

**'STILL WALKING ON EGG SHELLS': WOMEN'S LIVED  
EXPERIENCE OF STAYING WITH THEIR PARTNERS WHO  
HAVE COMPLETED ABUSIVE MEN'S TREATMENT GROUPS**

**by**

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**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK**

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**April, 1997**

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## ABSTRACT

Woman abuse is a serious problem in our society and our ready acceptance of men's treatment groups as a solution to woman abuse maybe short-sighted. Outcome investigations of abusive men's treatment groups have failed to include women's experience as a measure of treatment success and often disparity exists on whether success has been achieved. Many studies examine only physical abuse and fail to acknowledge the role of psychological abuse in relationships.

The goal of this study was to listen to the voices of those women who have stayed with their partners after the men have completed group treatment and to understand their day-to-day experience of living with the 'treated' man.

This feminist-oriented descriptive phenomenological study investigates five women, using face-to-face interview techniques. Descriptive information was generated from audio taped interviews. A metaphor emerged as the core phenomenon which participants described as 'still walking on eggshells'. This described the experience of living with their partners, post-group, and defined the essential element of the post-group experience. Within this core phenomenon, five themes were identified: safety, women's work of staying in the relationship, partner's use of power and control, concern for children and the role of the 'system'.

These descriptions of the essence of the post-group relationship allow us to hear from the women who experience the daily reality of "still walking on egg shells", a perspective often unheard and therefore unacknowledged. These perspectives indicate a need to review our current treatment options for abusive men as a means of providing greater safety to women.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None of what I have done would have been possible without the involvement of the courageous and honest women whom I interviewed. They took risks in talking to me. Their trust in my ability to describe their lives is immense. Their strength as women who continue to care and to hope is inspiring. I acknowledge the courage of those women who shared with me their stories and all women who struggle each day to find a way to be safe.

I am indebted to my long time friend, Sue McNeil for her hours of transcribing and patience with my schedule. She cares about this issue otherwise she would not have contributed the hours she did. I owe her much. A special thanks to my friend Carol Usher for the proofing and corrections.

To the staff at Attorney General Branch, Government of British Columbia, Adult Probation, especially Ursula Morris; to Diana Nakamura and Bev Zorn, Victim Support Workers, what you did may have seemed minor but it allowed me to reach the women whose voices must be heard and validated. Your co-operation has been a valuable contribution to the work of abused women.

I am ever thankful to the members of my committee, Barbara Isaac, my thesis supervisor, who gave me heart to continue and who believed in what I was doing even when I had lost faith in my ability to proceed. I am grateful to Barbara Herringer and David Del Mar, my thesis advisors, who worked with my deadlines and were there if I needed them. It is strong women and men like these people who will be a large part of finding the solution to woman abuse. They helped me to understand the ways of the academic and the balance of wisdom one must have in order to promote the cause of safety for women.

And last but never least, my deepest thanks go to my family who have stood by me through the intense years of my work. To my son Ky, my love and gratitude for cooking dinners and for those special hugs that kept me going as I madly typed away. To my daughter, Rissa, whose strength and questioning has kept me grounded, my love and thanks for your presence in my life. To my husband and friend, Larry, I want to acknowledge your role in holding things together so I could invest more of myself in this wonderful process of learning. You have challenged me to question more than you will ever realize. Thank you for believing in me.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Joyce Beattie, who has, unknowingly, inspired me to seek the answers to the issue of woman abuse. Her strength kept us all together and her loving kept us strong despite many difficult years.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction and Literature Review

#### Introduction

Woman abuse is a serious problem in our society, indeed it has been deemed to be a crime. The solution to this problem that we appear to have accepted most readily in North America is the use of group treatment as an effective intervention. Determining effectiveness however, is a much more difficult and often ignored issue. The women who stay with their partners after these group interventions are seldom heard from in the determination of whether or not the group has been effective in increasing the levels of safety in their daily lives. The focus of this study is the women who stay with their partners after group treatment, what their lives involve after their partner is treated and how they would determine the effectiveness of group intervention.

A number of issues must be considered when any examination of violence against women is undertaken. These include an historical perspective of the problem, the social structures that respond to and, or support the problem, the political, social and community responses to the problem and finally, but certainly not less important, women's voices and their experiences. The purpose of this enquiry is to explore and understand the lived experience of these women. It is through the description of their experience, uncovered through my interviews, that I hope to inform the discourse surrounding this seldom debated issue. It is hoped that by documenting their experiences of living with their partners who have completed group treatment we may be better able to understand and eliminate violence against women.

## Historical Context

The historical context of violence against women is closely related to our patriarchal development as a society and culture. Little has been studied on this issue as few historians have attempted to reach into the private domain of abusive men and abused women, instead preferring to leave this often times shameful and private matter, private (Peterson del Mar, 1996).

Throughout history, the family has been seen as a sanctuary where physical violence among family members is permissible and the explicit right of certain family members. However as one historian, Metzger (1978), concludes, "Men today batter their wives for the same reasons that men have battered women throughout history: because they have believed it is their right, their privilege and the duty to do so" (p.66). The early 1970's and the feminist movement opened up public and private discussions of this previously hidden issue. Since then, research, studies, literature and media have begun to more actively investigate the phenomenon of woman abuse.

Religion has played a strong role in the construction of our current day ideals about the nature of women and the social relationships between women and men. The consequences of theological thinking has had profound impact on every women in society today whether religiously involved or not. Throughout the Bible the fundamental notion of women is that they are property belonging to men and that their sexuality belongs to their husbands, fathers or brothers, not themselves (Milne, 1995). Women are perceived as a danger to men and their "bodies and words are deemed dangerous not to just a man's honor but to his very life. They create the need to silence women's voices and to control women's bodies" (Milne, 1995, p.49).

Women throughout the Bible are deemed inferior and subordinate to men. They are oppressed through the use of metaphorical text which are woman-blaming such as the story of Adam and Eve. It is the religious ideology of gender which has formed much of the basis for our

traditional beliefs of what constitutes family in today's Canadian society. During the late nineteenth century, the Church and State worked in partnership to allow women a role in the changing society. While the Church developed the "social gospel" movement, a movement recognizing women as an "agency of Christian Women", the State took advantage of women's movement into the public work arena to utilize women in a "grand mission of mothering" (Baines, 1991). This statement, by the first President of the National Council of Women, Lady Aberdeen, was indicative of women's role expansion into larger society, often as unpaid labor. This work was not new work. It was an extension of our caring roles in the home out into the public sphere (Baines, 1991). Women became a necessity for both the church and the state to proceed with their plans for social development. However, the emergence of women into the area of social action did not give us an equal position in society. While this did provide an opportunity for solidarity, women maintained their public role as members of women's organizations, working for women and children in institutions like hospitals and schools, under the watchful control of male clergy and male patrons. Even today the religiously conservative forces of the church and state continue to insist that women's proper role is in the home as wife and mother, with their primary function being to procreate. If they do play a public role, this ideological partnership of state and church allows women a less remunerated, less accessible role, one which clearly defines women's insubordinate status. It is this socially constructed attitude towards women within which men assume the 'right' to abuse women.



### Social Context

People tend to reduce violence to an individual level. Instead of questioning the systemic disparities that reinforce violence, people generally see only the individual characteristics and attributes that constitute violence. This type of 'reductionism' is the central approach used when studying men's violence against women (Morash, 1986). Men's individual psycho-pathology is used to analyse this issue (Dutton, 1986), and the women who are abused are reduced to individual characteristics that make them stay in the abusive relationship (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1990).

When examining woman abuse, individual characteristics are only one part of the analysis. A social context is also needed. While a social analysis may appear to deny the individualized impact on the victim and take responsibility from the offender, it is not intended to do so. Instead, a socially-oriented paradigm for example, feminist thinking, allows for abuse to be viewed in the context in which it occurs and, importantly, to see where the solutions to the problem may be apparent.

Abuse of women in relationships reflects the disparity of distribution of power as well as the social norms condoning violence that are evident in society as a whole. "Canadian society remains fundamentally patriarchal" (Milne, 1995, p.44). Patriarchy is defined as "a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions" (Humm, 1989, p.159). Our society is considered patriarchal in that men fill most influential decision-making positions; they control the majority of the country's capital, and still have preferential access to education (Milne, 1995). There are a number of specific beliefs in our society that are maintained by certain behaviors. Patriarchy is one belief that supports the injustice which allows the maintenance of women's oppression.

Another belief, that 'might makes right', is supported by violence or the threat of violence (Bishop, 1994). The use of both violent and nonviolent means of controlling women is condoned by the larger cultural and social structures that sanction men's violence against women (Gagne, 1992). Social controls of women are also enforced through the continuation of other variables such as low wages, poor work opportunities and limited access to child care. This restricts them economically and hinders their autonomy. Male social control of women is an accepted part of women's every day life (Green, Hebron & Woodward, 1989). Because this control is a social norm, it is seen as legitimate and even thought to be 'natural', especially when sanctified by the state of matrimony. The invisibility of women's work as caregivers in our industrialized society allows men to expect women's services without recognizing their reliance upon these services. When access to this invisible service is denied, male violence escalates as men perceive a threat to their control (Pennell, 1995). Should women resist men's authority and male privilege, then they live with the fear of retribution, perhaps in the form of violence. Most women are socialized to avoid conflict, fear violence, defer to men, concede, change the subject or blame themselves for erring (Langford, 1994) in an attempt to maintain the harmony in their relationships.

