over the interaction we shared. I sent her a letter apologizing and it didn't seem to alter the progress of the third interview.

Protocol During the Interviews

During the initial interview, women were first oriented to the study by reading and signing the document of informed consent. A copy of the document of informed consent is in Appendix C. Informed consent was critical in this study because I assumed that many of the children had been victims of child abuse. As a mandated reporter for child abuse, I am legally and ethically required to report cases of suspected child abuse. My obligation as a mandated reporter was clearly explained to women before I began the interview process. Because I chose to conduct the interviews in this way, it is possible that women chose not to inform me about or minimized the extent of some incidents of child abuse. Also during the first interview, each woman was asked to select pseudonyms for herself, her children and her abusive partner. She was informed that in all written work for the study, her pseudonyms would be used.

The initial interview was a semi-structured series of open and closed questions designed to get information about the abuse experience of the woman as well as the context of that abuse. I began the interview with demographic questions to put the participant at ease and begin rapport development. Following that, I asked questions concerning the type and duration of abuse suffered. Specific questions were asked regarding domestic violence; family-of-origin experiences for her and her partner; responses of the legal, medical, and social service systems; termination of the relationship; and other contextual variables. The interview protocol for the first interview is located in Appendix D.

I asked and was granted permission in all cases to take written notes during the first interview.

I asked women a few questions from the Kempe Family Stress Inventory (KFSI) to determine prior abuse experiences in childhood. The Kempe Family Stress Inventory is an interview protocol that documents parents' perceptions of the stress in their lives especially regarding their families-of-origin and children. For this study, a subset of the KFSI focused on family-of-origin issues was selected for use. I asked the women to complete the scale for themselves as well as for their perceptions of their abusive partners. The subset of the KFSI is in the interview protocol in Appendix C.

During the second interview, I asked the women more in-depth questions concerning their children's involvement in, and exposure to, violence. The interview protocol for the second interview is located in Appendix D. The protocol was developed from a review of the clinical literature that represents the current scope of understanding of the ways in which children are implicated in domestic violence. The interview allowed women to provide additional examples of the ways children are involved in domestic violence. This open-ended, in-depth interview was tape-recorded, with the women's permission. No woman refused to be tape-recorded.

The tape of the second interview was transcribed and coded using grounded theory (Glasser & Straus, 1967). Once transcribed, I sent each woman a copy with a letter asking her to review it for any changes she believed were necessary to accurately reflect her thoughts and feelings. Information

provided from the first interview was integrated with the transcribed interview to gain an understanding of the experience of the woman and her perception of the experience of her children. Once integrated, I sent the summary to the participant with a letter explaining that I would contact her in a week to schedule a follow-up interview.

During the third interview, we discussed her transcripts and summary. We agreed upon changes to accurately reflect her feelings and memories. Changes were also made to insure her safety and privacy. During the third interview we explored the interpretation and meaning of her experience, her perception of her children's experiences, and her perception of the meaning of motherhood in the context of domestic violence. The third interview was also tape recorded to allow for accurate recall of our working discussion.

Participants were also asked to complete the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus 1979). The Conflict Tactics Scale is a paper-pencil inventory of the types and intensity of violence experienced in an intimate relationship. The CTS was used to understand and categorize the women's experiences based on the severity of violence they have encountered in their abusive relationships. Because actions thought to be less severe, i.e., a push or shove, can result in serious injury when they occur at the top of the stairs, or very dangerous actions, i.e., threatening with a weapon, can result in no injury, the CTS has been criticized for failing to accurately measure severity of injury (Shepard, 1992). Thus, for this study, the CTS was modified to include a section that allowed participants to record the actual injury as a result of each tactic used.

Administration of the CTS involved asking women to rate each of 17 items measuring physical, emotional, or sexual violence in their relationship. Items on the CTS were categorized based on the three types of abuse--physical, emotional, and sexual, and totals were calculated for each category. Thus, each woman had a score based on her rating of the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in her relationship and an overall score. The modified Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) used is presented in Appendix G.

In completing the CTS, women were asked about two time periods: the final year of their relationship and the entire length of their relationship. Because of the retrospective nature of the interviews, only the scores for the entire relationship were analyzed. I thought, based on discussions with the participants, that the reporting of the last year of the relationship was the most accurate.

Although not informed of payment until after the interview process, women were paid \$25.00 dollars at the completion of their participation in the study. (The exception to this is when I paid for gas money or child care earlier during the interviews. In those cases, they received what was left of \$25 after all these expenses had been deducted). Most women were very appreciative of the token payment, but indicated surprise and stated that they would have participated without the money, which they did, since they didn't know.

On average, women were interviewed for a total of 5.5 hours over the three interviews. The longest total interview time was 10.5 hours with Celeste. The shortest was 2.5 hours with Rachel.

Settings for the Interviews

Interviews were most often conducted in the woman's home. In a few cases, they were held after hours at either my work site or the work site of the woman. Celeste's interviews were conducted at my home. For seven women, all three interviews were conducted in the same location. Two women had interviews conducted in two locations and each of Faye's three interviews was conducted in different locations.

Efforts were made to schedule interviews at times when the children were not present to reduce disruption to the interview process. Children were not present at all for three women's processes. Children were present but not privy to interviews for Jane, Joan, and Mary. For Elaine's interview, her daughter Martha returned home during two of the three interviews and listened for short periods of time as her mother talked. Rachel's children were present during two of the three interviews and she spoke openly in front of them, saying they knew very well what had gone on in the relationship. Ginger's newborn daughter was present during all the interviews. Ginger's husband (not her abusive partner) and 6-year-old, son were periodically present during the third interview. Two of three interviews with Faye involved children. The first, held at her home with her 4-year-old and 10-year-old sons periodically interrupting the interview, was held on a Saturday morning. The final interview was held after hours at her work site on a day that her 11-year-old daughter had come to work with her. Children, when aware of the interview process, seemed to be interested. Perhaps it was

just the presence of a strange woman in the home that interested them. In some cases, women indicated that they had told the children of their involvement in the research process. Faye in particular said she thought her children were glad that their stories were being told.

Evolution of Research Protocol

The research protocol was prepared from a review of the academic literature, writings by advocates for domestic violence victims, and from my clinical experience working with adult survivors of and children exposed to domestic violence. I compiled a list of the various ways children are implicated in domestic violence and categorized them into five areas: legal, custody/visitation/child support, social pressures, child involvement, and child abuse. When women talked about issues involving their children that were not on this initial list, those issues were added to the interview protocol and were included in subsequent interviews with other participants.

Participants were highly involved in the evolution of the protocol. I often consulted the women when I was struggling with how to ask a particular question or understand something said. They were very willing to provide input and suggestions.

Participants were also involved in analysis. They were asked to read my written report and interpretation of their stories and to make any changes that would more accurately reflect their thoughts or feelings. Additionally, I wanted to make sure they felt safe. In some cases, additional names were changed, parts

of stories were deleted, and in two cases, the ages of children were changed. During the portion of analysis when I was beginning to consider the concept of motherhood in domestic violence, I asked some participants about the categories I was seeing arise in the data. Their input and thinking was critical to the development of motherhood themes.

I shared the concept of feminist qualitative research methods with several women. Jane indicated that she thought this was the only appropriate way to interview domestic violence survivors. The use of the Conflict Tactics Scale at the end of the interview was in direct contrast to feminist qualitative methods. Three women had very difficult times with that instrument. Celeste was in tears as she tried to "count" the numbers of times a particular behavior had happened to her. She said it was extremely painful to have to consider if an incident of abuse in which she was hit repeatedly, screamed at, and abused in other ways counted as one or more than one. She was very critical of the instrument. Ginger shared similar questions about how to count abuse experiences although she did so without the apparent emotional difficulty that Celeste had experienced. Similarly, Wendy was critical of the instrument. She said she thought it was not an accurate representation of the abuse she suffered. Wendy spoke at the beginning of the third interview of having intense flashbacks and nightmares as a result of the interview process and "just wanted to get it over with." By the time we began to complete the Conflict Tactics Scale, she was unwilling to take the time to "count" how many times a particular behavior had occurred, and thus she believed it was highly inaccurate.

As the researcher involved in the process with these ten women, I struggled with the use of the CTS as well. I had spent many hours listening to intimate details of their abuse experiences, only to end with a detached accounting of hits, choking episodes, and name calling. I felt the change internally as I conducted the interview. When we were involved in the interview process, it was a dialogue, an open discussion, a sharing of their life experience with compassion. During the recording of the CTS, I felt much more like a number collector. "Just give me the number" passed through my mind on a number of occasions. Its use in this study felt dishonoring to the process I had shared with these women.

During the writing and editing of this paper, the chair of my dissertation committee asked me why I continued to include the CTS in spite of my dislike of it. I sat dumbfounded in her office as I realized I was holding onto it in part because of a tie to a more traditional research paradigm. I had said during my proposal meeting that I would include it; therefore, I would include it. I think I felt some responsibility to have some form of statistics in my dissertation research. Further, the CTS has been used in nearly all studies of domestic violence. Internally, it felt impossible to eliminate it, even though I was making huge changes in other parts of the protocol. While I was critical of the effect of the CTS on the interview protocol, I never thought it possible to eliminate it from the study.

The Researcher's Experience

Being worthy of the participants' trust, telling their stories, and giving the women a voice became important motivators for me as the researcher. As I began the interview process, I still felt ambivalent about finishing both my dissertation and the research process. I had a full-time job that I loved and that challenged me. I was interested in my topic but I didn't think I had a burning drive to "know the answer to my questions." However, when I finished the first interview with Celeste, my first participant, I was struck with the enormous sense of responsibility I had to finish my work and share their stories with the world. My research participants became my research partners. I strove to feel worthy of transmitting their stories to the larger world. Oftentimes when I would struggle with motivation, with finding the structure, with any part of the process, I recalled their stories and their trust in me and found the motivation again to go on.

The interview process was painful for the women. Without exception, they talked of having painful memories and feelings surface as a result of their involvement in the process. However, all 10 women who started, also completed the process. Toward the end of my involvement with Wendy, I thought she was going to withdraw. When we spoke about her participation in the third interview, she said she just wanted to get it finished. On one hand, she didn't want to finish it. Her husband was strongly encouraging her to stop. She said,

I have to finish this process. And, when we made that first appointment, three nights before I had the appointment, I started having nightmares. I was so disappointed that I had to cancel because I just wanted to get it over with. And, this is, like today, this morning I woke up and I was just a mess. And, he's [her husband] like, just cancel. And, I said, 'You know what', I said, 'I

don't want to do it so bad, I want to call her and tell her I don't want to do it.' And, he goes, 'Do it.' And, I said, 'I feel almost like I'm in an abusive relationship, an abusive pattern, because I'm doing something I don't really want to do.' I said, 'I have to finish'.

Like Wendy, I also experienced feeling like I was in an abusive relationship. Reading and rereading the stories for themes was extremely painful. At times I felt I was feeling the weight of all the cruelties ever done to humans by other humans in the name of love. When I worked, I was cognitively focused and, thus, less aware of the emotional ramifications of this work. However, when I stepped away from the computer or the transcribed pages, I was immediately flooded with strong emotions, mostly of grief. Once I became aware of that pattern, it became difficult for a time to face the work, knowing that attention to my dissertation would result in intense emotional reactions in me. I knew these women. I had spent many hours listening to the atrocities done to them and to their children. When I read their stories, I revisited the look in their eyes when they had related it to me originally. I saw the tears and heard their anger and confusion. I experienced their pain repeatedly.

I found a strange paradox in the process. It was by knowing the women and hearing their stories that I experienced the pain that led me to want to abandon the project. However, it was also by knowing the women and hearing their stories that I found the strength to continue, day after day. I feel the utmost of respect and gratitude for the women in my study. Truly, without them, this would not be possible.

Description of Participants

Women in the study were all Caucasian, with the exception of Mary who identified as Native American and Caucasian. Eight of the women's ex-partners were Caucasian. Harry, Celeste's, ex-husband was African-American and Randy, Elaine's ex-partner, was Hispanic. The women's ages ranged from 33 (Mary) to 47 (Celeste). Their mean age was 34.9 years.

Women were selected for participation in this study on the basis of being involved in a physically abusive relationship. The shortest time a woman was involved with an abusive man was Elaine, who was involved with Randy for 1.5 years. Celeste had the longest relationship, 24 years with Harry. The mean number of years participants spent in abusive relationships was 11 years. All but three women, who co-habitated, were married to their abusive partners.

In order to participate in this study, women needed to have been out of the abusive relationship for a minimum of 1 year and not more than 5 years. Because resolution of a violent relationship takes time and energy, I thought women would be better able to answer questions concerning their children given time for resolution of their own issues. Additionally, in order to preserve the researcher-participant relationship, I thought it was less likely that I would need to make a report of current child abuse if the children were out of the violent home for some time. Celeste had been out 5 years, while Elaine had been out only 1 year. The mean number of years that the women had been out of the abusive relationship was 2.7.

The final requirement for participation was having had at least one child living with them during the abusive relationship. Among the ten women interviewed, a total of 32 children were discussed. All women interviewed spoke of at least two children, although Jane reported that one child, her stepson, was only there for a short time. Of the 32 children, five did not live with the mother full-time during the abuse, but were none the less important in the mothers' stories. Seventeen children were female and 15 were male. The children's current ages ranged from 2 years old to 28 years old. At the time of the study, eight were adults, 11 were adolescents, nine were school-aged, and four were 5 years or younger. Ginger has one child who was 5-months-old during the interviews but had not been born during the abuse. This child was not included as one of the 32 children.

Participants' Profiles

When I began this study, I expected the women's stories to be merely context for the experiences of their children. I had planned for their summaries to be included as an appendix. However, as the study progressed, I came to realize how much the women's experiences informed their perspective of their children's experiences. To describe the experiences of the children without an understanding of the view from which these stories came provides an incomplete picture of the story. I have come to more completely understand the importance of context in feminist research in general and this study of domestic violence in particular. A large part of the problem of society's handling of domestic violence

is that professionals make decisions without fully understanding the context of each family's situation. I do not wish my study to mirror that practice. For that reason, I have prepared a table and brief profiles of each woman's life that are included as a part of the text. Following the profiles, women's abusive experiences are reviewed collectively.

Women provided rich detail about their experiences, and those of their children. Table 3.1 provides the reader with pertinent details of each woman's story. In this table, the woman, her age, and race are in the first column. The second column describes her special characteristics, such as disability, alcohol or drug use, and other relationship information that was seen as important contextual information. The third column lists significant childhood issues of each woman. The fourth column lists abuse in prior relationships. The fifth column provides information about the abusive partner and his race. Special characteristics of the abusive partner are listed in the sixth column. The seventh column describes the type and length of the relationship as well as the length of time since it ended. The eighth column summarizes the type of abuse the woman suffered in the relationship under study. The last two columns provide information about the children. Column nine lists the children, their ages, and their relationship to the woman's abusive partner. The final column provides a summary of the types of experiences of the children in the home.

In addition to Table 3.1, narrative profiles have been prepared to introduce the women in the study. Profiles give the reader greater context about the women's experiences. These profiles are not complete pictures of the abuse

TABLE 3.1 Participants' Profiles

1. Woman, Age, Race	2. Special Characteristics	3. Childhood Issues of the woman	4. Abuse in prior relationship	5. Abusive Partner, Race	6. Special Characteristics	7. Relationship Status Length How long out?	8. Type of abuse to woman in relationship	9. Children, Age, Relation to Abusive Partner	10. Child Involvement
Celeste 47 Cauc	Disabled, Narcolepsy, PTSD, chronic fatigue, Church, Lesbian	sex abuse, phys abuse, emot abuse, foster care, demeaning dad	none	Harry African America	alcoholic, prison, childhood abuse	Married 24 years Out 5 years	phys, emot, sex, fin abuse, affairs, hostage	Hank 28 bio Kathy 26 bio Peter 24 bio Tessa 23 bio Debbie 20 bio Robert 18 bio Samuel 16 bio	witness phys, emot, sex abuse, court testimony TRO violation, legal manipulation, tricks, abuse worse at beginning to older kids, DUIs. phys abuse, boys>girls, emot abuse, girls>boys
Cheri 37 Cauc	Alcoholic, In recovery, University student	only child, early alcohol use, divorce, step-dad rage, father in Holocaust,	hit by all past boy-friends	Steve Cauc	drugs, prison, abandonment issues	Co-habit 5 years Out 1 year	emot, phys, fin abuse, hostage	Tina 5 bio Gary 2 bio	witness emot, phys of mom, emot abuse of child, no visitation, threats girl's friends, toys girl>impact, older too, FAE boy, in utero exposure
Elaine 40 Cauc	Deaf, 1st husb suicide, drug use	mom alcoholic, raped 7 th grade, teen pregnancy, childhood athlete	not physically abusive, alcoholic	Randy Hispanic	childhood abuse	Co-habit 1 years Out 1 year	emot, phys, fin abuse, threats, mind games	John 23 none Martha 15 none	aftermath, lost mother, threats, child suicide attempt, manipulation, mental molestation, child lied to him for mom, child in abusive peer relationship. Exposures, girl>boy

(Table Continues)

Table 3.1 Participants' Profiles (continued)

1. Woman, Age, Race	2. Special Characteristics	3. Childhood Issues of the woman	4. Abuse in prior relationship	5. Abusive Partner, Race	6. Special Characteristics	7. Relationship Status Length How long out?	8. Type of abuse to woman in relationship	9. Children, Age, Relation to Abusive Partner	10. Child Involvement
Faye 37 Cauc	church	not wanted, divorce, sex abuse, sib w/ cancer dad not her dad	none	Don Cauc	bi-polar, alcoholic, childhood abuse, drug use	Married 14 years Out 2 years	phys, emot, sex, fin abuse, legal issues	Jo 17 step Marie 14 bio Nadine 11 bio Junior 10 bio Ray 4 bio	witness emot, phys, sex of mom, mom protection, threats. Emot, phys, sex of kids, emotional incest of Jo, court involvement, manipulations, DUIs
Ginger 40 Cauc	3 other kids lived with their fathers, new marriage, new born child	poor, happy	none	Bill Cauc	many children, phys abuse	Married 6 years Out 2 years	phys, emot, fin abuse	Tom 23 none Velma 18 none Betsy 14 none Leonard 6 bio *Ruby 5 mo *Not exposed	children removed from mom's home by ex-husbs, witness abuse of mom, emotional abuse to child, neglect, no contact with father
Jane 44 Cauc	food issues, adopted son	"chaotic," oldest kid, divorce, DV, sib died, sib brain tumor	3 mar, 2nd abusive but not control	Robert Cauc	drug use, dead 3 yrs, childhood abuse	Married 12 years Out 3 years	phys, emot, fin abuse, affairs	Michael 13 bio Travis 23 bio (Jane's step-son)	witness phys, emot mom, emot, phys by father, protection of both parents, father abusive to Jane's step son, sex abuse by step-sib, police exposure

(Table Continues)

Table 3.1 Participants' Profiles (continued)

1. Woman, Age, Race	2. Special Characteristics	3. Childhood Issues of the woman	4. Abuse in prior relationship	5. Abusive Partner, Race	6. Special Characteristics	7. Relationship Status Length How long ut?	8. Type of abuse to woman in relationship	9. Children, Age, Relation to Abusive Partner	10. Child Involvement
Joan 40 Cauc	strong Catholic, student	divorce, raped 3x, sex abuse, psych hospital, jail, runaway	3 prior, 2 were abusive	Paul Cauc	childhood abuse	Married 11 years Out 3 years	sex, phys, emot, fin abuse	Nicole 11 bio Marie 10 bio Kay 7 bio	witnessed emot of mom. emot, sex abuse older>effects younger>divorce effects
Mary 33 Cauc & NA	alcoholic in recovery student	"insanity" phy, sex, emot abuse. alc., divorced parents, mom suicide, psych hospital	3 prior, all abusive	David Cauc	learning disabled, illiterate, Navy brat, drug affected baby	Married 4 years Out 3 years	emot, sex, phys, fin abuse	Jeffrey 13 step Michelle 8 adopt Dawn 3 bio	witness phys, emot of mom, values differences, oldest boy FAE, abused because of it. adopted 2 nd girl, then abandoned, 2 nd girl most impacted.
Rachel 36 Cauc	new marriage w/ problems	secrecy, sex & emot abuse, runaway, never fit in	none	John Cauc	military, nervous breakdown, mistreated	Married 12 years Out 4 years	phys, emot, fin abuse, control	Amber 15 bio Christopher 13 bio	witness emot, phys of mom, intervened to protect, custodial interference, lied to abuser for mom
Wendy 34 Cauc	newly married therapy	sex, emot, phys abuse, isolation, divorce, alcoholic parent	many prior abusive relationships	Burt Cauc	blackouts, phys abuse, dad not dad	Co-habit 7 years Out 2 years	phys, emot, mental abuse, affairs	Katie 8 bio Kevin 7 bio	limited child exposure, mom intervened to protect, limited visitation girl - stands back boy - intervenes, protective of mom

experienced. Even the interviews and subsequent transcripts are incomplete indications of the women's experiences. After 10.5 hours of interviewing and several phone calls, Celeste estimated that I had heard about only 10% of the abuse she experienced.

Celeste. Celeste was a 47-year-old Caucasian woman with seven children ranging in ages from 28 to 16. She was married for 24 years to Harry, an African-American man who was physically, sexually, and emotionally abusive to her. Harry was the biological father of all seven children. The children and their ages at interview time were: Hank (28), Kathy (26), Peter (24), Tessa (23), Debbie (20), Robert (18), and Samuel (16). After they separated, Celeste reported that Harry stalked and harassed her and her new partner, Sabrina. Harry also set fire to her house and car, once while her and Sabrina were sleeping in the car. She's been out of the relationship for 5 years. Most of that time Harry has been in prison for molesting his 15-year-old niece.

During the abusive relationship Celeste was intensively involved with a church that repeatedly threatened her with excommunication if she were to leave her husband. Currently, she lives on Social Security and Disability for chronic fatigue, narcolepsy, and post-traumatic stress disorder. She lives with her youngest son, Samuel; her middle daughter, Tessa; Tessa's daughter; and Tessa's boyfriend. She is involved in a long-term relationship with Sabrina, whom she sees mostly on weekends because Sabrina works out of town.

Cheri. Cheri was a 37-year-old Caucasian woman, mother of two children, Tina (5) and Gary (2). She lived with Steve for 3 of the 5 years they were involved. She has been out of the relationship for 1.5 years. Neither she nor the children have contact with Steve now because he is a methamphetamine addict. For 2 years, he was in prison for a drug-related probation violation from a domestic violence charge levied during a previous relationship. With Cheri, Steve was physically violent on three or four occasions. His main form of abuse was yelling and screaming. He also exhibited some "hostage-taking" kind of behaviors that really scared her. For example, when he would become upset, he would unplug all the phones and disable her car. She said he was very protective of the kids, but that his abuse to her was often done in their presence.

Cheri had used chemical substances since she was 12 but quit after she got pregnant with her first child in the relationship with Steve. Currently Cheri is a chemical dependency counselor, volunteers for a children's advocacy program, and is a full-time student. She lives with her two children, supported by financial aid, scholarships, and a little bit of money she earns from her job. She isn't hopeful of getting child support because Steve quit his job when their relationship ended.

Elaine. Elaine was a 40-year-old Caucasian woman with two children, Martha and John. Martha was fifteen and lived with her mother. John was 23 and lived with Candice, his wife, in the same city. Elaine was involved with her abuser, Randy, for about 1.5 years and has been out of this relationship for

about 1 year. Elaine and Randy were never married, but lived together at least 1 year. On a few occasions he was physically abusive, but his primary tools were emotional abuse in the form of tricks, lies, deception, manipulation, and severe threats. Elaine also believed that Randy used his knowledge as an electrician to "booby trap" her house. She reported him wiring the garage door to open for him without the opener. In addition, he left water running, shined lights in her windows at night, and she found doors that she was certain were locked open upon her return.

Elaine has been deaf since she was a child. Randy used this disability to abuse her and her daughter. She believes that he "mentally molested" her daughter by making noises to simulate sexual activities in the night after Elaine had removed her hearing aids. Martha became very upset thinking they were having sex every night. Elaine also believes that he drugged her hearing dog so the dog wouldn't warn her when there were intruders in the house. Elaine also tried to get Randy's help when she quit crack use. Instead of supporting her, he used that information against her in abusive statements. She was also a victim of financial abuse. She now fears losing her home because of the mortgages she took out to pay for the home improvements that Randy started.

Faye. Faye was a 37-year-old Caucasian woman who was married to Don for 14 years. She has 5 children; the youngest 4 are Don's children. The children's ages at the time of the interview were: Jo (17), Marie (14), Nadine (11), Junior (10), and Ray (4). Faye was sexual once with someone else during

the time that Marie might have been conceived. Marie refuses to acknowledge Don as her biological father because of the abuse he has perpetrated.

Faye described daily physical and emotional abuse, and occasional sexual and financial abuse. Faye described Don as bi-polar, manic-depressive with schizophrenic tendencies. His mental illness combined with alcoholism resulted in behavior that was difficult for her and the family. He left home fairly routinely for several months, returning when he needed money or to get cleaned up.

Faye now lives with her five children, one cat, one dog, and bird just outside the city limits of a medium-sized city in the West. She works full-time but supplements her income with housing assistance and food stamps. When asked about child support, she stated that Don is about \$16,000 behind in his child-support payments.

