

In the Aftermath of Intimate Partner Violence: A Focus on Positive Psychosocial Living

INTRODUCTION

I. Statement of Purpose

Intimate partner violence is the systematic, intentional use of physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse that one person in a domestic relationship exerts over their partner in order to maintain power and control. In our society, we tend to focus on the external evidence of intimate partner violence such as the bruised lip or the fractured wrist. Likewise, most of society typically aides the survivor by tending to the physical results of intimate partner violence. With such emphasis on the physical nature of intimate partner violence, one might wonder what happens to the remnants of the survivor's abused psychosocial self. As a society, are we adequately recognizing and supporting the survivor's mental and social state after they escape the violence? I believe the answer is "no." I believe we need to recognize and study how survivors *positively* cope and learn from their experience.

In this thesis I present the individual and societal strategies currently being utilized in promoting *positive* psychosocial wellness for intimate partner violence survivors, both women and men. My research also assesses the negative stigmas placed on abused women and men and explains how these stigmas collectively force these women and men into emotional and social solitude, hopelessness and a general sense of

personal failure. I focus on how survivors can change their negative associations of their past abuse into tools for their *positive* self-growth, awareness and perception.

In terms of managing the scope of my work, I limit my focus to abuse in heterosexual relationships in the contemporary US context. I examine how society plays a role in intimate partner violence, especially with respect to race and class differences in the experience of abuse. Because it is currently under-researched, I am particularly interested in male survivors of violence by women partners, and the coping lessons they learn, both in spite of and because of, the available societal support toward their mental health and social status.

II. Intimate Partner Violence

From my own childhood observations of an abused mother and the experience of my own partner abuse, I often wonder how much intimate partner violence has affected the woman I have chosen to become. Moreover, I wonder how much intimate partner violence has influenced, and will continue to influence, how I interact with people. What is it about intimate partner violence, specifically, that has this much power to affect, to influence? Based on her interviews with heterosexual women survivors of intimate partner violence, Cheryl L. Sattler argues that,

abusive relationships share a debilitating dynamic most often labeled “power and control”. That is, the abuser takes all power in the relationship in order to control another person. The power may include controlling the finances; keeping the car keys; determining what friendships a woman may have; and all of the other small, day-to-day experiences that are hardly noticed---until they are gone (Sattler 2000, 80).

As someone who has experienced intimate partner violence, I describe it as the physical, emotional, economic and social hurt inflicted on the less dominant party in a relationship. Intimate partner violence becomes embedded in people's lives because it touches the intimate layers (physical, emotional, social etc...) of a person's self-esteem. In this way, intimate partner violence is able to affect or influence the very core of who we are and what we do.

In addition to my own experiences, I have researched how intimate partner violence has affected the lives of many other survivors. I wanted to set my own experience of intimate partner violence against the backdrop of a social epidemic permeating the lives of millions of people throughout the world (<http://endabuse.org/resources/facts/>). In *It Could Happen to Anyone*, a study of women survivors of abuse by heterosexual male partners, Alyce D. LaViolette and Ola W. Barnett (2000), argue that "A woman cannot know with complete certainty that the man she loves and plans to marry will not eventually abuse her. An abused woman could be *any* woman or *every* woman" (14). The purpose of their research is to spread the awareness that there are many factors that can pull different types of women into a situation where they experience intimate partner violence. The researchers list as risk factors an emotional dependence on the partner, lack of economic resources, and, more commonly, the psychological cycle of waiting for their partner to change his ways (37).

I can vividly remember the reasons why it was easier for me to stay with my partner than not. Firstly, I *knew* he wanted and needed me, *because he told me so*, and he was internally struggling with the traumatic childhood scars he claimed his parents, particularly his mother, had left on him. I should note that my belief that I was needed, as

“reassured” by my respective abuser, and his claim of victim-hood, is a common trend for many women in an intimate partner violence situation (LaViolette and Barnett, 35-36). Furthermore, my partner and I were economically established, which meant that our flow of money was greatly dependent on us staying together. This economic reality far outweighed what I could secure financially on my own. LaViolette and Barnett discuss the process by which many abused women mentally measure the pros and cons of leaving their respective abusive situations. The most common feature they found involves the abused woman’s emotions (101-102). Abused women become trapped into a cycle of fear, dependence and negative self-perception. At the core of this cycle is the affection and/or love felt for the abuser and, as a result, these women attach guilt and shame to any proposals for changing their abusive situations (LaViolette and Barnett 138). Moreover, it is easier for many women to consider their situations in emotional rather than practical terms because, even today, many women are raised to be passive, emotional and accommodating. Even if abused women are realistically able to intervene in the cycle of abuse and propose workable relationship solutions, the primary instinct of many women is to approach the abusive situation with their feelings, not their logic (LaViolette and Barnett 32-33). In the next chapter, I discuss in more detail the emotional experience of many abused women in the cycle of violence. The main lesson here is that it is no surprise that women have been and continue to be on the receiving end of intimate partner violence.

However, there is another side to this story: men are abused too. Indeed, in addition to intimate partner violence in homosexual relationships, the fact of female abuse of heterosexual male partners is a side of intimate partner violence that is rarely

discussed. To be sure, there are more incidents of male on female than female on male violence documented in social science research. I must admit that the concept of a man being on the receiving end of intimate partner violence by a woman surprises me, as I can imagine it does much of society. In fact, the popular belief that men are the aggressors who beat and don't get beat on is a major part of what has hindered societal awareness of abused men. In *Abused Men: The Hidden Side of Domestic Violence* by Philip W. Cook (1997), he argues that "the situation of the abused male in the relationship dynamic, and of the issues that must be confronted, is more similar to his female counterpart than it is different" (108). Cook strongly advocates for the unheard voices of men who are physically and emotionally abused because he is aware of the ridicule and disbelief that these men often face when attempting to get help.

Unlike women, heterosexual men are not expected to express emotions other than anger. Their emotions are generally not expected to enter a relationship in the same manner as a woman's emotions are. Men provide, they mow the lawn, they watch a good ball game, but they certainly don't cry because their partner forgot their birthday, or insulted their choice in furniture. We should ask ourselves if these expectations accurately reflect reality for all men. I argue that we should figure out when it makes sense to discuss men as part of a uniform category and when it makes sense to discuss each man's circumstances on a case by case basis. Many of the classic studies on intimate partner violence opted to place men in one category, the abuser. These findings rely heavily on traditional societal stereotypes (see, for example, Cook's critical analysis of the traditional research [Cook 1997]).

In many of these studies, all men are viewed as immune from being abused because they are thought to be the stronger and unemotional sex that can't be physically or emotionally hurt by women. The common view is that they can beat on women but they can't, and, quite frankly, shouldn't get beat on *by* women. Kathleen Malley-Morrison and Denise Hines (2004) address this view by asking if "there is any need for a consensus about the meaning of emotional abuse of husbands?" (53). Malley-Morrison and Hines do not specifically include their own opinion in this matter but by asking the question they are at least recognizing that male emotional abuse has not always received the attention it warrants. Malley-Morrison and Hines's focus is specifically on heterosexual husband abuse, versus general abuse of men by men, and they examine the reasons why these particular men (husbands) get into situations of abuse as the abused, not the abuser.

Malley-Morrison and Hines complement Cook's argument regarding the idea that the issues facing men survivors are very similar to those faced by their female counterparts. They do this by discussing some of the reasons a woman becomes an abuser. Setting aside the self-defense plea, Malley-Morrison and Hines report that the "primary motives for violence by women include expressing jealousy or confusion, showing anger, retaliating for emotional hurt, expressing feelings that they had difficulty communicating verbally and gaining control over the other person" (53). The similarities with violence by men include the negative expressions of jealousy, anger and controlling behavior. I argue that we need to focus on the similarities displayed in male and female abusers alike; that, indeed, in heterosexual and homosexual relationships alike, gender is unlikely to alter the motivations of the abuser in question.

So, who are these people who become abusive? Abusers can be the closest people in your circle of influence, as they will generally have access to your emotional, physical, economic and social self. In the *Treatment of Family Violence*, Robert Ammerman and Michel Hersen (1990) argue that past research "...assumed that [male] abusers [in heterosexual relationships] were merely sadistic men who enjoyed beating their wives and that abused women were masochistic and did not want to escape the violence" (114). These assumptions provided an overly simple explanation of intimate partner violence. These assumptions also allowed many individuals to be overly critical of the women who were being abused but stayed in the relationship.

Much of the historical research on intimate partner violence didn't directly account for why women become the abusers in relationships. Instead, there were theories to further extend the woman's role as the victim in intimate partner violence. Many researchers, psychologists and doctors hypothesized what I call a "chameleon effect," in which the abused woman would eventually blend in with her surrounding environment. As Mollie Whalen states "it is quite possible that being abused for many years promotes characteristics in the victims that are similar to the ones exhibited by the abusers" (1996, 115). Notice that here, Whalen subtly excuses women who model the abuse of their partners.

I argue that there is no excuse. With respect to women who abuse in retaliation and women who are simply abusive, both have made an inappropriate choice to express themselves with violence. However, it should be noted that the "Abused Woman Syndrome" is a legal defense of a woman's violent behavior acknowledging that such behavior isn't always a choice that a woman decides to engage in. However, in his essay

on the Abused Woman Syndrome, Joe Wheeler Dixon (2002) argues that we need to be more specific with respect to how the Syndrome gets used in court:

Abused woman syndrome (BWS) was first proposed in the 1970's and was based solely upon the clinical observations of a single clinician, Dr. Lenore Walker. After she coined the term and published her hypotheses the concept quickly caught on. BWS became a popular way to justify criminal conduct of women who were charged with the murder of their husbands. However, while the idea initially enjoyed success in some clinical circles and several legal jurisdictions, BWS was never empirically validated through scientific research as a bona fide condition, and therefore it has not enjoyed widespread support by psychologists who practice clinical and forensic psychology. For those women who are indeed chronically abused, they may more reliably and more correctly be diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (<http://www.psychologyandlaw.com/battered.htm>).

Likewise, men who are knowingly abusive versus men who claim to accidentally hit when they drink or become very angry have both foregone the wiser alternative to engaging in abuse. In either case, the attacking party is actively deciding to harm another person.

I should note that, despite the gains of feminism in the US context, socialized gender expectations still play a role in the lives of both women and men abusers and survivors of abuse. Traditional gender roles remain powerful factors in intimate partner violence; even if those effects are more subtle today than in the past. As Rekha Mirchandani argues in, “Hitting is Not Manly: Domestic Violence Court and the Re-Imagination of the Patriarchal State” (2006), many state court systems, such as those in Utah, still operate as a Patriarchy when handling intimate partner violence. As she

explains, “Feminist scholars generally agree that states are patriarchal, that is, they work to the advantage and power of men over women” (783). Mirchandani uses the welfare system as an example of how social and legal systems assist in maintaining traditional gender inequalities:

welfare state benefits have positioned women and men in gendered ways, fostering men's economic and physical dominance over women in the home. In addition, feminist scholars have found that states can implement policies unequally. In particular, research suggests that in imposing laws, states require women to conform to tightly circumscribed and often moralistic notions of gender imposed in a style that is “cumbersome and repeatedly intrusive” (783).