These processes are the same for women living with abuse, although perhaps more exaggerated. For this reason a sensitivity to their partner's behaviors and their perception of danger are more acute. Thus, the social context of woman abuse is important in understanding the issue of safety for women after their partner's completion of a treatment group.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

There is clear agreement that abuse of women is a problem in our culture today. There is less agreement about whether this abuse is a family problem or a more universal issue of oppression of women. Beneath the stated opposition to woman abuse is a complex definition of the issue and varied reaction to that definition. As we search beneath the outer camouflaging of mainstream reaction to woman abuse, there appears a more yielding substance and more complicated response to the issue. These reactions depend on norms, values and socialization of the individual or organization that is addressing the issue. In North America, we have primarily chosen to address this issue from a 'family violence' perspective, seeing violence as an interpersonal issue between all family members. Thus, funds have been designated, women's shelters erected, groups to treat male offenders established and campaigns begun to send a social message about the unacceptability of this family issue of violence. Thus, I explore this concept in greater depth in the literature review.

This raises the question of whether this approach is working if we have not seen a reduction of violence against women in the twenty years that men's treatment groups have existed. Because there is a wide discrepancy in what is considered success in treatment of abusive men (Edelson & Tolman, 1995), determining the impact and effectiveness of abusive men's treatment groups on women becomes an arbitrary task. Women are often not included in the process of determining effectiveness yet it is for their safety that the groups exist. One could argue that until a standard definition of effectiveness is established, researchers will continue to define their own parameters of success thus perhaps producing a varied and skewed perspective on effectiveness.

Effectiveness is generally defined along a continuum with some researchers having used

statistically significant reductions in physical violence to demonstrate program success (Neidig, 1986) while others approach the definition as the completely refined alteration of program participants as pro-feminist men (Gondolf, 1987). The major controversy surrounding the evaluation of abusers' programs focuses on the extent to which one will go in defining violence as an issue of more than physical proportions.

Another term utilized in these discussions but seldom defined is 'safety'. Again, some researchers will define safety as the reduction of physically harmful incidents (Straus, 1979) while other researchers will study safety as a reduction of physical and psychological incidents (Harrell, 1991). The British Columbia government's guiding principles cites, "The safety of women and children is paramount" (1992, p.32), yet they fail to define safety other than to refer to stopping all forms of violence as a goal of *most* programs. Safety then is not standardized nor is it explicitly defined. For the purpose of my research I have defined 'safety' as the absence of danger or threat of danger, whether physical or psychological. By including the concept of *threat* in the definition of safety, many studies on evaluation of effectiveness would be unacceptable. By including *threat* in the discourse, we may begin to validate women's experiences and give them opportunity to include threats as a valid part of their reality and experience.

My research question asks women, who have been abused by their partner and who have stayed after he has received treatment, what their life is like now. Would they define their lives as safer? What is the life quality of this relationship? If men's treatment groups are indeed a service for women as well as men, then why are women addressed in the research only in the context of quantitative reports? My belief is that women are the best source from which to determine both the impact and the success of men's treatment groups. I also believe that the important knowledge will be found in the voices of these women and their experiences.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Currently treatment groups for abusive men are the solution most referred to in the issue of violence against women. There are a growing number of researchers and practitioners however, who are questioning their effectiveness or 'success' (Gondolf, 1987; Hart, 1992 Edleson, 1995) as we cannot always ethically assure women that these groups are effective. Yet it is the men's involvement in such groups that many times prolongs women's involvement in the abusive relationship. My research explores whether we are providing an illusion of safety and therefore hope for women, which in fact we cannot prove or support. Many women stay in the abusive relationship because their partner is receiving 'help'. Are we giving 'help' to men that in turn assures the 'safety' of their women partners? Social workers, clinicians, practitioners and policy makers base their acceptance of the use of men's group's on the belief that they are effective. They often do not have the time or in the case of rural and northern workers, the access to information that would allow them to question and find alternatives that better provide for the safety of abused women in their care. Research that is inclusionary in its language, and qualitative in its design may assist many individuals and bureaucrats in making better decisions on behalf of their clients, decisions that will ensure women's safety.

We know that women who leave their partners are at greater risk of being murdered (Cooper, 1994; Wilson & Daly, 1993). This possibility requires that the decision to leave or to stay is one that could cost them their lives, either way. To be able to provide an alternative to the risk of being murdered for leaving or being further abused and possibly murdered for staying, is a necessity rather than a luxury for women. If we can listen more carefully and certainly more often to the women who stay after the treatment group, then policies, financial support, community initiatives and support services would possibly be more responsive to the issue of women abuse



in all its dimensions.

### Literature Review

Two competing paradigms are the basis of a controversy about violence against women, which splits researchers, academics and practitioners. Depending on where one stands in experiencing the world, violence against women can be considered an issue of interpersonal conflict or an issue of societal oppression. Each perspective provides a place from which to examine the issue of violence against women.

Literature on violence is prolific, so it is helpful to recognize that the issue of violence has many intra-personal configurations: men against men, women against children, men against children, children against children, women against women and men against women. While each of these dimensions is of significance to the field of social science, this paper will specifically address men's violence against women who are their partners. Men's violence against women has not only the highest reported numerical incidence, with one in three British Columbia women being assaulted by her husband or partner (Statistics Canada, 1993), but this problem has an added dimension often overlooked in the mainstream discussion of the issue. As with most forms of violence, violence against women is primarily one of oppression (Smith, 1979, Russell and Cory, 1996) and is essentially a gender issue which is deeply rooted in society's patriarchal values and beliefs.

Violence against women has not decreased despite our hard work to find effective solutions for addressing this issue. However, one of the most critical aspects of violence against women is our society's tendency towards naive acceptance of solutions for addressing this crime. Men's treatment groups for violence are one solution that we have accepted as a primary answer

to ending violence against women. Yet we know that in working with men who batter we are only reaching a very small percentage of these men. At least one million Canadian women are beaten each year (MacLeod, 1987). There are an estimated 150 programs across Canada. Most programs take in approximately 180 men per year and drop-out rates in most programs are large (Dufresne, 1995). The numbers do not seem to add up, but it is not simply the quantity of men who complete treatment, but more importantly the quality of that treatment that effects continued change. Still, we continue to use these groups to deal with the issue and, in examining the solution of effectiveness of men's treatment groups, the perspective of women is often left out.

Violence against women is often disguised as family violence and this can be misleading. It masks, for example, who is abusive and who is abused. In spite of this, many of the more widely accepted researchers (Straus and Gelles 1986, Gelles and Maynard, 1987) continue to frame the issue as family violence with multidimensional causes. Their labelling of the abuse issue suggests joint responsibility between men and women. There is, however, concern that this view allows researchers, clinicians, and policy makers to relegate this issue away from the public domain and back to the private domain of the family. Such a construction allows individuals as well as political, economic and religious structures to absolve themselves of the responsibility in looking at societal constructs and power inequities as central to violence against women.

Because there is limited material focussing on the women's experience of men's treatment groups, the literature search for my research was expanded to include research on the effectiveness of group treatment as a means of preventing further violence from those men toward women.

This review is organized to move from the larger issue of defining violence to the specific area of the group treatment of violence against women, its effectiveness in changing abusive men

and finally my focus on the experiences of their female partners. Hence, an attempt is made to locate research that examines women's and men's relationships after the man has completed treatment. I start with locating the issue of violence in its societal context and naming the issue in order to move toward a de-psychologized context. I finish the review with a grounding of the issue in women's experience.

### Naming the Problem

Though there is a presumed neutrality in language, language is a human construction. The act of naming violence, of choosing whose language will define violence, is a political act. Choosing neutral terms like *family violence*, *domestic violence*, *spouse abuse*, serves to minimize and obscure the conscious nature of this criminal attack against women (Fine, 1993). It also serves to distort and mislead the discourse away from the central issue of oppression. By naming it *woman abuse* we contextualize the issue not as one of the family as the central unit of study but the power relationship between men and women as the key area of analysis.

The definition of violence against women is broad and encompasses a wide array of behaviors which describe acts of aggression and destruction. For the purpose of this literature review, violence has been confined to violence between male and female partners irrespective of their legal marital status. Deciding on the working definition, however, becomes harder because definitions are conceptually confused and remain elusive. There is no unified definition of woman abuse from a feminist perspective (Taylor, 1991) nor from a family violence perspective (Strauss & Gelles, 1986).

Definitions of wife abuse, marital battering or violence against women range from physical abuse definitions where the term 'woman abuse' describes more than marital abuse; it



includes physical attacks by a person with whom the victim has a relationship involving cohabitation and sexual intimacy (Halsted, 1992), to the more multidimensional, gender and power-oriented definition provided by Linda MacLeod:

A loss of dignity, control, and safety as well as the feeling of powerlessness and entrapment experienced by women who are direct victims of ongoing or repeated physical, psychological, economic, sexual and/or verbal violence or who are subjected to persistent threats or the witnessing of such violence against their children, other relatives, friends, pets, and/or cherished possessions by their boyfriends, live-in lovers, ex-husbands or ex-lovers, whether male or female (MacLeod, 1989, p.16).