Faye has been out of the relationship for 23 months and tries to have no contact with Don. However, they are still involved in legal proceedings, including mutual restraining orders. She has a stalking order against him. He currently lives about 2 hours away from her and the kids.

Ginger. Ginger was a 40-year-old Caucasian woman who was married to Bill for nearly 6 years. Ginger and Bill had one child together, Leonard, who is now 6 years old. Ginger also has three children by previous marriages: Tom (23), Velma (18), and Betsy (14), who are living either with their fathers or

independently. After leaving the relationship with Bill 2 years ago, Ginger married John. Ginger and John have one child, Ruby, who is 5-months-old.

During her marriage to Bill, Bill was physically, emotionally, and financially abusive. She was physically hit, kicked, choked, and punched. He called her names, said degrading things to her, and picked on her family. His drug use, lying, and trying to "pick up" a 19-year-old woman finally pushed Ginger to kick him out.

Ginger now lives with John, Leonard, Ruby, and their two cats. John works at a job that takes him out of town frequently through the week, but she states that she is quite happy in this relationship. Neither Ginger nor Leonard has any contact with Bill at this point. Ginger recently learned from her father that Bill is working in the town where she lives, and she has informed the state child support agency in order to seek child support. She doesn't expect to receive any. She also plans to use that information to reestablish a restraining order to keep him away. She and John have changed residency, phones, and names to keep her safe from Bill.

Jane. Jane was a 44-year-old Caucasian woman who was involved with Robert until he died 3 years ago of a drug overdose. She described intense physical and emotional violence in the home environment as "always there; like a soup." Jane doesn't believe she was sexually abused, but acknowledged that Robert had numerous affairs during their relationship.

Robert's drug and alcohol use was a critical factor in her abuse. He also stole thousands of dollars of drugs from the hospitals in which he worked. Jane made several attempts to leave Robert and finally divorced him when the state was pursuing her to pay child support for his child from a previous relationship. Even when they were apart, they would have frequent phone contact and sexual relations. Robert always tried to keep track of her. They both knew the relationship was not healthy, but they were very strongly drawn to each other. Jane said that she thinks she would still be in the relationship if he hadn't died.

Jane and Robert adopted a son, Michael, at 6 weeks of age from India. Michael is now 13. For a short time, Travis, Robert's son from a previous relationship, lived with them at Robert's insistence. Jane said during the first interview that Robert and Michael were best buddies and that Robert was never abusive to Michael. During the second, she disclosed physical and emotional abuse to Michael by Robert and sexual abuse to Michael by Travis. Jane holds herself and Robert responsible for this abuse because of the dysfunctional patterns in their relationship.

Joan. Joan was a 40-year-old Caucasian woman who was married to Paul for 11 years. They had three daughters together: Nicole (11), Marie (10), and Kay (7). Joan described violence in the relationship that was mostly sexual. He was very sexually demanding and coercive. He would push and push her to have sex when she didn't want to and she would finally just give in. On a number of occasions, she had been medically restricted from sex and he would

push her until she consented. She often had severe pain and negative physical consequences. She learned he was having an affair just before their first anniversary. She nearly left him at that time but stayed because she was just about to give birth to her first child and was concerned about making it on her own.

There was also significant emotional and occasional physical violence. She has been married four times, several of which were abusive relationships. She said that Paul was not the most physically violent abuser. She said her relationship with Paul was much longer than her other marriages and relationships "because of the girls."

Joan has been out of the relationship for 3 years, but the divorce wasn't finalized until a year after she left. Joan and Paul have worked out mutual visitation, custody, and financial arrangements at this point, although it was not that way immediately following the divorce. They are now able to compromise for the benefit of the children's schedules or financial needs. She communicates approximately weekly with Paul, mostly in regards to the children. He has visitation every other weekend and 4 weeks in the summer. He calls at least weekly. Paul currently lives near Mt. Hood with Christine, the woman he was having an affair with when his marriage to Joan ended.

Mary. Mary was a 33-year-old woman of mixed race, Native American and Caucasian. Mary has been the victim of abuse throughout her life. She was the victim of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse as a child and she has been

abused in all her four marriages. Mary has three children: Jeffrey (13), Michelle (8), and Dawn (3 1/2), each by different fathers. David, Mary's final abusive partner, adopted her middle child, Michelle, when her second husband, Michelle's father, was no longer involved with the family.

For this research, we focused primarily on the relationship with David, who was abusive emotionally, financially, physically, and sexually. Mary said that David's pattern of abuse made him the most typical abuser she experienced in terms of the cycle of violence. She could feel the build up of violence, the explosion, and then the "nice time." This pattern happened three or four times in the relationship. David's main form of abuse was verbal and emotional altercations. At these times he would throw and break her things, yell and scream at her, and talk about her past behavior. He physically choked her on several occasions. He was also sexually abusive and used financial control against her.

Her 4 year relationship with David ended about three years ago. Mary currently lives with her three children and their two cats. She was a student at the university, working on her bachelor's degree in psychology and political science. She was an alcohol and drug counselor and also works with batterers in the corrections department. Other sources of family income include financial aid for school and child support that David sends regularly when he is working. Because he works construction, there are a lot of dry times, and she knows he is sometimes not diligent about finding work.

Rachel. Rachel was a 36-year-old Caucasian woman who was married to John for 12 years. John was physically and emotionally abusive. They have been divorced for 4 years. John and Rachel have two children: Amber (15) and Christopher (13). John was a long-haul truck driver based in the West. During their marriage, abuse happened about every few months, usually escalating when things went wrong at work. He hit her, used choke holds, and shoved her against walls or furniture. John is a retired law enforcement officer. His knowledge of the system also prevented her from legally protecting herself many times.

The worst form of abuse to Rachel directly involved her children. Shortly after she left John the first time, the children traveled to Alabama to see him for Christmas. He refused to return them and immediately began custody proceedings. Rachel returned to him after the children were with him for 4 months because she didn't want to lose her children or see them grow up with only his influence.

At the time of the interview, his practice was to see Rachel and his children when he was in town, usually about every 6 to 12 weeks. She said they had "mostly civil contact, for the children." When he was in town, they went out to dinner and shopping to get things for the children. She said he has always been critical of her mothering and believed he could do better than she did. Therefore, although things were civil, she was cautious about what she said to him.

John's attempts to control Rachel continued during the divorce and visitation. When he came to town, he expected her to drop everything and attend to his needs. When she refused, she believed that he "bad mouthed" her to the children. Rachel lived in a small community with her two children, one dog, and two cats. She worked providing day care and receives \$200 per month child support.

Wendy. Wendy was a 34-year-old Caucasian woman with two children: Katie (8), and Kevin (7), both the biological children of her physically abusive ex-partner, Burt. She and Burt lived together for about 7.5 years. She said the abuse didn't begin until she became pregnant. Then, during the 14th week of pregnancy, he became insecure, thinking the child was not his, and began immediately to physically abuse her. Subsequently, physical abuse happened about every other day, but usually not around the children.

There was also emotional and mental abuse. Wendy does not think she was abused sexually, although Burt had numerous affairs. Emotional abuse consisted of his putting her down because she couldn't spell or read well. She was not allowed to talk to his friends. When she did, she was accused of sleeping with them. She said the children were not directly abused but she knows they were exposed to Burt's abuse of her.

Wendy has been out of this relationship for about 2 years. During this time she met and married her current husband, Ron. She and Ron have been married about 7 months. She has been working closely with a counselor,

Candice, for the past 3 years. She believes that she would have never been ready for the love she has found in her relationship with Ron without counseling. Both she and Ron work at a manufacturing company in a small community in a Western state.

Wendy has never sought child support from Burt, preferring instead to keep control of the children. She transports the children to see Burt about once a week for brief visitations. Burt still lives in the same town and she said, "everybody gets along fine."

Women's Experiences

Information about abuse experiences were obtained from women's stories as well as from a standardized research instrument used in studies related to violent intimate relationships, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS, Straus 1979). Women's composite experiences will first be discussed from their stories, followed by an exploration of their responses to the CTS.

Women's experience as stated in interviews. Because being a victim of physically abusive domestic violence was a criteria for inclusion in the study, it was no surprise that all the women interviewed talked about physical abuse. The abuse ranged from extremely severe to mild and infrequent. Women talked about getting slapped, hit, punched, beat up, choked, thrown to the ground, and having weapons used against them. They reported injuries ranging from cuts and scrapes to broken bones and other internal injuries. Many women were physically abused during pregnancy. Most sought medical treatment at some

point. Only two women said that physical abuse was not the main form of abuse.

Elaine said the majority of the abuse was emotional, consisting of mind games, manipulations and threats. Joan said her abuse was primarily sexual. Her husband forced or coerced her to have sex when it was physically damaging to her and against doctor's orders.

All women described emotional abuse as a "normal part" of the relationship, whereas physical and sexual abuse were episodic. Celeste and Elaine encouraged me during interviews to focus more on emotional abuse because they both felt it to be more detrimental in the long run than the physical abuse. Celeste said in a phone call while scheduling the third interview, "It's the things that were said in the day-to-day that have the long-term impact. I still hear his voice in my head, 'You are sure ugly in the morning.'" She said, "The bruises heal, but the emotional abuse creates a belief."

Emotional abuse consisted of name calling, insults, mind games, blame, ignoring feelings, belittling, shaming, yelling, humiliation, and threats. Past relationships or things said in confidence were thrown back in the women's faces. For example, Elaine was confronted with crazy-making behavior. She believes John "booby-trapped her house." When she attempted to confront him, he denied doing anything and blamed it on her drug use.

Financial abuse, or using economic methods or financial dependency to control, was present for 7 of 10 women. Typical experiences of financial abuse included the women having to take full responsibility for managing the household finances but being blamed when there wasn't enough money. Often this

occurred because the abuser was spending money without their awareness. Both Mary and Joan were held responsible for balancing the household checkbook, something that was impossible to do because but both men accessed cash through the cash machine without the women's knowledge. The women were blamed when money was short or they couldn't balance the budget. Several women said they thought finances kept them in the relationship because they feared they couldn't provide for their children on their own.

Four of the 10 women described sexual abuse experiences. Two others, Jane and Wendy, didn't classify affairs by their partners as sexual abuse, though most researchers and practitioners recognize affairs to be abusive to the partner. After discussing this with Jane, she said she needed to think more about this, "perhaps that was abusive." Ginger and Faye talked about their abusers withholding sex or using it as a tool in the relationship by having sex with other women, but neither classified that as sexual abuse. Ginger said she and her abuser rarely had sex after their child, Leonard, was born, yet she suspects her abuser had affairs with other women.

Finally, two women described experiences that could be characterized as hostage-taking behavior. Celeste described Harry stalking and harassing her and Sabrina, her new partner. Although it was not possible to prove that he had done all that she suspected, Celeste said, someone shot out the windows in their apartment, set their car on fire while they were asleep in it, set their house on fire, slashed the tires on their car over twenty times, put sugar and wood putty in their gas tank, and cut the radiator hose on Sabrina's truck. Cheri also talked

about hostage-taking behavior that alerted her that she was in extreme danger. "The thing that comes to mind is ripping the phones out of the wall and dismantling my car," she said. She also described him refusing to take her home when they were out in the car. Two other women described similar behaviors designed to create isolation. Rachel said that John occasionally took her car keys so she couldn't leave the house. Elaine said John attempted to isolate and separate her from her family.

Conflict tactics scale. Women were asked to complete the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS, Gelles, 1979) in order to categorize their abuse. Scores for the participants are summarized in Table 3.2.

Compared to the other 8 women, 2 women, Joan and Mary, had relatively low scores overall for physical violence. However, it is important to carefully consider the meaning of these "low" scores. Joan reported being pushed, grabbed, or shoved between ten and twenty times during her relationship with Burt. Mary reported being choked and pushed, grabbed, or shoved between three and five times each during her relationship with David. These scores reflect a degree of violence in the relationship that could easily lead someone to feel unsafe. In addition, Joan and Mary each reported sexual abuse and emotional abuse.

Most women reported physically assaultive behavior that reflects, on average, the use of each behavior three to ten times over the course of the relationship. Faye reported the most extreme physical violence in her

Table 3.2 Conflict Tactics Scale Scores for Participants

	Faye	Celeste	Elaine	Jane	Ginger	Cheri	Rachel	Wendy	Joan	Mary	Mean	SD
Physical Abuse 8 items	45	32	24	34	25	22	24	21	5	6	23.8	12.04
Emotional Abuse 7 items	42	35	37	27	33	29	23	24	27	26	30.3	6.20
Sexual Abuse 2 items	11	12	0	0	0	4	6	0	12	6	5.1	5.13
Total	98	79	61	61	58	55	53	45	44	38	59.2	17.78

relationship with Don. For all items except two, she reported over 20 incidents of violence over the course of her relationship with Don.

All women reported high levels of emotional abuse. The mean score of 30.3 is the highest score of the three categories. This places their experiences at about midway between CTS categories that indicate abuse six to ten times or ten to twenty times over the relationship. All women indicated over twenty times for the item "swore at, screamed at or insulted you." Emotional abuse was pervasive in these women's lives.

Making sense of the scores for sexual abuse was clearer in the context of women's stories. Joan, Celeste, and Faye indicated in their stories and in their CTS scores that sexual abuse was a large part of their abuse. Sexual abuse was pervasive for Joan. In the third interview when completing the CTS, when I asked Joan the questions, "Physically forced you to have sex?" She responded with a laugh, "Every time we had sex. Wasn't my choice. Because of those socks you know." She is referring to a story she told me during the first interview about Paul using socks to masturbate and his subsequent practice of leaving them around the house, she believed, as messages to her that she wasn't fulfilling her duty to him. Rachel, Mary, and Cheri's sexual abuse experiences were less frequent but still present. In both CTS scores and their stories, Jane, Ginger, Wendy, and Elaine indicated no sexual abuse.

The significance of sexual abuse is found in its occurrence, not its frequency. Celeste, Joan, and Faye experienced forced sexual relations. This item, when renamed "rape," takes on a more powerful connotation. Both Joan

and Celeste were raped by their abusive husbands within a few days after surgery or giving birth. Whether rape happened one time or more than twenty, it has significant implications for the safety and power balance between two people. Overall six women experienced coercive or pressured sexual relations. In most cases, the women said they didn't feel they could say no. The power imbalance in their relationship with their abusive partner was acted out with the sexual relations.

Childhood and Prior Abuse Experiences of the Participants

Nine of the 10 women talked about some family dysfunction while they were growing up. Some had been victims of severe emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Celeste was sexually and physically abused by her father, her siblings, and in foster care. Mary was the victim of extreme physical and sexual abuse by her stepfather. Wendy was the victim of physical and sexual abuse as well as severe social isolation in the family. Rachel was sexually, emotionally, and physically abused. Faye was sexually abused by foster children in the home and felt unwanted by her mother.

Other women in the study reported alcoholic or neglectful parents. Elaine described an alcoholic mother but otherwise a fairly happy childhood. Jane said her parents were so young and irresponsible when they married that she, as the oldest child, had far too much responsibility growing up. She also stated that her father was very controlling. For Cheri, divorce and a rage-aholic stepfather comprised her childhood experiences, but in general, as an only child,

she said she thought she had fared well. Finally, Joan said that her parents looked like Ozzie and Harriet on the surface, but she realized it was not real. Her parent's divorce after 25 years was devastating for her as was the subsequent sexually inappropriate behavior by the man who would become her stepfather. Only Ginger described a happy home life. During her interviews, she repeatedly expressed gratitude for the childhood experience she had in her family.

Besides abuse within the family, two women talked about rapes prior to their abusive relationships under study. Elaine was raped when she was in 7th grade and told no one for years. Joan was raped three times over several years as a young adult.

About half of the women in the study talked about prior abusive relationships. Jane's second husband was violent but not as controlling as Robert was. Cheri and Mary were both abused by all their former husbands or boyfriends. Joan had three marriages and she described only one of them as good. And Wendy described several abusive relationships prior to her relationship with Burt. Wendy had a prior marriage that she described as loving, but she, like Joan, felt like she wasn't ready to be loved.

Celeste and Rachel had no prior abusive relationships, perhaps because their marriages were their first relationships. Elaine said her prior husband was loving. His only flaw was that he was an alcoholic. Their relationship ended when he committed suicide. Neither Ginger nor Faye described abuse in prior relationships.

The women's experiences are provided as context to understanding the homes in which the children lived. The remainder of the findings will focus on the children's experiences, with the exception of Chapter 6 that explores women's conceptions of motherhood in the context of domestic violence.

Research Questions and Analysis

Three research questions were proposed for this study.

- 1) In what ways are children implicated in domestic violence?
- 2) Are characteristics of the mother or child related to how children are implicated in domestic violence?
- 3) Is there a predictable pattern of involving children in abuse? And, if so, can a trajectory be articulated?

Once into the interviews another research question arose from the context of the interviews.

- 4) What is the meaning of motherhood in the context of domestic violence?

Information from interviews with participants was analyzed for differences and similarities among participants, with special attention to patterns of abuse involving the children. Initially, I catalogued the data and analyzed lists of the ways in which the children were implicated in domestic violence. Next, I examined the relationship between the ways in which children were involved in domestic violence and identifiable characteristics of the child or the mother. These characteristics included child's gender, age, disability of the child, and

family-of-origin, and severity of abuse the women experienced. Other child characteristics that arose in the analysis included poor health and family relationship to abuser, i.e., stepchild, no relation, or biological child. Additional maternal characteristics included prior abusive relationships, disability, use of drugs or alcohol, church involvement, lifestyle choices, financial dependency, and perceptions of motherhood. I examined the child's involvement in combination with the mother's abuse in an attempt to determine whether a predictable pattern of involving children in the abuse was present. Finally, the material gained in the third interview was analyzed for similarities and differences in women's perceptions of motherhood in the context of domestic violence.

Presentation of Findings

The results of this study are presented in three chapters. The study addressed four questions. To answer the first question, (In what ways are children involved in domestic violence?), I compiled a comprehensive listing of the ways children are involved in domestic violence. These findings are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 focuses on the second research question, the effect child or maternal characteristics had on the type of involvement of the children. These characteristics included children's age, gender, and disability, as well as mother's experiences of childhood abuse, previous relationship abuse, and the severity of violence in the most recent relationship.

The third research question asked whether it was possible to describe a typical pattern of involving the children. Patterns of abuse are considered collectively. For example, patterns may exist which mark the turning points in the abuse sequence when mothers protectively intervened on behalf of their children. This provides initial exploration of women's roles in domestic violence. These findings are presented in Chapter 6.

The participants' stories led me into an analysis of motherhood in the context of domestic violence. Through their words I became interested in the internal conflicts they faced as mothers and partners to abusive men. Examining women's protective actions on behalf of their children provides a useful view for seeing the interplay between motherhood and other social or relationship pressures. Their roles as mothers in relation to their children became central to the exploration of the implications of abuse for their children. These findings are also found in Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 provides summary comments and findings about this research and comments and suggestions about further research and public policy.

The interviews were emotionally intense and rich in content. Women spoke of the difficulty they had in retelling and rereading their stories, some after many years, much political action against domestic violence, and for two, telling their story in public many times. It was still difficult and painful to confront the realities of their lives and the effects their choices have had on the lives of their children.

CHAPTER IV CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

This chapter focuses on children's experiences in domestic violence as perceived through their mothers' eyes. The experiences of the children are presented thematically. The following themes are explored: direct child maltreatment; legal issues involving the children including visitation, custody, and child support; and direct and indirect child involvement in the abuse.

The children of the mothers in this study were exposed to a variety of abusive experiences living in homes with domestic violence. Because the criteria for participation included experiencing abusive behavior by male partners, the majority of reported exposure was perpetrated by the men. No mother said her children escaped exposure, although some described the exposure as minimal. For example, Wendy described the only three incidents during which the children were exposed to the violence perpetrated against her by her partner, Burt. Elaine said that most of the violence happened when Martha was out of the home, thus her child's direct exposure was also limited.

In contrast, most women described frequent child exposure to domestic violence, especially emotional abuse. For example, Cheri described daily exposure to yelling and screaming. Mary's and Joan's stories and CTS scores indicated little physical abuse but both women said the children were exposed to emotional and verbal violence.

The majority of prior research on children exposed to domestic violence has documented the overlap between domestic violence and child maltreatment.

Rates as high as 70% have been reported (Bowker, Arbitell, & McFerron, 1988), and a recent meta-analysis of studies place the rate between 40% and 60% (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 1997). In this study women reported evidence of physical abuse of children in 50% of the homes, evidence of sexual abuse in 20% of the homes, evidence of emotional abuse in 90% of the homes, and expressed concerns about neglect in 70% of the homes.

Child Maltreatment

Women described six themes of child maltreatment: (1) physical abuse, (2) emotional abuse, (3) sexual abuse, (4) neglect, (5) other abuse, and (6) other effects. With the exception of Wendy, all mothers indicated that their children were victims of some type of abuse or neglect. Also, these mothers described ways the children were harmed because of the parents' lack of attention to their circumstances. In a few cases, children were threatened with weapons or were the victims of actions at the hands of their fathers.

Physical abuse. Five mothers stated that their children were victims of physical abuse. Four mothers indicated that their children were injured by physical abuse. Heavy-handed discipline or spanking hard enough to leave a mark was described by three women.

Several of Celeste's children experienced extreme physical abuse. Harry pummeled Debbie as Celeste and three siblings were attempting to get him off. Peter had welts on his legs at school and a handprint on his kindergarten picture from his father's discipline. Hank's thumb was bruised from

being slapped for sucking his thumb as a toddler. Celeste also described how Samuel and Robert were slapped hard enough to fly across the room. Celeste talked about head butting that caused a bloody nose for her son, Robert. Celeste said the abuse of the children was worse at the beginning of the relationship and tapered off towards the end.

Although less severe, physical abuse was also present in other homes. Mary's ex-husband kept Michelle home from day care one day when his wedding ring left a mark on her bottom. John spanked Kevin, Rachel's son, with a willow switch until his legs bled. Mary described David holding the baby while violently shaking Mary, throwing a high chair across the room with a baby in his arms, and very nearly stepping on a crawling baby while choking Mary.

Faye and Jane described how their ex-partners physically abused their children while playing. For example, Faye said Don was unable to play with the children in a normal way, but always made them cry. In other forms of abuse, Faye described Don chasing Marie with a chain saw and an ax. Faye also said Don bit and pinched the children, and in one case sucked on his son's skin so hard that a physician thought the child had a skin disorder. Faye's ex-husband held four of five of his children over railings or the edge of a steep cliff saying, "It would be so easy to drop them." Rachel described John pushing and holding her children up against the wall and in one case forcing Christopher to take medicine.

Despite these and other incidents of physical abuse, child protection services were involved in only three women's lives. For the most part, the abuse was a silent secret known only within the family.

Emotional abuse. For purposes of this study, emotional abuse is defined as "...harm to a child's ability to think, reason, or have feelings. Parental behaviors fall into a pattern of emotionally destructive actions usually taking one or more forms: rejecting, terrorizing, ignoring, isolating, or corrupting. Acts include, but are not limited to, habitual ridicule, scapegoating, deprivation of food or water, exposure to violence, threats to health or safety, torture, and confinement" (State Office for Services to Children and Families, 1998, pg. 9).

With the exception of Wendy, all mothers indicated that their children were victims of emotional abuse. Five women described their abusers calling their children names. Jane's child Michael was called names when he couldn't compete in wrestling with his father.

He'd sometimes call him a pussy or something like that if he would cry or stuff. Or they would wrestle, which Michael liked, but it always made me, like practically throw up, cause it always ended with Michael crying. Not because Robert would hit him or anything, but somehow in the wrestling around Michael would get hurt or he would bump himself and it was like, 'well you little pussy. You can't take this, you want to play with daddy but you...'
I would think, well, you fucking asshole, you outweigh him by 150 pounds.

Mary and Rachel also said their partners made fun of their children's feelings. Don used putdowns and belittling comments with Faye's children, often with sexual overtones. Celeste's daughter was ridiculed about her weight. Sometimes emotional abuse took the form of name-calling. Cheri said that

Steve called Tina an "ugly little kid." Although Cheri knew that was the way his family talked and it was meant with affection, she didn't like it. John called Rachel's daughter Amber, "my little bitch." Bill called Ginger's daughter, Betsy, a "bitch" on one occasion.

In one case, emotional abuse to the child was a result of the father's controlling behavior. For example, Celeste also talked about not being allowed to accept collect calls from her oldest son after he had been kicked out of the house after his father returned from alcohol and drug treatment. Harry continued to converse by phone with Hank but refused to allow Celeste to talk with him, giving Hank the impression that his mother didn't want to talk with him.

Children in two relationships were subject to weapons. Besides Celeste's daughter, Kathy, being held hostage in the car, once during visitation at Harry's, a loaded shotgun was left on the floor where the children were allowed to run. Faye's son, Junior, had a gun held to his head and then later found a gun in the glove compartment of Don's truck during visitation.

Sexual abuse. Children of three women underwent sexual abuse investigations. Jane's son, Michael, was sexually abused very severely by his stepbrother, Travis. Travis took Michael out into the field under the guise of taking the dogs for a walk. Jane said she noticed scratches on his back but for a long time didn't understand what was happening. She believes that if she and Robert hadn't been so embroiled in their own issues, she would have recognized what was happening sooner.