Similarly, some community conditions contribute to the continued practice of intimate partner violence. In “Community Violence and Its Direct, Indirect, and Mediating Effects on Intimate Partner Violence” (2006), the authors discuss how certain groups live in communities with increased rates of social disorder and alcohol/drug abuse. They found that experiencing these things, particularly the former, contribute to community violence which, in turn, can eventually lead to increased intimate partner violence. The main aspect of the social disorder they discuss is the gender expectations of the men in these communities. Due to the poor living conditions and the less than ideal community standards, these men escaped the pressures of their socialized gender roles by abusing their female partners; these actions, in turn, created pressures for the abused women to conform to their own socialized gender roles. As the authors argue:

Economically disenfranchised men may experience high levels of stress because they are unable to attain the status typically associated with masculine success validated by a patriarchal system. For example, unemployed men may perceive themselves negatively because they have failed to live up to their traditionally

defined role as breadwinner. Seeking out and affiliating with similar men and sharing narratives of power, emotional conquest, and sexual exploits and asserting control of women's bodies and their sexuality can serve to alleviate this powerlessness but results in negative consequences [such as intimate partner violence] for the health and safety of women (Raghavan, Mennerich, Sexton and James 2006, 1135).

It is not surprising that the role of patriarchy in both community violence and intimate partner violence is affected by constructs of race and gender. It is evident that many of the poorer communities are populated with minority groups. These groups include, but are not limited to, African Americans, Latin-Americans, and Native Americans. As I discuss in more detail, below, race is an important factor for predicting which people might become involved in intimate partner violence. Much of this predictive power is due to social disorder, yet, other factors, such as fewer opportunities to go to school, secure a decent job, and escape the welfare cycle, play a large role in keeping women in these groups at higher risk for intimate partner violence. In “Community Violence and Its Direct, Indirect, and Mediating Effects on Intimate Partner Violence,” the authors note that,

impoverished women who live in poor neighborhoods may rely on other distressed individuals for social support. Poor women may have less choice from whom to select their network compared to affluent women because restricted educational and vocational opportunities may limit their ability to interact in “communities of interest” in addition to their “communities of residence” Therefore, they tend to rely on and network with women with very similar profiles (Raghavan, Mennerich, Sexton and James 2006, 1137-1138)

The latter problem is important in understanding why the cycle of violence can continue endlessly for many women in this situation. These women try to get support from other women who can't always give the support needed to escape intimate partner violence because they too are disadvantaged.

To better understand the prevalence and incidence of intimate partner violence in today's society, the following four tables are illustrative. They serve to show that 1) intimate partner violence is still primarily experienced by women, 2) while women are the primary victims of intimate partner violence, men are too, and 3) race is an important factor for many people who experience intimate partner violence. (All four tables are from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/intimate/victims.htm>)

**Average annual nonfatal
intimate partner victimization
rate per 1,000 by gender and
age group, 1993-2004**

Age	Females	Males
12-15	1.9	0.3
16-19	12.4	1.2
20-24	17.0	2.3
25-34	12.3	2.1
35-49	6.3	1.3
50-64	1.4	0.5
65 or older	0.2	0.1 *

Figure 1: Average annual nonfatal intimate partner victimization rate per 1,000 by gender and age group, 1993-2004.

***Based on 10 or fewer
cases.**

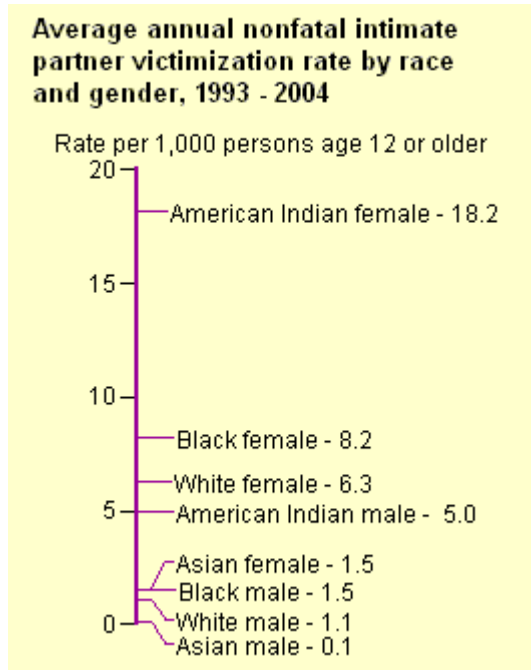


Figure 2: Average annual nonfatal intimate partner victimization rate per 1,000 by gender and race, 1993-2004

**Average annual
Hispanic rate of intimate
partner violence**

Hispanic females	6.0
Non-Hispanic females	6.5
Hispanic males	0.9
Non-Hispanic males	1.2

Figure 3: **Average annual nonfatal intimate partner victimization by Hispanic origin and gender rate per 1,000 persons age 12 or older, 1993 – 2004**

Average annual number and percentage of households experiencing nonfatal intimate partner violence where children under age 12 resided, by gender of victims, 1993-2004

Households with intimate partner violence victims	Annual average	
	Number	Percent
All households with -	871,510	100%
Children	349,020	40.0%
No children	389,300	44.7%
Unknown	133,200	15.3%
Female victim households with -	746,580	100%
Children	318,290	42.6%
No children	307,080	41.1%
Unknown	121,220	16.2%
Male victim households with -	124,930	100%
Children	30,730	24.6%
No children	82,220	65.8%
Unknown	11,990	9.6%

Figure 4: Average annual number and percentage of households experiencing nonfatal intimate partner violence where children under age 12 resided, by gender of victims, 1993-2004.

Simply put, intimate partner violence is a major problem which affects everyone's lives; even if some of us experience it at higher rates than others.

The focus of much of the research on intimate partner violence concerns how societal forces can mold individuals into reconstructing their violent outbursts and fighting into a series of non-aggressive strategies for more effective management in their

relationships (see for example, Cook [1997]). The goal is to prevent abuse in any type of intimate relationship.

However, society's effort to combat the potential for intimate partner violence has greatly overshadowed the much needed efforts to combat the actual violence expressed in intimate partner situations. I am referring here to how society, and the individual partners themselves, deal with the abused survivor. It is widely agreed that intimate partner violence survivors have many medical resources to treat the physical wounds sustained during intimate partner violence. My concern centers around the psychosocial wounds inflicted via the verbal, psychological and emotional aspects of intimate partner violence. Indeed, we should ask ourselves how many tears the abused female and male survivors are shedding from the non-physical wounds of abuse. Furthermore, we ought to ask ourselves how society might more effectively promote emotional and social wellness for abuse survivors.

In her study of the counseling available to heterosexual women survivors, Mollie Whalen (1996) distinguishes between the emerging intimate partner violence counselors and the past intimate partner violence counselors by noting that,

the role of the [emerging] counselor is to provide support, identify resources, supply information and at times serve as an advocate for the abused woman. By contrast, the role of traditional counselors and therapists is to diagnose, analyze and interpret the underlying meanings, behavioral efforts or both..." (52).

Indeed, we see a shift from viewing the abuse survivor as having an illness and/or simply as the subject of research, to understanding that they are injured spirits needing support with a boost in positive perception. More importantly, recognizing the validity of an

abused survivor's feelings, concerns and standard of living, as either created or affected by the intimate partner violence, allows for individuals to evaluate their survival of intimate partner violence as a positive step. I believe that, in contrast to how life appears from within an abusive relationship, and possibly even before, survivors who have left these relationships are more likely to develop a new perception on how a positive life can be lived.

One may wonder when this venture into a new perspective starts. Ideally, doctors could prescribe a pill and make the intimate partner violence experience go away. Realistically, however, it starts with the individual self. Cook comments that "the abused person [male or female] who has left the relationship is not free from all problems" (106). He or she must be honest within themselves and be ready to be the only one in their own corner. Cook discusses how society often has heavy expectations of the survivor, such as expecting them to feel immediate happiness to be finally free from the violence. We also often criticize the abuse survivor for how they handled the intimate partner violence situation, rather than focusing on the courage it took to get out of the relationship in the first place. I argue that abuse survivors should be encouraged to take a step-by-step analysis of what they can learn from their experience of intimate partner violence as a template for developing more positive perceptions and habits.

III. Metaphors and Models

Before getting into the body of my thesis, I would like to explain my use of a reoccurring metaphor. As I move through life, I discover that revelations about my independent and interpersonal self evolve based on how I've chosen to perceive life. I believe that most people's perceptions evolve in similar ways though each individual may have a distinct method of perception. For myself, I find metaphors to be very helpful when analyzing life. While brainstorming for the initial writing of my thesis, it occurred to me that our journey through life can be compared to moving through the rooms of a house, or through different houses. The house of my metaphor is a structured place that holds the elements (social, emotional and physical) that make up each phase of our journey. As with a regular house, the "house" I am discussing possesses various pieces of furniture, windows and doors. For example, in my thesis, I refer to some of the negative features of intimate relationships as "comfy chairs." In regards to the issue of intimate partner violence, the "house" is a structural setting separated from, yet still influenced by, the other personal issues of the abused survivor in question. Inside this "house" are the elements of intimate partner violence that constitute this overall phase in the survivor's life. One element, in particular, is the stronghold intimate partner violence has on many abused people; there is a point at which one becomes accustomed to the abusive treatment and behaviors used to reinforce that treatment. This is what the "comfy chair" represents. It is that particular aspect of intimate partner violence where abused survivors get so comfortable in the situation that they simply "sit down" and make no active attempts to leave the "house" that is their abusive relationship.

As I perceive it, one reaches a particular “house” via descending or ascending steps. I propose looking at the aspects that lead many, if not all, abuse survivors to their intimate partner violence situations as steps. The idea is to picture the individual, who is not yet a survivor, at the top of a series of steps. At this moment, whether or not they are in an ideal place, they are not in an intimate partner violence situation nor do they feel they have the characteristics of people who find themselves in an intimate partner violence situation. Each step represents an aspect that eventually leads to the bottom of the steps; the pathway to the “house” enclosing them in an intimate partner violence situation.

The metaphor continues in describing an abuse survivor leaving an abusive relationship via the back door of the “house”, traveling down a path away from the “house” and discovering a new series of steps. These upward steps represent the abuse survivor finalizing the escape from the intimate partner violence and reaching a state of self-actualization (the top of the steps); where they realized that they have even more self- possession than they did before the intimate partner violence.

Thus, for the purposes of my thesis, descending the steps represents going into an intimate partner violence situation while ascending the steps represents coming out of an intimate partner violence situation. I would like to note that, unfortunately, many people are accustomed to “houses” that represent intimate partner violence either because they grew up in this particular sort of “house” and/or have not yet broken the pattern of continually entering these sorts of “houses.”

A PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN AS VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

I. The Individual's Experience of Intimate Partner Violence

A) What led me to my intimate partner violence situation?

“At the bottom of the steps I am in self reflection: I am smart, funny, kind and active in life. I am worthy of respect, love and appreciation; Yes, I know this! Yet here I am looking up the steep incline of the steps and wondering how I became an abused woman. What steps did I walk down to enter into my intimate partner violence situation?”