These terms are not, however, legal ones. They are sociological terms which limit or expand the area being studied, depending on the choice of definition. One of the ways in which we decontextualize the issue of violence against women is in the limiting of the definition to that of physical violence only. Many researchers (Bograd, 1988; Browne, 1993; Brinkerhoff and Lupri, 1988; Dutton, 1988, Kennedy and Dutton, 1989; Smith, 1990) focus solely on the physical abuse, conveying a message that these acts are worse than psychological abuse. Yet practitioners know from listening to women that women disagree. For example, in studies done by Lenore Walker (1979), women described incidents of psychological humiliation and verbal abuse as “their worst abusive experiences” (DeKeseredy & Hinch, 1991, p.9), regardless of whether they had been physically attacked. Some Canadian researchers formulate their research based on both physically violent and psychologically abusive behaviors (Lupri and Price, 1990), but many Canadian women who are beaten are also economically and sexually victimized by their partners (DeKeseredy & Hinch, 1991).

Considering the fact that many researchers attempt to limit and decontextualize woman abuse, I disagree with Gelles & Cornell (1985), who believe that it is necessary to restrict definitions to physical behaviors because “lumping all forms of malevolence and harm-doing

together may muddy the waters so much that it might be impossible to determine what causes abuse”(p.23). How do we begin to define woman abuse in a context which incorporates the many ways in which a woman is abused and victimized?

Another way in which we lose the full context of woman abuse is in defining threats of violence as a less severe form of violence ( Edleson & Brygger, 1986; Straus and Gelles, 1986). These narrow definitions, which address only the physical aspects of violence or which minimize the quality of the experience by rating violence on an arbitrary continuum, support a piecemeal approach to the issue and result in an unevenly developed definition which represents unevenly developed responses toward violence against women.

Within this array of definitions two distinct perspectives are apparent. One is the view of *family violence* as a part of a pattern of violence that occurs among all family members (Gelles and Strauss, 1988). This perspective agrees that women's subordinate position is a contributing factor to the interplay of violence but it takes the position that this subordination is just one of many causal factors. Included in this perspective are psychological and sociological definitions which seek to understand wife abuse through examination of the individual characteristics of men and women, or the social factors in the individual's environment. The other perspective is a *feminist approach* which perceives gender as central to the issue and places inequality and oppression at the center of the discussion (Bowker, 1983; Jones, 1994; Russell and Cory, 1996; Thorne -Finch, 1992; Yllo, 1988). Each of these approaches treats women differently and, therefore, has different consequences for our understanding of the issue of violence against women. Understanding these controversial perspectives is fundamental to understanding and naming one's orientation toward the issue of violence.

The feminist movement must be credited with establishing the concept of wife abuse in

our vocabulary (Schechter, 1982). It is feminists who are committed to social action perspectives, who have enabled us to rename this phenomenon as one of woman abuse thus identifying the issue as one that exists for all women regardless of their marital status. There is growing concern that renaming it once again is covering the sexism that this movement worked hard to uncover (Jones, 1994). Adopting genderless terminology like *domestic violence* and victim blaming terms that focus on the woman like *wife abusers* will serve to placate the funding sources, many of whom are men who control the finances. These terms allow the focus of responsibility to be taken from the man and placed on the woman or the family. In using terms that are directed towards women and by minimizing the role men play in the "social problem", we are once again obscuring the central issue of oppression.

It is clear, however, that the definition of violence one chooses either allows us to more narrowly describe the oppressive behaviors of particular agents (in this case male partner's) or to serve as a rich source of information that contributes to societal change.

### The Societal Context of Violence Against Women

Much of the literature written by family violence advocates gives only a cursory acknowledgment of structural issues of violence against women. Aside from their contention that violence in the family is fairly equally distributed among family members, this position isolates three causes of violence in contemporary society: family structure, the family's acceptance of violence as a means of resolving conflict and family socialization of children to be violent. (Kurz, 1993). Societal constructs are considered as an extension of the family dynamics, a move of the private world into the public world. Interestingly, it is this very language, 'private and public', which indicates the more positivistic views of family violence proponents. In a male-dominated

world where language itself reflects male experiences, the words 'public and private' may fail to define or describe a woman's experience. They may be incongruent with the naming of their experiences because terms like 'private and public' "construct a distinction that obscures women's multiple crisscrossings of fluid and constantly shifting boundaries" (Devault, 1990, p.97).

Family violence researchers such as Strauss and Gelles (1988) recommend societal policy changes such as media controls, public awareness campaigns, reduction of violence provoking stresses such as unemployment and poverty and encouraging extended family support networks. However, while these seem positive at first glance, such policies focus on "particular forms of violence (such as wife battering) and conceptualize them as problems faced by individual victims" (Levan, 1996, p.319), and not as societal issues which require massive structural change.

In contrast, feminist researchers attempt to develop a theoretical concept of the systemic causes of violence against women, "and the common links between its various forms" at the same time as criticizing the "state's tinkering approach" (Levan, 1996, p.319). However, large scale social interventions on a structural level are not valued or supported by society. Instead, social policy makers have teamed up with liberal feminists in rewriting the agenda to reflect a family violence perspective. Evidence of this can be seen in such studies as Changing the Landscape (Canadian Panel on Violence against Women, 1993), where state and liberal feminists were happy to keep the issue of violence against woman outside the mainstream agenda.

The final report of Changing the Landscape, a document written to address and make recommendations for policy and practice change regarding the issue of violence against women, makes a clear statement that any plan to address the roots causes of violence would require major policy initiatives. Because this redress would require challenging male privilege and patriarchal

ideologies firmly entrenched in the Canadian government, it is likely that "future governments will revert to addressing single issues and working within limited and familiar arenas such as the criminal justice system" (Levan, 1996, p.350). There is a limited social mandate from policy makers and funding agencies to assist men in ending the use of illegal violent and threatening behaviors (Edleson, 1995).

In seeking to explicate the politics of gender, power and violence inherent in battering, an understanding is needed of the institutional structures that sustain violence against women as well as the goals of these institutional structures in addressing violence. Within the literature we see the stated goals of government, men's programs and researchers as being the achievement of 'safety' for women. "Intervention programs for men who batter are foremost committed to the safety of battered women and children, and, therefore, structure each component of their work so as not to jeopardize the wives/partners and children of those in intervention programs" (Hart, 1992, p.1). In spite of this, the definition of safety for women is not generally defined or explored. Defining 'successful treatment' becomes an arbitrary task, dependant on both society and the treatment provider's perceptions of safety.

The next section of this review will examine the abusive men's treatment programs, their typologies, evaluation studies and assessments of effectiveness.

### ABUSIVE MEN'S GROUP TREATMENT EVALUATIONS

A number of treatment approaches have been described in the literature and, although most agree on the use of groups as the medium for treatment, there is limited agreement on the philosophy or treatment goals.

Gondolf (1987) describes three major program types based on differences in affiliations, formats and orientation. This includes counselling under the auspices of mental health and family



services, adjuncts to women's shelters and self-help organizations or men's anti-sexism collectives. There is a significant increase in programs centered around a clinical and professional orientation, focussing on family violence and a cognitive-behavioral approach which operates from a belief in men's skill deficit (Gondolf, 1987). Practitioners have overwhelmingly preferred cognitive-behavioral treatment approaches when intervening with men who batter (Eisikovits & Edleson, 1989). For example, of sixteen well-known programs evaluated by Burns, Meredith & Paquette (1991), twelve programs were described as cognitive behavioral approaches.

These programs do not stray far from their roots in psychology. In 1978, Ganley developed the first of these programs. She advanced a social learning orientation which focussed on improving conflict resolution skills and other adjunctive skills such as communication, assertiveness and anger management (Dutton, 1995). These programs continue to psychologize men's abusive behaviors and favor skill acquisition as the main method of treatment (Dutton, 1995). Anger management, stress reduction and communication skills are a few of the areas covered. "This [skill] deficit model, however, fails to explain the situational aspect of abuse" (Russell and Cory, 1996, p.7). Research demonstrates that abusive men had no specific problems in anger or stress management, nor were they deficient in conflict resolution skills other than with their woman partners (Russell and Cory, 1996).

An important result of these skill deficit programs is their danger in creating a reduction of physical abuse and an increase in psychological battering. "Indeed, programs that have focussed on anger control or anger management, communication skills, or self-esteem have many times aided the batterer in becoming a more successful psychological batterer" (Tift, 1993, p.82). One explanation for this change in the pattern of battering is put forth by the batterers themselves, "As some batterers have stated, that they are willing to abstain from the use of

violence as long as they can continue to manipulate and control their partners through threats” (Edleson & Brygger, 1986, p. 381). The implications for this are that we may in fact be facilitating a re-formulation of men’s violence from the physical realm, which is sanctioned against in law, to the psychological realm which is beyond the law. These programs then allow the offender refuge from culpability and from criminal sanction and do not necessarily provide safety for women.