Jane opposed Travis coming to live with them in the first place, but she conceded when Robert demanded that his child live with them.

If I would have had my right mind, I don't think I would have really let Travis come here. There was a time before I even saw this kid when we got this report about him. He had molested his biological brothers and sisters and had a problem in his foster care home. I had thought to myself, now do I really want to let this around my son? And I had told this to Robert, now we were even separated. And he said, 'I want my kid and I'm going to get my kid here no matter what.' I said, 'Well, I don't know if I'm going to do this.' Well, he brought over and left on my doorstep, a copy of the tape, The Jagged Edge, about the guy who gets away with murdering his wife. It was a threat! I spent the night in a shelter that night. But then, eventually said, 'Well, I can't live without him, so I'd better just do this thing'.

Again she recognizes that the relationship dynamics between them led to her making poor choices for her own son, Michael. Jane talked about the responsibility she feels.

We were naive and I didn't have an education then. I didn't realize that a 10-year-old could be an evil monster and capable of all kinds of stuff. And I also didn't realize, I always felt that if he ever did anything to Michael, Michael would come and tell. I didn't know then that there was a whole psychological thing that happens between the victim and the abuser where they wouldn't tell. So, I feel that the level of abuse that was happening to me made me so fuzzy, and my memory so weird, that I, myself didn't notice things to where I, too, I hold me and Robert totally responsible for that, because of our system and our weird thing that we were living in.

Joan's ex-husband, Paul, underwent a psychiatric evaluation when Joan found blood in her daughter's underwear after a visit with Paul and his girlfriend.

Joan also expressed concern about other inappropriate or suggestive behavior that occurred between Paul and her two other daughters. Nicole, her oldest child, slept between Paul and his new girlfriend during one visit. And Paul got

into bed with Marie, the middle daughter, one time when she was sick. Joan didn't believe that anything happened during these incidents, but cited these examples of evidence of Paul's poor judgement where children and sexuality were concerned.

Faye said that she believes that Don has sexually abused all her children. While it has never been proven in court, she said that both of her sons, Junior and Ray, were sexually abused by him. The abuse to Junior, her 10-year-old son, began when he was four. Her youngest son, Ray also exhibited very bizarre sexualized behavior. Faye said Don also used pornography with the two boys. Nadine reported her father touching her inappropriately. Faye suspects that Don also sexually abused both her oldest daughters. When Jo was a baby, she was examined at a hospital for possible sexual abuse. She also said Marie found condoms under Jo's bed. Faye also described intense triangulation between Jo, herself, and Don. Faye believed that Don treated Jo more like a girlfriend than a daughter. Because the system had ineffectively responded, she suspected her girls would not come forward even if something had happened.

Four other women had additional concerns about sexual abuse by their ex-partners. Elaine provided the most salient example when she talked about living in continual fear that Randy abused her daughter, Martha. She said Randy had a history of child sexual abuse that Elaine learned of only after he had moved in. Besides fearing actual sexual abuse, Randy did what Elaine calls "mental molestation" of her daughter. Elaine's and Martha's bedrooms shared a wall, and because Elaine is deaf, Randy was able to simulate the sounds of

sexual activity. After Elaine had gone to sleep, he unplugged the touch lamp on the headboard and began shaking the bed. Martha was upset, thinking they were having sex every night. In addition to this type of emotional abuse, he also took Martha's underwear and other clothing. It was secretly returned only after they had a family meeting to discuss the problem.

Neglect. Seven women described behavior that they felt was neglectful to their children. Ginger talked about Bill not picking Leonard up at day care because he was drunk or stoned. She also told the story of coming home after working graveyard and finding 3-year-old Leonard eating out of the garbage because his father was passed out in the bedroom. Celeste and Faye's partners put their own needs for material possessions above those of their wives and children. They believed that because they were the breadwinners, they were entitled to the best. Wendy and Jane described their children as "cheated" because their partners had the ability to be very good fathers, but often weren't.

Other direct abuse. Abusers in several relationships harmed pets, took their children's money or sold their children's belongings. Three women described their partners destroying or giving away toys. Celeste said Harry threw out the children's toys. She thought he was reenacting a childhood trauma of watching his favorite train set burn up because he had failed to put it away.

Thirty percent of my participants talked about their partners abusing their pets compared to Ascione's 1998 article in which 71% of a sample of 38 women seeking shelter from violent relationships described repeated pet abuse. Faye's ex-partner Don slit the dog's throat and blamed it on the children. Jane said

Robert threw the dog one time when he was very angry. Later Jane was severely abused when she gave away Robert's dog because it was not being adequately cared for. Elaine's ex-partner Randy threatened to kill their cat.

Summary. The rates of abuse found in my study are similar to those reported in prior research (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 1997).

I have included less detailed attention to the stories of direct child abuse because, in my study, I was hoping to learn about what happens to children in homes with domestic violence before the child is directly abused. These others forms of involvement including legal and indirect and direct involvement are the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

Legal

Consistent with prior research documenting children's involvement in legal proceedings (Cahn, 1991; Hart, 1990; Zorza, 1996), children in this study were also involved in legal issues, including visitation, custody, or child support.

The public agencies charged with making visitation, custody, and child support decisions grapple with how to make equitable decisions (Hart, 1990).

Professionals are expected to balance "best interest of the child" and "parental rights" (McKay, 1994). Decisions are especially difficult when allegations of child abuse or neglect are made, as often happens during contentious divorce proceedings (Cahn, 1991). In domestic violence cases, the threat of violence often increases the stakes. In the stories related by participants in this study,

children were frequently used as pawns in the abuse and conflict in the relationship during visitation, custody, and child support decisions.

Visitation. Visitation arrangements directly concern the children and are thus a focus for problems during many domestic violence settlements. The children are thrown into a system that determines the level of ongoing contact they are to have with each parent. In many jurisdictions, visitation is often awarded to the father, in spite of evidence of violence because he is more economically stable (Zorza, 1996).

In this study, children in five families had no current contact with the abusive partner. Two men are out of the children's lives because of death or the lack of biological relationship with the child. In the remaining three cases, courts ordered supervised visitation but the men failed to follow through on those orders.

Of the five remaining families, children in three families had ongoing, amicable contact with their fathers. Although interactions at the time of the custody arrangements were not positive, Joan, Rachel, and Mary stated that they were able to work out issues beneficially for the children. This was best exemplified by the arrangement Joan and her ex-husband made for him to pay off his child support debt in November in order not to affect the children's medical insurance coverage.

If he's not current by December 31, he can't claim the kids on his taxes. So--and this is where there is some coordination between him and me--I said, if you're going to do this, don't do it in December because I have to re-qualify for the state Health Plan in February and they take February and the 2 months previous and if my income shows \$5500 in December, those kids are going

to be off the health plan. He said, 'OK.' I said, 'You've got to pay it in November', and he did. And he knows the same is true this year.

Celeste and Wendy's children had minimal contact with their fathers. Celeste's ex-partner, Harry, was in prison so has infrequent visits with the children. Prior to his incarceration, the children had visitation every other weekend. Because of the volatility of his abuse, a third party transported the children to and from visits with him. Some of her children had contact with Harry in prison as Celeste explained.

Actually, it's mostly the older boys. All either visit on occasion or have telephone or letter contact. The girls, I know that Debbie, the youngest girl, has had telephone contact and letter contact. I know that Tessa has had a little bit of both. Kathy has had letter contact but told me that she mailed him a bunch of things several months ago and never heard back from him. Samuel has not had any contact.

In addition, the children arranged to be gathered in one location when he called so he could talk to as many of them as possible.

Wendy decided to never seek child support from Burt. She did this in order to maintain full control of her children. This was easier for her because Wendy and Burt were never married, thus, no formal child support agreement was legally necessary. Currently, she takes and remains with her children while they visit their father, usually about once a week. She said firmly, that if he acted inappropriately with her or with the children, he knew he would never see his children again. Wendy talked about watching other women go through this process.

If they take his money then they have to let them see the children. I have made it clear to Ron [her new husband] that I will never

ask Burt for money. He may come back and see us, but if he hurts me again, that [visitation] would be cut off, and he would not be allowed to see his kids.

Supervised visitation is often ordered in courts when there is concern about the parent being appropriate with the children but the court wishes a relationship or attachment bond between the child and parent to be maintained. As might be expected, supervised visitation was a part of several restraining or custody orders in this study.

Two women felt so strongly that their children still have contact with their fathers, that they conducted the supervised visits between them. In Joan's case, her ex-partner continued to abuse her even through the supervised visit. She said

There was a period of time when he was on supervised visitation and I had to be with him because nobody else in the family could stand the sight of him. And I didn't want the kids to miss seeing him. And, it was after he had smashed my hand. So it was a pretty uncomfortable situation for me. He made comments about--I was wearing a hand brace, a wrist brace--and he made comments about that, [saying] 'It was a phony ass thing.'

For three women, supervised visitation was awarded to their ex-partners, but the men never arranged to see their children. For example, Ginger's ex-partner, Bill, won 8 hours a week of supervised visitation when he contested the first judge's order. Ginger took Leonard to see his father twice, and on the third visit, Bill was not there. While she did not block his efforts during the subsequent 2 years, he made no efforts to see his child. She came to think it was best for Leonard not to see his father because "It has been too long."

For some fathers, finances are used to explain their reasons for failure to follow through on visitation orders. For example, Cheri's ex-partner, Steve, bargained with her for 6 months to find someone to supervise the visits in a way that wouldn't cost him anything. She considered a friend or a family member and finally got strong. She described their conversation.

'It says visitation, supervised. Here is someone who will do it. You need to call them.' But he never follows through, so he never did. But I went through the bargaining phase for probably at least 6 months. And that was a way for him to talk to me about it, a way just to get to see me.

During visitation, men often used children to continue abuse to the woman, often by passing messages from the abuser to the woman. Two of Celeste's children reported to their mother that their father had told them that there was a contract on her life or that someone was "going to hurt her and hurt her bad." Celeste described the messages that were sent to her through Debbie and Samuel.

So, one time, he'd been in jail. I don't remember exactly. While he was out of jail after I left him, while he was out of jail and the kids were on home visit. He had Debbie call me and tell me that he had found out that there was a contract out on my life and so I'd better be careful through the weekend and he just wanted me to know this. He told Debbie to tell me that. She called me from a pay phone to tell me this. She was 16, I think at the time. And, then he had the same like, within the same 3 weeks or so, he had Samuel come home, cause I think it was either 2 weeks before or 2 weeks after that, either the preceding home visit or the one after that, that he had Samuel come home and give me a similar message.

In summary, visitation, a process legally instituted in most cases, is frequently used as a way to continue to control or harass the woman by using the children. Many times when abusers attempt to win visitation or custody, their

efforts are more aimed at hurting their partners than maintaining relationships with their children. Thus, children also become victims in this process. Especially for those children whose fathers didn't follow through with visitation orders, I wonder about the impact on the children.

Finally, women talked about activities while their children were in the care of their fathers that they perceived to be unsafe for their children. David's mental stability concerned Mary. David was diagnosed with bi-polar disease. When he was not medicated, he was highly erratic. Both Celeste and Jane believed their ex-partners drank or used drugs during visits. Celeste also told a detailed story of finding a loaded gun on the floor while the children were on visitation. She attempted to work with his probation officer to find out if this report was factual. While Harry was never cited for having a gun as a convicted felon, she found a gun with matching serial numbers at a local pawn shop the day after she called the probation officer. She suspected that Harry had turned it in.

Celeste also talked about Harry "almost hitting" the children during their visits. "They would come home and say, 'I think dad was about to hit me this weekend, but he didn't do it, Mom. He's really trying.'" Two things upset her about this. First was the children's pride in his still very inappropriate behavior. Second, one child, Samuel, exhibited self-sacrificing behavior in response to Harry's unpunished violence against her. When Samuel was about 11, he came back from a visitation with his father and said, "You know, Mom, sometimes when he is close to hitting me, I feel like letting him. Because if he hits me,

they're not going to turn him loose. If he hits you, they just let him loose the same day."

Sometimes in the fathers' homes, children were actually placed at risk during visitation. Two women cited examples in which they felt their ex-partners were placing their children at risk. Both Mary and Faye talked about their abusers smoking in front of children with seemingly little regard for the effect on their children's health. Mary was quite angry talking about David's lack of consideration for Dawn's asthma.

Dawn, the youngest. His biological child! She was *born* with respiratory problems. And, she's had medication for her asthma off and on and I'm afraid that she is going to have to start having it all the time. Inconsiderate, inconsistent, and selfish! I mean, not even realizing another person is, you know, comes into the equation at all. He does what he wants to do. And, if its convenient for him to pacify someone by letting them think that he's doing something for them, he will. Or if he gets something out of it. At this point, he's not getting anything out of not smoking around his kids. And he's a fairly intelligent man and he damn well knows what second hand smoke does!

Faye also talked Junior and Ray being exposed to smoke on visitation.

One of the visitation places is--both of our boys are asthma children and the doctors have even written notes to say that they shouldn't be in smoking environments. The place where they are supposed to have their supervised visit, they smoke heavily. When they returned, the air chamber for Junior, for his asthma medication, it just reeked of smoke. Junior can't use it. We had to throw it away and get a new one.

In addition to threats to their children's physical safety, several mothers talked about their ex-partners allowing inappropriate behavior in their homes. For the most part, behaviors seen as unacceptable by the women reflected differences in values between the women and their ex-partners. In general,

these differences were present during the relationship as well. For example, Rachel cited differences in discipline, saying he was tough and she was lenient. Because her children were both teenagers, she thought they had adjusted to the differences when they were with each parent. "Whatever they do with him, they are very guarded about what they say and do, because they know what will tick him off and what won't."

Custody. Custody decisions during divorce proceedings are often hostile and contentious, especially in domestic violence cases. Often partners who were minimally engaged with their children during the relationship demand their rights during legal proceedings, beginning with visitation and followed by custody (Zorza, 1996). The most extreme example is one partner kidnapping the children. This happened to only one woman in the study.

For eight of the ten women, threats to obtain custody were made by their abusive partners during the custody negotiations to get the children. Even in the two cases in which the abusive partner did not seek custody, threats to remove the children were made.

Five of those cases involved indirect or implied statements. Indirect threats were just as powerful in the women's minds as direct threats. Although indirect statements may be less clear to the outside observer, the battered woman knows what is meant. Mary's description of the indirect threat David made regarding custody of Dawn exemplified how she understood the batterer's intent.

I can't remember what we were talking about or what my comment was but his comment back (was), 'but I would love to have my baby

live with me.' It was just the way he said it, just the right words that threw me for a loop. I was scared to death that he was going to sue for custody.

In some cases, intention to seek custody of the children is directly stated.

Cheri said that Steve made such threats on a daily basis.

If I left, then he was going to make sure that he had the children half of the time. He said, 'You can leave, but you can't take my kids from me.' He said, 'That's OK, but we're going to have them half, we're going to share them. At the very least, I'm going to have them every other weekend.' And that scared me to death. I thought that would really happen.

During threats to get custody from Cheri, Steve made very emotional pleas to get the children. Cheri and Steve had frequent discussions about custody of the children. Steve wrote little notes about these discussions. The notes said things like, "You may have temporary custody of these children or the car." She said she kept these in her wallet and she "...felt better having these notes because it meant that they were working on things." She continued to find these notes in the house even two years later.

Three men made direct statements about their intentions to get custody of their children. Faye said that Don made threats to get custody of the children, but she talked about him doing this only to hurt her. She said he even told the children that he only wanted to hurt Faye. Faye said, "He didn't do much of anything with the kids. The only thing that the kids were told, the only thing that he wants to do with the kids, is to hurt me."

In three other families, ex-partners actually took action to obtain custody of the children. Rachel's ex-husband, John filed papers to sue for custody while he had the children during Christmas visitation. He stopped the proceedings at

the last minute when she agreed to return to him. She thought he might have felt satisfied that he had "gotten to" her.

Elaine's children were not Randy's biological children so he did not seek custody, but he did threaten to have her children removed from her because of her drug use. Jane said Robert would never have sought custody because he wouldn't have wanted the financial responsibility of raising a child. Nevertheless, Robert threatened to stop Michael's adoption process before it was final by saying Jane was an unfit mother.

In summary, all the women in this study described some direct or indirect threats to seek custody of their children. Actual custody decisions were made primarily through family court actions including custody studies.

Custody studies are often ordered by judges whose job it is to determine the custodial arrangements for children when relationships dissolve. Children of two women, Joan and Faye, were involved in custody studies. Joan believed that the custody study was especially difficult for her children. Although this custody battle was resolved out of court, Joan thought the legal process in general was very hard on her children. She said, "Children suffer with attorney battles."

Faye agreed that children were harmed in the process. "I've seen the kids victimized so badly, like property in the divorce. They're not people. And, its not fair to them." Faye's children were intimately involved in the custody study by writing letters and submitting journal entries in the process. At one point her oldest daughter Jo was in counseling as a part of the custody study.

Faye said Jo told the counselor that Faye was abusing her. Faye thinks this was said at Don's urging. Faye denied the abuse and the counselor thought Faye was lying. This set into motion a chain of events that led to a lengthy child abuse investigation by the child protection agency. Ultimately she was cleared of all charges, but the process was difficult for Faye and Jo.

Two women were critical of their own behaviors during the divorce proceedings, believing their actions negatively affected their children. Rachel said she and John both played games with the children. "I would tell the kids that I was going to leave their dad, like 'Don't say anything to him.' Putting them in a position I never should have put them in. They were too young to even begin to comprehend." Similarly, Joan talked about the games she and Paul played around visitation at first.

Because we had a temporary order, it left a lot of gray areas especially with regards to holidays. And, so during the divorce, it was really hard. There was a lot of arguing, and we were both doing a lot of, I have to say posturing as far as, 'You know, it says 12:00 and you were here at 12:01,' and then there was a situation that he ended up screaming at my mother one time when he came and dropped the kids off. And, so I said he couldn't pick them up at the house anymore, and I would leave them somewhere. And, then, I had no car so it was hard to meet him anywhere with the kids. And, there was a lot of little crap involved with that.

Because this study was focused on women's behaviors, and study participants were not asked directly about such actions. Had they been asked, it is likely other women would share similar experiences.

In some jurisdictions, family custody actions are taken when extended family members wish to maintain contact with the children. In domestic violence divorce cases, families of the abuser sometimes use the legal system to demand

contact with the children. These actions may be motivated more by the interests of the abuser than by what is best for the children. In this study, family members of three women's ex-partners pursued custody or visitation actions. In Cheri's case, Steve's mother filed papers to sue for grandparent rights. Steve's sister also sought visitation of the child. Cheri suspected that Steve was behind these actions because Steve's mother asked for a tremendous amount of time. "She put in there that she wanted all the major holidays, and then she wants their birthdays, and she wants them to spend the night once a week. This was an extreme request."

For Wendy and Mary, the financial status of the ex-partner's family became an issue during family custody actions. Wendy said that Burt threatened her that his family would seek custody and win because they had more money than she or her family did.

Finally, threats of kidnapping were common for the women. In general the women felt very vulnerable to these threats. Only Rachel's husband actually interfered with a custody order and kidnapped her children. The children were visiting him at Christmas break just a few months after Rachel had left him the first time. He immediately began to seek full custody of the children while they were with him in Alabama for 4 months. Rachel made two trips to Alabama because that was the only way she could regain custody. She ended up reconciling with him because she wanted her children back, but also because she didn't want them to grow up alone with him. She talked about that experience,

At that point, I wanted them at all costs. I didn't want them in that [situation]. Because I didn't want them raised by him. Because without a mediator or a person there who cared about them and what they were going through, there wouldn't have been anyone there for that piece of it. It would have been strictly the abuse and control without any safe middle ground.

Five other women talked about their ex-partners threatening to kidnap their children. For example, Faye related that Don said, "If you divorce me, I'll take the kids." After making those statements, his behavior frightened Faye and her children. Faye said Don chased Nadine and Junior at school and both children believed he was going to kidnap them. She said Don stated, "I could just walk into school and take them. There's no way you can legally keep me away from them."

Once the relationship was severed and new lives were established, threats of kidnapping or custodial interference were rare. This led women to believe that ex-partners were threatening custody simply to control their behavior.

Child support. Child support issues were a common concern for women in this study. Six women received no child support. Of the four women who collected child support, all complained that it was often late or non-existent. All stated that their ex-husbands were behind in paying their children support. They also commonly stated that they had to beg or "play games" to get it. Rachel said,

I have to beg for it. Its like, it's due by the 15th and he always has an excuse for that. 'Oh, I mailed it and it got lost. I didn't get paid as much as I thought I was going to get paid this time and it will be half and half.' Or like if he give me extra money--like he went out and bought food when he was here last because we

didn't have any food in the house--and then he takes it out of child support, instead of just paying the full amount.

Faye, Ginger, and Rachel also talked about their ex-husbands' failure to complete their obligations to pay children's medical expenses. In Faye's case, her ex-husband was ordered to pay medical expenses for the children but has never done so. Similarly, Ginger said Bill was ordered to pay the insurance premiums for Leonard's medical insurance but has never done so. Rachel described her interactions about medical expenses for her children with John, her ex-husband.

Amber needs glasses and he's dragging his feet. He doesn't pay the medical bills and they need stuff and he's not willing to fork it out. Its 'Next time, next time I'm in town.' Next time, instead of just sending me the money and letting me get it done, he won't do it.

Another woman, Mary, noted her husband's conflicting responses to child support verses child custody. She said,

When we were struggling for child support, he was fighting the child support tooth and nail. He didn't get a lawyer to fight for custody, but he got a lawyer to fight [the] child support [arrangement] and he ended up getting more [paying] child support than they ordered him in the first place.

For some women, lack of payment of child support appeared to be another means of abuse. For example, Joan said her ex-husband made verbally abusive statements to her regarding his beliefs about paying children support and suggested that she should get a job. "He told me a couple weeks ago, 'Get off your fat fucking ass; quit going to school, get a job, you can get a job. You fucking welfare recipient.'" She was upset because the children's lifestyle is negatively impacted by the reduction in child support.

Four women said their ex-partners quit jobs or moved jobs frequently to avoid paying child support. Both Mary's and Joan's ex-husbands were construction workers and moved to new jobs before the child support enforcement officials could garnish their wages. Joan's ex-partner, Paul, formed a construction company and incorporated his business to protect himself from the child support authorities garnishing his wages.

Mary specifically spoke about plentiful jobs in the local paper but knew that her ex-husband, David, wasn't looking, in part because he didn't want to pay her. Mary talked about David using the excuse that he had to pay for his medication for his mental illness as the reason he couldn't pay child support. Mary also said that David attempted to have less contact with his adopted daughter than his biological daughter. She believed this was so he wouldn't feel obligated to pay child support for his adopted daughter. She described the dynamic between them concerning child support. She said that she chose not to raise any issues with him because "then he'll have a reason to mess with me. He'll think twice about paying support."

Jane's child support story was unique. Jane said the reason she finally divorced Robert was because the state was pursuing her to pay support for Robert's son from a previous marriage. Robert had defaulted on his obligation years before and Jane did not believe it was her responsibility. After their divorce, Jane and Robert continued their relationship until he died.

Only Joan and Celeste were awarded alimony as a part of the divorce agreement. Joan's talked about her ex-partner being significantly behind in both

his child support and alimony payments. She expressed her frustration with the system.

Right now the law is that if they're delinquent more than \$2500 in child support, they can suspend or begin proceedings to suspend any professional licenses. Well, he's a CDL [Commercial Driver's License], don't know how much it would be. At this point, he's probably getting close to being \$2500 in debt on child support but then, from the people I talk to at the state, they begin proceedings.

OK, they make up this agreement with him. He'll pay \$500 a month or whatever. And, if he doesn't, if he doesn't make that payment by the 15th of the month or whatever it is, whatever the agreement is, then they serve him with papers and he has 30 days to comply with whatever. And, it's like, get a grip on reality. It's not what it's cracked up to be. Cause people have said to me, 'Well, why hasn't the state done anything?' The district attorney won't help me because it's going through the state, and this is what the state is doing. They're playing around with, as far as I'm concerned, they're playing around with the wording in this thing and it's plotted against me and my kids.

Clearly, visitation, custody, and child support negotiations are ripe for child involvement in domestic violence cases. These situations are challenging for all involved, but the children live with the consequences.

Other legal issues. In addition to visitation, custody, and child support, children were involved in other legal proceedings. Some children testified or were expected to testify in court against one parent. In one case, the child was blamed in court by the abusive partner's attorney in an effort to shift the blame from the abuser to the child. Children were present when the police came and arrested their fathers. Finally safety issues were a concern for several children.

Court systems are complicated and threatening for most people, requiring appropriate comportment and protocol. Such appropriate behaviors may be especially challenging to children. According to these women's stories,

however, children were critical components of their court processes especially for Celeste, Faye, and Cheri.