In informal discussions with other female survivors of intimate partner violence, this metaphor accurately reflects the sorts of thoughts racing through their minds. They have a sense of failure about who they have become and, often, tend to compare the woman they were before the intimate partner violence with the woman they've become after surviving the intimate partner violence. Indeed, there becomes this struggle to investigate what aspects of their lives allowed them to become consumed by intimate partner violence. Which steps led them to this situation? These steps vary with each woman, however, there are a few specific steps that are more common for many female abuse survivors.

Step 1: The issue of race

It is easy to say that many abused women are in intimate partner violence situations for the same reasons. Likewise, it is easy to say that it is simple for many abused women to walk away from their abusers. Saying or even thinking these things

keeps us from recognizing the different social constructs that affect our lives. One controversial social construct, race, has a number of implications for how and whether a woman takes the descending step into intimate partner violence. Data from the National Family Violence surveys (1994) “revealed a disproportionate amount of violence in black and Hispanic families compared to whites” (La Violette and Barnett 67).

A key difference between how white and black women experience intimate partner violence concerns societal status (La Violette and Barnett 40-41). Generally, black women have little to no access to the resources usually allotted to white women. Resources include, but are not limited to, better types of employment opportunities, encouragement to further education, and social support from societal institutions in general. Moreover, black women tend to experience higher rates of poverty, single-parent families and discrimination from both society and their male partners. Thus, with respect to the question who has the opportunity to completely avoid or escape intimate partner violence, white women often have more leverage.

Interestingly enough, the fact that white women on average will be more likely to be educated and economically advantaged also works to hinder white women from reporting intimate partner violence. La Violette and Barnett review a number of studies of calls to police departments or shelters revealing that “African-American women are more likely than Anglo-American women to seek help” (La Violette and Barnett 67). Much of this fact involves the prejudices of the upper class. Many white women are socially bound to present a “happy picture” for their peers and family. Admitting to being abused is embarrassing and suggests that something is wrong with the woman; that she is somehow not good enough to fit in with her social peers. Even lower-class white women

are reluctant to report household violence because intimate partner violence is not supposed to touch the lives of white women. Malley-Morrison and Hines (2004) note that while “the limited data available provide no support for the assumption that acceptance of family violence is pervasive in African-American communities” (102), it is still widely believed that intimate partner violence is a cultural norm in black families.

Thus, the actual number of cases involving white women is not accurately reflected statistically, as black and white communities alike inadvertently support the notion that intimate partner violence is a black woman’s problem. That being said, I would like to point out that intimate partner violence is still mainly a *woman’s* problem. What the “race step” contributes, in leading a woman to intimate partner violence, involves the benefits, pitfalls and expectations related to a woman’s race. Although any woman can take this step, the constructs of her racial profile will affect how fast she approaches the step and, likewise, how quickly she moves beyond it.

Step 2: The issue of emotions

A few more steps down into the violent relationship and the woman hits the “emotion step”. In my experience, no matter how independent or intellectual she is, any woman can let her guard down. Consequently, her emotional self can become vulnerable and focused on her intimate partner. In a healthy relationship, these moments of vulnerability are not necessarily problematic and, therefore, not something a woman should work toward completely shutting down. To engage in a complete shutdown would be to give in to the stereotype that all men are abusive and that there is never a safe time to let your emotions out to express yourself. However hard it might be to believe at times, this stereotype does not reflect reality. I would like to note that this may not be the

normative belief of all women. However, it is likely that this is more a normative belief for many abused women.

Research, with women in relationships that have become violent, shows that the emotional breakdown of women often follows a pattern (e.g., Walker 1994). Many relationships are initiated with intense admiration and love. Your partner is your soul mate, he understands you and would absolutely protect you from any harm. For the abusive man, however, protecting you from *any* harm does not necessarily include protecting you from *his* harm. The trouble starts for those women who are psychologically reared to take care of others at the expense of their own self-protection. The domino effect displays itself in the following manner:

- 1) The woman's emotional self works to satisfy the man's emotional self
- 2) The man's emotional self comes both to resent and require the woman's love
- 3) The man becomes aware that the woman's emotional self can be used against her
- 4) The woman does not notice that her emotional self is what has trapped her;

unintentionally taking her further down the steps into intimate partner violence.

“Over time, these reactions change into a response pattern that is emotionally based, not cognitively based” (La Violette and Barnett 70).

It is important to note that some abusive men attack their partner's emotional self because their emotional selves are damaged. Oftentimes, people believe that men are always self-confident and have no insecurities; that, indeed, men abuse simply to be abusive. However, as Susan Forward and Joan Torres (1986) have found from their counseling practice and research, it is important to remember that even an abusive man needs

...as we all do, to feel emotionally taken care of, to be loved, and to feel safe...his normal needs to be close to a woman are mixed with fears that she can annihilate him emotionally. He harbors a hidden belief that if he loves a woman she will then have the power to hurt him, to deprive him, to engulf him, and to abandon him (99).

Thus, we see the “emotion step” can sometimes feel the feet of both the woman and the man approaching the intimate partner violence situation.

Step 3: The issues of gender

As I argued in the Introduction, intimate partner violence continues to be affected and supported by the traditional gender role expectations. Many couples enter into relationships with their own individual expectations of themselves and each other. What we see, though, are these same couples crumbling in an attempt to prioritize and conform to societal gender expectations. In the case of most men, society expects, even demands, that they be the primary breadwinner (i.e., the sole financial provider) and that they dominate the decision making in the household. In contrast, most women are expected to be homemakers, or if they work outside the home, that their job be secondary to their role as wife and child care provider. As Forward and Torres comment,

Society has traditionally reinforced the idea that girls are inferior to boys, that girls can't take care of themselves, and that women need men to take care of them. We've all seen men portrayed in the media as stronger, more competent, and smarter than women, while women are often portrayed as highly emotional, indecisive, scatterbrained, passive, illogical, manipulative, and even malevolent. Such stereotypes further damage a young girl's ability to see herself as a strong and worthwhile person (1986, 132).

In an effort to maintain their manhood, some men exert a stranglehold on their respective women partners, reinforcing the traditional views. Indeed, women who are approaching an intimate partner violence situation often struggle between expressing their own “girl power” and succumbing to “man power” (note the sexism in the usage of “girl” versus “man”). The expectations of both partners will collide endlessly if she doesn’t find a balance agreed upon by both herself and her partner. Lenore Walker’s classic work on what she called *The Cycle of Violence* (1994) illustrates how abusive relationships can sometimes continue for a lengthy amount of time. See Figure 5.

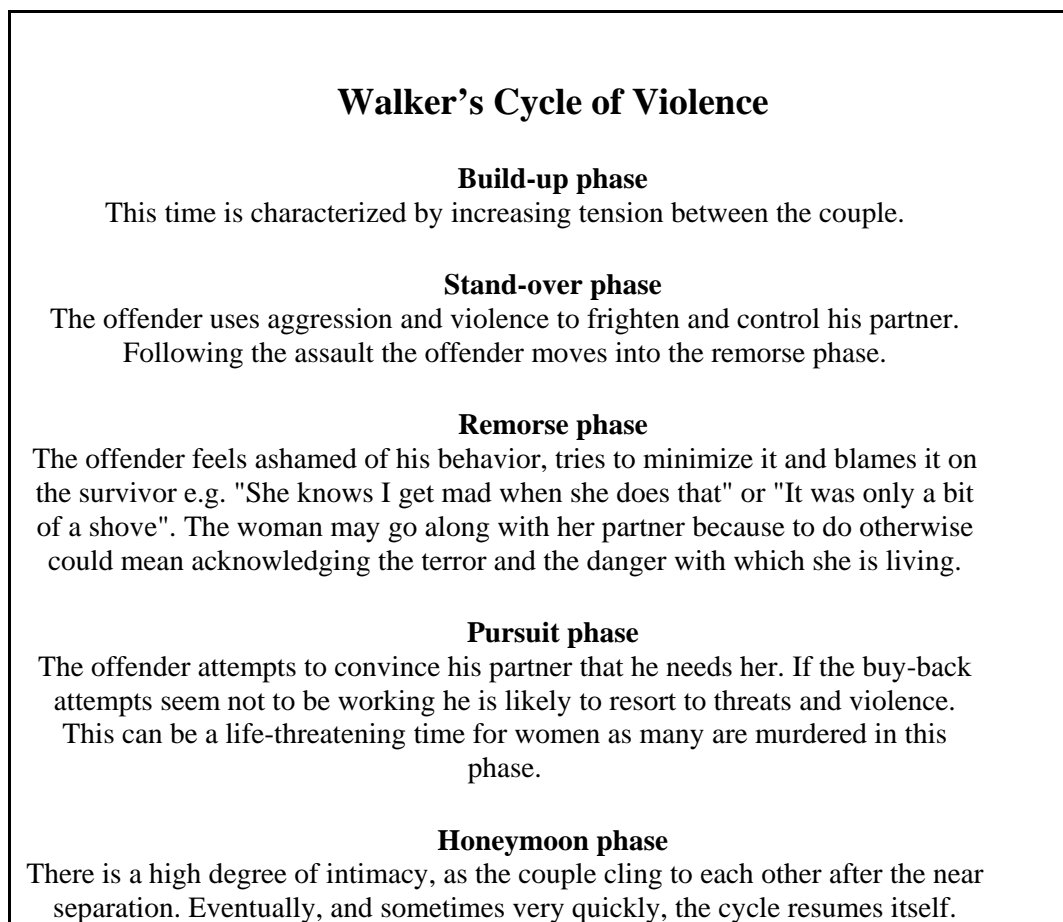


Figure 5: Walker’s Cycle of Violence

(http://www.health.wa.gov.au/publications/archive/dvpk_cycle.html)

Whether or not this cycle of violence applies within relationships where females are the abusers is not well-known. However, it is my belief that these phases are likely to be

applicable for abused men. Here is yet another feature of the female abuse of males that requires further research.

B) Why am I still in my intimate partner violence situation?

“Well, I opened the door to the house, went down the stairs, and entered into a new violent phase of my relationship. It seems like I traveled down those steps quicker than I would have liked to, yet, here I am. But look a comfy chair! It seems so familiar - I might as well sit in it. But wait, if it’s just a familiar and comfy chair, why do I feel instead uncomfortable and unsafe? Why is it that I have come to live and breathe violence?”

The reality is that most women are able to recognize when they are in an abusive situation. After they walk down the steps, it is relatively easy for them to see the exact ways their abusive partner has controlled them; easy to understand how the self-actualization they once strived for has slipped away from them. The comfy chair, as inviting as it sounds, actually represents the defining reason why a woman often stays in a violent relationship, against her better judgment. Simply put, the comfy chair represents dependence. From the time women descend the steps leading to the violent phase of the relationship, they are systematically stripping themselves of their independence. By the time they reach the bottom step, they are mainly driven to cater, please and console the abuser. More importantly, these women are driven to minimize even the most severe beatings. Literally, the woman has it ingrained in her, by the threats and actions of the abuser, that there is no escape from him. Coupled with her shameful need in wanting to stay with her abuser, she creates a mental block against ever really considering an escape

from the violence. This also highlights her fear in leaving the abusive partner, as many women have reported fear being the main reason for staying. Her view of herself, her relationships (with family, peers, and co-workers), and her life ambitions are completely consumed by what the abuser claims is best for her.