Such programs fail to address the hierarchical social arrangement of the family which, itself, reflects a structural arrangement that reinforces the continuation of violence against women. “Teaching abusive men how to relax and communicate more without challenging the underlying misogyny provide abusive men with more subtle and effective tactics of control” (Holmes and Lundy, 1990, p.13). It is these approaches that focus mainly on the psychological changes for men, that often create problems for women. By dealing with these issues on an individualistic level, sexist attitudes and behaviors are not challenged. This leaves them as socially sanctioned and, therefore, reproduced.

A second approach assumes that men are themselves victims or witnesses of abuse in childhood and in need of psychological healing and self-concept building. This model, termed by Adams (1988) as the ‘insight model’, holds intra-psychic problems in men as its central premise. Men are attributed with problematic behaviors such as poor impulse control, fear of intimacy, dependency and fear of abandonment or underlying depression as the problems. The abusive man is viewed as fragile, tormented, confused and in need of support (Jenkins, 1992) This approach risks transforming the man into a victim and absolving him of the responsibility for his actions (Holmes & Lundy, 1990). There is also a danger that group leaders who facilitate or escalate this approach face possible collusion with the ‘victim’ and are then unable to confront the men as

accountable for their behavior (Holmes and Lundy, 1990).

One of the most common approaches is to combine cognitive behavioral and insight approaches. Using developmental factors, socialization and skill acquisition, this type of program attempts to address the man's violence from both an awareness and skill deficit perspective (Sakai, 1991). In addition, some programs will attempt to add a power and control perspective which focuses on men's attitude in justifying the abuse and a range of abusive controlling behaviors which attempts to targets change at all levels (Pence and Paymar, 1993). Some programs have adapted the latter model to be completed in a shorter time than the original program advised. Demand for space in groups from court referrals and limited funds from government have resulted in twelve or sixteen week groups totalling a maximum of fourty eight hours, that attempt to address second order change in a very finite time period, often with conflicting results. Though a rigorous study of alternative treatments found that there were no gains associated with longer treatment (Edleson, 1990), programs of short duration on the other hand, have been criticized as too limited and not intense enough (Hurrell, 1991; Gondolf, 1984). The difficulty in combining all three approaches is that the mix of goals is, perhaps, in opposition to the priority of treatment which is the safety of women. And no matter which the current choice of treatment philosophy, we have not seen a significant reduction in reported assaults over the twenty-year period that men's treatment groups have been in existence (Levan, 1996).

A small number of newer programs look exclusively at changing men's belief systems regarding women's roles (Holmes and Lundy, 1990; Russell & Cory, 1996). These programs attempt to change attitudes towards women by confronting traditional male socialization. This approach focuses the issue of violence on the patriarchal society which allows men to control and dominate women. Unlike the Duluth model, which focuses mainly on the individual man's need



for power and control, this program expands the discussion to include societal socialization and ideologies which support the individual's beliefs and behaviors. The program confronts, challenges and alters belief systems on a structural and individual level. Using "women-centered challenging questions" to alter belief systems, the goal of this type of program is to secure the well being of women and not necessarily the psychological remedy for men (Russell & Cory, 1996). A possible dilemma in separating these two goals is that men will not give up their power if there are no apparent advantages to doing so.

Evaluation studies of groups based on any of these philosophies vary in terms of reported success. In 'cognitive-behavioral' and 'insight' models, success was generally defined as the decrease in physical abuse as reported by the abusive man and his therapist and, in some cases, in consultation with the abused women (Gondolf, 1987). These were mainly measured by quantitative means such as the Control Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979), The Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI) (Tolman, 1987) and the Generalized Contentment Scale (GCS) (Hudson & McIntosh, 1981). Use of these clinical scales has been criticized for measuring only a "narrow band of perpetrator behavior to the exclusion of the effects that such 'tactics' have on victimized women and children" (Edleson, 1995, p.2). Hence, women's definition of safety is not addressed.

An examination of batterer's programs by Jeffrey Edleson (1995) questions the criteria by which these evaluations have been determined successful. He has found that the majority of programs using statistical significance change as a criteria are not only problematic but that "as a criterion of success.....it may have little practical significance"(p.1). It is this concept of 'practical significance' that is becoming an alternative measure for practitioners intervening with batterers. The term 'practical significance' relates to the concept of whether indeed batterer's programs

have any positive day-to-day impact for the woman in the relationship. Researchers are beginning to address both the complete cessation of *actual* violent behavior as well as cessation of the *threat* of violence. Where most program evaluators have centered on measurement of the degree to which men's programs eliminate violent behaviors, a limited number have attempted to address the range of direct and indirect threats of violence as well (Edleson & Sayers, 1990, 1991; Tolman & Boshley, 1989).

Evaluations of feminist-based programs are more difficult to locate but they do attempt to evaluate attitudinal changes and have less focus on psychological outcomes (Russell & Cory, 1995). Success of treatment becomes defined less in terms of cessation of physical abuse and begins to examine the qualitative variables of women's self-reports of overall change. This approach begins to address women's safety. Unlike programs that determine safety based on the reduction of physical incidents, feminist based programs generally address the violence from a change in beliefs about the subordination of women.

Comparisons between feminist program and cognitive-behavioral programs are helpful in revealing the value of each orientation. A recent report by Russell (1995) examined one such study comparing the Confronting Abusive Beliefs (CAB) program and an Anger Management (AM) treatment for Assaultive Males. Results found the CAB program as effective as the contrasting AM program in "bringing about reductions in physical violence, psychological violence and men's depression levels" (p.9). The interesting difference was that the CAB completers reported less use of argument to support their own point of view whereas the AM groups reported an increase in the use of argument, a form of communication often utilized in psychological abuse.

Though these finding are preliminary and require replicative studies and different

standardized measures (Russell, 1995), they were supported by reports of the female partners. Russell recommends the “greater use of qualitative measures to assess the impact of various assaultive men’s treatment programs on female partners”(p.5). Such measures would provide a first hand accounting of the day-to-day lived experience of these women and allow for a greater understanding of the outcomes of treatment.

A majority of the quantitative evaluation studies had important methodological limitations. They included: “Short follow up periods, inadequate control groups, absence of corroborative data (e.g., from spouses) small sample sizes and reliance on official records (eg., police records, court appearances) as measures of recidivism”( Bell, Browning and Hamilton, 1992). Of particular interest for my study is the obvious lack of descriptive, corroborative data by female partners. The voice of female partners appear to be silenced in much of this research.

Statistical evidence can be found to both support decreased abusive behavior post treatment (Deschner, 1986; Dutton, 1986; Halpern, 1984; Waldo 1988) and to suggest no decrease in abusive behaviors after attending treatment (Rosenfeld, 1992; Lindquist & Taylor, 1983; Harrell, 1991). The point of this review is not to prove the truth of either of these positions. Instead, the purpose is to point out that contrary findings exist and that perhaps taking a closer look at one variable will add to the discourse in the continuing discussion around woman abuse and the effectiveness of men’s treatment groups in providing for women’s safety. An early review of the treatment literature indicated that “evaluations of treatment effects based on empirical outcome studies have yielded diverse results” (Russell, 1988). A later, thorough review of treatment programs for men was conducted by Burns and her associates (1991). Their findings reported a number of recurring themes throughout the literature which concerned methodological challenges (Burns, Meredith & Paquette, 1991). These included attrition in treatment groups,

lack of comparison group, breadth of measures, length of follow-up, follow-up response rate, access to victims, victim corroboration and the use of police data. Despite these contradictory or questionable results, treatment for abusive men has not significantly altered. One explanation for lack of change in treatment is that program provider's and policy maker's ideological convictions remain in support of the family violence perspective in viewing woman abuse (Russell, 1988).

This restrained perspective contrasts with the more structural view that addresses the connection between the psychological and political. It is this structural perspective that provides a full understanding of the ways that political hierarchical structures shape men's behavior and attitudes towards women (Adams, 1989). This next section addresses specifically the issue of women's safety and how this is measured in evaluations.

### Defining Women's Safety

One question which prompted this literature review was how safety for women is defined. This term is used widely in all research on violence, yet the definition is vague. Whether it is limited to physical safety of life and limb or assumed to be a widely held, generally acknowledged term with global meaning, evaluations and reviews of evaluations of abusive men's treatment groups fail to define safety. For example, studies that indicate a reduction of physical violence also indicate that a decrease in physical abuse did not always lead to an increase in emotional quality for the women (Gray, 1994). It is this emotional quality for women that the literature neglects to address. As well, a measurement of success in achieving safety, as both defined and measured by the abused women, is noticeably absent in the literature as "victims do not feature strongly in the literature on men's programmes." (Gray, 1994, p.37).

In determining women's safety, evaluations that measure women's responses do so



quantitatively (Hurrell, 1991) and conservatively (Edleson & Grunznski, 1988) as men typically report fewer incidents of violence than women report.

Quantitative studies, measuring reductions of incidents of physical violence do not provide a full picture of women's experience of remaining in the abusive relationship after the abuser has received treatment. The empirical, scientific approach which measures quantitative variables can restrict the parameters and lead to loss of "both the fabric of individual experiences and the context in which those experiences occur; preventing us from benefiting from the depth and quality of understanding that would not otherwise be possible through questionnaires and statistics alone" (Shaw, 1991, p.78). Even those attempts by researchers, who state that they utilize a feminist anti-patriarchal position with regards to abuse of women, often fail to see the patriarchal and androcentric bias that their research methods embody (Yllo, 1988). "Most [quantitative] research published in academic and professional journals is patriarchal and androcentric" (Davis & Srinivasan, 1995, p.50).