For Celeste's and Faye's children, court became a familiar part of life. Children were expected to testify against their fathers, submit Victims' Impact Statements, and prepare written statements documenting abuse in their homes. One especially troubling court occurrence was when Celeste's ex-husband's (Harry) attorney shifted the blame from Harry to Hank and Peter for setting the house on fire. Celeste said that her lesbian lifestyle was used as explanation for the children's behaviors. "His attorney kept insinuating that the kids were so upset with Sabrina's and my relationship, that due to their anger and upsetness they could have been the ones to be doing these things." In another trial, Harry's attorney called Tessa to testify about not liking her mother's partner, Sabrina. When Tessa realized the information was being misused and misrepresented, the child ask the district attorney to put her back on the stand to clarify. The district attorney called her to the stand the next day, and in Celeste's words,

Tessa was asked, 'Did she have anything that she wanted to say about the testimony she'd given the day before.' And she said, 'I would never choose Sabrina for a friend, we're just not... You have friends and you do things with, you're compatible with and Sabrina and I would never be friends, and it doesn't mean I don't like her or respect her and it doesn't mean that I think these negative things.'

Faye's four oldest children wrote and delivered numerous letters and statements to court. Her children wrote journal entries during the custody study, advised by the attorney and the counselor. During most of the time Faye was

involved in the court system, she and her attorney attempted to keep the children out of the courtroom, because they both thought it would be too much for them. In the final court appearance, which happened during this research process, she allowed the children to attend and participate in the court process. The oldest two children, Jo and Marie, made formal statements to the court. The next two children, Nadine and Junior, were allowed to approach their mother and tell her things while she was making statements to the judge. It was Faye's belief that this involvement was quite healing for her children. She thought she had been wrong for not initially letting them testify in court. Their involvement in the system increased their trust in the system, and gave them a sense of control.

Faye said,

Since they testified at the stalking hearing, they have a new look about them, like they got some control back and a sense of confidence. Maybe even some trust in the system. It's like a light came on for all four of them.

Temporary restraining orders (TROs) are one legal recourse available to women to protect themselves and their children from violence. TROs are enacted by courts to prevent abusers from being in the proximity of their victims. Many women sought protection through temporary restraining orders. For example, both Cheri and Wendy attempted to eliminate contact between their abusive ex-partners and their children through their restraining orders. Both were denied because there was no evidence of direct abuse to the children. Ginger was initially awarded a restraining order with no contact allowed with the children, a decision that was very unusual given that her partner hadn't directly

abused the children. When contested and heard by a different judge, however, the TRO decision was reversed.

Once TROs are in place, police can take enforcement only after the order has been violated. In these women's stories, TROs were violated, often in ways that involved the children. Celeste filed numerous restraining orders, which Harry consistently violated, to protect herself and her children from Harry.

She said, "I know he was ordered out within a three block radius, and he broke that, and then, he was ordered not to have any telephone contact, and he broke that." Celeste said the judge eventually intervened as a condition of Harry's release from jail.

When we came back [to court], as a condition of his release again, then the judge told him that since he didn't seem to be able to remember where the boundaries were, he was going to make it very easy for him. And, I think it was the map out of the telephone book. It was that size, that type of a map. He had this paper for him. He had yellowed in the whole area so he couldn't make a mistake.

Celeste described how Harry monitored the children despite the temporary restraining order that legally limited his ability to be in the neighborhood. He was able to accurately describe the actions of the children as well as the clothes they were wearing. Celeste described the details Harry was able to relate about a day during which Debbie came home from school because she wasn't feeling well.

He could tell her what time she had left for school, what she wore to school, when she came home, and this wasn't a typical day because she rarely came home other than for lunch. She came home that morning because she had cramps, took some medicine, laid down for a while, then changed clothes and went

back to school when the medicine had taken effect, and he knew every step of the way.

Another woman, Faye reported getting about four or five restraining orders, all of which her ex-partner, Don, violated. He cut phone lines, held a knife to her throat, and demanded that she get the TRO removed. She did so immediately. He chased and harassed the children at school. He called and hung up both at work and at home. He came into the house and took food. He stalked her and accessed her bank account, all while restraining orders were in effect. In short, for women who used TROs, the lack of enforcement and continuing fear of their partners, reduced the orders' effectiveness.

Besides court and temporary restraining orders, children were involved in police actions in other women's stories. Faye's oldest child Jo called 911 at least four times. Jane's child Michael was present when the police came and arrested him after his father had destroyed the living room. Michael was also in the room during the police interrogation of his mother. Wendy's children were present when the police came during the final abusive episode. Contrary to Wendy's wishes for her children not to be involved, the police interviewed the children about what had happened between Wendy and Burt.

Conclusion. Legal issues including visitation, custody, and child support were common ways in which the children were implicated in the violence. Many of the conflicts described by the women in these relationships mirror the conflicts found in divorce cases involving children (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). The realities of the violence in the relationship and the violent nature of the partner, however, increased the danger to the women and the children.

In many cases, children were subjected to experiences that they were would not developmentally able to understand, for example, providing testimony in legal hearings and trials. In other cases, they were asked to choose sides in the fighting, either by virtue of information shared with them by one parent about the other or being expected to select with whom they wished to live. Women talked freely about their partners' roles in using the children, but in many cases also found fault with themselves or members of the legal system, primarily attorneys. Finally, all women talked about getting little or no child support and their struggle to raise their children with fewer economic resources than were ordered in child support agreements.

Indirect Child Exposure to Violence

Little is known about the specific ways children are indirectly exposed to domestic violence. In this study, women perceived the indirect involvement of their children in domestic violence in a number of ways including, (1) witnessing effects of abuse, (2) negative things said about mother, (3) threats, manipulation, guilt, and control tactics, (4) demanding sex before attending to the needs of children, (5) problems with authority and discipline, and (6) threats of suicide.

Witnessed effects of abuse. All mothers talked about their children seeing the physical or emotional effects of abuse on their mother. Seven women also talked about children witnessing effects on the house after abuse. Celeste

talked about Harry's abuse while stating she didn't think her children were aware of much of it.

He was good with his stuff. He knows how to place things where it's easy to hide. I think I only had one black eye that I can remember. I have a broken rib that never healed right. Places that were covered, like your arms and around my neck. He'd hit me in the belly.

Other mothers said children knew more about the physical abuse done to them. For example, Faye talked about bruises and being knocked out and tattooed by Don. The children witnessed cuts, her torn clothing, and the other effects of the knives that were used on Faye. Faye described, "They've seen the bruises, they've seen my lip cut. They've seen when I was cut here [demonstrates on her arm]. They've seen my clothes torn. He likes knives."

In contrast, Wendy didn't think her children would remember her abuse because they were so young during the worst physical violence. Her abuser severely bruised her face when the children were about 4 months old, and he generally abused her when they were away from the children.

Besides the physical effects on their mother, some children also witnessed their mother's emotional outcomes from abuse. Elaine and Jane talked about children seeing them crying. For example, Jane's son Michael witnessed her crying on the couch wondering if Robert was going to return. She said with embarrassment, "It was nearly every day when Robert was gone." Ginger was critical of her own behavior that involved her children emotionally. They frequently witnessed her crying because, as she explained it, she needed

them to be close after violence. She thought it was selfish but she wanted some "uncomplicated" physical affection.

Oftentimes, children were indirectly involved because they heard screaming and name-calling, as evidenced by their ability to recite things said during fights. Joan's said her girls repeated things they had heard said while she was screamed at in the bathroom by Paul.

Since the divorce, they have told me they heard that a couple of other times. I don't think at this point that they remember that particular one. But they do remember the same type of thing where we're again in the bathroom. Because they have repeated some of the stuff that he'd said.

Women provided less detail about the children witnessing effects on the house, however, seven women provided examples of this. Faye said, "Don took all the things off the walls, all of our clothes. He urinated on the bed." Elaine said Randy hit the wall and tended to take things out on himself. "He threw his insulin needles, smashed pictures of himself, and threw dog food, knives, and hammers around the house." Martha, Elaine's daughter, witnessed the after-effects of this behavior.

Negative things said about mother. At some point in time, children in all these women's homes heard negative things said about their mothers by their mothers' partners. Women were frequently called names by their abusive partners, many times in front of their children. The list of names was predictable across all of the women: fat, ugly, bitch, lazy, whore, slut, selfish, stupid, and a bad mother.

Abusers said negative things about the women even when the women worked not to put their partners down. Joan said she thinks that her ex-husband, Paul, still says negative things to the children. Joan described one incident in which Paul picked up Marie, her middle daughter, when she was crying and said, "Mean old mommy; let daddy make you feel better." This contributed to Joan's feeling like the bad guy or the cop all the time.

Threats, manipulation, guilt, and control. Threats were a part of all the women's and children's experiences. Threats made to Elaine were focused on the children but designed to hurt her. For example, Elaine's partner, Randy, threatened to cut her son's throat.

In another example, Faye talked about Junior finding a gun in the glove box of Don's truck during a scheduled visit. She believed this to be an intentional act on Don's part. Don had previously held a gun to Junior's face and this event brought things to the surface again for Junior, causing him to comply with Don's demands.

We used to keep candy in the glove box and so the kids always would go and snatch our candies. And, they knew, and they knew that Don always kept candy. And so he had the gun right there. I thought it was an intentional thing. And so Junior said that he just did what Don wanted him to do so nobody would get hurt.

Several women experienced threats by their ex-partners to involve the legal system against her. Abusive partners used child protection, police, housing, welfare, and other systems as ways to attempt control of their partners.

Both Mary and Faye's ex-husbands contacted the child protection agency and the welfare department and turn them in for abusing the system. Faye said, "He

reported to the child protection agency numerous times that I'm abusive. He also asked friends to make reports. That's why there's such a long list, lots of reports about me abusing the children." On at least one occasion, Don also involved Faye's daughter, Jo, to use the system against Faye. Don coerced Jo into calling the police to report Faye for child abuse.

Jo had gotten in trouble and I had spanked her with my hand. I had hit her three times on the bottom. That's my standard discipline, you get three swats. And, I went to the store and I came back home and we were working on the yard and everything and the police came to the door. And Don goes, 'Oh, who do we have here?' And Jo kind of cowered. And, the officer said that one of the children had called and reported that I had abused them. And, later she said that Don had made her make that call.

The abusive men found many other ways to use the children to either gain access to or harass the women with manipulation and guilt tactics. Celeste talked about how Harry implicated Samuel, her youngest child who was about 10-years-old at the time. Harry told Samuel that he wanted his help in surprising his mother with a gift of a new phone machine. He needed Samuel to tell him the kind of machine she currently so that he could get her a better one. He also told Samuel that he needed the numbers on the bottom of the machine. These numbers are used to access the answering machine at a distance. Samuel was very excited to be a part of this surprise. Celeste was quite angry when she learned of this manipulation. She believed it sacrificed their safety and involved Samuel in a way that was very manipulative.

Faye said Don used manipulation and threats to get their daughter, Marie, to remove money from Faye's checking account. She said, "Don went to

Marie and said if she didn't get money for him that he would hurt us. He would bomb the house or something."

Many women talked about their ex-partners interrogating the children. For example, Harry was subtle and manipulative in obtaining information from Thomas, age 10. Harry asked Thomas questions when they were staying at the women's shelter. Harry said, "I don't want you [Thomas] to tell me where you are, just tell me what you see when you look out the door." Whether Thomas realized Harry's actual request was unknown, but he kept the family safe. His response was, "Trees."

The abusive men frequently used children to check up on their partners. Many times, this was done by use of the phone. Rachel, Faye, and Joan gave examples of this. Children in all three homes were asked these questions by their fathers. "What's mom doing?" "Are there any guys?" "Is she entertaining anyone?" In a very specific example, Rachel explained how John maneuvered and interrogated the children to get the information he wanted.

Maneuvering them, manipulating them into positions that he wanted them to say things. Like he would ask them direct questions, that if you ask a kid they are not going to hurt either parent, so they are not going to say, Oh, like he would say, 'Do you want to live with me?' Of course they are going to say yes because they don't want to hurt him, yet they actually might not want to.

Rachel said John used the skills he learned as a police officer to interrogate the children. "It's like he'll ask questions and then he'll be totally silent and most people will just keep giving information until they [the questioner] get what they want."

Many women talked about their ex-partners trying to get information about their social lives from the children. Mary said when she first started dating a new man, David called and hung up as many as up to fifteen times a night. She knew it was him because she had caller ID. During that same time, she heard Michelle, her middle child, talking to David on the phone, saying, "Nobody else is here, just me and my mom and Dawn and Jeffrey [her sister and brother]." Wendy told a story of a time when Burt went out of town without her and the children. She heard her son, Kevin answering a question on the phone to his father that made her wonder what he was asking. She took the phone from Kevin to hear Burt say, "What's Momma doing?" Wendy answered him saying, "Momma's cleaning the stove."

Children were used as pawns in visitation arguments with little or no regard for the effect of this on their development or the children's desires. If children could be used to cause further pain or difficulty for the partner, they were fair game. In one example, Faye's children indicated that they did not wish to visit with their father. Don made it clear the consequences of that child's actions. Faye said,

Nadine was very clear. 'I do not want to stay with him.' She jumped in the back of the van and was screaming, 'I hate you, I don't want to stay here.' He looked at the kids and he looked at me and he said, 'She doesn't have to stay this time, but I will see you about this in court.'

Manipulation and control tactics were often used to insure the abusive partners' desires were met. Celeste provided several examples. Harry routinely came home and demanded that all the children and Celeste clean the house, all

night long. On some occasions he upended drawers or totally ransacked the house, and then demanded that the family put everything back together. Sometimes Celeste had to clean with the children, but if, "He was in an amorous mood [he would say], the kids could get up and clean house all the rest of the night because your mother has done her very best and she gets to go to bed." Celeste added, with sarcasm, "Well, guess why she gets to go to bed."

Rachel described a particularly painful control tactic used by John that involved her children. She said,

When we were having an argument, he would be keeping them with him. He would physically hold them, carry them around, not let me at them when we were arguing. Not let me hold them. I remember specifically when Amber was a baby, him doing that.

She said that the children would be crying and screaming and John would not let her near her children. While this was happening, he was also blaming her for being a bad parent, telling her that she didn't deserve her children.

Coercive sexuality before attending to children. Three women were expected to engage in or complete sexual activities before their abusive partners allowed them to attend to their children. This tactic pitted a woman's concerns for her children directly against the abuser's desires. Celeste's gave the most salient example. She said, "There were times that say, I wouldn't be wanting to facilitate his desires, and so, I'd be kind of stand-offish, and the baby would be crying and he'd let me know that I couldn't go take care of the baby until I took care of him."

Authority and discipline. Authority and discipline were cited as problems for many women. In some cases, women felt their authority with the children

was compromised when their partners undermined them in front of the children. Different standards with regards to discipline were challenges for other women. Most of these problems in the relationship existed prior to, as well as after, the end of the relationship.

Celeste, Joan, and Faye all talked about experiences with their abusive ex-husbands that undermined their authority as parents. Joan offered the clearest example, in a story about Halloween candy.

After Halloween one year, my mom was at the house staying with us and the kids had of course been at their candy bags. After dinner, I let them choose something and I said, 'No more candy. That's enough candy for 1 day.' And, it wasn't five minutes later I had gone in the living room and Paul had got their candy bags down from off the TV and just gave it to them. To me, that is just like saying, you don't have to listen to what your mother says. And that happened, that type of thing happened so many times that I couldn't even begin to, you know, daily, it was on a daily basis. It was like a slap in the face to me.

Joan felt as if Paul didn't support her parenting even after agreeing to do so in therapy. She said,

I'm always the bad guy, I'm always the one that is more direct and regimented. 'Oh, you know they can stay up another fifteen minutes for bedtime' or just whatever it was. If somebody was supposed to be having a timeout, he'd let them go, or whatever, so whatever I said, he would generally go against it.

For Rachel, Cheri, and Joan differences in discipline strategies between themselves and their ex-husbands were the basis of many arguments. Rachel said John was the strict disciplinarian while she was more lenient. Joan said in her home it was the opposite. She felt as if Paul refused to hold the children to the standards she wanted. The conflict in discipline strategies, regardless of who was strict and who was lenient, was problematic for these women.

Rachel and Cheri both talked about being lenient and paying for it now as the children get older. Rachel has had difficulty determining an appropriate mode of discipline. While Rachel and John were together, she said she found herself balancing out his harsh discipline. Later as a single parent, she found it hard to find middle ground.

When I had them by myself, I guess, one, I didn't realize and two, didn't know how to come back to that middle ground without feeling like I was being abusive, feeling like I was being unfair, feeling like I was being just like their father. I didn't want to feel like that. I didn't want to, and I still have that problem today, if I become really harsh with them.

Rachel's memories of John's abusiveness continue to color how she disciplines her children long after the relationship has ended.

In summary, parental conflicts over authority and discipline were common. They were played out as means to undermine the mothers' relationships with their children. Long after the abusive relationship ended, the earlier difficulties with authority and discipline continue to be reflected in mother-child relationships.

Suicide. Suicide attempts by abusive partners affected two women's lives. Jane believes Robert's death was a suicide although she doesn't think he planned to do it that day. When he died, he was on the way to a job interview after getting high. Still, in reading his journals after he died, she said, "He predicted his death fairly accurately." Faye's ex-partner, Don, attempted suicide when her two oldest children were quite young. Don was taken to the state psychiatric hospital for that action. She said she thinks her daughter, Jo, saw the blood in the bathroom.

Although only two of the ten women reported actual suicide attempts by their partners, suicide threats by abusive partners were more common. The majority of threats came when the abuser was remorseful for his abusive behavior or when the abuser sought to control his partner. For example, Celeste's ex-husband, Harry, threatened suicide early in the relationship when he was very remorseful for beating her. Elaine's ex-partner, Randy, threatened to kill himself the day he moved in with her. Wendy's ex-husband, Burt, threatened to kill himself when she called him the first time she left.

Summary. As is clear in these stories, children were indirectly exposed to violence in a variety of ways. Often this exposure occurred when children saw the after effects of violence. Besides such indirect involvement, children also became directly involved through the actions of one or both of their parents. These included threats, manipulations and other actions.

Direct Exposure to Violence

Four themes emerged that described children's direct involvement in domestic violence through: (1) witnessing abuse, (2) efforts to protect mothers and fathers, (3) feelings of responsibility, and (4) unintentional physical injury of children.

Witnessing abuse. Children were present during and witnessed a variety of abuse experiences. Nine women described children's exposure as extensive. Only Wendy described her children's exposure as minimal, yet she still related three incidents of physical violence. They were present when he hit her and

made her ear bleed, when he choked her, and when he threw a battery at her and injured her hand.

Ginger's daughter, Betsy, was present during only two incidents of. During the first incident, Bill choked Ginger and Betsy intervened both verbally and physically. In the second incident, Bill called Betsy a "bitch." When her mother verbally protected her, Bill began to call Ginger names and yell. Betsy began to verbally protect her mother and got quite aggressive with Bill. Ginger was frightened for Betsy's safety and sent her out of the house. "I was afraid that his aggression for me would turn because she was the attacker then. I wasn't attacking him anymore, she was."

Faye's children were exposed to extensive abuse, and the only children in this study reported to be exposed to the sexual abuse of their mother. Junior heard her crying when Don was raping her. Faye also said her children watched Don force her to have sex once when they were on a family outing.

Then he forced me to have sex out in the open up there while the kids were watching. That was the one time that he made me have it while they were watching. They were there. Marie was, she was barely walking so she was a little over a year. Jo was probably three.

Consistent with prior research that described the overall pervasiveness of violence in abusive family environments (Westra & Martin, 1981), four women talked about abuse being the norm in their lives. Abuse was not unusual. For example, Jane talked about abuse being in the atmosphere.

Just that whole tense thing, everybody's got to take care of Daddy. You never know when Daddy might get mad. I think it's the extreme thing was rare, but the threat (...) was constant. And that also, the whole way the communication was so twisted. I think that

was just like a general family dynamic and I, my part of my thing, and I remember this just so incredibly well is thinking that Michael wouldn't be able to do it well enough. And sometimes, you know, like holding my breath in different situations thinking, 'God Michael, don't say that to Daddy.' Or don't do that around Daddy. Daddy's tense, can't you figure that out? You know, worrying that Robert would lash out at him.

Rachel also talked about abuse being the norm. She said she thought John was belittling her to show the children how worthless she was. She said, "Usually, it was the norm rather than not. It seemed to be part of the power play that he did it in front of them and not when they were not there. And, [he would] start things when the children were present."

The ease with which women provided detailed discussions of their children's direct exposure to and involvement in violence indicated its prevalence. In this atmosphere of violence, children frequently attempted to protect their mothers.

Efforts to protect mother and father. Children were often directly involved in domestic violence by verbally and physically intervening to protect their mothers. Children called the police and performed other actions that were protective of their mothers. In one case, the child had a pre-planned protective role, developed for when the abusive ex-partner came to the house in violation of a restraining order.

Young and old children alike verbally intervened. For example, Mary's daughter Michelle, who was five during the fights, was highly involved in verbally protecting her mother. Mary said that Michelle told David, "Don't hurt my mommy." Mary said Michelle also made sure they both knew she was there by

talking and screaming. Mary believes this was an effort to draw attention away from the fight. Michelle also intervened physically by deliberately putting herself in the middle of the abuse. Michelle continued this behavior until the fighting escalated to breaking or smashing things at which time she hid and stood back. Rachel said that her oldest daughter, Amber, jumped in verbally to calm things down, especially when she was younger. Amber advised her mother, "Mom, don't say anything. Just do what he says," when fights were escalating.

Most children's verbal interventions had no effect on the violence. However, Wendy talked about both her daughter Katie and son Kevin yelling at their father, "Daddy, stop it!" when he was abusing her mother. It was their words that got him to stop even though his friends were trying to stop the violence as well. Those children continued to think about their mother's long after the abusive event. For example, 6 months after an experience in which Burt choked Wendy, her children still talked about keeping their mother safe.

Wendy said,

They don't forget that. In fact, when he would come to visit us after it was over with, they were still--this is what sticks in my mind as abuse. They would say, 'Daddy, you're not going to choke Mommy,' and he would just bawl. And he would say, 'No, I'm not going to choke Mommy.' So I think that was probably for them to keep bringing that up was a good thing in a way to realize what an impact he'd put on those children's lives. And I think that clearly stated to him that if he couldn't stop, he knew he could never come back.

Children often asked abusers if they had hit their mothers. When Rachel's son, Christopher asked, John lied and said that he hadn't, or told the child that she had hit him first. In contrast, when Wendy's children, Katie and

Kevin, asked Burt if he had hit their mommy when her ear was bleeding, he told them that he had. For Wendy, this was the moment when she knew it was time to leave.

He was like, 'Yes.' And it was like, that's when it all crumbled. He had to actually say to those kids that he hurt Mommy. And, that's when I became strong enough and knew that it was time to go.

Four women talked about their children's active physical interventions during abuse episodes. Celeste's example involved her son, Peter. "Peter jumped on to him [Harry, the abusive partner] and Peter was wearing a pocket knife and he [Harry] tried to get the pocket knife off of Peter's belt."

Other children also intervened during choking episodes. For example, Mary described a choking incident when Michelle was present.

He [David] pushed her [Michelle] out of the way as she was trying to pull on his arm. When she was small, and I think he pushed her out of the way. That was when I was pregnant with Dawn. And he was choking me again and she was pulling on his arm, and I think he kind of shoved her out of the way. Not to the point that she fell against the wall, but he pushed her enough that she knew she needs to stay away.

Ginger daughter, Betsy, also took strong protective actions when her mother was being choked. Betsy's actions may have been more empowered than Michelle's because she was significantly older at the time.

Somehow it [the violence] worked into the kitchen and he had me up against the wall and I had my robe on and he kept twisting and twisting. He was going to kill me. He was going to shut me fucking up. Betsy tried to jump into the middle of it. She tried to literally, just wedge herself in between us.

In two families, older children performed other direct protective actions.

Elaine's son, Peter, and his wife were extremely protective while Elaine was

leaving Randy. Peter and his wife stayed with Elaine for two weeks when the abuse was especially bad. They also bought her a car phone and encouraged her to use it to get help if needed. Elaine's daughter, Martha, significantly altered her behavior during this same time. Martha accompanied her mother everywhere, even sleeping. In general Martha provided constant companionship and support during the prolonged period.

In addition to verbal and physical protection, many children had important safety roles in the family. For example, in Faye's family, Marie, who was the fastest runner, was delegated an important safety job. In the event that Don violated the restraining order, Marie was to go out the bedroom window on the opposite side of the house, run to the neighbors, and call the police. Faye talked about this safety plan.

Well if he comes, everyone goes in the bathroom. Because she [Marie] is the fastest runner. She, whichever side of the house he's on, she goes out the opposite side of the house through the window and runs to the neighbors for help.

In a real-life experience when Don violated the restraining order, Faye learned that this plan would not work. Marie was too scared to run.

Other women talked about their children seeking to protect them in other ways, such as screening phone calls, erasing phone messages, or lying to the abuser. In summary, children as young as five were described as being verbally and physically protective of their mothers.

Compared to protection of their mothers, children's protective actions toward their fathers were less common in frequency and intensity. Still, four

women gave examples of their children protecting their fathers. Jane said Michael protected his father, Robert, even after Robert's death.

Michael didn't really know anything about the drug use until Robert was dead. And I even tried to keep it from him then, but one of the people from the counseling thing said that they couldn't tell me what to do, but their feeling was that kids did better in the long run if they knew the truth. And it would be better if I told him than if he found out from someone, somehow. And, what he said when I told him--'Mom, he didn't mean to.'

Sometimes children's actions seemed to the women to be to protect their father's role, rather than actually protecting him. For example, Mary said Michelle, her oldest girl, seemed to be protective not only of her, but also of her father's role when she was trying to stop a choking incident. "I think she [Michelle] was not only protective of me, but she was protective of her image of her father. 'You shouldn't do this.'"