As Walker (1994) argues,

Batterers tend to impose isolation on their partners in order to keep power and control, to calm their own fears of abandonment and feelings of intense, irrational jealousy, and to make it less likely that the victim will be able to report the “secret” or find help. An abused woman may believe that the less she and her abusive partner go out into the world of other people, the less likely some societal event will trigger another violent outburst (72).

Therefore, her energies are focused on softening the beatings versus stopping them. It is relevant to note Walker’s use of the word “victim.” The abuser establishes the woman’s dependence on him by creating a sense of helplessness in her. As a victim, the woman is vulnerable, powerless and incapable of being saved, by herself or anyone else. Likewise, the flight of steps (including the steps affected by her race, her emotional self and her gender expectations) serves to magnify her dependence on the abusive partner and maintain the helplessness. Regarding this helplessness, Walker notes:

some research suggests that chronic, repeated abuse brings about a pessimistic cognitive style that is often associated with depression. Seligman (1990) called this “learned helplessness”. Those who have developed learned helplessness are not “helpless” as the name might suggest, but they may be unable to anticipate that their behavior will affect events in any reasonable, reliable, or systematic way (Walker 71).

Thus, a woman, who asks Why am I still in my intimate partner violence situation, finds herself on conflicting ground , as she may not see why that comfy chair is still so inviting; that, in fact, she has become dependent on it.

C) How did I get out of my intimate partner violence situation?

“Even though it’s comfy and familiar, I am very tired of this chair. Wait, I feel a breeze coming from the back of the house! Hey, where did that back door come from? Has it always been there? Well it’s WIDE open now. Oh my goodness, it is a way out but I wonder what else is on the other side? Can I make it on my own? Yes, I have to try! Here I go, I am out of here!”

As a survivor of intimate partner violence, I can report how absolutely terrifying it is to make up your mind that you are fed up and are *finally* leaving your partner and the violence. There are so many doubts, fears and social stigmas associated with upgrading your status from intimate partner violence victim to intimate partner violence survivor. Truthfully, you are alone whether you have support or not. The main reason I state this is because no one else has experienced the particular steps that led you to your intimate partner violence situation, no one sat in the comfy chair of dependence you sat in and no one will ever feel the exact moment your heart was racing as you stepped out the back door and began healing.

Many women really do have to escape their intimate partner violence on their own. Due to the trademark isolation practices of an abusive partner, women lose most, if not all, of their social connections. Unfortunately, these are the very social connections they need for support. Some of these connections can be reluctant to communicate with the

abused woman because she stayed with the abuser for so long. In contrast, other social connections are ready and waiting for an opportunity to jump in and help as soon as they get the okay from the abused woman. In either case, the abused woman is reluctant to ask for help due to shame, embarrassment and self-anger for driving (or letting him drive) her social support connections away in the first place.

It seems impossible to leave the intimate partner violence under these circumstances, as the abused woman worries about who will help her and how she will ask for the help. First, however, the abused woman should shape the individual terms by which she is going to help herself leave the abusive partner. People often attribute the end of the intimate partner violence relationship to the outside sources surrounding the abused woman. Indeed, counselors, court advocates, family, and friends are often given credit for stopping the abusive relationship. Even abused women themselves sometimes forget to look in the mirror and congratulate themselves before giving credit to others who assisted them in leaving the abusive situation. While it is correct to recognize the allies who helped, the pivotal acknowledgment should be given to the abused female survivor. There are a number of questions that complicate this acknowledgment:

- Why give abused female survivors any credit when they are the ones who got themselves in the battering situation in the first place?
- Why would abused female survivors need to get outside help if they are able to get themselves out of the intimate partner violence situation by their own initial decision-making?
- What exactly are we acknowledging abused female survivors for anyway?

The last question is the first place to start in truly understanding how an abused woman gets out of her intimate partner violence situation; she starts with herself. Many abused women get to a place, the back door of the “house”, where they suddenly realize

that the costs of being partnered, fearful and abused no longer outweigh the benefits of being single, safe and healthy. There is an internal switch that turns on the abused woman's will to break free. They are steadily driven to conquer any and all factors that have contributed to anchoring them to the intimate partner violence. In fact, this drive is maneuvered by the onset of newfound empowerment. On a series of empowerment levels, abused women strengthen their psychological selves and begin experiencing that first push out of the back door. As LaViolette and Barnett explain:

Women often pass through several different empowerment stages before they are able to change their feelings and cognitions about being abused. During the first stage, women feel fearful, angry and powerless. During the second stage, victims become more aware of the danger of being victimized, and they start to place the blame for battering on the abuser. In the last stage, the woman is able to be more assertive and self-determined (143).

This last stage is what prepares the abused woman to seek and accept assistance from outside sources. These outside sources include, but are not limited to, family, friends, fellow abused women (usually women meet in shelters), counselors and other legal authorities. It is important to access these outside sources because the abused woman has not completely reached the "point of no return" required to successfully stay out of her abusive relationship. While, it is the abused woman's initial decision-making that activates the leaving process, the remaining pieces of the process are managed by the collective support of the abused woman's outside sources. In other words, the abused woman and her outside sources of help pull together to create the healing needed to fully escape the intimate partner violence. Specifically, most intimate partner violence counselors like to use survivor therapy as a treatment approach. This treatment approach

is used to address traumas that people experience from the violent actions of other people. The main components of this approach derive from other theories (feminist therapy theory and trauma theory) that concentrate on the strengths of the survivor (Walker 285). As Walker further clarifies:

Survivor therapy explores the coping strategies that the victims have adopted and helps them build on them in new ways, so they can become survivors. It takes into account the gender based impact of trauma within the woman's socio-political, cultural and economic context, emphasizing respect and empathy for all women who have been abused (Walker 285).

Thus, the main idea is to accept that the violence happened as an unfortunate side effect of the societal sexism, and other prevalent factors, in the relationship and not as a consequence solely brought on by the abused survivor herself. The abused woman didn't put herself in that place (the intimate partner violence "house") because no person ever freely enters into abuse.

What we come to understand, instead, is that abused women are to be respected for leaving and doubly credited for completing the process of leaving. Moreover, it is a growing revelation that many abused female survivors are self-reflecting and finding the courage to rebuild themselves. "Without re-establishing her own personal power the woman cannot be expected to regain control of life" (Walker 303). Therefore, getting out of an intimate partner violence situation mainly entails abused women escaping the power and control of the abuser and finding their own power and control for their inner selves.

D) What positive lessons have I learned?

“As I scan my surroundings, I am aware that the journey is not over. I made it through the intimate partner violence and I am pleased that I found the back door to safety and peace. But where do I go from here? I will continue walking and see where it leads me. Wow, look at those steps! They seem high but there is a light at the top. I am going to climb those steps.”

Many people associate experiencing intimate partner violence with negative outcomes. There is not as much discussion about what an abused female survivor can positively learn from her abusive experience. Once abused women have escaped, they face three choices:

1. They can turn around and go back in the “house” to sit in the “comfy chair”; back to the violent relationship.
2. They can focus on the negative lessons they learned from the intimate partner violence and descend down steps leading to a different violent relationship or into self-victimizing single hood.
3. They can focus on the positive lessons they learned from the intimate partner violence and ascend up steps leading to an even higher state of self-actualization than before the intimate partner violence occurred.

The last choice is what my thesis is meant to focus on. Each step taken represents a positive lesson learned from the intimate partner violence experience. Each lesson (step) is able to stand on its own but it is the combination of steps that really bring an abused woman closer to a better way of life after the violence.

Step 1: Perseverance

Part of the reason intimate partner violence exists is because in our culture women are often identified as being weaker than men. Whether they agree with this or not, women in intimate partner violence relationships will often settle for this label and bring about a self-fulfilling prophecy. Staying in the abusive relationship contributes to the notion that women are weak and, oftentimes, permanently eliminates the opportunities to summon the strength within her. Likewise, a woman who finally leaves her intimate partner violence situation can also be stuck in believing that she is weak. How can she do anything else worth pursuing in life when she was weak enough to get into an intimate partner violence situation? In answering this question, many women lose the little hope they had and go back to choices one and two. Other women, however, figure out that staying for so long and dealing with the abusive situation was a matter of strength and, within that strength, developed perseverance.

Undoubtedly, it takes great strength to endure being broken and then to keep enough pieces of yourself together to endure renewed assaults. Just when the abused female survivor thinks the violence of the abuser might permanently disable her, she gathers all her pieces up and finds the strength to escape. For many, this is what, ultimately, happens in an intimate partner violence situation when an abused woman transitions from accepting the abuse, tolerating the abuse, denying the abuse to, finally, leaving the abuse. She persevered through this process and now understands exactly how much struggle she can deal with, even at the cost of some of her psyche. Moreover, the abused woman realizes that she can now be more whole than before the intimate partner violence broke her; for now she can make it through any problem she might encounter in

life. Indeed, she has learned the true strengths of her character in escaping intimate partner violence.

Step 2: Self-confidence

After firmly recognizing her ability to persevere, the abused woman acquires confidence in herself. She is conscious of her previous struggles and comes to realize that her main shield against the abuse could have been her self-esteem. That, in fact, it was her self-esteem being used against her as a weapon alongside the physical violence. Examining this reality, can create a healthy level of self-admiration in many abused female survivors. They can see all of the beautiful aspects, their spirit, their mind, their personality, and finally appreciate that they are beings who deserve respect. The abused woman needs not ignore these positive attributes simply because her abuser chose to ignore them; she now understands the basis of self-worth is not how another defines you. Her true lesson from being abused shows her that she is the author of her own personal story. With that responsibility, comes the acceptance that it is she who defines her worth and performs the maintenance work on her own self-esteem. Many abused female survivors, who choose to focus on the positive lessons of intimate partner violence, begin to understand that they handed this responsibility over to the abuser. Typically these women do not have the self-confidence to fight to get this responsibility back, or even to stop the transfer of responsibility in the first place. Thus, abused female survivors learn to re-establish and regain their self-confidence.

Step 3: Awareness

“One effective approach to changing beliefs is cognitive reappraisal. [The abused woman] must make some cognitive readjustments along the lines of defining the meaning

of the violence, what caused it and what role it plays in her life now” (LaViolette and Barnett 145). This process of cognitive reappraisal leads to a sharpening of her awareness. As an abused woman moves further away from her intimate partner violence situation, she gets a clearer view of herself and her external world. She is suddenly aware of how much pull she has as a person, as a moving force in the universe. Likewise, she is quicker to stop and appreciate the simple aspects of life; to enhance her philosophical self. For instance, I noticed an awkward standing tree in front of my university’s library. There is nothing special about the tree in particular, however, I immediately identified with its uniqueness. To me, it stands out from the other surrounding trees and now every time I walk past it I think to myself: I am not walking past a mere tree! No, it is more than that now. That tree could represent me as a grounded entity. Like the tree, I am secure in my foundation on this earth and I possess adorning attachments (my personality, looks, intellect, etc...) that complete my whole being. As weird as it may sound to others, something as simple as a tree has induced a positive self-concept in me, something that could never have happened while I was in my abusive relationship.

In fact, an abused female survivor’s awareness is what allows her to realize the perseverance and self-confidence she acquired from surviving her abusive situation. She is able to see through a different set of eyes and perceive everything in life as simple, beautiful and powerful in its own right. In all respects, she has learned to pay attention to herself, down to the smallest of details, and apply her self-awareness to living with her world as positively as possible.