Many researchers are questioning the feasibility of men's treatment groups. "Ending violence and some threats is insufficient to create true safety for women. Other forms of manipulation often replace violence and maintain the same system of power and control by the man over his woman partner" (Edleson, 1995, p.2 ). MacLeod (1987) notes some positive results of men's treatment groups but also remarks that victims have reported increases in psychological, verbal and economic abuse when the physical abuse decreases. Harrell evaluated three court ordered treatment programs against non-court ordered treatment and found, "overall, the results do not suggest that participation in these treatment programs resulted in increases in the perceived or actual safety of the victims"(Harrell, 1991, p.93)

A more recent attempt to evaluate two treatment projects was undertaken by the B.C.

Institute on Family Violence. This two-year project evaluated whether treatment was effective in reducing assaultive behavior and whether personality characteristics of abusers could be used to predict a successful group candidate. The study found that group completers did better than men in other abuse groups and that three personality characteristics -- Borderline, Avoidant and Anti-social personality disorders, marked men as less treatable. (Bodnarchuk, Kropp, Ogloff, Hart & Dutton, 1995). Hilton (1994) discussed similar predictors, looking at assaulter types and the need to match arrest and treatment to the type or level of commitment to change of each assaulter. If greater change occurs when the abuser is a type that is motivated, then perhaps court ordered groups, where men are ordered to attend and are resistant to this forced involvement, are less effective. The most remarkable aspect of Bodnarchuk et al study, however, was the choice of title: "Predicting Cessation of Intimate Assaultiveness after Group Treatment". If the act of naming is political, then what is said in the choice and use of the term '*intimate assaultiveness*'. How can assault be intimate? Does this mean that the relationship is intimate, a term usually defined as "suggesting informal warmth or privacy; a very personal or private nature" (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 1993). It suggests that the act of assault is intimate, in which case we are once again relegating the violence of men to the inner reaches of the 'private' family. Assault defined as an intimate act minimizes, denies and destroys the inherent violence and power of this experience. The terms are contradictory and opposing.

In summary, the method by which a researcher defines the term 'success' in relation to batterer's programs will determine the perception of effectiveness. If success is measured in quantifiable terms then a statistically significant degree of violence reduction could be termed success and safety for women will be assumed. However, "while programs struggle to identify key factors that contribute to positive treatment outcomes, the definitions of success are



inconsistent across studies” (Burns, Meredith and Paquette, 1991, pp.56). If instead, success is measured by the quality of well-being and safety in a women’s experience then few studies address how one could evaluate based on this criteria (Russell, 1995).

### Abused Women’s Perspective

Women experience a diverse consciousness concerning issues of gender, power and violence. A psychologist, Carol Gilligan (1982), who was studying moral conflict and choice, found that women make ethical distinctions that are different from men. She concluded that women seem to reason differently and were more concerned with real human relationships and connectedness. Yet most research follows traditional paradigms that have been “shaped by the concerns and relevances of a relatively small group of powerful men” (Devault, 1990, p.97). Research about abused women has mainly come from a male consciousness, failing to “...write women and their diverse experiences into both the discipline of research” (Devault, 1990, p.97) and specifically, into the area of violence.

The separate body of literature on abused women does not necessarily address the divergence of women’s knowing from that of men. If, as Taylor (1991) states, “a woman’s identity is formed in relation to others, in contrast to a man’s identity, which is developed in relation to the external world ”(p.210), then it perhaps follows that a woman’s relationship to others has different dimensions and meanings than does that of a man. Most earlier research approached this area from a clinical or positivistic academic perspective defining characteristics such as learned helplessness (Walker, 1979). Researchers appeared once again to psychologize women. Later, women were further victimized and labelled in discussions of the ‘Battered Women’s Syndrome’ (Walker, 1984). Recent discussions described the women’s risk factors for



abuse (Stark and Flitcraft, 1996). Other researchers explored the reason why women stay and looked at empowering principles to move the individual and groups of women towards freedom from oppression (Goldberg Wood & Middleman, 1992; Gutierrez, 1990; Gutierrez et al, 1995).

As we begin to move from a psychological or sociological perspective towards a feminist view of woman abuse (Kirkwood, 1993), some of the literature quotes women's stories within the context of their contributions (Price, 1992), but few speak from the women's lived experience in a way that centers the issue in the experience of the woman who has been abused. Instead the knowledge we have gained leaves us with a "euphemistic abstraction that keeps us at a dispassionate distance, far removed from the repugnant spectacle of human beings in pain" (Jones, 1994, p. 81). It is this distance that limits our knowledge about the outcomes for women victims who follow these societal prescriptions and stay with their partner's after treatment intervention (Browne, 1993). One such study, conducted by Jane Wolf-Smith and Ralph LaRossa (1992), interviewed 50 women for the interactional dynamics following battering incidents, but like many studies they were actually studying accounts or aligning actions (ie. apologies, excuses, etc.) of the abusive men. This study was not studying women's lived experience, in their own words, but rather women's accounts of men's behaviors to support their research questions.

Earlier feminist research attempted to advance a clearer understanding of battered women's experiences. One study, conducted by the Women's Research Center and Vancouver Transition House (November, 1980), researched battered women's experience by interviewing battered women themselves. Their intent was to not only inform through a "reflection and analysis of the accounts, concerns and the needs of the [transition house] residents", but also to "work for changes that are necessary in legislation, policies and programs"(p.125). When literature about battered women's experience is made available its source is questioned. "The

current work in this area is still primarily written by activists and practitioners. As a result, it is descriptive and its outcomes are mainly impressionistic" (Davis & Srinivasa, 1995, p.50). This statement infers that the literature is somehow substandard or, not being positivistic, its validity and reliability are in question. In contrast, many researchers in the field agree that those women with whom the batterer was partnered when he entered treatment and those with whom he is in an intimate relationship at the time of follow up are the most reliable sources of information on the use or elimination of violence. (Eisikovits and Edleson, 1989; Gondolf, 1987; Saunders, 1988; Shepard, 1987; Tolman, 1987).

The literature supported my intention of researching women's lived experience of staying after their abusive partner has completed group treatment. Having established this support, this examination moves to the next chapter outlining my methodology, the research method, information collection and analysis.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Exploring Feminist Oriented Descriptive Phenomenology

#### Introduction

There are few studies examining the experience of women who stay in the relationship after their partners have completed group treatment. Most studies involving these women are quantitative in design, etic in perspective (researched from the perspective of a distant observer) and fail to directly address the lived experience. After examining various methods, I chose a method which discouraged reductionism (Spiegelberg, 1982) and encouraged the explication of women's immediate experience. I also thought that focussing on a feminist research approach was an important part of maintaining the integrity of my social work practice because feminist research is concerned with creating social change (Reinharz, 1992). Thus, I have chosen to conduct my research through a feminist-oriented phenomenological approach.

While, a number of qualitative designs were available to me, including participatory action research (participant focussed empowerment process), grounded theory (observes interprets and develops theory), and phenomenology (uncovers and describes the essence of the lived experience), I chose to use a descriptive phenomenological inquiry (Bergum, 1991; van Manen, 1990) coupled with a feminist oriented research perspective (Stanley & Wise, 1990) as this provided me with an opportunity to understand the essence of women's lives from their perspective. Specifically, the qualitative notion of 'verstehen' "places emphasis on the human capacity to know and understand others through sympathetic introspection and reflection from detailed descriptions and observations" (Patton, 1980, p.45), a process in research that suits my professional social work background.

### Descriptive phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of lived experience, essences, humanness and thoughtfulness (van Manen, 1990). It is the study of the world as we immediately live in it. Using a phenomenological approach, I seek to reach a deeper understanding of the day-to-day experiences of women whose partners have completed an abuse group treatment, by asking what the experience of living with a 'treated' partner is like. It does not attempt to provide theories with which we can control or explain the world; instead it describes experiences which provide possible insights that bring us into immediate and direct contact with the world. It seeks the very nature of the phenomenon with the intent of better understanding what makes something what it is. The concern is not primarily whether something occurred or not, or how an occurrence relates to other conditions, the concern is how to better understand what this particular experience is like and to transform the lived experience "into a textual expression of its essence" (van Manen, 1990, p.36).

Van Manen (1982) describes four procedural activities characteristic of phenomenology. First, phenomenology is descriptive and not a science of empirical facts that produces empirical generalizations. Instead, by turning to the nature of lived experience, we move from a naive description to a deep questioning of the way in which the world is experienced. This precludes theorizing, categorizing and conceptualizing. It provides an opportunity to directly contact the real world experience, investigate our world as we live it and relearn to look at the world by "reawakening the basic experience of the world" (van Manen, 1982. p.40). This involves investigating experience as we live it, not as we conceptualize it (van Manen, 1990).