The fact that children were placed in the role of protector for mother or father is troubling for their psychological development. The significance of children's perceived roles as protectors, with the concomitant likelihood of failure, is perhaps best understood given their feelings of responsibility for the abuse.

Children's feeling of responsibility. When asked if they thought their children felt responsible for the abuse, all but one woman indicated that their children might have felt responsible. The one woman, Wendy, said her children felt no blame because, she believed, her children were too young to feel responsible.

Children were sometimes indirectly blamed for the abuse, based on the content of the fights in the home. Celeste and Faye thought their children felt responsible because the fights often were about the children or the house not being clean. Celeste said she and her husband, Harry, often fought about the kids, "As far as just what they should or shouldn't do or as far as going places or things like that." Celeste said the children might have felt responsible because "If the house hadn't been a mess because of things, it wouldn't have happened."

Similarly, Mary said, "A lot of our fights were about money and most of the money gets spent on kids so I'm sure if they heard that they probably would have felt responsible."

Some mothers believed that if their children had been developmentally able to understand causality, they would have felt responsible. For example, Jane told the story of her son, Michael, having his hair pulled by his father, Robert. When Jane confronted Robert, she suffered the worst violence in her relationship. She said she thinks that if Michael connected her standing up for him with her getting so badly beaten, Michael must feel responsible. Ginger thought that Betsy probably felt guilty about one fight that happened when Ginger challenged Bill's choice of television programming in the presence of a child.

In other cases, blame was direct. Faye said her children repeatedly heard from Don, her ex-husband, "If you would obey me, I wouldn't have to leave," or "If you would do what you were told, I wouldn't get so mad." As

previously stated, two of Celeste's sons were blamed for arson by Harry's attorney in an attempt to shift the blame from Harry.

In summary, children's feelings of responsibility for abuse was an important theme in these women's stories. Consistent with previous research (Jaffe, Sudermann, & Reitzel, 1992; Wolfe, Jaffe, & Wilson, 1990) these feelings responsibility were extremely problematic for children. Typically, their attempts to stop the violence failed, potentially leading to the longer-term development of poor self-efficacy or poor self-esteem.

Unintentional physical injury. Children in homes with violence are frequently physically harmed unintentionally (Elbow, 1982). In one study being held while parents were being hit or attempting to intervene were the most common circumstances in which children were injured in one study (Christian, et al 1997). Because unintentional physical injury was not directly examined in the current study, it is unclear the extent to which children may have been injured while being held or intervening.

In this study, children in two homes were reported as unintentionally injured during maternal abuse incidents. Both Faye and Celeste described being thrown to the bed or the ground and landing on the children. This was especially common when the children were younger. Marie and Junior, two of Faye's children, were also hit with thrown objects. Marie was hit and scratched by parts of a stereo that was thrown and smashed. Junior was hit with hot water that had been thrown at Faye although he suffered no clear injury that day.

Chapter Summary

Conversations with these ten women increased my understanding of the ways children are involved and implicated in domestic violence. Although the study findings cannot be generalized to children in all homes with domestic violence, these findings provide a glimpse into the range of experiences children face in abusive homes.

Children in these homes were exposed to extensive domestic violence. Children in several of these homes were also victims of direct child maltreatment ranging from emotional abuse (90%), to direct physical abuse (50%), to sexual abuse (20%). In some cases, the children were maltreated by their fathers or father figures. Other times, mothers were the abusive or neglectful parties. Seventy percent of its women were concerned about neglect of their children's needs. In some cases, the children were maltreated because of the dysfunctional family system present in the home by virtue of the domestic violence.

These children lived in homes where their needs were not primary. Children were used as pawns in arguments, brought into the legal system, and fought over in visitation, custody, and child support battles.

The role children played as protectors of their parents emerged in this study of domestic violence. The role of protector demanded skills and emotional maturity that the children rarely possessed. When the children failed to successfully offer protection, they understandably experienced exaggerated feelings of responsibility for the abuse.

The study examined specific behaviors involving children, however, the notion that living in an abusive home environment is *in itself* abusive should be given closer study. The pervasive climate of threat and danger that exists in a violent home may be as detrimental to development as are the specific actions involving the children.

CHAPTER V CHARACTERISTICS RELATED TO CHILD INVOLVEMENT

The second research question that focused this study was: "Are characteristics of the mother or child related to how children are implicated in domestic violence?" In our interviews, women talked about characteristics in themselves or their children that their abusive ex-partners seemed to target for abuse. Child characteristics, such as age, gender, and relationship to the abusive man, and maternal characteristics such as difficult childhood issues, prior abusive relationships, disability, and drug or alcohol use, were originally identified as areas of interest in this study. Children's special needs, mothers' involvement with a church, lifestyle choices, and mothers' relationships with their children were characteristics identified as important as the interviews progressed.

Impact of Child Characteristics

Age and gender. Because of the small sample size, the effects of child age and gender on exposure are inconclusive. Most studies to date have considered the effects of age and gender on children's outcomes (Davis & Carlson, 1987; Holden & Ritchie, 1991; Hughes, Vargo, Ito & Skinner, 1991), but have not examined the relationship of age and gender with exposure rates. Consistent with findings reported by Moore, Pepler, Weinberg, Hammond, Waddell, and Weiser (1990), in this study younger children and girls had less exposure to direct physical violence and more exposure to emotional abuse; older children and boys were more often exposed to physical abuse. For example, Celeste said in her home generally, "Boys

were more severely physically abused, while girls were more severely emotionally abused.”

Whenever possible, the women in this study chose to insure that their children were out of harm's way, especially when they were young. As the children got older, they were less easy to control and more likely to intervene in the abuse. For example, Mary's child Michelle, who was eight when most of the abuse occurred, was very assertive and included herself in the violence in an effort to protect her mother.” Cheri made the decision to leave based on the acclimation to violence of her infant son, Gary. At the same time she said she assumed her daughter, Tina, was able to handle it. Tina was only 5 at the time.

There were exceptions to the general pattern that exposure to violence increased with the child's age. Hank, Celeste's youngest child, suffered severe physical abuse at the hands of his father when he was only a baby. Hank was under a year old and still sucking his thumb when Harry “slapped that baby's hand until it was bruised.” When Hank was a toddler, he accidentally dented the car door on a pole on the side of the road. Harry then spanked Hank so severely that Celeste had to sooth the welts on his legs with cold compresses. Harry held a gun to Kathy's head when she was a preschooler in order to force Celeste to get back in the car. Celeste thought the abuse to Hank by Harry was a misguided effort at child discipline while the abuse to Kathy was aimed more at modifying Celeste's behavior.

Gender appeared to be related to emotional abuse. Some women talked about their girls being exposed to more emotional abuse, especially comments related to being an “appropriate female.” Rachel said John's emotional abuse of

Amber consisted of denying Amber's feelings and calling her names. Rachel said, "This has gotten worse as Amber has gotten older and been able to voice her own opinion." This finding is consistent with prior research that asserts that domestic violence is training ground for strict, stereotypic sex role behavior (Walker, 1979).

In this study, despite the examples in which children's age and gender appeared to be related to abuse exposure, it appeared most likely that individual situations dictated the way children were implicated in domestic violence. Rather than hard and fast rules about the significance of age or gender of the child, the interplay between abusers' desires and the tools seemed to be more important in determining how children were implicated.

Relationship of children to abuser. From my clinical work, I thought it possible that children related biologically to their fathers may experience less exposure or less direct assault by their father. By comparing the responses of the abusive men to their biological and non-biological children, I considered how the relationship between the children and the abuser impacted the type of abuse to which the child was exposed. Regardless of their relationship to the abuser, children were exposed to and abused by their fathers.

In families with both biological children and stepchildren, however, it did appear that biological ties were sometimes protective to children in homes with domestic violence.

For example, only the oldest of Faye's five children, Jo, was not Don's biological child. Jo received the worst emotional abuse in the home. Faye consistently described how Don placed Jo in the middle, treated her more like a

girlfriend than a daughter, and used her to hurt her mother. While the other children in the home also were significantly emotionally abused, Jo's treatment was the most severe.

The special role of adoption was examined in two families. Jane adopted Michael from India when he was an infant. Jane reported that "in general, both Robert and I loved him." However, Robert used Michael's adoption as a method of maternal control. Before Michael's adoption was finalized, Robert made threats to turn Jane into the system and have Michael taken from her. She said,

He threatened to tell Dennis [Jane's ex-husband] that I was this horrible unfit mother and that I would lose Michael. He convinced...and he'd go to court and say that I did, you know, whatever. And he'd make stuff up and that I was a totally unfit mother and I would lose my kid.

David, Mary's abusive ex-partner, adopted Mary's middle child, Michelle, when Michelle's father was no longer in her life. Mary said that Michelle was extremely bonded to David and lived in constant fear that he would leave her. Mary was concerned because David sought visitations only with his biological child, Dawn. The preferential treatment Dawn received has been very painful for Michelle.

In this study, it appeared that a legal or blood relationship with the paternal figure may be protective of the child, but as with age and gender, individual circumstances appear more important in determining how children are involved. In these women's stories, if the abusive man was able to gain some measure of control over the woman by implicating a child, regardless of his relationship to the child, the child was involved.

Children with special needs. Although not queried in the original interview protocol, some mothers talked about the vulnerability of children with either learning disabilities or severe illness in early childhood. Mary and Cheri had children who are learning-disabled, the likely result of prenatal exposure to alcohol. Mary thought that her son, Jeffrey, suffered extensive abuse as a result of his disability from all three of his stepfathers, who she also described as learning disabled. She thought Jeffrey was a reminder of their own inadequacies. With only two children in this study who exhibited any form of disability, it is impossible to make any conclusive statements. There was no evidence that leads me to believe the child's disability was used to abuse the mother.

Celeste had two children who were significantly sick when they were young, Peter and Debbie. In Celeste's mind, illnesses created vulnerabilities to violence and abuse in these children. Harry severely emotionally abused Peter, Celeste's second son. Celeste was not sure why Peter was singled out for emotional abuse, but she believed Harry might have been motivated by the fact that Peter was often sick as a child. Harry was critical of the way Peter dressed and acted. Celeste gave this example:

When we got to our meetings, they have to do these talks, five-minute bible readings for the boys. And I remember his dad [Harry] would ridicule him [Peter] about the way he dressed, the way he combed his hair or something. And spend this whole amount of time giving him a lecture and this one night I remember him saying, 'You're a piss poor excuse for a little boy,' for an hour before we left the house.

Celeste's daughter, Debbie, was also quite ill as a child. She was able to ingest only breast milk, white grape juice, and water for her first year of life and there was concern that she had cystic fibrosis. Debbie, at the age of 3 or 4, was the target

of the incident Celeste identified as the worst violence in her home. Debbie had done something for which she was going to be punished and ran from her father. He caught her down a long hallway and Celeste described him "wailing on her." Debbie was screaming hysterically, "No daddy, no daddy, no daddy." Celeste and Debbie's two oldest siblings were trying to pull him off of her.

He would take turns flinging us back. Like we would grab an arm and [he would] fling us and we'd go flying. And like when one of us was going back, the other was going through the same kind of process. And, he...I don't know if he was hitting her with his hand, belt or what. I don't remember, but this went on until she messed her pants.

It is interesting to note that in this home with seven children, Celeste said that boys were typically the targets of physical abuse and girls received more emotional abuse. The two children who were vulnerable to illness, however, were the exceptions to that pattern. Peter, a male child, received the most emotional abuse and Debbie, the female child who was victim to the worst physical abuse. Clearly, more research in to the mechanisms and dynamics of abuser's targeting of children with disability or illness and its subsequent effect on their involvement in violence is warranted.

Impact of Maternal Characteristics

Most maternal characteristics seemed unrelated to the ways in which children were involved in violence. The exceptions were lifestyle choices and motherhood in general. One woman left her abusive husband for a lesbian relationship, something that has been used against her and her children. Six men used women's roles as mothers as the basis for abuse. Discussions of these characteristics follow a brief

review of those characteristics found to be unrelated to the involvement of the children.

Maternal characteristics not affecting the children. Maternal characteristics examined during this study but found to be unrelated to patterns of child involvement were childhood family dysfunction, prior abusive relationships, disability, drug or alcohol use, and involvement in church or faith. These maternal characteristics, however, appeared to influence the patterns of abuse experienced by the women. For example, family-of-origin issues and/or prior abusive relationships were used by all abusers to justify their actions. Four women have disabilities that affected the type of abuse they suffered. Drugs and alcohol were important in three women's stories, as were church involvement or religious. Although critical to the abuse done to the woman, these characteristics were not found to be related to the ways in which the children were involved in violence.

In contrast, the next two sections highlight maternal characteristics that did appear to influence the children's involvement: lifestyle choices and motherhood.

Lifestyle choices. Near the end of her long abusive relationship with Harry, Celeste was involved in a lesbian relationship. Harry used this against her in the process of leaving. He threatened her from prison by passing messages through two of her children. He said that there was a contract out on her life and that "someone didn't like her lifestyle." Her relationship with Sabrina was used to shift the blame for arson from Harry to her boys. The relationship between Celeste and Sabrina made front-page news during the newspaper's coverage of a car fire. Celeste's lesbian lifestyle was also a factor in putting Tessa on the stand to testify

against Sabrina. In summary Celeste's lesbian lifestyle, an area of specific vulnerability, influenced the abuse that she and her children received.

Motherhood. Mothers spoke of bonds with their children that often gave them great joy. However, for six women, their role as a mother also became a target for assault by their abusive partners. For some women, the men actively worked to create the belief that the women were poor mothers. For example, Rachel, Mary, Jane, and Ginger were told directly by their abusers that they were bad mothers. David constantly criticized Mary for her parenting. Although he had never had children, and she had one child prior to her relationship with him, she said he thought he knew more about child rearing than she did. She said,

He had a knack of telling me what a terrible mother I was and he had never been a father before, but I was a terrible mother and I didn't know how to do it. And, his mother and his sister used to do it this way. And it was all this control that he wanted me to do it the way he wanted me to do it. And whatever I did wasn't good enough.

Robert used sarcasm to imply that Jane was a poor mother. Jane said, "He said things like, 'Oh, is that the kind of mother you are?' and 'You call yourself a mother?'" Over time, Jane became immune to most of his criticisms, but she said that even at the end, she was still vulnerable to being called a bad mother. Jane said,

I'd say that was one of the main things [he used], because, not so much after the years hurt me, but that is a place that is dear to me. I try to be a really excellent mother, I think I am an excellent mother, but you know someone is putting me down over the years and you don't have your perceptions totally right. I was vulnerable to hearing that. And I also had some guilt over other things that happened. Because here, I brought this kid across the planet, and I had this idea in my mind that I was going to give him this little house on the prairie, white picket fence, and I was going to be this perfect vegetarian mother, and

all this exercise, Montessori school, and everything and what do I give him, this abusive environment, so, you know, vulnerable.

Ginger said Bill criticized her mothering because she was always working. "Mostly it was in the essence of you don't care about your kids because you would rather work. That was a big thing, because I did work a lot." Ginger said she worked a lot because Bill couldn't hold down a job. She believed that her long work hours highlighted his inability to remain employed. Criticism of her ability as a mother seemed to be a "red herring," something used to abuse and control her because of its effectiveness.

However, Ginger's skills as a mother did come into question when the fathers of her three oldest children, in collaboration with her brother, intervened after Bill became violent. They refused to allow their children to visit Ginger. When I asked her if Bill ever used this as a way to abuse her, she said, "No. Because the scenario was because of something he was doing, so if he brought that up, then he had to admit some guilt in that part so, that was like a nonexistent deal." This example provides further evidence of reality-shifting in this relationship. Ginger explained, "Because the real reason was because of his violence, but the way it got spoken about was because I was always at work. I wasn't a good mom because I was always working."

In contrast to being directly told they were poor mothers, Faye and Celeste's abusers made it clear by their actions. Faye's ex-husband Don made repeated threats to the child protection agency, housing authorities, and police that she was abusing the children. Harry continually denigrated Celeste for not being a "real woman." This placed her in a double bind: If she stood up to him, she was not

being a real woman because she was talking back; when she submitted to his demands, she was abused and told she was not being a real woman because she let him do these things to her. His abuse to her affected not only her sense of self, but also her beliefs about her ability as a mother. Harry attacked her commitment to her family when he made a reference to her suggestion that their grandchild would be better off living outside their family. She quoted his words, "A real woman would never give up their grandchild." Harry's effect on her was demonstrated during her final interview when she was very critical of her mothering. While reviewing the transcript she said, "I didn't like me very well. I thought I was not a very good mother at all. It was really sad to have all those kids and do such a rotten job with them."

For these women, motherhood was a source of specific vulnerability that was used by their abusive partners. Women spoke of the meaning and importance of motherhood in life. Thus when their competence as mothers was attacked, they often felt like their very sense of self was being attacked. Mary articulated this well.

I didn't really have a lot of self-esteem going into it because I came out of that abusive childhood into that series of abusive marriages, and I thought my only purpose was to be a mother...In some sense, becoming a mother gave me self-esteem because I had some worth and worthiness in this world that I could bear a child. Because now somebody else was dependent on me. And this person wouldn't be alive if it wasn't for me....It was kind of like where ever he could, he would try to take that fulfillment away from me. And then just kind of berating me the whole time. Every man I was with berated my parenting skills. Even though with each of them, I had their first child. So, like with Larry, I was a mother, and he wasn't a father, and he was berating my parenting skills. And David, he wasn't a father, I was a mother twice, and he was berating my parenting skills, and at that time, it was pretty much the only thing that gave me worth in my life and they were trying to take that away.

Only four women escaped criticism for their mothering behavior by their ex-partners. In those cases, the women felt good about their skills as mothers. In Cheri's words, "If he had said I was a bad mother, I wouldn't have believed him." Mothering wasn't an area about which some women felt vulnerable to criticism.

Chapter Summary

Child characteristics considered in this study seemed to be related to the manner in which children were involved in domestic violence. While not conclusive, age and gender seemed to influence how children were involved. Younger children and girls generally had more exposure to emotional abuse and older children and boys experiencing more exposure to physical abuse. Being biologically or legally related to the father seemed to be protective of children in homes with domestic violence. Children's disabilities or vulnerabilities to illness made them more likely targets of abuse.

Two maternal characteristics, lesbian lifestyle and motherhood itself were used to involve the children. No other maternal characteristics appeared to influence how the children were involved in domestic violence.

In most cases, the abusive partners used maternal or child characteristics to target abuse to the mother. Even when abuse was directed at the child. The mothers believed this arose out of the desire to control her behavior. Children's vulnerabilities, when they were the focus of abuse, appear to be tools to further abuse and control the mother. In these cases, abusers' involvement of children was

opportunistic; abusers used children's specific characteristics, especially vulnerabilities, to achieve further control over their abused partners.

CHAPTER VI MOTHERHOOD IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As women told stories of their abuse and shared their perceptions of their children's experience in domestic violence, themes of motherhood continued to surface. When I began the interviews, I had no plan for pursuing this area of investigation. While some writers have recognized the importance of children in abused women's decisions to leave (Pagelow 1982), no empirical research exists that explores motherhood in domestic violence. Even after years of clinical work, I was unaware of the role that women's ideas of motherhood had in women's decision making. I was also unaware of the internal conflicts faced by mothers in domestic violence. These issues arose in interviews with the first three women. Subsequently, I began to more systematically explore ideas about motherhood with the women.

In this chapter, I explore women's perceptions of motherhood in domestic violence. First, represented are data supports the assertion that children were critical factors in women's decisions about relationship transitions: staying with, returning to, and leaving abusive partners. Second, through the women's stories, I examine four general themes in relation motherhood in domestic violence: protecting their children; role conflict, concern for their children's needs, and feelings of guilt about mothering. In the final part of the chapter, I discuss the turning points trajectory for women concerning the protection of their children.

Child-Related Reasons for Relationship Transitions

Motherhood and women's perceptions of what is best for their children were critical factors in women's decisions about relationship transitions. Women balanced conflicting and confusing desires concerning the termination or continuation of their relationships with abusive men. Social pressures, including their internalized belief systems, perceived obligations, and responsibilities to their children, were important considerations in their decisions. In weighing their reasons for leaving or staying, reasons to remain in the relationship often outweighed reasons to leave, and children were often described as important in that decision. As women told stories of their abuse and shared perceptions of their children's experiences in domestic violence, it became clear that their roles as mothers were central in their lives. Relationship decisions were explained with their children very much in mind.

Staying in the relationship. Children were considered in all relationship transitions: staying with, returning to, and leaving abusive partners. In deciding to stay in abusive relationships, women described three themes: the belief that children need a father; commitment to marriage and the family; and children's desires. For the most part, the women interpreted children's desires for a father to bonding present between father and child.

Most women in the study talked about the importance of children having a father. For example, Celeste talked about being the "best mom" while describing the socially conditioned expectation that "good moms don't raise their children without a father." Joan, Mary, and Jane talked about the decision to leave as "breaking up the

family" or "taking daddy away." Joan's said she stayed longer than she would have because "It is mandatory for children to have two parents. It's the right thing to do. Kids need a dad."

Most often, women talked about the male child needing the influence of his father. Rachel provided an example saying, "...for my son, it was better that there be a strict father figure than nothing at all." However, Mary stayed longer than she would have because her female children need a father. In contrast, Mary said, "I was so afraid. I heard this thing, some pop psychology thing, that if a daughter grows up without a father, she becomes promiscuous. I didn't want my daughters to become promiscuous."

Seven women said that social pressures about marriage and family were important to their decisions. Faye said that both she and her children wanted a family. "...because they wanted the family. I wanted the family too. We wanted that little family." Wendy shared a similar story saying,

Well, I always pictured this happy little family in my life and I thought if I worked hard enough that I could make Burt that dad and that husband that I wanted him to be. I am a very strong person. And I knew with enough strength and enough power and enough force behind me praying every day, I knew this could happen. I knew this was not out of reality for me. And, seven years later, I finally realized it was beyond a reality.

Four women had previously been married at least three times each. These past marital failures influenced their thinking about ending another marriage. For Joan, having children kept her in the relationship longer. She said, "The fact that I stayed with Paul for so long was a societal pressure I guess. Part of that upbringing,

my family. In spite of the fact that I was divorced three times before Paul and I were together, I'd never had kids before."

Three women talked about divorces between their parents or the parents of their ex-partners as being influential social pressures that prolonged commitment to their abusive relationships. Jane said both her and Robert's parents were divorced.

When she wanted to divorce Robert, he blamed her for breaking up their family, saying, "Both of our parents were divorced and we didn't have our parents and now you want to do that to Michael?"

For Joan, her experience as a child of divorce led her to questioning the right time to divorce Paul. She said,

I grew up in a two-parent family...my parent's divorce hurt me, even though I was quite a bit older. You know, even when I was really miserable with Paul, I said, 'Well, I'll wait until the kids are teenagers, and then I went, 'Whoa,' cause I was a teenager when it happened in my family, and it screwed me up pretty bad. So, when it gets to the point that you start to realize that, well, there's no good time to get a divorce.

For Faye, the importance of her marriage vows kept her in the relationship longer. Faye said, "I married Don for better and for worse." She talked about his illness in relation to marriage vows.

I knew that the counselors had consistently told me that his problems were that he was alcoholic and he's bipolar, manic-depressive. That it was these things that were causing the things that he was doing, and that was his sickness and that I was bound into this in sickness and in health. Until death do us part. I was making sure I was doing everything I possibly could to help him make it.

Because Don was sick and needed her help, Faye believed that she needed to help him. Perhaps this fact provides partial explanation for her staying in the relationship through extensive abuse of herself and her children. It was important to her to do

everything possible to make their marriage work. She felt no regret or guilt about leaving the relationship after trying so hard.

Pregnancy, the presence of young children, and abortion were other family-related factors that women described as social pressures that kept them in their abusive relationships. Four women talked about realizing early on in the relationship that they needed to get out, however, they had young children and were afraid that they could not make it on their own. In all cases, they ultimately left the relationship with additional children. For example, Celeste suffered the greatest abuse early in her relationship with Harry when she had only one or two children. However, she didn't leave until 24 years of marriage had passed and she had seven children. When reviewing her decisions, Celeste realized that it might have been easier to leave sooner, but she had been trying hard to make everything work. Pregnancy and child rearing "kept" her in the relationship.

Mary considered abortion when she realized she was pregnant with Dawn, her youngest child. Because things had not been going well between her and David, she considered getting an abortion so that she could leave the relationship without the additional stress of a new child. She said,

I remember the day. I looked through the phone book to find out--we were in California so it was easier there, and I was about 18 weeks along then--and I was looking in the phone book to find out where I could get an abortion. I wanted the baby. We planned this baby, but I knew if I left him at this point, I couldn't have made it. We were pregnant, and I had Michelle and possibly Jeffrey at any point. And I remember just crying, how could I do that? And I called my AA sponsor, and I didn't tell her why, I didn't tell her what had happened, I just told her we were having some problems. And that I was thinking about doing this. And that I was torn. It's not that I was torn about the pro-choice thing because I've had abortions before. Just having planned the pregnancy and being

married. I would have been stuck, you know, leave my husband, abort my baby at 18 weeks, and I decided not to do it.

In summary, beliefs about marriage and family as well as the demands of pregnancy and child rearing helped keep these abused women in prolonged abusive relationships.