While there are many other steps or lessons to encounter, it is the perseverance, self-confidence and awareness that lay the foundation for abused women who choose to

live their lives in a positive psychosocial manner. With the support of family, friends and abused survivor advocates, an abused woman can, slowly but surely, heal her mental and emotional self and develop effective life skill tools for the peaceful, aspiring life for which she is long overdue.

II. Society's Role in Enabling and Alleviating Intimate Partner Violence

A) How has society contributed to my status as victim vs. survivor?

“As I reach the top step to my newfound freedom, I look up in the sky at the clouds and breathe in a sigh of peace. I still wonder, however, whether society could have helped me to reach the top of these steps more quickly rather than holding me back at the bottom of the steps.”

On being a victim:

To be a victim implies that one is helpless, passive, and weak. Other people control and look down on the victim because the victim is so inefficient in his or her own life. In turn, victims sit and let things attack them and, whether they have the power or not, are too hopeless to make the effort to combat the attack. There is always a power differential between two particular people and, because of the social constructs of the female gender, women typically have less power than men. Although the following description is three decades old, it is unfortunately still appropriate:

There are two definitions of woman. There is the good woman. She is a victim. There is the bad woman. She must be destroyed. The good woman must be possessed...the bad woman must be punished, and if she is punished enough, she will become good...the posture of victimization, the passivity of the victim

demands abuse. [Thus], women strive for passivity, because women want to be good (The United States Commission on Civil Rights 1978, 217).

These views are precisely what drive women into victim-hood. They are reared to cater to a man via submissiveness, silence and dependence. Any attempt to assert themselves translates into women trying to rebel and forego the gender responsibilities assigned by society. In a violent relationship, the pressure exerted by society contributes to the uneven power and control shift between the couple. Moreover, sexism still operates to keep women down by encouraging their “subordinate” thinking, and to keep men up by encouraging their “dominant” thinking. This means that many women are normalized to accept the abuse because they are taught that they are inferior to their male partners. Likewise, it means that a man gets the “okay” to abuse a woman at will, particularly when she does anything to challenge his masculinity. It is important to note that not all men exercise the “okay” to abuse a woman at will. When a woman changes the duties of her private sphere, this can be seen as a challenge to her partner’s masculinity. Since societal gender discrimination still remains an active force, society reinforces the abuse, both indirectly and directly, to maintain the power and control hierarchy, where men are seen to be at the top as the superior gender. In other words, “...the basic problem [is] the way in which women and men are socialized to act out dominant-submissive roles that in and of themselves invite abuse.” (The United States Commission on Civil Rights 216)

In addition, lack of educational and economic opportunities assist in keeping women buried under a victim-hood status. Our society promotes higher wage and earning potential for most men while, simultaneously, demoting women who work equally or at

least as hard as men. Furthermore, women are generally campaigned against when attempting to seek high status careers, particularly careers that have been traditionally male dominated. Even if a woman makes her way to the top of the career, her journey in getting there is often exhausting insofar as she still faces criticism for stepping out of her traditional duties as a woman. The latter is particularly relevant when a woman simultaneously handles a household, children and economic maintenance (bills, banking and miscellaneous payments). There are many situations where a woman is the sole provider of a family. However, women who are in an abusive relationship generally can't see being the sole family provider as a realistic option because the social constructs holding up the abusive relationship in question assist in brainwashing them to feel exactly like a victim; they are indeed helpless, passive and weak.

Moreover, society makes it hard for a woman, who needs to completely start over from an abusive situation, to get the financial and/or educational means required to safely leave and stay away from the abuser. Society both punishes women who stay in abusive relationships, as well as, making it impossible for them to leave. With respect to the latter, there are a number of economic and legal factors that discourage women or make it impossible for women to leave. If society gave women permission to leave, it would be admitting that men have no rights to correct a woman; that men would be wrong in today's popular assumption of being superior to women who should be submissive. Likewise, it would weaken the stance that women are naturally victims.

Legal, historical, literary and religious writings all contribute to understanding the unique status of women, a status that composes the kernel of the explanation of why it is they who have become the "appropriate" victims of...violence. Almost all writings about women discuss them in only one type of relationship, their

personal relationships with men. The only roles truly allowed women in real or the imaginary world have been those of wife, mother, daughter, lover, whore and saint (Dobash and Dobash 32).

In sum, there are a number of factors that contribute to the victim-hood role for women experiencing intimate partner violence.

On being a survivor:

To be a survivor implies that a woman is strong, determined and inspired. The survivor accepts her wounds and moves on through the healing process. While making her way through the healing process, the survivor reflects on the negativity and, rather than perceive it as a means to stay down, uses the experience to strengthen her psychological self. Other people can enhance the survivor's state, however, being a survivor requires depending on herself more often than others. In contrast, a victim's status is primarily defined via the relationships with other people; these other people set the criteria for how a victim relates to herself. To truly be a survivor, though, means standing on your own and setting criteria for how you relate to yourself *and* others.

As mentioned before, there is a power and control differential between men and women. Society promotes the shift of power and control in favor of the male gender while hindering equal opportunity for *healthy* power and control for the female gender. This is, ultimately, the building blocks of victim-hood for women. In contrast, there are some ways, although still few in comparison to "victim rearing", that society contributes to women "upgrading" to survivor status. The main tools utilized by society entail intimate partner violence advocacy programs for abused women and their children. These programs offer shelter, counseling, food, clothing and other needed family commodities. Many advocacy programs even have enough funding to put abused women through

school and/or on the job training. More importantly, though, is the change in perception these public programs give the abused woman. Through this change in perception, women are taught to not be ashamed of having a voice, speaking up for themselves with that voice and understanding that this voice shouldn't be an excuse for being abused.

Indeed, the molding of a survivor solidifies when society takes responsibility for the normalized gender biases and accepts that women are persons with valid rights, valid feelings, valid opinions and valid earning potential.

When a woman admits she is being abused, she is also confessing to any number of other things: admitting her parents were right about the boyfriend, husband or partner; admitting that she needs help; admitting that she can't "fix" that situation through her other efforts. Imagine the feeling of making your troubles public---in a society where intimate partner violence is still viewed both by its victims and by the larger society, as an individual problem---without a solution (Sattler 25).

Although we are still working on a solution, a pivotal part of this solution will be society shifting the power and control so that it is more evenly distributed between men and women. The current therapies, shelters, training programs and general abused women support are a great start on society's part.

B) What can society do to promote the positive lessons I have learned?

"At the top step of positive self-actualization, I am independent and confident. The positive lessons I have learned are a big contribution to this fact. Still, I am

concerned about the support I will get from society. I wonder what society can or will do to support the positive lessons I have learned.”

One of the difficulties in overcoming intimate partner violence is the fear of what other people will say about you; likewise, how other people will treat you. Our society tends to support a victim-victimizer complement system. One person or persons are socially constructed as inferior to another person or persons. Inequalities based on racial, gender and socioeconomic differences are maintained to keep classes of unequal power between people; with the result that one side becomes seen as the victim (the less influential person) and one side as the victimizer (the more acceptable person of influence). As discussed previously, in terms of the individual experience, a woman's social status is more likely than a man's to be associated with the victim role because of gender inequality. She does not have the advantage that some men have of being automatically handed the resources and support needed to further enhance her positive lessons of perseverance, self-confidence and awareness. Indeed, these positive lessons are often discouraged by people, as their existence threatens the victim-victimizer complement system with which many are comfortable.

In fact it is the latter problem that raises the question: What can society do to promote the positive lessons learned by abuse survivors? First, I want to clarify my use of the term “society”. I am using “society” to represent a collection of individuals engaging in interpersonal relationships. These individuals can represent themselves in the personal, legal, business and social sense. For example, a female intimate partner violence survivor may wonder how the courtroom system will help promote the positive lessons she has learned. Within that courtroom system, however, I am specifically talking about the

collective individuals that make the courtroom system possible through their duties and the interpersonal skills applicable to the duties. Thus, I suppose the better question is: What can individuals, as a collective force, do in their interpersonal relationships to promote the positive lessons learned by survivors of intimate partner violence? Whalen (1996) has some suggestions in terms of women survivors:

[In the past], most women were seen as needing survival tools or material resources to survive and avoid further abuse. Many of the counselors thought that women needed an Alternative Education to relearn much of what they were taught growing up in our society as women. Counselors also thought, however, that women needed relational experiences with other women who had also experienced abuse---a relational relearning, as distinct from information-based learning. Some counselors spoke of the need for Symptom Treatment, implying a physical or psychological problem that needed remediation or healing (80 – 81).

Whalen emphasizes therapy for the low self-esteem and mental illnesses acquired as a result of the intimate partner violence. In my own experience, I was told that all I needed was the financial backing to support the positive lessons I had learned from surviving intimate partner violence. Financial support indirectly fosters the positive lessons learned by female survivors by alleviating the stresses associated with education, household finances and applicable childcare expenses. Although not a complete restoration of the abused woman's psyche, it is an important practical matter to understand that monetary compensation can be used to give a female survivor the leverage she needs to survive the intimate partner violence aftermath.

While there are other resources to consider, I will focus on counseling and money, as these are the primary ways in which society is currently working to support the

survivor's positive lessons. Out of the two, counseling is the more common resource utilized.

In counseling, the prevalent mindset is that the survivor needs to be “fixed.” “Fixing” her may mean several different things, such as redefining her criteria for an unhealthy relationship or creating a deeper dependence on her abuser. In my own discussions with therapists and counselors, I was surprised at the mixed messages I received. It was made clear that violence should never have been an option in my relationship; that abuse was wrong and that neither I, nor any other woman, for that matter deserved to be abused. However, I was questioned about my educational pursuits. Two of my counselors in particular attempted to change my mind about staying in school. Both of their views on gender were fairly traditional, in that, they felt that a woman's role was primarily to be a caretaker of her children and her husband. They actually commented that this role was an innate womanly duty and that I should fully embrace it.

I remember the confusion I felt during this time; I couldn't understand how these views could help me overcome the abuse. The irony of the situation was that these counselors were promoting the very gender expectations that had contributed to the abuse they readily claimed to be against. It was after these sessions that I realized that there are some professionals who approach their abused clients' with unhealthy views. It is unfortunate because these views contribute to keeping women in the same submissive role that contributed to the abuse in the first place.

Likewise, “fixing” her could simply involve igniting her awareness that she is not alone and that intimate partner violence can happen to anyone. The concept of “fixing”

the abused woman is equally applicable when money is the selected resource utilized in helping her.

However, rather than attempting to “fix” the abused survivor, it is my belief that society should concentrate instead on the conditions, both societal and individual, that allowed the intimate partner violence to occur in the first place. Individuals should address the constraints, liberties and lack thereof that contribute to making the abusive relationship. My reasoning here is not to neglect the needs of the abuse survivor; indeed, I am still in favor of her psyche being tended to. However, I believe that truly to remedy the structure of intimate partner violence, society has to focus on that which is causing the abuse and not simply mask it temporarily through attempts to “fix” each individual abused woman who seeks outside help. After all, if intimate partner violence can be eliminated, via the conditions that make it possible, then society would not need to handle the abundance of intimate partner violence cases that are currently accumulating.