The second characteristic of phenomenological research is "reduction". Often our 'common sense' assumptions and presuppositions require us to begin interpreting the

phenomenon before we have asked the phenomenological question. To suspend these beliefs we engage in a process of 'bracketing', whereby the data is examined without the benefit of our own prejudices, theories or judgments (Patton, 1990). This 'reduction' of the information to be bracketed and set aside is an important step in producing an unbiased approach to the meaning of the experience. Beck (1992) suggests that "this process, called bracketing, involves peeling away the layers of interpretation so the phenomenon can be seen as they are, not as they are seen through preconceptions. Bracketing does not eliminate perspective. It brings the experience into clearer focus" (p.167). This unbiased process is important as it allows the "subject matter to be confronted, as much as possible, on its own terms" (Patton, 1990, p.408).

The third characteristic defines our ability to orient ourselves to the phenomenon. This activity is the study of essence whereby some - 'thing' is clarified so that the structure of a lived experience is made visible in a way that we are now able to understand both the nature and the significance of an experience that had previously been unknown. The search for essence "asks for the very nature of a phenomena, for that which makes a some - 'thing' what it is" (van Manen, 1990, p.10).

The final characteristic is the formulation of the phenomenological question. Van Manen (1990) argues, "To do phenomenological research is *to question* something phenomenologically and also, to be addressed by the question of what something is 'really' like" (p.42). It is the ability to open up and remain open to other possibilities and not dismiss those possibilities as we "live this question and we become this question" (van Manen, 1990, p.98). We are directed back from the theory to the reality of lived experience. Using this method we ask the basic question of what it is like to have a certain experience.

In examining the lived experience of abused women who have stayed with their partners

after treatment, I am attempting to better understand the experience of 'increased safety' that treatment groups attest to provide for these women (Hart, 1992; Hamberger & Barnett, 1995). Researching the meaning structures of these women's lived experiences helps me to understand what it means to be an abused women whose partner is supposedly 'treated', and also to understand the dangers, dilemmas and compromises which come to restrict and define the nature of being his partner. This search for humanness is concerned with the ways a women can possibly experience the world after her partner is 'treated'.

This approach is not interested in whether or not the reports of women's experience is an unquestionable account of their individual experience at the time, instead what matters is that their experience presented them with a phenomenon (Spiegelberg, 1982) and they can best describe what that experience is.

### Feminist Research

As in phenomenology, in feminist research women are relied on to be the experts of their own experience. Feminist research seeks information about the construction of knowledge and because knowledge can be constructed in many ways, experience is often ignored. I am attempting to account for knowledge based on women's experience (Reinharz, 1992).

Feminist research methodologies vary widely. As Reinharz (1992) states "... feminists have used all existing methods and have invented some new ones as well. Instead of orthodoxy, feminist research practices must be recognized as a plurality"( p.4). Therefore, feminist researchers use a range of methods. Instead of a set formula for procedures, they utilize many approaches, among them, phenomenological interviewing.

I believe, as Kelly (1988) so aptly states, that " feminist research is more than research



about women's position in society. It is research that is based on the theoretical premise that women are oppressed" (p. 117). Thus, feminist research explores violence against women not as an individual problem but as a social problem. A feminist analysis of men's violence against women becomes a social analysis. It reinforces the idea of moving violence from the perspective of an individual issue to an analysis of structures and belief systems within those structures, which support the maintenance of women abuse. Research then becomes action oriented and a means of changing this oppression.

Having worked with abused women, I also believe that it is only in listening to their voices that we will truly be able to address the issue of violence against them in realistic and practical ways. If one accepts that knowledge is socially constructed, it becomes a requirement that women themselves define and describe their experiences of what treatment outcomes of abusive men's groups actually are. Studies that quantitatively evaluate or assess the incidence of post-group violence, fail to acknowledge that hearing women's voices in context is essential to the 'knowing' of their lived experience, post treatment group. Studies such as those of Dutton (1986) and Edleson (1995) which address the female partner's opinion, do not begin to describe the reality of these women. Unlike some research approaches, as a feminist-oriented researcher, my position becomes privileged if I analyse or draw conclusions from the context of these women's reality. My understanding of the experience should not subsume that of the participant's. If I present my interpretation of the phenomenon in isolation, then I have exercised a researcher privilege that dominates the actual events. My description and analysis then becomes the knowledge upon which future decisions regarding violence may be based rather than upon the knowledge of these women.

What makes research 'feminist' is not the methodology. It is the framework within which

the methods are located and it is the particular ways in which the methods are positioned and utilized (Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994). Important to my research are four key aspects of feminist research as defined by Kelly, Burton and Regan. First, it is research on and with women. This apparently exclusionary statement is intended to ensure that feminist research remains a tool for understanding and changing women's oppression *through* the reality of women themselves. By creating knowledge about their experiences, we can then turn our attention to the ways oppression is structured and reproduced, always from a gendered lens.

The second key factor is that feminist research usually uses qualitative methods (Kelly et al, 1994). There are a number of assumptions underlying this statement however: that women want to share their experiences with other women; that this sharing between women will result in a more understanding and compassionate process when painful or difficult areas are studied and that there is a personal benefit to this process. I have chosen qualitative research in an attempt to reach this goal. However, it should be noted that a good deal of research on violence relies on quantitative methods which provide a rich source of information to inform this issue (Reinharz, 1992).

The third key aspect states that feminist research should be empowering for participants. The central issue here is the definition of 'empowering' and the sometimes simplistic interpretation of this conceptually confused subject. The definition of empowerment that I use in my research is both a theory and a practice which considers the issues of power, powerlessness and oppression. It addresses all areas of power; individual, family, community and society. This is an ideal albeit elusive goal for any feminist research.

The final aspect of feminist research which has an impact on my feminist approach is that it be directed toward social change. While this is ultimately a desired goal there is little clarity in

the literature (Kelly et al, 1994) around *how* a researcher might achieve it. However, my research is intended to be of use in the struggle for eliminating women's oppression, since any information that adds to the depth of understanding of this oppression is, by definition, directed towards social change.

### Methods

A number of qualitative designs could have been used to research women's experience of staying after their partner's 'treatment'. Dey (1993) points out no less than forty-five different approaches to qualitative research but cautions that the method chosen depends entirely on the data to be analysed and the purposes and preferences of individual researcher (Dey, 1993). I have chosen to use a descriptive phenomenological, feminist-oriented approach to research the day-to-day lived experiences of women who stay with their partners after these men have completed treatment, because the characteristic face-to-face interview style of feminist research coupled with the similar approach and data analysis options of phenomenology suited my purpose. My purpose was to have women's voices heard in a manner that not only validated their experience, but also described that experience directly from their immediate world.

### Participants

My choice of the term participant instead of sample was used to provide consistency in my choice of methodology. To describe the essence of the experience of the interview, the term participant provides an embodied concept where each woman is regarded as the 'expert' of her own experience.

In speaking only to abused women, I was working with the knowledge that

phenomenological researchers borrow other people's lived experience to gain access to the nature of the experience (van Manen, 1990; Giorgi, 1985). To effectively explore and gain useful insight into the lived experience of women whose partners had completed an abuse treatment group, I selected participants who had this history. Purposeful selection is used as a strategy when a researcher wishes to learn something and reach an understanding about select cases without the need to generalize that information to all such cases.

Phenomenological research can be conducted with as small a number as one participant (van Manen, 1990 and Giorgi, 1985). This suggests that the experiences of the participant need not be dismissed as peculiar to these women alone. In this project, with three different agencies providing names, the 'geographical' variation could present confidence in the patterns that emerged as somewhat representative of the category 'abused women' (Patton, 1980).

While studying one or a few critical cases does not technically permit broad generalizations to all possible cases, logical generalizations can often be made from the weight of evidence produced in studying a single critical case (Patton, 1980, p.103).

Though one participant is able to give insight, it is generally believed that more participants will provide greater insight into the general structure of the experience; nonetheless, a saturation point can be reached. This occurs when added information does not reveal new understanding about relations or abstractions (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). For the purpose of this research, I had designated a minimum of five interviews, with more to be conducted if necessary. However, I found after the fifth interview that the same themes were emerging consistently.

## Procedure

### Recruitment Process:

Upon receipt of ethics approval, received early in 1997 from the Faculty of Graduate Research and Graduate Studies, University of Northern British Columbia, I proceeded to contact the agencies that were assisting in recruitment. Those that agreed to assist were the Attorney General's Office of the Province of British Columbia, as well as two Victim's Services agencies. I discussed the research inquiry and sent a letter of explanation. The introduction letter (Appendix A) was also made available to three key workers from these agencies who were to assist me. Women were contacted by these agencies and invited to participate. In some cases, if the worker determined it appropriate, I contacted the women myself.

Participant protection was foremost in my mind throughout the research process. While standard safeguards, such as pseudonyms and confidential taping procedures were used throughout the study, I employed sensitivity to safety and security issues when contacting the women in their homes. The danger of putting women at risk was my underlying concern. Whilst studies such as Dutton (1986) and Tolman and Bhosley (1991) indicate that there may be a slightly lower risk of violence or danger from men who had completed treatment, all decisions about participant contact and interview locations were made weighing potential risk to the women contacted.

The potential for retaliatory violence was described by some potential participants as the reason why they could not be involved in my study. Despite the fact that their partners had completed a treatment group, these women did not feel safe enough to risk talking to me about their daily lives. This fear, obviously intense, was a phenomenon in itself. It told me that their lives did not appear safer and that there was a possibility that their partners continued to control

them with fear of reprisal. This could not be established however without interviewing these women. One woman was interested in speaking to me further but asked me to call back. When I called back I was to state that I was a friend of hers so that her husband would be unaware of her involvement with me and her discussion of his abuse.