Children's desires for a father and family added pressure to their mother's decisions to stay with an abusive partner. After Celeste left Harry, she described how Kathy walked around the house saying, "It looks like we don't love daddy no more." When Faye left Don, her children said, "We want a dad." She initially interpreted that to mean that they wanted her to take Don back. When she took him back and they became angry with her, she realized they wanted "a dad, not that dad."

Children's statements often led women to question the decisions that they had initially made with their children's best interests in mind. For example, when Cheri's 5-year-old daughter, Tina, asked questions like "Why don't I have a daddy?" and, "Can't I even talk to him?" and made statements like "All I want for Christmas is my Daddy," Cheri reconsidered her decision that her daughter have no contact with her father, Steve. Cheri said, "Some part of me thinks, God, have I been so extreme; maybe I shouldn't have cut off every tie." Cheri was also concerned that her son Gary was creating a father from his imagination, pointing to men in magazines, saying, "Daddy." Between the second and third interviews, Cheri talked to a friend and learned that Steve was still heavily involved in drugs. As a result Cheri concluded that she made the correct decision. Nevertheless, children's

behaviors and statements were very compelling to Cheri and to other women as they strove to make the best choice.

Children's behaviors, like their statements, indicated a bond between father and child. These behaviors clouded women's thinking as they made decisions for themselves and their children. Faye talked about Jo's attachment to a coat of Don's. "Jo, when she was real little, he had a red coat that he used to wear. And, when he went to jail, she would sleep with that coat." Celeste described Peter as a toddler, talking to a picture of his father. She said, "Peter had a picture of him and he would talk to his dad's picture. He would tell his picture things as if he had been there."

Mary's middle child, Michelle, also demonstrated attachment through her involvement with a picture. Mary described the picture frame that Michelle, age 8, carried with her.

We have this plastic framed picture and one of them, it's one of those five by sevens and I put a bunch of little pictures in there. And, one of them is him and her when she was really little. And, one of them is him and me, and she slept with that thing, I mean even when he left the state, she slept with that while he was gone. Now she takes it with her when she goes to his house because my picture is on the other side.

Mary talked about her reaction to Michelle's attachment to this picture.

Well, when we were still married, it felt good because I thought, ah, she's bonding to him. Her father was so rotten, that, he's much better than that guy. Then, after we divorced, it made me feel guilty as hell. And, it made me wonder, could I have done anything different? Could we have worked it out? Could we have possibly gotten along? And, now, it just kind of irritates me [laughter]. Because I wish she hadn't bonded to him as well as she has, because now he's her role model for a male mate [laughter].

Mary's story demonstrated how she questioned her decision making because of her child's behavior and offered a view into her changing emotions as the relationship progressed and deteriorated.

In summary, three child-related factors were critical in women's decisions about staying in their relationship: beliefs about children needing their fathers; beliefs about marriage and family; and finally, children's desires for a father. Children also influenced women's decisions to return to the relationship.

Returning to the relationship. The point at which women leave and abusive relationship is known to be very dangerous time for women (Hart, 1993). Many women return out of fear (Walker, 1984). In this study, four women talked the importance of their children in their decisions to return to the relationship after they had left.

The first time Celeste left for one night when Hank, her oldest son, was still in diapers. She visited a friend who lived within walking distance. After Celeste described the abuse in the relationship, her friend refused to let her go home. She stayed the night, but in the morning the baby needed diapers so she returned home. Harry was there and she described what happened.

That was the night that he picked me up and threw me over the couch. He picked me up and held me like a log...and the house had wood floors, and he threw me and I landed right on my back on the wood floor. And, he knocked me around quite a bit...I remember I started to go out the door. And, instead of the aluminum stuff on the door, it was an old wooden screen door with that old wrought iron stuff on it. I was trying to go out the door and he was trying to pull me back, so I grabbed hold of that rot iron stuff and I remember I was holding on so tight and he was pulling so hard that it bent that. And then finally, I was able to get away from him and I got out the door and I was running across the lawn...and I heard a click. And, I just froze. He had the gun. And he said, 'Now, get back in the house.'

She returned to the house and after some time retrieved Hank from the friend's house. Celeste said, about leaving abusive men, "Once you go, you don't get that chance again." The next time she left was the final time, over 20 years later.

Wendy was confused by the overlap between her current abusive relationship with Burt and flashbacks to her exposure to wife battering as a child. After driving 150 miles during an escape with her children to live with relatives three states away, Wendy returned to Burt. As she drove back to him, she remembered witnessing the abuse of her mother by her father. She remembered her youngest brother being manipulated by her father as they were all trying to escape. She described what she saw in her flashback:

Picturing all of us in the car going, 'Come on David, come on. Let's go.' I was that mom saying, 'Kevin and Katie are in the car. There's no one we're waiting for. Let's go.' Get to that point Wendy. Get to that point. I mean that is basically, from the first time he hit me, when am I going to get to that point?

Clearly, children were important in women's decisions to return to their abusive relationships. Internalized societal expectations about appropriate actions for mothers influenced women's decisions to return to their relationships, as did statements and actions by their children. In the next section, I explore children's roles in women's decisions to leave abusive relationships.

Leaving the Relationship. Women often leave abusive relationships when they realize their children are in danger (Martin, 1976; Pagelow, 1982; Walker, 1979). All women in this study spoke about their children when describing their reasons for leaving their abusive partners. Six women said that they left their relationships primarily because of their children. In some cases, family members of

the women influenced women to leave their relationships, especially based on potential harm to their children.

Faye and Rachel said they endured the abuse as long as the children weren't being abused. Once their children were harmed, the women made the decision to leave their abusers. Faye said,

Once I found out that he had been hurting the children, and I mean, it was clear to me that my children were being hurt, that was it. That's where the decision is made to get out.

Cheri and Wendy acted earlier. Both decided to leave when they saw that children's increased exposure to or increased tolerance of violence. Cheri saw that her youngest child had become acclimated to violence. That day she left Steve, her abusive ex-partner.

The morning I left was one of the mornings I'd ask for three dollars of gas money. He was screaming his head off about how he couldn't just do all this, and, he had knives, and he was looking for his lunch box, and he was throwing all this stuff and screaming and cussing. And before I had asked him, as he was going down the hall screaming, 'I don't have any money. It's too much. I can't do this by myself.' And here I am with a brand new born, and another one, and, I'm feeding him the bottle, and he's screaming and the baby's awake and Tina's asleep and, the baby's up, just smiling at me. It's all normal to him, like it was to Tina. And it just clicked in my head. Uh Oh! I got a baby that's...I guess I thought that Tina, she was older, actually this was silly thinking now. I thought she's older, I thought she could handle it. And the baby doing it, really made me think. Because I thought a baby should be reacting to that. Now thinking, he probably heard it. It was very normal. He wasn't flinching, he wasn't doing anything. And, it was making me flinch. They were both acclimated. It was very normal. I guess I thought a baby would have had a reaction. He was smiling during it. He was actually smiling!

Joan also left because of her children; however, the pivotal event occurred 2 years before she left. After being screamed at for 45 minutes in the bathroom, she walked into the living room to find her two oldest daughters huddled together crying.

After this incident, she said, "It was like a shutter came down over my consciousness. I blocked out things he said. I wanted to be totally separate from involvement with him." She said she believed she stayed in that "blackness" for about 2 years before she finally ended the relationship. She had always remembered finding her daughters huddled together, but it took 2 years for her to take action.

In some cases, women's family members increased women's awareness of their children's vulnerability to harm by living in a violent situation. These relatives repeatedly to convince women to leave their abusive relationships in order to protect their children. For example, Joan's sister challenged her to examine the example she was setting for her daughters. Joan related the conversation she had with her sister.

[Her sister speaks] 'What are you doing there? What example are you setting for your girls?' [Joan's thoughts] I started talking with my sister about a year or so before Paul and I split up. She couldn't believe it. Well, she could believe it, but she was incredulous. It's hard to put that stuff together with what you see on the surface because here's this guy that, you know, he loves his kids, he goes to work every day and everything and my sister had been through some really nasty relationships too, so she knew what the emotional stuff was all about.

Wendy's parents directly appealed to Wendy's sense of motherhood with their intervention. She related what they said to her.

My mom and dad told me that if you don't leave him, eventually you will lose your children. And that's what made me really start buckling down and thinking, how can I get out of this alive? Because they were getting old enough, they were going to school. My parents would say that if this violence continues, the children say one thing to their teacher, you'll get your children taken away and you'll have to prove that you're a good mom. You may be a

good mom, but now you'll have to prove it. And, that really hit home. That hit my heart.

Only four women didn't identify their children as their most important in their reasons for relationship transitions, however three of these women said that their children were still important factors in the decision to leave. For example, when Mary finally left David, she had finally had enough of being blamed for everything in the relationship. When she stood up to David, it resulted in physical violence, with the children present. This final abuse experience ended when David nearly stepped on Kay, their youngest child, who was a toddler at the time. This clear and escalating danger to her children contributed to Mary's decision to leave.

Ginger was the only woman to clearly state that she didn't leave because of the children. She said they were not a factor in her decision because she never perceived that they were in any danger. Bill, her ex-husband, and Leonard, her son, were strongly bonded, and if she had been trying to please Leonard, she would have never left Bill. Leonard's behavior demonstrated his continued attachment to his father, even after Ginger left.

He [Leonard] had a little baggy with some coins in it that my mom had given him. Nickels and pennies or whatever was in it. I don't remember anything else but it was a very beautiful day in the summer and we're in the car and he puts this up and he says, 'Look what my daddy gave me. He's a great daddy. He loves me so much.' It broke my heart. Because this poor child is clueless to what a maggot he has for a father. And, as young as he was, I don't think his memories are ever going to leave. He still talks about it. We're 2 years down the road.

In summary, children were important considerations for all women in their relationship decisions. While six clearly prioritized the children's needs, all women's stories included children in their decisions to stay, return to, or leave the abusive

relationship. For women in this study, the presence of children in their lives directly influenced decision-making about dealing with abusive partners.

Motherhood Themes

All women were questioned about what it meant to be a “good mother”. Following that, I asked them what it meant to be a mother in domestic violence. To access their internal conflicts, we explored the differences between those two notions and how those differences made themselves known in their lives. These questions were then added to the protocol for the third interview and thus, ask of all participants.

When I asked women in this study about being a “good” mother, they gave predictable responses: nurturance; love; support; listening to and being there for them; helping their children to become whole people or contributing members of society; and caring for their daily and emotional needs. None of the women cited protection of their children. Joan’s response of—“guiding through crisis and trauma”—or Rachel’s response—“teaching the things needed to survive”—came the closest to speaking about helping children to cope with life demands.

When women were asked what it means to be a mother in domestic violence, their answers were more complex. Four themes surfaced as women talked about being mothers in domestic violence: (1) protection of their children, (2) role confusion between their roles as wife, partner, and mother, (3) providing for children’s needs, and (4) feelings of guilt about their mothering. Each theme is explored in this section.

Protection. All but one woman clearly named the role of protector as key in being a mother in domestic violence. For most women, protection was the first statement they made in response to the question. Offering physical, emotional, or sexual safety for their children was central for these mothers. Even if the role as protector was not initially articulated, all women described actions that were intentionally designed to protect the children. Because protection was the focus of so much discussion and was demonstrated in various ways, this section includes extensive detail about women's experiences.

Wendy spoke the most strongly about her role of protecting her children. She saw her role as "Protecting those children over anything and everything." Because of her mother's failure to protect her as a child from her father, Wendy felt very strongly about protecting her children. When she described not being protected as a child, she said,

Nothing could ever take back what happened to me as a child. Nothing. And that's why it is so important that these women know, that they think they'll grow out of it, they're just kids. That's bull. If we were brainwashed as a child saying this is the way life should be, we have to reprogram ourselves. You can prevent this from ever happening.

Wendy's childhood experiences with violence paved the path that lead her to be a strong protector of her children. She protected her children by making it very clear to Burt that she would not tolerate any abuse of them. She said,

He [Burt] knew the line to cross and that would have been to touch my kids or to even verbally abuse my children. It was like to the point of, you know you can do it to me, but if you ever, ever touch one of my kids, you are crossing that line.

Because of her protective stance during her relationship with Burt, Wendy's children were spared exposure to all but three abusive events. She believed that they had been spared any negative effects.

Wendy said she enjoyed the role of protector once she had the support of her new non-abusive husband. "Now, it's a wonderful thing to be a protector when you don't have to protect against the dad. Against the enemies or the bad guys or whatever. Walking down the street, that's OK, because you don't have to face them when they walk through the door and say, 'Hi, honey, I'm home.'"

The other women also offered many examples of the types of behaviors they used to protect their children. For example, women removed children from the room, started fights when the abuser was beginning on the children in a harmful way, and intervened in many other ways. When Rachel noticed John beginning to be abusive to the children, she put herself in the middle "to draw attention away from the kids." She also put them in their rooms. "If he got to the point that I knew that things were going to get ugly, they would go to their rooms so they were just out of the picture basically." Cheri's and Ginger's responses were similar. Cheri said, "...I would tell her to go into her room. It seems like I even had her go outside at the other house before." Overall, women said that by sending children to their rooms, the children would be spared the visual memory of the violence.

For many women, protection took the form "picking fights" with the abuser when he began to be abusive to the children. Cheri said, "I was worried and I wanted him to come after me first." The women believed that they were better able to handle their abusers' aggression than their children were. Four women talked

about intentionally starting fights when their partners began to emotionally abuse the children. For example, Faye said

...If he was getting angry with the kids, I would try to get him mad at me instead. Learned to be really good at that. He starts to get mad at them and then I would just step in and say, like I would tell him, you can't play with them without hurting them. Then we would start fighting and that was OK. They would take off outside or something. Or they would go in the bedrooms and listen for whatever.

Mary's described similar behavior. "Sometimes it means deflecting shit from the dad to the mom or from the kids...If shit's going to happen, it should happen to the mom instead of the kid." Mary said she timed her arguments with David around the children's presence.

I would never ever disagree or start an argument with him except if I thought he was starting to be sort of emotionally abusive towards the children. Then I'd jump in. And, I knew I was just going to get shit for it, but I would jump in anyway. Because I could handle it much better than they could.

Some women kept the children "in line" and quiet as a way of preventing violence against the children. Jane realized recently how hard she had worked to keep Michael quiet when she was involved with Robert, her abusive ex-husband. She realized this only after an argument with Shawn, her current boyfriend. The argument happened when Jane became very upset hearing Shawn's baby cry. She couldn't understand why Shawn wasn't quieting his child. Shawn said that he thought she had overreacted. It was only after an argument with Shawn that she realized how hard she had worked in the past to keep Michael quiet in Robert's presence.

Mothers' interventions on behalf of their children often meant further abuse for the women. Rachel and Mary knew this would happen and chose to protect their

children anyway, believing that the children should be spared exposure to abuse. The most poignant story, however, was Jane's. Michael drew a picture that portrayed Robert negatively. Robert responded by lifting Michael by his hair from sitting to standing. For several days, Jane didn't know it had happened. When Michael finally let it slip, and Jane confronted Robert, he denied it happening. Jane fervently believed Michael and told Robert, "My child doesn't lie!" Jane was very upset and challenged Robert, saying, "Don't you fucking touch my kid." Jane suffered the worst, and last, abuse in her relationship with Robert as a result of this incident. He choked her and slammed her head up against the bricks in the front of the house. She thought she might die. Robert died 6 weeks later of a drug overdose.

Celeste and her children experienced abuse at the end of her relationship. After several years of extensive abuse, Harry went to an alcohol treatment program and, for one year after he returned, he was much less abusive. When the abusive behavior began to return, and Celeste had grown in self-confidence, she intervened on behalf of her children.

I had started to change during the time he was in alcohol treatment, and during that whole year that he wasn't abusive. I had also been diagnosed as narcoleptic, and I finally knew it wasn't me. Within a week of my getting my diagnosis, he decided to go to treatment [for alcohol addiction]. So, in this next whole year of time, he's making some changes. He's not drinking. We're doing the aftercare thing once a week, so he's not abusive. Everything's looking up. I'm starting to feel like it's not just me. I started feeling more like a person and not quite so bad, like maybe there's hope still. So, I think that is the biggest reason why I stepped in between then and why 2 years before I wouldn't have.

It was at this time of greater personal strength that Celeste protected Kathy from Harry when he began to abuse Kathy because of her long distance phone bill. Celeste reminded him that Kathy had already paid her portion. Six months later, Harry was abusive again to Robert and Samuel. She talked about the experience with Robert.

Robert would have been 12 or 11...He [Robert] had been not doing his homework and so he was out at the dining room table and I was in the bedroom changing the boys' sheets. I noticed that Robert had gone into the bathroom, because the bathroom was across from the bedroom, with a bloody nose. Robert gets bloody noses a lot and he usually takes care of them by himself. I mean this is something that, he's just one of those kids that does and he knows what to do. So, I remember thinking it was really odd that his dad was in the bathroom with him, mopping up this bloody nose. So, I went and ask the other kids what happened. They told me that while they were still at the table, his dad had grabbed him and did this head-butting thing, and crashed his head into Robert's forehead. And, when I saw Robert's head, he had this great big goose egg, right in the middle of his forehead.

She went on to talk about the final abusive experience with Samuel.

He [Samuel] had gotten into the freezer and gotten cupcakes or fruit pies that were supposed to be for his dad's lunch. He was about 10 and his dad called him in and ask him about it. He slapped Samuel so hard that he flew across the bed and hit the wall on the other side of the bed. Those two incidents with Robert and Samuel had happened in February, and the thing with Kathy was the August before. Nothing real heavy had happened between that time. He'd do all this ranting and raving and like it was our fault that he drank and our fault that he'd lose his temper, but he hadn't hit anybody between August and February.

Celeste stepped to protect Kathy in August and left the relationship in February following the incidents with Robert and Samuel. Protecting her children, in spite of Harry's long history and reoccurrence of violence toward her had become very important to Celeste.

For some women, protecting their children informed many of their actions.

Faye described the way she protected her children.

It's kind of like, kind of a shielding, trying to shield the children all of the time... Trying to keep him from abusing the children, or spanking them, because some of the time, most of the time, whenever he would spank, it would be in anger. So I would try to keep the kids out of his way. I can remember feeling like we had to be very quiet.

Cheri slept with her partner when he was released from prison as a way of protecting her daughter, Tina. Before she knew much about child sexual abuse, she saw this as a way to insure that he would be satisfied and to keep her daughter safe.

For other women, the protection was more subtle. For example, Jane talked about her mental process, which she described as "silently protective" of Michael. She would be thinking to herself, "Please say it right. Please say it right," as Michael was interacting with his father. Jane also actively protected Michael—"Just like hovering, or pulling him away, taking him away." She said she thought Michael was learning to cope with Robert's moods and explosiveness, but she came to believe a child shouldn't have to learn that.

Several women also worked to protect the role of the father in the eyes of their children. Wendy talked about being a "stone wall." "You have to be a mother, a protector, a stone wall. You have to, like if you have a bruise, you have to protect them to a point of, I didn't want them to know that Daddy was doing this to me." She thought the violence would be confusing to the children. By being silent about the abuse she suffered, she thought she was protecting their image of a father. "You have to be inside, a stone wall, not on the outside, but inside you have to be strong enough to say, it's no big deal."

Ginger was the only woman not to articulate protection as a function of a mother in domestic violence. I asked her about the themes, including protection during her interview. She said, "I never felt like I had to protect my children because they were never in any danger." Still, as she told her story, she described several occasions when she protected her children from harm. "I was protective of him [Bill, the abusive partner] trying to take Leonard. I was protective when he and Betsy would get into their scuffle. I felt I must protect her and I did. In a shabby way, but I did." In part Ginger was not concerned about the safety of her children because they were exposed to very little violence. She also believed that Bill would not hurt her children because Bill was terrified of their fathers, Ginger's ex-husbands.

Sometimes the women asked other people to help protect their children. Ginger, although she had said she didn't recognize protection as her role, called a friend to protect Leonard from being taken by Bill. She asked the friend to put Leonard in the car and lock the door. Because the police were present, Bill didn't challenge this action and the child stayed with his mother. She took this action because she feared Bill would kidnap Leonard.

He [Bill] was leaving and trying to take Leonard. I called a friend of mine and she came over and I had her—by this point in time, the police were there because we were out in the front yard, screaming, yelling, and all this is going on. So, she gets there—and so I know this is a time, I know he overheard this going on, but there was nothing physical going on in this. She got out of the car and said, 'What's up?' I kind of rammed him [Leonard] at her and said, 'Get in the car and lock the doors.' You know, because the police are not going to do anything, which I knew too well by then. Bill said, 'You can't do that.' And, I said, 'Bet me. You try to get him. There are two police officers right here, you try to get him.' Well, that is all it took. He gets in the truck and leaves.

In some cases, the women's behavior would not necessarily be seen as protective, except in the context of danger to the children. Elaine said she was more permissive with Martha, letting her go places to be safe that she would not have if she was not living in domestic violence. "I kind of let her go to Peter's [brother] house, and friends' houses, my mom's house. Because I didn't want her to see him like that. I did not want her to see him blow up and be like he was doing."

The clearest example of behavior that was protective only in the context of domestic violence comes from Celeste's story. Celeste talked about disciplining her children in a way that left marks or made them cry so she could say she had taken care of the situation and he wouldn't treat them worse. She said,

You slap them hard enough that there's a red mark. I mean, not a bruise. I mean, you slap them hard enough that there's a red mark, or you spank them so that they have cried so you can say, or they can say if they're asked, that they've already been disciplined.

She was ambivalent about her reasons for doing these actions, taking personal responsibility for some of the choices she made.

On one hand, that was so they wouldn't get it worse because, you know, like at least a red mark slap is better than a bruise. However, did it happen for all those wonderful and protective reasons, or did part of that happen out of frustration or desperation? Because sometimes I don't know. I know that there are times when I blame myself, when...I look at it with someone else's name there and I wouldn't blame that person. But I blame myself with my name there. Was there a thread of anger in me too? That these things are happening, I can't control it, what am I going to do?

She also wondered if she took out her frustration on her children. Talking in a distant third person, Celeste said, "Because she gets frustrated from being abused because of feeling trapped because of the kids, or because some of the things that come down on her head are because of the kids' actions, and she feels you know,

she ends up taking it out on them because she has no other outlet." It was not clear to me whether she was talking about herself or some unidentified abused woman. What was clear is that she still felt confused and guilty hurting her children in order to protect them.

In summary, protection of their children was central to women's experiences in domestic violence. For the most part, the men offered little in the way of help or support for parenting activities. Later in this document I will consider the implications of protective actions and interventions and the meaning of motherhood in the context of domestic violence.

Role conflict. Women raised themes of role conflict in response to questions about motherhood and domestic violence. Conflict occurred between their roles as mothers and as partners of abusive men. Several women also talked about conflict between their personal needs and those of their children or partners.

Six women said it was difficult to meet the needs of both the children and their abusive partner because their abusive partners' needs were so prominent. Celeste said she thought that, for most moms in domestic violence, that the kids' needs were often neglected. "...because the mom can't take care of the needs of the abuser and the kids both, so they (the children) get neglected."

Faye talked about not being able to be there for her children because she was busy mothering the abuser. Faye said that the emotional and basic needs of her abuser were met before the children's. "You're so busy mothering the abuser, that the children are somewhat, they are receiving less of their mom, the mom time, the mom person. Because it's all being poured out to the abuser, that the things that

mom needs to be doing for the children, a lot of that is being taken away by the abuser.”

Cheri also talked about the energy drain of trying to meet both needs.

I think it is really hard, it's really hard, your energy gets so drained. I don't see how, looking back on it now, I don't see how you can give your attention to both. I don't see how, because you are so consumed with all that other friction. It is hard enough to have a healthy relationship with a man and be a mother too because they are both, you know, I can't, thinking back on it, it seems like totally consuming. I guess that you could do it, your kids would end up being parentified or something, you know the older ones I would imagine would be on their own a lot or maybe overly needy.

At the point in her life Cheri was describing, Cheri had recently gotten sober, and the demands placed on her were quite challenging. She said, “At that point in my life, I hadn't been sober very long and I would do it (try to meet the needs of her abuser and her children). Now I wouldn't... I would know where the boundaries are.”

When women in violent relationships fail to perceive and respond to the cues of their abusers, violence often ensues. Because of this, women described themselves as attending to their abusers' cues more than to the needs of their children.

Some women attempted to control the violence by modifying their own behavior as mothers or individuals. They hoped by acting in ways that met the abuser's expectations, the violence would end. For example, Joan modified her roles and her activities outside the family. “I changed myself, the person that I was in order to stay in line with his expectations and not cause one of those flare ups.” She believed that her children ultimately suffered because as she changed who she was, they “got less” of her.

In addition to direct conflicts between the role of mother and the role of spouse, several women felt they lost their identity as they tried to be mother and spouse. Beyond the specific alterations they made to their behavior, women gave up large parts of themselves in order to keep the peace. For example, Joan quit working outside the home to be home with her children. At the time, she believed that this was best for her children, but later realized that the decision had negatively affected her power in the relationship and her sense of self.

Before I quit my job, and before I had my kids, I had outside interests. I did jazzercise three times a week. I had girlfriends that I went out to lunch with, and I did all kinds of stuff. Well, when I was no longer making an income, Paul was the top priority, because he was the breadwinner, then the kids, and then me. I was always taking care of everyone else and I had no time, no money, no energy for me.