In her book, Whalen organizes the political responses to intimate partner abuse into three main categories: the Women’s Affiliation model; the Women’s Equality model; and the Human Rights model (Whalen 90). These three social ideologies explain violence against women in terms of factors such as women not being valued, the lack of power and privilege for women, the current social learning of gender roles, as well as the failure to apply basic human rights. These factors are strong contributors to the problem of intimate partner violence. I argue that these are the issues on which society should focus when acting to support the positive lessons woman survivors have learned. Making the solution to intimate partner violence a human rights problem is particularly attractive

because it simultaneously works to address an abused woman's psyche and focuses on the conditions that allowed her to become abused in the first place.

A PERSPECTIVE ON MEN AS VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

I want to note at the outset that in the following discussion I am in no way attempting to assume what an abused male survivor feels. Although the resources that discuss the abused male are limited, I am appreciative to have discovered Cook's *Abused Men: The Hidden Side of Domestic Violence* (1997). Cook not only discusses the abused male experience in the third-person, but he also includes first-person accounts from abused men. Due to the expressed personal thoughts, feelings and experiences of these men who have been abused by women, I believe I am able to discuss the abused male experience with some confidence.

I. The Individual's Experience of Intimate Partner Violence

A) How could I be in an intimate partner violence situation?

“They asked me what was wrong. I did not reply. If I spoke too loudly the insecure emotions would show so I chose to remain silent. Deep down, however, I was still trapped by the realization that I was on the abused end of intimate partner violence. I am a man! That means I am strong, powerful, secure and don't have to take abuse! So how did I become a victim of an intimate partner violence situation?”

The realization that men can be abused by women puzzles many of us. True to the gender hegemony established by society, we all expect men to be more aggressive, stronger, controlled and unemotional. These expectations contribute to the idea that men are incapable of being vulnerable enough to experience abuse from a female partner. As with the abused woman, I propose picturing a man, before getting in an abusive situation, at the top of a series of steps. At the top of the steps, the man is confident, secure and in

control of his inner self enough to open up to a respective female partner. Unfortunately, some men travel down the steps into the “house” of an abusive relationship. The problem in understanding this scenario, however, stems from men, and society in general, not recognizing that there are aspects (steps) in a man’s life which allow him to experience intimate partner violence. The following is intended to explain that men, as well as women, can be victims of intimate partner violence.

Step 1: The issue of emotion

From the early years of childhood, most men are taught to suppress their emotions. More specifically, little boys are expected to play, think and act “tough”. There is little to no room allotted for tears, hurt feelings and lack of confidence. Whether they realize it or not, parents initially practice toughening up their male children and often deter any actions that are labeled as “soft”, “girlie”, “cry-babyish” or “weak”. This is not to say that little boys don’t get to cry or express their feelings from time to time.

According to Daniel Sonkin and Michael Durphy (1989), “most men are trained from an early age to make their evaluations by using only rational means---by thinking. [They] see something happening and add up the pluses and minuses. Then [they] have a judgment of what that thing means. Often [they] do not pay attention to [their] feeling response” (55). The fact is that boys will engage in their feeling expressions, yet, will be raised to decrease the frequency with which they want and *need* to express their feelings. The way we rear male children results in men who have not had the chance to fully develop and strengthen their emotional self. They deny themselves any emotional examination and pour all their energy into developing their physical external self.

This works well when a man keeps others at either an emotional and/or physical distance. The mechanism of actions used to achieve this distance creates a shell for men. Some men continue to protect themselves even when they do allow others to know them intimately. Other men, however, completely relinquish their protective barriers and discover that the same emotions they were taught to belittle and ignore are the ones that give their respective abuser the leverage to belittle and ignore them. “Whenever two people are in a close relationship there is bound to be some polarization and therefore some imbalance of power. In healthy relationships, the power shifts back and forth so that each partner at times has more power than the other” (Forward and Torres 148). The abusive woman will continue to shift the power in her favor by emotionally abusing her respective male partner. Initially, just as with male abusers, she is sweet and accommodating but then she uses the abused male’s trust against him.

Through a number of connected incidents, an abusive woman creates a system of abuse. Name calling, belittling household and/or occupational efforts, denying access to shared children, harassment in public and many other emotionally draining events from the initial constructs of the system of abuse. While women who abuse are just as likely as men to use physical violence (Malley-Morrison and Hines 53) it is my belief that many men victims of intimate partner abuse are damaged the most from emotional abuse. Once the shell of their masculine gender identity is penetrated, they no longer have any other defenses to handle the wounded feelings they experience. Malley-Morrison and Hines argue in their cross-cultural study that “as is true in regard to women, there is as yet no consensus as to what constitutes emotional abuse of men, although research on dating relationships supports the view that men can be emotionally abused, sometimes even

more so than women.” (Malley-Morrison and Hines 53). Insofar as the latter is true, it is likely a result of the fact that men typically don’t get as much practice as women in expressing their emotions.

Step 2: The issue of women abusers

It is true that, in most cases, the man is more physically powerful than the woman. And even when they are evenly matched, gender training again plays a role with most men being more familiar with their physicality than women. Thus, when a man is physically abused by a woman it is usually because he has chosen not to initiate physical abuse or retaliate with physical abuse. When a man initiates physical abuse, the abused woman is likely acting in self-defense if she responds with physical abuse. If the abused man acts in retaliation to the woman’s physical abuse, this suggests that the woman is abusing the man and *he* is acting in self-defense. In either case though, the relationship involves the woman making the unacceptable choice to use violence. In this section of my thesis, however, I discuss women who initiate the physical abuse of their male partner. In these instances, women are starting the abuse in their relationships and the likelihood of acting in self-defense is not applicable to these women. It contributes to men feeling weak and, since hitting the woman back is generally not an option for these men, they are often confused about how or if they should retaliate.

In fact, many men report a sense of bewilderment when discovering that they are on the receiving end of physical abuse. “For them, there are no rules as to how they should act or respond. They seem to be searching for a set of guidelines that do not exist. They want to apply logic to an illogical situation. Time after time, men telling their stories would ask, “What was I supposed to do? It is a plea for some direction.” (Cook

46) More importantly, it should be recognized that the decision has been made to not take the direction of an abuser. In fact, abused men who choose not to return the abuse are asking for help as opposed to continuing the stereotype that ALL men are violent, whether provoked or not. I don't think that it is ever okay for a woman to physically mistreat a man. It is important to recognize some of the ways that a woman can engage in the physical mistreatment of a man:

- She can throw things at him
- She can sleep deprive him
- She can attack the groin area
- She can bite him
- She can misuse alcohol and attack him
- She can use weapons against him

Now think about how and why this could happen to a man. The simplest explanation is that some men don't want to hit women and they believe that a few punches from a woman are just that, a few punches. One man recalls: "You don't hit girls, you just don't...I could hit back....the first time it happened, I was just shocked and figured it was a one-time thing. It was just one slap, and I blocked it, and that was the end of it or so I thought" (Cook, 47). Unfortunately, abusive women do not stop their violent actions. Much like abusive men, abusive women interpret the abused partner's lack of retaliation as weakness and acceptance of the abuse. They continue acting out in the abusive manner because they believe they are getting away with this mistreatment; if nothing else, the mistreatment keeps the power and control in the abuser's hands.

In attempting to understand how a man could find himself a victim of intimate partner violence, it is important to realize that the emotional and physical abuse work

together to diminish a man's psychological health. He is simultaneously pressured to maintain his manhood, as defined by society, and challenged to face his vulnerability, as defined by the relationship. As with any psychological damage, abused men lose core pieces of their identity. These core pieces can include self-confidence, interdependence skills, optimism and the ability to trust. As Sonkin and Durphy describe it, the "the aim of this psychological violence is to damage the victim's sense of self-worth, to make [him] feel powerless. [He] has to give up [his] own values, [his] point of view, in order to keep [her] from being out of control (Sonkin and Durphy 3). The consequence, however, is that the abused man forfeits his ability to control, in a healthy manner, in order to avoid the abusive woman's misconduct.

B) What would make me stay in an intimate partner violence situation?

"It did not take long for me to take the steps into the house. When I look back, I can't even see the top step anymore. I see that back door to freedom, but it is going to be hard to leave because I don't know what others will think once they find out I am an abused man. Since I can't use the back door to leave, I might as well take a seat in that comfy chair over there."

Once abused men figure out that they are being abused, they face another obstacle, as leaving the relationship is the next logical course of action, yet, it doesn't often run smoothly. We might expect that men can leave these relationships with no difficulty. After all, they are believed to be the stronger sex and are not expected to entangle themselves in relationships as deeply as women. Furthermore, they are not supposed to need a woman, rely on a woman or put all their focus into a woman to the

point of being unable to leave when the time calls for leaving. However, the previously mentioned steps illustrate that the aforementioned does indeed happen. Still, there has to be some reason why an abused man continues to stay in an unsafe situation. “Leaving the household in a hurry may have long-term adverse consequences. The phrase “possession is nine tenths of the law” has particular meaning in domestic relations cases. Leaving valued material possessions in the hands of vindictive [female partner] could result in their being damaged, sold, or destroyed” (Cook 103). If nothing else, a man is reared to economically thrive and take pride in the materialistic commodities he generally provides for the household. Thus, many men continue to accept the abuse versus risking the loss of a mortgaged home or even a co-owned vehicle. Likewise, many men will remain in abusive relationships to keep in contact with shared children, whether biological or not.

In fact, abused men report that their number one reason for staying with an abusive woman is fear of losing their children. Abusive women have the upper hand in controlling men through interactions with shared children. Much of this power is distributed by the court system, as, more times than not, a woman is awarded primary decision-making power over the shared children (Cook 26-27). While this fact works well for families who have less stable father figures, it greatly disadvantages men who should have more involvement with the respective shared children.

[Men] strongly believe that the judicial system is stacked against them because of their gender and that gaining custody of their children will be difficult if not impossible. Many believe that physical custody will be won by their spouse and that any visitation granted will be blocked or denied by their [female partner] in a continuation of controlling and abusive behavior (Cook 62).

Unfortunately, this was the case in the majority of custody disputes discussed by the abused male survivors in Cook's Book (Cook 62-78). Abused male survivors also have to worry about being falsely accused of sexual molestation and general physical abuse toward the shared children. The irony of these accusations is that most of these men, who don't retaliate with abuse, "strongly believe that it is their responsibility to provide for the children, and in many cases, they acted as protector of the children when their [female partner] was abusive to [the children] as well" (Cook 62). Given our attitude about the role of motherhood, which we assume includes the innate desire of women to protect their children (and certainly not be the one your kids need protection from), these facts seldom count when custody decisions are being made. Thus, abused men literally see leaving the domestic situation as a greater threat than the unhealthy consequences of staying.

Another overlooked reason for why an abused man stays in an intimate partner violence situation entails understanding the type of environment he grew up in. Some men are survivors of sexual, emotional and physical abuse. These types of abuse are often carried out by people the vulnerable male trusts the most, such as parents, clergy and teachers. The process involves molding the abused person's psychological self into a sponge for abuse. An abused male survivor, who has been systematically abused over time, will unconsciously seek out an abusive female partner. This is not to say that abused men will partner with a woman who immediately abuses them. Abused men will attract women who treat them in a manner similar to that displayed by the trusted individuals who abused them early on in their lives. There are a number of complex ways in which mothering and fathering can contribute to the likelihood that a boy will be

abused by his female partner as an adult. Although somewhat inaccurate stereotypes in current research, Forward and Torres discuss two of these parenting patterns in both fathers and mothers:

“Just as the **tyrannical** father sent his son to his mother’s arms by frightening him, the **passive** father sends his son back to mother by being withdrawn and unavailable to him.” (114); and “The **smothering** mother doesn’t permit her son to experience frustration, so he does not learn to deal with disappointments later in life. The **rejecting** mother frustrates her son to an unbearable degree, so that, he, too, cannot cope with frustration” (117).