I developed a set criteria, established to clearly delineated the participants' appropriateness for the study. Participants were required to meet the following criteria to be involved in this study:

- ◆ They are abused women who are still residing with their partner or
- ◆ They are no longer with their partners but did reside with them for a period of time, post-group.
- ◆ Their partner has completed a treatment program.
- ◆ The treatment program could have been court-ordered or voluntary.
- ◆ They reside in Prince George or within a reasonable driving distance (up to two hours) from Prince George.
- ◆ They are willing to participate in one to two in-depth taped interviews in person or by phone if safety was an issue.
- ◆ They are receptive to utilizing a support service post interview should they be in need of emotional support. Local support agencies were made aware of my study.

I interviewed one participant over the phone as her safety concerns were high. Her partner was not home. She talked at length and was very interested in speaking with me further except that she did not feel safe to do so if her partner was home or if there was a chance he would find out about her speaking to me. This information was significant for it alerted me to the possibility that there was a group of women who could have made a contribution to our understanding of post group experiences.

During this phone contact we discussed the purpose of the research, the contribution we were to cover, confidentiality, their right to withdraw at any time and the benefit and risks to participating. A meeting time was arranged to take place in my professional office in the downtown area of Prince George. This afforded these women anonymity and safety to speak.



The interview sessions lasted from one to two hours. The interviews were audio taped on a specialized high frequency tape machine made available by the Regional Coroner's Office in order that tapes could only be heard on one device and no other audio machine. This ensured a high degree of security around the information on the tapes. During transcription of these interviews, all identifying information was removed. The quantity of data produced totalled one hundred and seventeen pages of qualitatively rich data.

### Participant Characteristics

Response to my phone contact was mixed. Of sixteen possible candidates, six could not be contacted in a confidential manner (without letting their partner know I was calling), five women refused to be involved and five women responded positively. One woman was unable to attend an interview during the interviewing period but did speak to me at length on the phone. These women were in their late twenties to late forties and had lived or were still living with their partner after the abuse treatment program. One woman was living on income assistance, three were employed outside of the home and one woman owned her own business. One participant was First Nations descent, one woman was East Indian, born in India, and three were Caucasian. One participant had a childhood history of living on income assistance, another was from a middle class background. The other three did not volunteer this information. These women came from diverse walks of life and cultures. What they had in common was that they were all abused women and working mothers with children to support on relatively low incomes. Four of the women were still currently living with their abusive partners and one was with a new partner but had lived with her ex-partner for a period of time after his treatment group.

### Interviews

While quantitative methods have been the norm for exploring the effectiveness of men's treatment groups (Bodnarchuk et al, 1995; Poynter, 1989; Harrell, 1991), I believe that qualitative methods provide the most practical data for this study. In-depth, face-to-face interview methods, in particular, "provide us with a route through which inter-subjectivity and non-hierarchical relationships between women researchers and women participants can be developed" (Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1994). It is through these forms of relationships that I felt I could best uncover the essence of the experience of safety. In-depth, face to face interviews have become the embodiment of the feminist method because "[It] explores people's view's of reality" (Reinharz, 1992, p.18).

For centuries men have spoken for women, interpreting and rethinking their experiences. Phenomenological interviewing gives access to women's memories, feelings and thoughts in such a way as to validate their reality, not that of the researcher. This descriptive approach allows me to more fully explore a women's lived experience. This method is also consistent with my interest in encouraging the development of a connectedness that creates a more equitable relationship. In turn this avoids replicating the power-based relationship of women's oppression.

Feminists who utilize intensive interviewing methods have labelled their interviews phenomenological (Sandelowski & Pollock, 1986; Webb, 1984). These researchers describe elements of the research process that characterize their search for women's reality. These include, "careful listening [which] allows the interviewer to introduce new question as the interview proceeds" (Reinharz, 1992 p.21). Reinharz (1990) also states that restraint and listening are stated to be valuable tools in maintaing an interviewee-oriented study, a process essential to following the threads of a women's lived experience. Open-ended questions are

introduced to facilitate the collection and exploration of the experience. Though these usually result in non-standardized information (Reinharz, 1992), such information is rich in description. In developing a richer and deeper understanding of human phenomena, the interview is a vehicle for collecting and exploring experiential narrative material and it is also used to develop a conversational relationship with the participant about the meaning of their experience (van Manen, 1990). Thus, my research interviews attempted to follow these characteristics defined as feminist phenomenological interviewing. I employed a face-to-face, open ended, interviewee driven process. This approach asks almost no prepared questions with the exception of the initial experience-focussed inquiry. The goal is to remain as close as possible to the lived experience, avoiding ready made questions and encouraging concrete specific instances, situations or events that explore the whole experience to the fullest (van Manen, 1990). This allowed questions to be added when unanticipated patterns emerged. The more carefully I listened to these unstructured accounts, the more focussed on the lived experience I became. This allowed for full discovery and rich description of abused women's lived experience.

The process of inviting participants to choose their own pseudonyms, a practice first defined by Gregg (1991) in her doctoral dissertation, is one consistent with feminist methodology. Gregg attempted to interview in a way that avoided separation of the researcher from the researched.

Also, as I listened to the accounts of these women, there were remarks left incomplete. This is the nature of using male language and its incongruence with female experience to define women's lives (Devault, 1987). Aspects of participant's lives may be so difficult to describe that they appear to vanish. My work as a feminist researcher then becomes "listening 'around' and 'beyond' words to recover aspects of women's experience" (Devault, 1987, p.33). This is

consistent with phenomenology as I attend to the experience and search for the essence of the phenomenon and what makes a some - 'thing' what it is (van Manen, 1990).

Research using interviews with abused women, some of whom are still in danger in their relationships, is not the same as doing therapy with them. As a counsellor providing therapy, I listen to a women's reality, but instead of accepting it as the truth I challenge their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. In therapy, the goal is to actively effect change on a personal level. In the research interview however, the goal was to hear the experiences or essence of their stories. I asked these women to share with me the components of their day-to-day lived experience. As a researcher I had to remember that although my study is not therapeutic intervention, engaging in the process of research is intervention (Boechler, 1990). By encouraging women to talk, by asking them to consider questions and issues they may never have previously looked at, by making visible the invisible and by providing feedback that connects their experience to that of other women, I intervene in the experience and the interpretation of that experience for these women.

Information or data comes from a variety of sources. Fragments of conversations, while at first appearing peripheral, may eventually become central to the analysis. New information may come from unlikely sources and whether involved in the formal interview or afterward 'chatter', all talk may have significance. Information does not always present itself in manageable ways or at convenient times (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). My ability to adjust my data gathering and to be attentive to what might need to be gathered became an important piece of my research. For this reason I also chose to partake in public forums, workshops or information sessions related to my thesis topic during the period of information collection. This means of collecting further information allowed me to maintain a societal context in my research.

Each interview began with a discussion of the purpose of the research and the topic area we were to cover. Consent forms regarding confidentiality, pseudonyms, special instructions for contacting the participants, safety plans and supporting information were obtained (Appendix C). The participants were free to withdraw from the process at any time as well as to withhold parts of their interviews from the study. None of the participants chose to do so. All participants were offered an opportunity to obtain a copy of the research when completed. Due to the safety issue inherent in working with abused women, the transcript was not mailed to their homes. Instead it was made available to them through phone arrangements for drop off.

Throughout my research, I wanted to learn from these women. I was looking for some 'thing', a common thread of experiences upon which I could reflect. I was also hoping to give something back to them. Yet, I realize that involvement in my research is unlikely to transform the conditions of their lives. I am aware that politicizing participants or creating awareness does not automatically lead to them being involved in actions that challenge the conditions of their oppression. However, I hoped my research would be an experience of mutual benefit for as van Manen (1984) states, "We gather other people's experiences because it allows us in a vicarious sort of way, to become more experienced ourselves" (p.56). From the outset, these women were made aware of what I was doing and why. We discussed the risks and the benefits of participating which reinforced the element of choice for them.

The Interview Guide (Appendix D) consisted of the central question: "Please tell me about your experience of living day-to-day with your partner since he has completed his treatment group." The intent of this question was to determine what is the nature of the phenomenon, living with a 'treated' man as a basically human experience. Other questions were prepared to assist the interview process should they be required; however, I attempted to carry



out a phenomenological interview which moved within the course of the participants' experience. Each participant's experience differed in terms of perspective and circumstances, which in turn modified the questions, inquiries and summaries with which I responded. The skill of the researcher in the interview process "is to keep the question [of the meaning of the phenomenon] open, to keep himself or herself and the interviewee oriented to the substance of the thing being questioned" (van Manen, 1990, p.43). In this way, the participant then becomes a co-researcher of the study, engaging them in the conversational process which asks questions that lead to further questions. Research is about doing the best investigating and listening that I can. It is also about being able to engage in a discourse that is mutual and respectful. For participants to 'ask back' was a part of the research process that enabled a richer and more meaningful dialogue to transpire.