In part this was a personal decision to maintain the home atmosphere, but she realized it wasn't good. She said,

If I did strike out to do something on my own, I was punished one way or another. He would bitch at me about money. Anything I tried to do for myself, I was stepping outside. I hid things and I don't think you should have to hide things. I hid things from him so that he wouldn't be mad or give me the silent treatment.

Loss of self was also a concern for other women in this study as they attempted to meet the demands as partner and mother. Rachel said, "I'm trying to make everybody else happy, but not quite sure how to step out of that. And, afraid to." While Rachel felt concern about losing herself, Celeste felt she totally lost herself. When I asked her what happened to her as a mother in domestic violence, she said, "I think part of it is what happens to the person. Because the mom's not a person if there's not a person inside."

When asked to talk about their roles as mothers, many women called upon media portrayals of good mothers, and were critical of their own mothering behavior.

Mary talked about Donna Reed when describing the ideal self-sacrificing mother. But, she also said that she didn't necessarily believe this anymore. "I should be self sacrificing for my children, that I should take care of them before I take care of me. And, that's a belief that I have, it's not necessarily something that I think is a good thing." Celeste, provided a definition of motherhood and cited it as if it had come from Woman's Day or Family Circle magazine.

A mother does everything to make life better and enriched for her child. Pushes them just enough but not too much, and makes sure that they are always clean and well fed, and is attentive to their needs, and makes things available to them at the proper times, that they are able to grow and learn, and helps them to understand the basic concepts of humanity and manners and morals.

She was quick to say, "I don't think I've done any of those." Neither woman felt they were able to live up to their ideals of motherhood, but held themselves responsible for failing to do so none-the-less.

In summary, role conflicts were most often created because the abusers demanded care-taking behavior from their partners in ways that detracted from the women's abilities to meet the needs of the children. Many women's ability to maintain a sense of personal identity as she struggled to meet the needs of her partner and her children was severely compromised.

Meeting children's needs. When asked about their children's basic needs, most women in the study felt that their children's basic needs had been met. However, they clearly stated that they, not their partners, had met their children's

needs. Some of women realized they overcompensated for their uninvolved partners.

Several women talked about the difficulty meeting the needs of the children while struggling with survival issues. Mary talked about working to insure fun times for her children while in the abusive relationship, saying, "I felt like I had to work harder, and maybe in this way, I was a better mother, by creating fun for my family or laughter for my kids." Wendy explained how exhausted she felt in her relationship with Burt.

You have to be so many things. And, I think that's where, as women get torn down when you're in an abusive relationship, you're trying to be all of these things. And, all it takes is just another little tap on the head and you're like, I can't do it any more. Maybe because they weren't getting it from Burt, maybe I double did it. I think maybe I tried to overdo.

Only two women believed that their children's basic needs were not met. Both Celeste and Faye stated that their ex-husbands demanded that their needs come first, regardless of the needs of the children. For example, Faye talked about when Don returned home.

The kids would want shoes, need shoes, and Don would come back home. Usually, he didn't have any clothes except for what he had on and so we would go out and buy him new clothes, new shoes, new pants, a new shirt, underwear, everything. And, get a hair cut. And, here's the kids going, 'But mom, I need track shoes or tennis shoes.'

Faye also described a time early in their relationship, when her two oldest children lived homeless with her:

Jo and Marie specifically, when Marie was 6-weeks-old. When he [Don] burned the garage and we were having to live under the stairs. When he was stealing the formula for money for booze. I think that was the only time they were specifically, the basic needs were not being met.

Although most women felt they had met their children's basic needs, several felt that they had not been able to meet their children's emotional needs. For example, Jane said, "I always provided for Michael physically, food, clothing, shelter, but he often didn't have his emotional needs met." Joan also recognized that she wasn't "much fun" to be around while she was living in domestic violence. She said she was very structured and regimented with her children.

I wasn't a fun person to be around back then. I was, bedtime is at 8:00, not 8:01. I wasn't mean or anything like that, but I worked my butt off to make sure that everything was done. When you get into the mind set of getting that regimented, it's hard to let loose and have fun.

The overriding issue expressed by these mothers was that they were not able to be there to support their children's emotional wellbeing. All women talked about how living with an abusive man limited their ability to be emotionally present for their children.

For example, Elaine talked about not being there for Martha, her 15-year old daughter.

You're not all there. You can't be a mom... You're so wrapped up in your own fear and being so afraid that you can't look beyond [yourself] to help them. How can you help them if you're so afraid? You can't. To me, it was being in that relationship, I felt like I wasn't a good mom because I wasn't really there for Martha. You can't be a good mom because you're so messed up in the head because you're dealing with all that stuff. Foggy, I was very foggy. That's a good way to explain it. It's just like, you can't be a good mom.

Faye thought domestic violence was bad for children because it took away their mother, their father, and themselves. "Their mom and dad are too involved in being in their roles of victim and abuser and they are not being parents. They are not being the whole parent. I mean, I was there providing, but I wasn't 100 percent.

It robs them of themselves because they can't be themselves. They have to walk around carefully."

Mary, Celeste, and Ginger also talked about their own survival when explaining the difficulty being present for their children. Mary said being a mother in domestic violence was, "Like being a sergeant in a unit that's losing. It's just kind of day to day, one day at a time. You just do whatever you can in that day to survive."

Ginger said that motherhood in domestic violence means the same thing as in non-violent families, but that domestic violence makes motherhood harder.

I think it [motherhood] still means all the same things. Its just, you don't seem to follow through with all those, especially when you get into the depression mode and life becomes just minimalistic basic living. I think you forget about a lot of things that are very important. Guidance that your children need. The routine your children need. I don't think you ever forget about the love, but I don't think that you think about it either. Its kind of like, I love you, yeah, so what? Its not more of a "Yeah, I really love you."

Similarly, Ginger said that once she was physically abused, she shut down all her emotions. "You can't work on an emotional level anymore. It's too painful. You can't deal. You have to work on a mental level, what you think, and your thinking is very muddled." Because she was unable to feel, she believes it affected her ability to be emotionally present for her children was reduced. She described a relative lack of compassion and empathy for her children when living in domestic violence.

Your child falls and skins their knee, you brush it off, you Bactine it or Neosporin it, 'OK, you're fine.' When you are living completely, you are a little more nurturing, a little more loving. You kind of encompass or cocoon the child. You feel their pain. But, when you can't feel, you can't feel their pain. There is no way you can be there for them. You are not whole, so you can't offer wholeness to anyone else.

Some women spoke of their inability to meet their children's needs for consistency. For example, Mary said,

I become inconsistent because I am thinking, well, maybe he knows a better way. So then I change what I am doing and then each time, there was a new man in my life, things changed for the kids, especially Jeffrey because he's seen all of them.

For Mary, this pattern spanned several abusive relationships. With each new man, she instigated new rules of behaviors for the household that required the children to adapt. She said it went further than rules for the household, "Even my personality was going with the winds of whoever happens to be there." She thinks this is why she's having difficulty with her oldest son. "He doesn't even know who I am now."

Feelings of guilt about mothering. For the women in this study, being able to be there emotionally for their children was very important. But, living in domestic violence limited their ability to do so. Emotional distance and inconsistency appeared more common than strong nurturing. Most women talked about feelings of guilt and remorse arising from their "failures" at mothering while living with abusive partners. Celeste was very critical of her mothering. She said, "It made me really depressed for all those years. I felt like there was a lot of waste there. And, it's really sad to have all those kids and do such a rotten job with them. I mean if you're going to have kids, it would be really nice to not put them through all that stuff." Celeste said managing her own survival explained, but did not excuse, her inadequate actions in regards to her children.

Rachel spoke of her guilt when she compared her hopes for her children at birth with the reality they are living.

What you want for your child verses the reality of what's actually going on in that child's life. Somehow trying to present a normal family and upbringing in the midst of very abnormal stuff. You lose that rosy outlook that you have when you first have that child.

Jane found some solace when she described her son Michael's life as part of a larger spiritual scheme. "If I didn't see Michael's life as part of a larger scheme, I'd just feel so guilty, I'd just die. I would feel terrible thinking I had brought Michael around the world to be with me and put him into this, but that Michael has his own path to work out, and this must be a part of it."

In contrast to the other eight women, only Cheri and Wendy believed that they had succeeded in placing the needs of their children ahead of those of their abusive partners. This stance appeared to protect these two women from the negative feelings that the other mothers described. In general, Cheri was satisfied with her role as a mother. She felt pleased that she was able to put her children's needs first and didn't talk about feeling guilty about her role as a mother.

Wendy also placed the needs of her children above those of her abusive partner. Wendy doesn't "blame herself" when she thinks back about her relationship with Burt because she'd been protective of her children. "I really think that protecting my children was probably the key thing [in not feeling guilty]."

In summary, placing the needs of their children above those of their partners appears to be emotionally protective for women. Nevertheless, only two of the then women in this study felt they had succeeded in meeting their children's emotional needs. As a result, most of the women felt guilt and remorse when they reflected on mothering in domestic violence.

Turning Points and Protection

The third goal of this study was to determine if a pattern of abuse or a trajectory of abuse could be articulated. I was unable to find such a clear pattern. It is possible the small sample size contributed to this difficulty. It is equally possible that by choosing not to speak to the abusive men or the children, that I was unable to understand the dynamics in the relationship and how the children were involved. Nevertheless, from my analysis, I was unable to find a pattern or trajectory of behavior that explains how children become involved in domestic violence.

The only pattern consistent across all violent relationships was that children become involved in ways that helped the individual abuser achieve his desired goals. Because each relationship was different, however, the specific ways the children were involved also differed. In order to support children, professionals working with victims of domestic violence need to understand the contextual details of each relationship to predict the children's involvement.

Although I observed no clear trajectory of children's involvement in domestic violence, I did observe a trajectory of protective action taken by mothers. Throughout their abusive relationships, all women took actions to protect their children. Recognizing that some women were very forthcoming with their stories while others were much more guarded, nevertheless, a trajectory of turning points appeared. A turning point is defined as *the point the woman realized she could no longer protect her children within the abusive relationship*. Most times, this turning point coincided with when she left the relationship. Table 6.1

outlines the points at which various mothers first described clearly shifting her thinking about her relative responsibilities as a partner and as a mother.

Before proceeding, however, I must state some personal discomfort with this notion. As a feminist researcher, I am uncomfortable with anything that implies that these women are responsible for the protection of their children when the main threat comes from their fathers or other males in the home. I am fearful that this may be used to further blame women or hold them responsible for the abuse done to them and to their children. In essence, I worry that I am guilty of expecting women to be able to care for their own needs and make the best decisions for their children in a situation in which it is unfair to expect that. Clearly it is the abusive men who should be held responsible for the harm they cause to all. Still, with that said, it is important to explore the turning point, that is, the point at which the women realized they could no longer protect their children within the context of the abusive relationship.

In reviewing their stories, four turning points appeared. For Wendy and Joan this turning point occurred at the point at which their children witnessed abuse. For example, Wendy repeatedly insured her children were not present during abuse often by leaving the room for Burt to abuse her. When she saw increasing frequency in her children's exposure she decided to leave the abusive relationship.

For two other women, the turning point occurred when they saw signs that abuse was affecting their children. For example, Elaine's child, Martha, had been exposed to verbal and emotional abuse, and had witnessed extreme reactive behaviors in her mother. Martha's suicide attempt, at age 14, was the final straw for

Table 6.1

Turning Points: Mothers' Protective Interventions When They Realized They Could No Longer Protect Their Children Within the Relationship

<u>Child Witnessed Abuse to Mom</u>	<u>Mom Saw Signs in Child</u>	<u>Emotional Abuse to Child</u>	<u>Physical/Sexual Abuse to Child</u>
Joan Wendy ^a	Cheri ^a Elaine ^a	Ginger Mary Rachel	Jane ^c Celeste ^{b,c} Faye ^{b,c}

^aNot married to abuser (3).

^bInvolvement in church with strong beliefs about women's roles (2).

^cHighest levels of physical violence on Conflict Tactics Scale (3).

Elaine. Following this, Elaine decided she must leave the abusive relationship in order to protect Martha. Cheri left Steve when her infant son, Gary, was non-reactive during Steve's verbal abuse to Cheri. For Cheri, this non-reaction from an infant was evidence that her son had become accustomed to violence. She feared this would damage her son's development and at that point, intervened by leaving Steve.

For three women, the turning point occurred when a child was victim of direct emotional abuse. Ginger protected Betsy when Bill called Betsy a "bitch." Similarly, Rachel intervened and drew attention to herself when John began to be emotionally abusive to her children. Mary said her children had been exposed to extensive verbal and emotional abuse, but when he nearly stepped on the baby during their last fight, she knew that she had to leave to protect her children.

Three women reached their turning points when their child was physically or sexually abused. Jane intervened immediately when she learned that Robert had pulled Michael's hair. Faye believed for a long time that her children were not being abused. When she finally realized the harm being done by the abuse to them, she left the relationship. During years of severe abuse to herself and her children, Celeste protected her children in many ways within the context of the abusive relationship. Celeste came late to her turning point. Her abuser, Harry, had been in jail and not abusive for one year. When Harry began again to abuse her and the children after a year's cessation of violence, Celeste said she had finally she gained the personal strength and confidence she needed to intervene and risk leaving. She had realized she could no longer protect them within the context of the relationship.

These turning points varied for women and were related to both social context and individual variables. In attempting to understand differences in women's responses, I compared other characteristics of the mother, child, or abusive relationship. For example, Joan, Wendy, Cheri, Ginger, Mary, and Jane all experienced prior abusive marriages or relationships, however, their turning points were varied (see Table 6.1). Thus, I could not explain the differences in turning points by prior abusive experiences. Similarly, no patterns in turning points were found between the points of intervention and early childhood abuse, divorce, number of prior relationships, or financial dependence.

Patterns were found between the turning points and marriage, church involvement, and level of physical violence. Women who were not married (Wendy, Cheri, and Elaine) tended to reach their turning points earlier. Perhaps without the legal obligations of marriage, these women had more perceived freedom in the relationship and therefore, greater capacity to stand up for their children or leave the relationship.

Women who were involved in churches with strict beliefs about women's roles reached their turning points later. For example, both Faye's and Celeste's turning points came after the physical or sexual abuse of their children. For both of these women, the messages from the churches seemed to reinforce the women's internal conflicts about their responsibilities as wives and mothers. In essence, their church involvement supported the maintenance of the abusive relationship.

Comparing the turning point with the scores on the physical abuse category of the CTS (proxy for the level of violence in the relationship), women with higher

levels of physical violence in their relationships reached their turning points later, when their child suffered direct and severe maltreatment at the hands of the abusive partner. For example, Faye's, Celeste's, and Jane's turning points happened after there was physical or sexual abuse to their children, and they had the three highest physical abuse scores.

In summary, among the women who intervened at earlier points, Wendy's response is most easily understood. Because of witnessing and experiencing her own mother's lack of protection, protecting her children became her most important maternal role. In terms of women who waited until significant abuse had occurred to their children, the church beliefs and high levels of violence and fear lead them to stay longer in the abusive relationship.

Chapter Summary

These mothers' responses to their children's involvement in domestic violence were complex. As mothers describe the ways their children were harmed by domestic violence, without exception they felt guilt and remorse about the length of time they remained in the abusive relationship and about the events to which their children were exposed. The two women who most clearly prioritized their children's needs and who offered the greatest protection of their children seemed to be spared some of the guilt.

Motherhood was a central issue for all the women in the study. All women experienced role conflict between their responsibilities as partners, wives, and mothers. They tended to take responsibility for meeting the needs in their children's

lives and didn't speak of their partner's responsibility in providing for the children. When their partners were abusive, the women typically took responsibility for those actions, somehow feeling guilty for the initial choice to be with this man. While all felt their children's physical needs were met, most also felt remorse at their inability to meet their children's emotional needs and to be "a good mother." All women were protective of their children, sometimes in ways that appeared in the children's best interest only when one considers the context of abuse. Their children were central to their decisions to continue or end the relationship.

CHAPTER VII CONCLUSIONS

This study has unearthed more detail about children's experiences in homes with domestic violence. All 10 women who participated believed their children were exposed to violence at some point. Most women articulated frequent exposure and extreme involvement. The highest child exposure rate previously reported in the literature was 91% in Jouriles, Barling, & O'Leary's (1987) clinical sample. The 100% rate found in the current study may arise because of the in-depth questioning. The long multiple interview methodology may have allowed women to overcome the defenses they had against believing their children had been affected. Faye, in particular, explored the realities of her children's exposure to abuse for the first time as she reflected, during the second interview.

When we talked the other day, the last time we talked, I realized, you know, these kids have been being abused all through the relationship. I hadn't labeled it. I'm like, when I finally realized, I was driving down the road by the prison and it was like, wow, getting hit in the head. How could I do that to my kids? That was so bizarre. I let them get abused.

In many of these homes, the children were abused, involved in legal issues, especially visitation, custody, and child support battles. They were also indirectly and directly involved in violence, especially in efforts to provide protection to their parents. In this study, mother-reported rates for child abuse were as follows: physical abuse (50%); sexual abuse (20%); emotional abuse (90%); and neglect (70%). The abusive parties most often reported were

fathers, however, mothers' self-reported abusive or neglectful behaviors. Many noted the overall abusiveness of the environment in which the children lived.

Further, this study initiated exploration into women's perceptions of their roles as mothers in domestic violence. Women cited child-related reasons for all their relationship decisions: staying in; returning to; and leaving. Children were central to the women's responses in almost all cases, even if the women were unable to respond in ways that immediately appeared to be protective. When women's behaviors are framed in the context of domestic violence, some behaviors that are abusive in most circumstances may actually be protective. An example of this is hitting a child in order to leave a red mark so the father will not further abuse and bruise the child.

Exploration into the meaning of motherhood in the context of domestic violence has begun with this study. Women responses were categorized into four areas: protection, role conflict, concern with meeting the needs of the children, and guilt over their choices. Placing the needs of their children over the needs of their abusive partners seemed to be protective of the women's self-esteem, yet only two women felt that they were able to do so.

Exposure to domestic violence causes harm to children (Wolfe, Jaffe, & Wilson, 1990). It was not a goal of this study to link specific actions to child outcomes. Still, in talking with mothers about the abuse to which their children were exposed, it was clear that children were unable to understand what was happening and trauma responses occurred. This is borne out by these women's stories of their children's reactions to exposure. Children were reported as

"standing there with wide eyes," "screaming," "frozen terror," etc. These reactions were most obvious in younger children, a finding that is consistent with a developmental analysis. Further, children are known to be egocentric in their views of the world. Whether they are blamed directly for the abuse or feel responsible by virtue of their developmental stage, exposure to domestic violence is likely to result in feelings of guilt and responsibility, especially if they are unable to reduce, stop or prevent violence (Arroyo & Eth 1995). Other writers have noted (Wolfe, Jaffe, & Wilson, 1990), that children often have exaggerated feelings of responsibility and mis-assignment of responsibility for abuse.

The mother-child relationship may be altered as a result of the violence experienced. From this study, it appears that mothers and their children in violent homes may be dependent upon one another for protection and safety. Specific characteristics of post-traumatic stress disorder have been defined for individuals (Herman, 1992), including intrusive thoughts, nightmares and distressing dreams, and flashbacks (APA, 1994), however, in this study, it appears that there may be a typical post-traumatic stress *relationship* response that affects the dynamics between mother and child. I posit that an interactive protection effect may be one characteristic of this post-traumatic relationship stress response. For example, when Ginger's daughter, Betsy, strongly protected her mother who was being choked, Ginger took actions to get her out of the house because Ginger feared for Betsy's safety. In that example, the child's protective actions elicited a protective action on behalf of her child. As a

reverse example, Mary's stood up to David during their final fight while Michelle, age eight at the time, shouted and screamed at her father to not hit her mother. In both examples, protection of each other is interactive. For mother and child, living with the threat of violence may alter their behavioral patterns with regards to one another, and in part create a pattern of mutual dependence. When battered women and their children appear in professionals' offices, lack of understanding of the specific context of domestic violence may lead professionals to misdiagnose such a dependent mother-child relationship as pathological.

Until recently, in many jurisdictions, child exposure to domestic violence was not recognized as a form of child abuse. For three reasons, I assert that, regardless of direct abuse, child exposure to domestic violence is a form of child abuse. First, as stated earlier by Westra and Martin (1981), and confirmed again in these women's stories, the environment in the home in itself is abusive, thus affecting the child in a deleterious manner. Second, 90 percent of women interviewed in this study stated that they believed that their children were direct recipients of emotional abuse if not physical and sexual abuse. Finally, because of the interactions in the home, attention to the needs of the child may be minimal. Their care is not the primary concern of their parental caregivers, leading to a strong potential for neglect. Clearly, they live in an environment that is not conducive to their development.

One goal of this study was to explore a possible trajectory or pattern of abuse that would help professionals working with mothers in domestic violence

identify clues to earlier intervention with regards to child safety. No such trajectory appeared. The general pattern was that abusive men use whatever means possible to control and abuse their victims. Involvement of children was one option for torment and abuse. Therefore, it is important for professionals to understand the context of the individual family relationship.

When considering the turning point when mothers realized they could no longer protect their children within the relationship, a continuum presented itself.

Three of ten women's turning points came only after children became the direct targets of either sexual or physical abuse. Three other women's turning points were when the children were directly targeted for emotional abuse. Two women's turning points were when they began to notice disturbing behaviors in their children in response to violence. Two women's turning points were when the children began to be subject to greater exposure to wife battering.

In this study, women with later turning points were involved in churches with strong beliefs about women's roles in maintaining relationships. These women also experienced much higher levels of violence in the relationship. Women who lived with the highest levels of violence waited longer to intervene on behalf of their children. Those who intervened earlier were not married to their abusive partners. No other patterns could be described from this data.

Approaching this research using feminist research methodology was important in obtaining rich details of the women's experiences and their perceptions of their children's involvement in domestic violence. Use of a more

rigid style of research that would not have allowed for additions to the interview protocol would have enabled me to explore women's perceptions of motherhood.

Limitations of study

All studies have limitations. The first limitation in this research concerns the sample. The sample was small and self-selected. While great amounts of time were spent with each woman, only 10 women from one Western state were included. Their willingness to participate in the study may set these women apart from other female survivors of domestic violence. As stated previously, recruiting efforts were targeted at women who were involved in a supportive program, such as, a domestic violence program, therapy, or HeadStart. Women who are involved in those programs may also be different than women who are not. Because the majority of the sample was recruited from social service agencies, it is likely that the sample over represents low-income survivors of domestic violence. However, from this in depth study, it is clear that children in homes with domestic violence are involved in pervasive ways.

The second study limitation is its retrospective nature. Women retrospectively reported on their perceptions of violence in their relationships and its impact on their children. The events described happened at least one year and in some cases up to 25 years in the past. Distortion in memory may be present when reporting retrospectively, especially when reporting traumatic events. Thus, it is possible that the women's responses were inaccurate, incomplete, or distorted. However, for these women, their perceptions form their

realities and their stories should be honored for the beliefs and reactions they create in their subsequent lives. For them, their stories are the truth. It is difficult to know to what extent the women's truths are fully informed by their children's realities.

Third, only one party (the woman) was interviewed to assess their perceptions of their children's experience in domestic violence. No efforts were made to interview either the abusive men or the children. Thus the views presented are limited to the perceptions of female survivors of domestic violence.

Finally, as a feminist research project, it is possible that the philosophical stance presented by the researcher may have led participants to adopt a more feminist stance in their responses than they actually live or believe. Additionally, the intimate nature of the in depth interview process may have altered women's responses. Social desirability may have influenced women's responses to the researcher. Throughout the interview process, women talked with me as a person who has expressed care and concern about their life situation and the impact on their children. It is very likely that the relationship that formed during the research process influenced the study.

While listed as a limitation, it is also probable that the methodology used favorably affected the research. That is, women may have revealed more through the interview process because of the trust and rapport developed than they would have given a different methodology. This area of self-reflexivity in feminist research is ripe for future study.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Professionals working with domestic violence survivors should have a clear understanding of the context of domestic violence and victim's responses to that violence. Reframing behaviors with consideration of the context will allow for the compassionate and non-judgmental responses that are necessary when working with domestic violence survivors. Further, because mother and child share a common relationship history and are dependent on one another for protection and survival, it is important to consider the impact of the violence on their relationship. Professionals must understand the impact of the violence, on the mother and her children individually and on the relationship between mother and child. Such understanding demands knowledge of the contextual details of the abusive relationship. Effective treatment can only arise from clear understanding of the context and effects of trauma and violence.

Although not used systematically in practice, it seems that contextual information about violence experiences could be useful in work with mothers living in domestic violence. Mirroring the woman's internal struggle may be useful in helping women understand sooner the effects that living with domestic violence is having not only themselves but also on their children. Women may have difficulty acknowledging the realities to which the child is exposed, instead wanting to preserve the notion that the children are not exposed or effected by the violence. Minimization, denial, and rationalization should be expected.

As evidenced by this study, some mothers' protective actions may themselves be abusive if not seen in the context of domestic violence. Clearly the stress of living in domestic violence forces women to make choices that are incompatible with positive outcomes for all involved. More sensitive responses are needed, which recognize the complexity of women's decisions and actions in domestic violence.