Exposure to these and other problematic types of parenting can create a mental stranglehold which guides the way a man chooses his partner. Insofar as men grow up in an environment that fosters abusive practices, “....these [male] children are quite likely to reenact the same sort of family drama in their own relationships when they grow up” (Forward and Torres 85). Thus, abused men, who were abused early on, are more likely to remain in an abusive relationship.

C) How did I react to my intimate partner violence situation?

“This comfy chair is not the best place for me to be in. But how can I expect to leave out the back door if I stay sitting down? Well, let me stand up and walk toward the back door and see if I can leave this abusive relationship. I am nervous to see what is outside of the house, especially since no one would ever believe that a man like me could be on the abused end of intimate partner violence.”

“No man or woman wants to admit to the world that he or she has been physically assaulted by a mate. It is just not an easy thing to do. Most people want their home to appear to the rest of the world as a nice “normal” family situation” (Cook 52). It may not seem like a matter of importance to them but men are equally concerned with the threatening dynamics of the abused family. Their initial reaction is to protect the family structure and, oftentimes, this protection is obtained by self-sacrifice on the man’s part. Self-sacrifice is directly seen by the abused man’s decision to stay and endure the abuse. Other examples of self-sacrifice include continuing to take abuse for children, pets and other neighboring family members harmed by the abusive woman. In addition, abused men also experience other components of self-sacrifice that are not openly observed. These components are shame, ridicule and passive anger.

Shame

“For men, there is an added dimension of shame not faced by female victims” (Cook 52). Abused men are embarrassed to admit to society, let alone themselves, that they were harmed by their female partners. In both physical and emotional abuse, men typically don’t reveal abusive situations with others. Due to the pressures of their gender expectations, it is especially difficult for abused men to escape the shameful feelings associated with admitting to experiencing intimate partner violence. As mentioned previously, most of society has the view that men are not suppose to be victims of intimate partner violence; the assumption is that they are stronger and should not allow women to hurt them, let alone expose, their vulnerability. In fact, abused men experience more shame than women because of the stigma that men aren’t vulnerable. This view, coupled with a man’s insecurity, create the groundwork of the abused man’s shame.

Likewise, abused men struggle with how they should respond to being abused. In Cook's book, many of the abused male survivors discussed the times when they would ask other people the question "Are you saying I'm less of a man because a woman hits me, because I don't hit her back?" (Cook 52). Many of them also quietly asked themselves this question and, because of how the male gender role is socially constructed, found that the answer leaned more toward yes than no (Cook 52-53). Moreover, these men expressed concerns that part of the difficulty in addressing this question was the shame in admitting that a woman had hit them in the first place (Cook 52-54).

Ridicule

Another problem abused men face is ridicule. For the abused man, part of feeling shameful entails being afraid that people will make fun of him. Again, we can attribute this type of fear to the way the male gender role is socially defined. In being ridiculed, many abused men are specifically afraid they will be made into a joke. We constantly see TV shows where a woman slaps a man, or is violent in some other way towards a man, and it is interpreted as comedic (Cook 53). This is in opposition to our initial reaction of distaste when a man is violent towards a woman. The majority of society simply doesn't give men, particularly abused men, the opportunity to be socially regarded as human beings with feelings. It is my belief that the fear of ridicule is the leading factor contributing to why abused men remain silent. It is our social norms that corner men into hiding the abuse of their female abusers and, oftentimes, contribute to these men becoming abusive themselves. In one abused male survivor's story, Cook illustrated the typical scenario of an abused man facing ridicule: "I worked with a man who was an ironworker...an ironworker is the epitome of macho. This guy was big and his wife was

tall, but thin, probably no more than a hundred pounds. She kept putting him in the hospital. She kept beating him up with a baseball bat. Every time he came out of the hospital, they [his co-workers] were laughing him off the girders. They had no sympathy or empathy for him” (Cook 54).

Passive Anger

This anecdote describes well how passive anger can occur in many abused men. In Cook’s study, many of the abused men expressed feeling anger but did nothing to express how they felt to the female abuser; some even felt that their trapped anger signaled that they had finally been conditioned to the continual abuse (Cook 49-51). Thus, I use the description passive anger. As previously described, the fear of shame and ridicule block abused men from expressing their feelings and this results in these feelings being bottled up inside him. As with many abused women, the anger abused men feel is also suppressed by his hope that the abusive female partner will change. Much of this hope is fueled by the abused man believing the abuse is not as bad as it really is and/or his reluctance to admit he is being abused (Cook 49-51). In either case his anger is expressed only minimally, if at all, in the relationship. The unfortunate reality of this reaction is that it either produces an abusive man or encourages an already abusive man to continue the abuse.

Whatever reaction is chosen, abused men discover they are just as imprisoned by intimate partner violence as abused women. Unlike abused women, however, abused men have few resources to turn to when faced with the abuse. In fact, some abused men come to realize that it is their societal status that contributes to the continual abuse; particularly in the reporting of the abuse (Cook 85-87). Indeed, being a man, with all its social and

individual expectations, gives the abusive woman the power and control she needs to hurt him. We are not as aware of it as we should be, but it is our society that makes intimate partner violence acceptable for men and women in both the abuser and abused forms. This is especially relevant when observing how we treat the “abused man and abusive woman” situation so nonchalantly.

D) What positive lessons did I learn?

“I have been walking for a while. I am not sure if I have walked far enough from the house. Hey there are another set of steps. These steps lead up and I see some light coming from up there. Well, I have come this far so I can go see what is at the top.”

For the abused man, leaving an abusive situation can be difficult. The circumstances of his situation differ from a woman, in that, most abused men either stay longer in a domestic situation or some may never leave at all (Cook 26-28). As mentioned before, the socialized male gender role contributes the most in keeping abused men silent about their abusive situation. Fortunately, there are still positive lessons to be learned from the intimate partner violence, whether the abusive man leaves or stays in his abusive relationship. I would like to note that I am not implying that men are stronger than woman simply because they can still be in an intimate partner violence relationship and learn positive lessons from the abuse. Given the gender inequalities discussed, it should be understood that, while men can be abused, they still have more social power to stay in an intimate partner violence relationship and rebuild themselves. Ironically, it is this same social power that gives many of them no choice but to stay and rebuild

themselves. The steps taken by the abused men assist in giving them a different outlook on the situation and their gender role in general.

Step 1: Vulnerability

Initially, men who discover that they are in an intimate partner violence situation, as the abused partner, think they have a firm understanding of what it means to be a man. Likewise, these men think they have a firm understanding of what a woman *should* be like in relation to her male counterpart. Indeed, the social power allotted to the male gender seems to have no flaws and is highly ideal for the man who is not yet abused. It is not until a man becomes abused that he begins to understand exactly how he is trapped. Furthermore, abused men are put in a position to see through an abused woman's point of view; to see through any person's eyes that has experienced mistreatment from a trusted source. "According to feminist theory, [however], men cannot be victimized by women in a society in which males are dominant" (Malley-Morrison 247). In contrast, I would like to note that many feminists see men as trapped by societal roles and expectations and, thus, believe men can also be victims. These are the very concepts that abused men contemplate when accepting and appreciating the expression of their vulnerability.

In becoming an abused man, he has entered a limbo state, if you will, where he is neither the definition of the typical male gender or an equivalent male version of the abused woman. As most of society sees it, he can't be a man if he is getting abused by a woman, if he is letting a woman hurt him emotionally and/or if he can't stand up for himself (hit her back according to the "macho" rules). Thus, it stands to reason that he

could then be accepted on the side of abused women. That, it would seem, is unacceptable as well. Many abused women may feel more empathy for abused men than society in general, however, they will still see him as a man and place gender biases against him (Cook 157-158). Therefore, the abused man finds himself stuck in the middle with no place to turn to except for within himself.

The positive lesson that can be derived from this limbo state, however, is in understanding how to use the vulnerability he has expressed regarding the intimate partner violence. Abused men can advocate for changes in the way we label the male and female genders. They can speak up for men, all men, and open our eyes to the fact that men are people that can be damaged just as badly as women. That, in fact, it is the male domination of society that contributes to the “male on female” and “female on male” violence through the unjust structure of our gender expectations. If interpreted positively, the abused man can find strength in this newfound respect in expressing his vulnerability; as now his eyes are open to the freedom and imprisonment of being an abused man in a “man’s world”.

Step 2: Self-care

After any abusive experience, the abused person has to, or at least should, figure out what approaches he needs to learn for proper self-care; this self-care includes taking care of one's emotional, social and physical needs before anyone else's first. For the abused man, the concept of self-care can come as a positive lesson once he realizes that he is responsible to the individual (himself) first before the collective (society). He will learn this lesson the hard way because he will have to battle what society says is best for him depending on the social constructs of manhood. As mentioned before, most of

society and many abused women are not willing to accept the abused man. The abused man is seen as not being a victim because of his allotted social power and, yet, he is a victim because he fits the criteria that define abused women as victims; for instance, helpless, passive and weak.

Furthermore, this situation forces him to continue bearing the burden of family care, partner care and, to a point, society care. For some abused men, there comes a breaking point where the abuse is so severe that there is no choice but to face the lack of care they have given themselves. If this breaking point is not noticed, it can result in setbacks such as mental break downs, death (suicide and/or murder) and even retaliation of the abuse toward the female partner. To prevent reaching this breaking point, some abused men stop and reflect long enough to realize that part of the reason they were being abused is because they were ignoring themselves as valuable people (Cook 107-108). They were not properly caring for themselves; which is also a common setback for abused women who put the needs of the abuser before their own. Cook makes a few excellent points on the aspects of self-care for abused men:

Some of the affirmation opportunities the abused [man] should recognize include the chance to feel affectionate again, to not be depressed, to try new things, to meet new people, to talk honestly with others and to have one's feelings respected. Another positive way to celebrate, affirm and improve self-esteem is to give self-rewards (Cook 108).

It is intended, therefore, that abused men will hopefully learn that the intimate partner violence can be a stepping stone to participating in proper self-care.

Step 3: Awareness

As with abused women, fine tuning their awareness can be the most influential positive lesson an abused man can learn from his intimate partner violence situation. The main prospect of awareness for abused men is in recognizing how the gender roles hinder both genders from co-existing non-abusively. As Cook notes:

If we can free ourselves of the bonds of what we are “supposed” to be like as men and women---men are independent, forceful, physically tough, good at sports, fearless, emotionally controlled, and non-nurturing, while women are emotional, bad at sports, passive, weaker than men, dependent, and always nurturing---then we can have a movement *and* home life that sees ourselves first as human beings and only secondarily as two genders (Cook 161).