Intervening with families involved in domestic violence is complex and challenging. To date, system responses have often been punitive. For example, child welfare workers intervening with mothers in domestic violence have threatened to remove children if women do not leave abusive relationships (McKay, 1994). Educational information to child welfare workers that articulates a non-blaming attitude about the mother's role in domestic violence should be implemented. For example, instead of holding the mother responsible for the safety of her children by a "failure to protect" clause in a protective order, Oregon's child protection agency has renamed it "inability to protect," a statement that recognizes the woman's victimization as well (State Office for Services to Children and Families, 1996). With that semantic change, workers and systems alike are encouraged to shift their thinking to reflect less blaming attitudes.

Systems attempting to intervene into families plagued with domestic violence must hold the abusive parties accountable for their behaviors. To date, because victims are easier to access and serve, efforts have been aimed at them, through temporary restraining orders, support groups, shelters, etc. The

dramatic societal change necessary to eliminate interpersonal violence must squarely address the behaviors and attitudes of those responsible for the violence, the abusers. Collaborative community responses as in some communities, (i.e., San Diego, CA, and Quincy, MA), in which all agencies involved intervene collectively are models for the zero-tolerance attitudes necessary to arrest inappropriate behaviors (Aron & Olson, 1997). Some examples are domestic violence response units where police and advocates are housed together and respond to domestic violence calls in unison. Offenders can be handled by the police while the advocates address the victimization needs of the women and children much more quickly than historically possible. Other jurisdictions use special prosecutors who are able to become highly skilled in preparing cases and collecting evidence in the absence of a victim too scared to speak out. Each of these actions, while efforts to protect the individual victim, also begin to challenge the collective denial of the problem of domestic violence.

Finally, legislation that imposes stiffer penalties for perpetrators of domestic violence should be enacted. A new law in Oregon makes domestic violence a Class C Felony if the violence is perpetrated in the presence of a child or if the perpetrator has been previously convicted of abusing the same victim. This law is a beginning, but there is much room for improvement. Without a legal definition of "in the presence of a child," each county court will have to develop a definition. The findings from my current study argue for a liberal view of "in the presence of a child." Women in this study believed that their children were harmed by even indirect exposure to the violence, and just by

living in an environment where domestic violence is present. Also, the legislation may require children to testify in court in greater numbers, since their presence becomes critical to proving the elements of a crime. As an advocate for children's rights, I am not eager for children to be required to participate in a legal system that is unaware of and insensitive to their developmental needs.

Implications for Research

This study is not exhaustive, and it raises many questions. Although the study identified many more ways that children are involved in domestic violence, further study can provide greater understanding of children's experiences in homes with domestic violence. This understanding could help define the actions to which children are exposed and their behavioral, emotional, psychological, social, and health outcomes. This understanding could also help identify interventions that are most effective.

The interaction between mother and child in domestic violence is ripe for further investigation. What is the nature and order of the protection between mother and child? By what mechanisms does protection occur? What are the consequences of this for later functioning of the child, of the mother, of their relationship? Is there a relationship-based traumatic stress response? What is the appropriate treatment for mother, child, and the relationship?

This study also has begun to explore women's perceptions of motherhood in domestic violence. What are the implications for women with regards to their

role as a mother in domestic violence? If being protective of one's children in domestic violence guards against negative self-esteem, how does that happen?

Finally, in attempting to explain women's responses toward their children's protection, many more questions were raised than were answered. For example, what factors lead to the differences seen between women's responses? Why do some mothers intervene earlier than others? Why do some mothers wait until very late? What interventions may support women's protective responses? Further study with domestic violence survivors may further elucidate answers to these important questions.

Conclusion

Women who mother children in homes with domestic violence face impossible choices. For these mothers, there are no easy answers. Motherhood in domestic violence presents the ultimate challenge to a woman's ability to balance what is in the best interests of herself, her children, and her relationship.

With compassion and understanding, professionals can better support women as they take the steps to free themselves and their children from violence. More complete understanding of the dynamics in abusive homes may also enable us to clearly shift accountability to the abusers who are responsible, and away from the women and children who are victimized. I hope that by telling these women's stories, readers will have gained such compassion and understanding.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
SUPPORT LETTERS FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS



May 5, 1997

Dear Sister Program:

This letter is to introduce Barb Wood. Barb is currently working on her Ph.D. and writing her dissertation on the effects of domestic violence on children. She needs your help to complete her research.

Let me tell you a little bit about Barb. She has a long history with CARDV as a board member, a volunteer, a trainer, and as the project director of our pilot project, Partnerships for Safe Families which was the collaborative pilot that we did with SCF. Barb has also done contract work with SCF in the ChildSafe program that provides treatment for children who have been sexually abused. Currently, Barb is the Executive Director of ABC House, the Linn County Child Victim Assessment Center. She is smart, funny and an "stealth" feminist in a community where that is still largely a dirty word.

Barb needs your help to interview women about the effects of violence on their children. She will fully disclose the limits of confidentiality regarding child abuse. The women will have the opportunity to discontinue the interviews at any time. Her method is more fully explained in her letter about her project.

Please give this project serious consideration. I think that the information that she develops from this process will be very valuable to all of us. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me. I have the fullest confidence in Barb's ethics and her ability to protect your clients.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "GayLynn Pack".

GayLynn Pack
Executive Director

CARDV

CENTER AGAINST RAPE & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

March 18, 1997

Barbara Wood
610 10th Ave SW
Albany, OR 97321

Dear Ms. Wood:

I am responding to your request to distribute letters of introduction concerning your doctoral research on Women's Perceptions of Their Children's involvement in Domestic Violence.

You are correct, it is important to understand how children are implicated in domestic violence. I'm pleased to know that you are conducting this important research.

After reviewing the information you provided, I believe it would be acceptable for you to provide introductory letters to recruit participants through our domestic violence program.

Good luck with your study.

Sincerely,



GayLynn Pack
Executive Director

APPENDIX B
LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

April 7, 1998

Dear Potential Survey Participant:

My name is Barbara Wood. For ten years, I have worked as an advocate with domestic violence survivors. I've been working with children exposed to domestic violence for the last three years. Now, as part of my furthering education at Oregon State University, I am studying domestic violence and how it affects women and children.

Please consider participating in this study. Domestic violence is a terrible crime in our society. Women are often blamed for their abuse. Their children become invisible in a system that fails to understand how to deal with their hurts. I hope that this study, with your participation, will help to make things better for the women and children whose lives are disrupted by domestic violence.

I want to talk with you and other women about their and their children's experiences with domestic violence. Women who participate need to:

- *be out of physically abusive relationship for between one and five years,**
- *have had a child living with you during the abuse,**
- *be willing to discuss your abusive experience, including how domestic violence has affected your children.**

You may find it difficult to talk about how your children were involved. I will try to make you are comfortable as possible and can refer you to a qualified counselor or other appropriate assistance. Women who have participated so far have indicated that this is very helpful.

If you choose to participate, we will meet three times. You can withdraw at any time. I will come to a location you choose at a time convenient to us both.

You will be asked to select a false name for yourself and for your children.

All materials for the project will be locked in my office at home and tapes will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

Please consider meeting with me and talking about your experience. Call me if you want more information or are interested in participating. I can be reached at (541) 926-2203. When you call, be sure to tell me it is about my research. I look forward to talking with you. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Barbara Wood, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Human Development and Family Sciences

APPENDIX C
DOCUMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on domestic violence and its effects on women and children. If you choose to participate, we will meet three times. Your answers will be very helpful in understanding women's responses to, and children's experiences of, domestic violence. Your information will also help to improve support services especially to children who are exposed to domestic violence.

You will be asked to select a false name for yourself and for your children. If you are reading any materials from the study, you will be able to locate the information written about you by searching for your chosen name. Other identifying factors, such as ages of your children, your hometown, employment, your partner's name, etc., will be changed to protect your privacy. Materials from all interviews will be kept locked in my office. All tapes will be destroyed at the completion of the research project.

You will be asked to provide information concerning your abuse and the experiences of your children. I am required to report any child abuse that may be revealed. Sometimes you may find it difficult to discuss these issues, but you may also find it helpful to talk to someone about your abuse experience. It is possible that discussion of your abuse experience may bring up old or unresolved feelings. I will make every effort to insure you are supported during the interview. If you wish, you will be connected with other resources to help you cope with the thoughts and feelings you are having as follow up to the interview.

By signing this document, you indicate your willingness to participate in this study. Please remember that you may discontinue your participation at any time and you may refuse to answer any questions. Thank you again for your participation. I look forward to talking with you further.

Sincerely,

Barbara Wood, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Human Development and Family Studies, Oregon State University
(541) 926-2203

I have read and understand the above informed consent. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this form.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW ONE PROTOCOL

Introduction:

[Self and Study]

[Thanks for participation]

[You may withdraw at anytime]

Choose a name by which to be identified during all phases of this study. When reported in written materials, you will be identified by that name. Choose names for child and ex-partner.

Name Chosen: _____

Name chosen for ex-partner: _____

Explain confidentiality and limits of confidentiality.

- Mandated reporter of child abuse.
- In the case of a child abuse issue, I will work with you to or I will report it.
- The agency would be required to conduct an investigation. This may be merely a paper search, or it may be someone coming to talk with you or your child.
- Agency is most interested in protecting children who are in immediate danger and who are younger. It can also be very beneficial for your children to have their abuse taken seriously by officials. I'd like you tell me the truth and the complete story, but I need to tell you this information so you aren't surprised later if I have to make a report. Please make the best decision for yourself and for your children.

Contextual information:

Age _____ Children:	Race _____ Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Rel. to ex-par
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

How old were you at the birth of your first child? _____

I have a few questions to ask about your childhood experiences.

1. What was it like growing up in your home?
2. What are some of your best memories?
3. What were some of the hardest times for you growing up?

4. When you were little and you did something wrong, what did your parents do? (Did they spank you, yell at you, send you to your room, or what?) If spanked, ask:

- a) What did they use -- a belt, their hand, or what?
- b) Was that hard enough to leave marks that lasted a few days or just a couple of whacks?
- c) Did you ever run away from home?
- d) Were there other memorable experiences or conditions in your childhood?
- e) Who did you go to for comfort, support or nurturing?

2. How about _____, what did his parents do when he did something wrong...(as above)?

Listen for:

- Did abuse actually occur?
- Regardless of facts, did parents perceive themselves as abused?
- Did parent receive nurturing as a child?
- Was family "dysfunctional"? (i.e., alcohol/drugs, or mental illness, sexual abuse, physical abuse, DV)

Is there anything else you think it is important for me to know about your childhood experience?

How about your ex-partners childhood experience?

Now, I have some questions about your current life.

What are your sources of family income?

Who lives in your household?

II. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INFORMATION

Please answer these questions about the relationship in which your partner was the most abusive to you.

What was the status of your abusive relationship (married, lived together)

Length of abusive relationship ____ Length of time since abusive relationship ____

Where does he currently live? (Location or type of living situation, not address.
EXAMPLE: "with his parents in Montana, with a new partner")

Do you have any contact with (name) now? Yes ____ No ____

Please describe any contact you have with him now.

When did the abuse start in the relationship?

What was the nature of the abuse? (physical, emotional, sexual, financial)

Tell me about the physical abuse. Types of things he did. How often it happened? Describe the pattern of events.

Tell me about the sexual abuse. Types of things he did. How often it happened? Describe the pattern of events.

Tell me about the emotional abuse. Types of things he did. How often it happened? (starvation, video and timing of events). Describe the pattern of events.

Tell me about the financial abuse. Types of things he did. How often it happened? Describe the pattern of events.

How often, if ever, did he use **drugs or alcohol** at the time the abuse occurred?
_____ What type? _____

How often, if ever, did **you** use **drugs or alcohol** at the time the abuse occurred? _____ What type? _____

Did he ever used a **weapon** to threaten or hurt you? Yes ____ No ____

How often? _____ What type of weapon? _____

Have you ever been to the **hospital or doctor** as a result of an injury that your partner caused? Yes _____ No _____ How often? _____ How seriously were you injured? _____

Please describe your most memorable abuse experience with your former abusive partner.

What has been the impact of the violence on you?

Before you separated this time, did you ever attempt to leave name?

Yes _____ No _____ How many times? _____

Where did you typically go after leaving him? _____

What typically happened when you left?

When you left for the final time, where did you go? What happened after you left?

Have you ever called the police? Yes _____ No _____ If yes, how many times? _____ What was the result?

Did the police give you information on **Restraining Orders**? Yes ___ No ___

Have you ever gotten a Restraining Order on him? Yes ___ No ___
If yes, how many? _____

Has the Restraining Order been **violated** by him? Yes ___ No ___
If yes, how many times? _____ What happened?

Did the police give you information on **Domestic Violence Programs**?
Yes _____ No _____

What services of a domestic violence program have you used?
Hotline _____ Shelter _____ Support Group _____ Advocacy _____ Other _____

Have the police ever turned you down when you needed assistance?
Yes ___ No ___
If yes, what happened?

What was **most helpful** in your process of dealing with domestic violence?
Why?

What was **least helpful**? Why?

OK, that is all the questions I have for today. Do you have any questions or comments for me?

Thank you for your time. I know these questions are sometimes difficult. I appreciate you taking the time and giving the energy to answer them. You are very brave.

I would like to schedule another time to meet with you. During the second interview, I will ask questions more specifically related to your children and their experience. I will also want to tape record that interview so I can remember clearly what you have said. Ideally, I would like to meet within one week. Will that be possible?

Schedule time, day, and location.

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW TWO PROTOCOL

Welcome

Remember that I was going to tape? Is that OK with you?

Choose name for child(ren).

Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4
Real: _____	Real: _____	Real: _____	Real: _____
Chosen: _____	Chosen: _____	Chosen: _____	Chosen: _____
Age: _____	Age: _____	Age: _____	Age: _____

Choose name for abusive partner:

Real: _____ Chosen: _____

- Transcribed and kept in my locked home office.
- I live alone so no one else will have access to it.
- Tapes destroyed after research is completed.
- Begin tape.

How are you doing?

Any thoughts or feelings about our last meeting?

Today I want to talk specifically about what your children's experiences were in the abuse. I will be asking you some questions which other women have described happening to them and to their children. Sometimes those will apply for you and sometimes not. I want you to tell me to the best of your memory if these experiences apply. And, you are welcome to tell me more about specific experiences if they apply for you or your children. This interview will be less structured than the one we had last time. Mostly I just want to hear your story and that of your children.

Domestic Violence and Your Children:

First, I want to will ask you some general questions about your children and their experiences.

What is the **legal relationship** between your abusive partner and each of your child(ren)?

Do your child(ren) have contact now with name? Yes ____ No ____

If so, what contact do your children have with name now?

Is there a custody and/or visitation agreement? Yes ___ No ___
What is the custody and visitation arrangement?

Have your child(ren) ever been present during the abuse? Yes ___ No ___
Unsure ___ How often? _____
What type of abuse? _____

Ever within hearing range? Yes ___ No ___ Unsure ___
How often? _____
What type of abuse? _____

Ever witnessed the after effects on the house of abuse? Yes ___ No ___
Unsure ___ How often? _____
What did the house look like? _____

Ever witnessed the after effects on you after abuse? Yes ___ No ___
Unsure ___ How often? _____

What did they witness?

Please describe your most memorable experience about your child(ren)'s
witnessing or hearing abuse:

What do you think has been the impact on your child(ren) of your ex-
partners' violence toward you?

Did the person also abuse the child(ren)? Yes ___ No ___ Unsure ___
If yes, how?

Abusers will sometimes use the child(ren) to get to you. Did your partner
ever do that type of thing? Yes ___ No ___ Unsure ___

Problems with visitation:

Some women talk about having problems with visitation. How have your visitation arrangements gone? Have you ever had problems with visitation with your abusive partner?

Has name ever used visitation as a way to continue to control you? How? Did he ever say or do things to you during visitation? What?

Did he ever say or do things to you during visitation?

Probe for:

- Used visit as a way to checkup on you
- Made abusive statements to you during visitation
- Physically abusive to you during visitation

Did he say or do things with the children that you were not comfortable with?

Probe for:

- Didn't arrive on time to pick up the kids
- Took children places you felt to be unsafe or harmful
- Became drunk or used drugs when caring for the children
- Did not provide adequate care of children during visit
- Allowed children to watch TV's, movies, etc. which you consider inappropriate.
- Has very different values -- unable to reach agreement about how to raise the children.

Did he do things that were inconsiderate to you during visitation?

Probe for:

- Demanded to see children without considering schedules
- Failed to return children on time after visit

Tell me about what happened.

Legal Problems:

Some women also talk about other legal problems with their abusive partners. How has the legal process gone for you and name? Have you had any problems with the legal process? What kinds?

Has name ever done or threatened to take actions legally which affect your children? If yes, tell me about the process of how this happened.

Did he make threats or use the legal system in ways that involved the children?

Probe for:

- Threatened to get legal custody of the children
- Won legal custody of the children
- Threatened to kidnap the children
- Kidnapped children or custodial interference
- Made allegations that you abused A & D or the child.
- Threatened to turn you into SCF, AFS, food stamps, HUD, WIC, etc.

Was he ever involved in illegal activities or activities not consistent with court orders?

Probe for:

- Withheld or was late with child support payments
- Quit job so didn't have to pay child support/alimony
- Not paying bills that affect the children.

Did he win a custody decision in spite of evidence of abuse to the child(ren)?

Probe for:

- Won full custody in spite of evidence of physical abuse of child
- Won full custody in spite of evidence of sexual abuse of child.
- Won joint custody in spite of evidence of physical abuse of child.
- Won joint custody in spite of evidence of sexual abuse of child.
- Won unsupervised visitation in spite of evidence of physical abuse.
- Won unsupervised visitation in spite of evidence of sexual abuse.

Were the children involved in legal activities?

Probe for:

- Kids had to testify in court.
- Kids had to testify against one parent.
- Kids blamed in court to get one parent off.
- Kids involved in a custody study

Societal pressures:

Women sometimes talk about pressures from family, society, finances, friends, church that keep them with their abusive partners.

Has that ever been true for you?

What pressures have been hard for you?

Did these pressures ever lead you to stay with name?

Did these pressures ever lead you to return to name after you had left?

Did you ever stay with him "because of the children?"

If so, why was it important to you to stay because of the children?

Did you ever return to name because of the children?

If so, why was it important to return because of the children?

Probe for:

Return to father due to financial dependency (only way to adequately provide for children)

Returned to or stayed with father because of loyalty to father

Returned to or stayed with father because belief children need a father

Violent marriage is better than no marriage for the children.

A belief that you could manage the abuse as long as the children weren't abused

Did the children ever do or say things that led you to stay with or return to your abusive partner?

Probe for:

Said they missed their father.

Talked to pictures or objects belonging to their father.

Did you at any time consider getting an abortion as a way of dealing with the domestic violence? Please explain.

Involving children in abuse:

Some women talk about their partners involving the children in the abuse. Has that ever happened to your child(ren)?

- Review: Children and ages. Ask about each.

Has the child (ask about each) been indirectly involved in the abuse?

Probe for:

negative things said about you in front of child, or to the child used
 guilt/manipulation with child to apply pressure to you,
 threatened suicide,
 forced child to watch abuse
 had to have sex before attending to an infant or child.
 child held or placed in front as protection during abuse.
 tricks done to the child to get information.

If so, tell me about the process of how this happened.

Have your children ever been made to feel responsible for the fights?

Probe for:

blamed directly, i.e., this is all your fault,
 if it weren't for you, we wouldn't have this problems
 blamed for other things, i.e., stealing.

If so, tell me about how this happened.

Have they (ask about each) been blamed indirectly?

Probe for:

fights are about the child,
 fights are about the child keeping the house clean,
 fights are about the expense of having child,
 fights about having to do things for the child,
 fights about how the child are cared for or disciplined

If so, tell me about how this happened.

Has your child (ask about each) ever been directly involved in the conflict?

Probe for:

tried to protect one mom.
 present during fight,
 put self in the middle of the abuse,
 got put in the middle of the abuse,
 tried to stop the abuse,
 called the police,
 intervened between abuser and mom in other ways,
 screened calls, erased phone messages, lied to abuser
 gotten hit with an object or body part
 involved in any other ways

Tell me about how this happened.

Earlier, you told me about the worst domestic violence experience the child (ask about each) was ever exposed to. (Recall the incident together). I want you to think back to that experience.

How was each child exposed?

What did they do?

How were they involved?

At what point in the fight did the child (ask about each) become involved?

What did the child (ask about each) do during:

Probe for:

emotional abuse, threats

yelling

throwing or smashing things

shoving or pushing, slapping or hitting

kicked or bit

used something to hit the other

beat the other

threatened to use weapons

used a weapon

What role did they take in the conflict?

Describe what happened when the child (ask about each) were involved?

What usually happened to end the conflict?

Actions taken against the child (ask about each):

Finally, some women talk about actions that their abusive partner takes which are aimed at hurting the child(ren). I want to ask you some questions about those things.

Before we begin, I want to remind you that I am legally required to report child abuse to the authorities.

- If you tell me something that sounds like child abuse, I will ask you if it has been reported.
- If something has already been reported, I will not need to report it again.
- If the abuse hasn't been reported but the child is not in current danger, I will need to report it.
- If there is abuse going on currently and the child is still in danger, I will need to report it to the authorities.
- Do you have any questions about what I have to report? I am most interested in the information you feel free to share; I am not trying to get you in trouble.

Did your abusive partner ever do things to intentionally hurt the child(ren) which might not have harmed them physically?

Probe for:

- destroyed favorite toys
- harming or killing pets
- gave them alcohol

Has he ever emotionally abused your child(ren).

Probe for:

- Favors own child above adopted or step child
- Jokes, Insults, Ignores feelings, Yelling
- Name calling or labeling
- Blaming or insulting.
- Belittling
- Humiliation
- Threats

Please describe.

How did the child(ren) come to be emotionally abused?

Why do you think he emotionally abused your child(ren)?

At what point did the emotional abuse to the child(ren) happen?

Has he ever physically abused your child(ren).

Probe for:

Hitting Slapping Pinching Punching Pushing
Throwing or Smashing Things
Kicked or Bit
Hit with something
Beaten or Excessive force during discipline
Excessive restraint
Use of weapon

Please describe.

How did the child(ren) come to be physically abused?

Why do you think he physically abused your child(ren)?

At what point did the physical abuse to the child(ren) happen?

Has he ever sexually abused your child(ren).

Probe for:

Taking child's clothes
Sexually inappropriate conversations
Entering room/bathroom without permission
Voyeurism, Fondling
Forcing child to touch or engage in sexual activity
Pornography, Sexualized Photography with child
Intercourse

Please describe.

How did the child(ren) come to be sexually abused?

Why do you think he sexually abused your child(ren)?

At what point did the sexual abuse to the child(ren) happen?

Do you believe your children were neglected?

Probe for:

Emotional neglect
Medical neglect
Educational neglect
Safety

Did things ever happen to the children that you believe wouldn't have in a non-abusive environment?

Probe for:

- Abuse by other
- Physical injury
- Other danger or harm
- Suicide attempt by child

Often mothers have a lot of feelings when they think back about the abuse their children were exposed to. What feelings have you had as a result of being a mother in domestic violence?

Feelings?

Anger, hurt, sadness, guilt, shame, embarrassed.

What do you blame yourself for?

What do you blame yourself the most for?

What would you have liked to have done differently?

What do you think you handled well? What did you do right?

That concludes my questions. Is there anything else you feel is important for me to know?

Check out emotional state.

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your participation in this important study. I would like to schedule one more meeting with you to review my interpretation of what we have spoken about. I will mail you a copy of the transcript of the tape we have just made. I hope to get it to you by _____. After that, I will call you to schedule another meeting so we can make any changes you want to make after you see it in writing. What is the best time of day, and best way to contact you?

Again, thanks for your time.

Address to mail transcript and summary:

APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW THREE PROTOCOL

Hello.

How have you been doing?

Permission to tape again?

Start tape.

Have you remembered any other things that seem important to tell me since our last meeting?

I'd like to walk through the tape and interview from the first two interviews.

When you were reading it, did you see any things that you felt or thought differently about?

I want to be sure I have your words and ideas correctly. Are there any changes you think I should make?

I also want to be sure that you feel safe. Are there things that you think should be altered to protect your privacy and keep you safe?

Is there anything you feel which should be left out of your story?

When you read your story, what did you think?

How did you feel?

What stood out for you as important when you think about your experience?

What stood out for you when you think about your child(rens) experience?

If you were to summarize your story in a few statements, what would you say?

If you were to summarize the experience of your children in a few statements, what would you say?

What do you think your children would say?

MEANING

Could you please talk about how you view the concept of motherhood?

What makes a "good mother?"

What do you think it means to be a mother when you live in domestic violence?

Please describe what it has been like for you to "come to terms with" your role as a wife/partner.

Please describe what it has been like for you to "come to terms with" your role as a mother.

Completion

Are there any other things you would like to say about your experience or your perception of your children's experiences?

Now, in completion, I'd like you to answer a standardized set of questions regarding the type of abuse you suffered. Some women find it helpful to answer and list the types of abuse they experienced; other women find this form irritating.

-- CTS --

Do you have any other questions or comments you'd like to make before we close?

Thanks for participating in this study. Please call me at any time if you have anything else you wish to talk with me about.

Give card. Give \$\$

End Tape