Likewise, abused men can take the stress of their intimate partner violence and learn how to recognize the difference between what is healthy for them and what is not healthy for them; whether anyone else agrees with the abused man’s definition of what is healthy or not for him. Indeed, the concept of awareness is what supports the positive lessons of vulnerability and self-care. As with the abused woman, an abused man, who actively searches out these positive lessons from his abusive situation, is able to see himself and the world around him in a more reassuring light. He understands himself better, as the intimate partner violence shows him he is an emotional being and can be hurt. He can now filter through the inequalities of his male gender expectations. Ideally, “there is opportunity for the man, by turning to his own essential maleness---putting on a “hero hat”---and accepting a challenge, to battle the fear of rejection” (Cook 106). One of his first steps in becoming that hero is awareness.

It is equally, if not more important, for abused men to obtain the aspects necessary to live as positively as they can, particularly on the psychosocial level. I

believe this because the current state of the male gender role does not support a man mentally and emotionally. Whether society agrees or not, a man's psychosocial health has more influence over him than all the physical and social power allotted to him. If we, as a society and individuals, continue ignoring this fact, abused men, and all men alike, will continue to suffer and the cycle of intimate partner violence will never cease. Abused men are equally long overdue for a peaceful, aspiring life.

II. Society's Role in Enabling and Alleviating Intimate Partner Violence

A) How has society contributed to my status as a victim of violence?

“Sometimes it is hard for me to know what to do. Am I a man if I show aggression and hit a woman or am I a man if I show self-control and don't hit a woman? There are too many conflicting messages from society on what makes me a man. How exactly have the interpersonal relationships I have experienced made me a victim of abuse rather than the abuser?”

As mentioned previously in the section on the individual male experience, men are faced with a difficult problem in intimate partner violence situations where they are the abused partner. Unlike their female counterparts, men have a higher risk of dealing with disbelief, ridicule and shame (both from themselves and others). Much of this is due to the socialized gender expectations placed on men. The male gender role is routinely regarded as macho, aggressive, insensitive, unemotional, tough and strong. Although not typically regarded as a caregiver in the sense of rearing children, the men are expected to take care of the household and family. This role is typically “breadwinner” and/or “head of the household”. Men often hide characteristics not consistent with their gender role.

These characteristics are labeled “feminine” and range from men expressing their emotions non-aggressively to being the primary caregiver of children. Society rears men to make the rules and support the inequalities created by the rules while punishing them for deviating from the stipulations of the rules. Therefore, men struggle with their place in domestic living in attempting to figure out which gender expectations of the male gender are correct to follow; their own or society’s.

The tension regarding the proper expression of masculine gender significantly contributes to the existence of intimate partner violence. Men are more likely than women to be pressured to be the abuser and use intimate partner violence as an outlet to exercise their gender privilege negatively. In many ways, men are pressured to be abusive because of the characteristics we expect men to have and because abuse of women is a direct technique to keep women in their socialized feminine roles. Since a man’s socialized rule is to be aggressive, society supports his role as the abuser, as he is maintaining the domination over the two genders as is expected and required of him in society.

The latter, however, is what causes a mental and social break for men who discover they have become the abused person of an intimate partner violence situation. It is the obligation of the breadwinner and the expectation of dominator that initially masks the warning signs of partner abuse toward the male. Likewise, once the abuse is directly identified by the abused male, it is also these very same things that halt the abused male from leaving the intimate partner violence. As stated in Cook's book:

It’s more difficult for a man than a woman to seek help. Men have been brought up with this macho upbringing, which I think is really a great disservice to men. They have this feeling that they must protect the women. If this means that they

have to take whatever the women dish out to them, they will. They'll stay. I find it very sad. They will come to our outreach group, and it takes a lot to convince them they should leave the relationship, and they should do the same things for themselves that the female victim does. It is much more difficult to get a man to make that change. Their role as being defined as protector of the home...Regardless of the fact that women are going out and working these days, men are still taught that it is their responsibility to provide. So, if you leave, you are abdicating your responsibility, and you are less than a man (Overberg in Cook 60 – 61).

In addition to having a sense of responsibility, men have to deal with not having permission to be vulnerable about their emotions, actions or even their logic. Unfortunately, the value of a man is more often determined by his masculinity, not his humanity. Seeing a man as a person with emotions, gentleness and general vulnerability has yet to surface as an option in the politics of gender relations. Thus, many men find it difficult to openly share their abusive experiences.

B) What can society do to promote the positive lessons I have learned?

“Now that I am on the top step looking out, I have a newfound understanding of what it means to be a man in a “man’s world” - Well, at least to be a man who has learned his value on a number of different levels. What will society do to enhance my enlightened self-awareness? Will society understand and be open to helping me further develop the positive lessons I have learned?”

A main focus of this thesis has been to explain how gender role expectations make it difficult for a man to express himself positively (non-abusively) in relationships.

To summarize, men are expected to be “macho” and to ignore any need to show vulnerability. Thus, when a man is abused, recognizes the abuse and speaks up against the abuse, he thereby shows his vulnerability, and has to figure out his new position in society. This, ultimately, means he has to replace current gender expectations with the newfound expectations he has constructed from the positive lessons learned from his intimate partner violence situation. As with abused women, one of the difficulties abused men face in overcoming intimate partner violence is the fear of what other people will say about them and how people will treat them. This fear is even more problematic for men and, unfortunately, is a concern that is hard to assuage. In the victim-victimizer complement system, male survivors find it difficult to get support from society---it is just not a reality we seem ready to fully accept. Given all of this, one might wonder what society is currently doing to help and/or support abused men. Likewise, one may wonder what society is currently doing to recognize the positive growth many male survivors experience.

First, it should be noted that society still has a long way to go in accepting that men are vulnerable to abuse. After all, the first step to addressing any problem is awareness that the problem does indeed exist. For the part of society that has recognized the reality of abused men, there are a few supportive practices, such as mutual restraining orders and criminal prosecution of abusive women, being utilized (Cook 142-143). Still, more needs to be done to address the prevalence of abused men. As Cook argues, “While it is not clear that there needs to be a large network of shelters for male victims at the present time, it is very clear that crisis lines that address their particular needs and concerns should be established” (Cook 157). Ideally, crisis lines will help address the

abused man's learned vulnerability because the existence of such services will illustrate to men that it is acceptable for them to admit and discuss their abusive situations.

Moreover, crisis lines can serve as an outlet for sharing hurt and confusion and can assist men in ways in which they can properly engage in self-care; talking to a non-judgmental third party will give the abused man objective advice about how he can build up and maintain a healthy mindset.

As we try to encourage the positive lessons learned by survivors of abuse, I believe we should focus on public education. Public education includes, but is not limited to, law enforcement education, socialized gender education, career option and domestic maintenance education and childrearing education. In other words, the goal should be to "...outline a plan for parenting and human relationship education at official, private, social service and school levels. The ultimate goal is to break the cycle of dysfunctional and violent families" (Cook 161). Ideally, investing our efforts in public education, on all levels, will greatly contribute to the newfound awareness shared by many male survivors of abuse.

In fact, public awareness is a key component in addressing the realities of people who are abused, particularly for men, especially since the superior status of men generally clashes so drastically with the inferior status of the abused man. The difficulties faced by those who want to help abused men are described as follows:

My feeling is that we are not touching the tip of the [iceberg] by our domestic violence programs as we see them today. We talk exclusively of women. The road to enlightenment has been a rocky one. Whenever I speak of male abuse, I am met with disbelief and, even worse, laughter. We are looked upon as being friends of the perpetrators rather than friends to the victims, because all males are supposed

to be evil and bad. If I mention [to staff] that we have a woman in here that deserves to be charged, rather than counted as a victim, I then become the bad guy. I notice in talking with other shelter staff throughout the state that this attitude prevails in the other shelters too ---men are the perpetrators, women are the victims (Dimmitt in Cook 157).

This quote saddens me because it illustrates how society reduces people to labels. A man is labeled as aggressive and strong so it is expected that he will be the one to cause hurt, not the one to receive or even feel hurt. A woman is labeled as emotional and weak so she isn't expected to be forceful enough to hurt a man. Her gender status only allows for submissiveness. It is clear that these stereotypes and labels hide the human side of every man and woman. It is my belief that intimate partner violence is about *human beings* hurting each other. Neither men nor women have any justifiable right to hurt each other.

As I come to a close, allow me to reintroduce details from the Human Rights Ideology model regarding the prevalence of violence. As Whalen explains "Within this ideology, violence [is] described in gender-neutral terms: emerging out of families, affecting victims, perpetrated by abusers and facilitated by the cultural desensitization to violence" (Whalen 94). Ideally, the gender-neutral view would be the type of perception society should adapt if the elimination of intimate partner violence is going to be a truly successful accomplishment. However, this view suggests that we could treat men and women the same in all aspects. This would mean that a parent could raise a son and daughter in exactly the same manner and ignore the gender differences that make men and women positively unique. The attempts to end violence cannot be accomplished by making the genders exactly equal in the social sense. It is not that simple, nor should it be, because I believe that it will be the gender differences that help men and women

complement one another in finding the solution to intimate partner violence. I believe that the only aspect that can truly be gender-neutral is the claim that no one deserves to be abused.

As far as the gender labels that sustain intimate partner violence, society is responsible for recognizing gender differences and finding an agreeable balance where gender differences do not lead to superior or inferior treatment of either gender. In examining what society can do to promote the positive lessons an abused man has acquired from his survival of intimate partner violence, society's best start will be treating men as the human beings they are, not the aggression-driven creatures they are labeled and characterized to be.

CONCLUSION:

I have discussed both women's and men's perspective as victims and survivors of intimate partner violence in heterosexual relationships. My discussion included critical analyses of the literature on abused women and men, and my own personal reflections. These resources helped answer some of the questions that plague both women and men who find themselves in abusive relationships. These questions opened up an array of discussion topics and, while I mainly focused on how socialized gender expectations are a pivotal contributor in sustaining intimate partner violence, there are many other factors to consider. To reiterate, the questions were as follows:

For women:

- What led me to my intimate partner violence situation?
- Why am I still in my intimate partner violence situation?
- How did I get out of my intimate partner violence situation?
- What positive lessons have I learned?
- How has society contributed to my status as victim vs. survivor?
- What can society do to promote the positive lessons I have learned?

For men:

- How could I be in an intimate partner violence situation?
- What would make me stay in an intimate partner violence situation?
- How did I react to my intimate partner violence situation?
- How has society contributed to my status as a victim of violence?
- What can society do to promote the positive lessons I have learned?

My answers to these questions challenge us to appreciate the importance of psychosocial health in surviving intimate partner violence. My research also works to increase awareness of the fact that men, as well as women, can be victims of intimate partner violence and how *the violence* can affects their lives. More than that, my research aims to

help past and future survivors of intimate partner violence realize that just because another person has chosen to abuse them this does not mean that living well is not an unobtainable goal; that, in fact, it was a choice for the abuser to engage in this destructive behavior; and that, likewise, it is a choice for them as survivors to nurture their physical *and* psychosocial wounds.

It is my hope that through my research and writing, other abuse survivors can find their own rainbows after their stormy rains of intimate partner violence. It is difficult to concentrate on the positive in a negative situation. However, I encourage those of you who have ever experienced intimate partner violence to continually work toward retraining your psyches to do just that. In the end, you will have gained so much more of yourself than you could have ever imagined!

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