In consideration that not all qualitative research is necessarily valuable to everyone, a question commenting on the research process was included. The participants were invited to give verbal feedback about the experience at the end of the interview. This helped me to reflect on my research methods and my commitment to consciously studying the impact of participating in research overall. As a feminist, my responsibility to these women was to ensure that no personal harm had been done in the interest of acquiring information for public change.

After I had stated my research question and attempted to provide an opportunity for them to begin their recollections in a safe way, I had anticipated that these participants would be initially less candid with the specifics of their experience. However, these women were immediately able to access private and personal experiences allowing me to fulfill the goal of my research, to discover the meaning of staying with their partner, from their lived experiences.



## Thematic Analysis

### Overview Of Process

As I prepared to make sense of the information I had collected, I attempted to locate myself within the framework of this phenomenological methodology and feminist thinking. My research goals directed this research process and a number of key sources guided my study. These sources include Giorgi, (1985), van Manen (1990), Bergum (1991), Reinharz (1992), and Coffey and Atkinson, (1996).

Interpretation of information (data analysis) is not a simple matter of systematic processes, classification, categorization, coding and collating. It is more than distinguishing forms of speech or consistencies in action. Analysis is essentially concerned with the representation or reconstruction of social phenomenon (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). This, however, goes beyond the simple accounting of what we find. Instead it concerns the reconstruction of the social world and the social participants that we observe. The goal of phenomenological analysis is “to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience’ (van Manen, 1980, p.59) and to derive meaning from these.

### Meaning Units

To achieve this goal, I analyzed the transcripts to capture the essence of these women’s lived experience of staying with their partners, post group treatment. I read and re-read the transcripts in an attempt to become familiar with their stories. Then, marking or ‘tagging’ the relevant and interesting text which related to my research question, I was able to choose a portion of that text as a means of beginning to identify common trends or themes of the participant’s experience. These ‘meaning units’ were selected using a highlight approach (van

Manen, 1990) and then given a code number. In this way the interviews were broken down into 'chunks'. According to Giorgi (1985) meaning units are "understood to be constituents and not elements... a constituent is a part determined in such a way that it is context laden. An element is a part determined in such a way that its meaning is as much as possible independent of the context" (p.14). By identifying these constituents as relevant units, a thematic analysis was begun.

Once these units were identified, I reviewed them again, tagging them with a single word or statement that best described the substance of what that woman said. In this way key themes or thematic statements were identified, a central process in the procedural activity of phenomenological analysis.

### Themes

The notion of themes has specific definitions in descriptive phenomenology. Generally, theme refers to an element which occurs frequently in a text or structures of an experience (van Manen, 1990). For the purpose of descriptive phenomenology however, discovering themes can be thought of as "making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning..... a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure - grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule bound process but a free act of 'seeing' meaning." (van Manen, 1990, p.79). Van Manen also defines phenomenological themes as "the structures of experience. So when we analyse a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what themes are the experiential structures that make up that experience" (p.79).

Each sentence or sentence cluster was read carefully, then each was studied for what it may reveal about the lived experience. I was attempting to identify the thematic meaning that

related to the identified unit. Bergum (1991) refers to this as a thematic moment, a term that attempts to capture more completely the nature of the experience “suggesting a cross between momentous and momentary” (p. 64). My task then became one of holding on to these themes by lifting appropriate phrases, noting relevant expressions or capturing single statements that contain the essence of the themes which is the next step in the analysis.

To consider themes as merely conceptual formulations or categorical statements would be naive as this infers not only predictability but stagnation, and I am studying ‘lived’ experience. ‘Lived’ infers a vibrant, kinesthetic process, the essence of which cannot be defined in conceptual abstractions. Van Manen defines phenomenological themes as “the structures of experience. So when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience” (1990, p.79).

### Essence

In discovering emerging themes through this analysis process, other experiential themes emerged. My concern was to discover aspects that make a phenomenon “what it is and without which it could not be what it is” (van Manen, 1990, p.117). This process is not so much concerned with facts of the circumstances such as whether something actually happened or how often it happened. Instead I am concerned with the essence of the experience of living with a ‘treated’ partner, showing others the “lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10).

This next step in my analysis was to move from the specific descriptors to the more general description. In moving to a general description, I attempted to use the core or essence as a “focal point or commonality of experience around which the phenomenological interpretation

occurs" (Bergum, 1991, p.64). This is similar to what Giorgi (1985) describes as arriving at "the general category by going through the concrete expressions" (p.17).

### Synthesis

To determine the structure of these women's experience, I synthesized the transformed meaning units, both individually and in relation to each other. By reading and re-reading, I was striving for a thoughtfulness, "a deeply reflective activity that involves the totality of our physical and mental being" (van Manen, 1984, p.28). As I read these women's stories, I realized that each story had a number of particular themes and that each of these were characterized by one particular theme. In reflecting on each woman individually and the pieces of her story that were uniquely her, I realized that this same theme or essence was also present in the other women's stories.

I then attempted to grasp the essence of these women's lived experience in a phenomenological description. I placed this essence at the core of a diagrammatic representation and "floated" the themes around this core. In this way I was able to visualize the concepts in a context and place the identifying description within a theme. This is not simply a representational description. Instead it was my goal to "transcend the experiential world in an act of reflective existence" (van Manen, 1984, p. 62). In this creative act of identifying, transforming and synthesizing, I was able to fit the specific meaning units into the context of the identified themes. This made visible the essence of these women's experience in staying with their partner's, post group treatment.

The synthesis of these participants' experience assisted me in arriving at the identification of five vital themes: safety, the work of staying in the relationship, their partner's use of power

and control, the role of the system, and concern for their children. This reflective process further allowed me to identify the core theme as 'still walking on egg shells' which was stated metaphorically by all the women in the study. This phenomenological theme is not a "singular statement", it is instead a closer accounting of an "actual description of the structure of a lived experience" (van Manen, 1984, p.21). This combination of processes allowed me to engage in a state of understanding the essence of the experience (verstehen).

### Writing and re-writing

In order to further my understanding the essence of this experience, I engaged in the thoughtful act of writing. Van Manen characterizes this process as " a reflective activity that involves the totality of our physical and mental being" (1990, p.132). It is the struggle to grasp the sense of being itself. This highly philosophical state allowed me to bring into focus the more concrete aspects of these experiences.

I used the identified themes as headings to elaborate further on the essential aspects of the lived experience of abused women. Each section heading articulated the theme that was being described in that section. These sections were further explicated in the case of complex themes. Though this process systematizes the human experience, which can never be systematic, it is important for both the purpose of producing a readable and useful document and as a means of making me think about my information in new and different ways. In presenting the synthesis of the information I began thinking and writing about the meanings, understandings, voices and experiences present in this information. Because the process of synthesis is done in a context, none of these themes is independent of the other, one will implicate the dimensions of the other, despite the somewhat contrived structure of the analysis.

I used these interviews and their subsequent analysis to ascertain the lived experience of these women. Though the core phenomenon discovered was 'still walking on egg shells', each of the identified themes; safety, the work of staying, power and control, the system and children, spoke of broader contextual issues.

When researching this phenomenon, I have attempted to hear the voices of these women in context. To understand their lived experience, it is crucial that we acknowledge structural issues such as the historical oppression of women, the effects of the economy on women, the assumptions of the government agencies that address woman abuse, attitudes of the society we live in, the institution of marriage, the ideologies of self-sacrifice and romantic love, and the delivery of social services in our community. By critically reflecting on the social context throughout the analysis, it ensured that I was able to hear and affirm the lived experiences of these women and at the same time critically reflect on those structures that influence the day-to-day lived experience. (Kirby and McKenna, 1989).

### Achieving Quality

#### Credibility

Establishing credibility in qualitative research is "a matter of persuasion whereby the scientist is viewed as having made those [descriptive] practices visible and therefore, auditable; it is less a matter of claiming to be right about a phenomenon than of having practiced good science" (Sandelowski, 1993, p.2). It is also a matter of valuing the knowledge that is created within that particular research method. As a feminist researcher I acknowledge that "the knowledge we create, and the process of its creation, will always be contested, since it begins from theoretical assumptions and has intended practical applications about which there is unlikely



to be a consensus" (Laws, 1990, p.13). The point in sharing a few women's experience is to provide another perspective in the discussion of effectiveness of abusive men's treatment.

### Fittingness

Fittingness refers to how well the working hypothesis fits into a context other than the one from which it was generated and whether the people who read this find the results as meaningful and applicable to their own experience (Beck, 1993). One must ask whether the complexity and diversity of the phenomenon is present in the analysis. I believe theoretical representativeness was addressed in this research by trying to discount conclusions and by searching for alternative or negative cases,

### Relevance

It is argued that relevance is a criterion that must be addressed in any assessment of qualitative literature. Of course the question of relevance is also subjective and dependant on the audience of the research (Hammersley, 1992). Hammersley suggests that importance of topic and its contributions to the literature or practice are the two criteria that both research and the clinical communities should judge relevance by. Research devoted to understanding the lived experience of abused women who stay with their 'treated' partners is relevant to scientific inquiry and to clinical social work practice.

### Rigor

The unique efforts of individual researchers include qualities not often present in discussion of qualitative methodology. These include uses of intuition, insight, and creative

thinking that are experienced within the context of immersion in and experience of the data (Langford, 1994). In creating rigorous designs in qualitative research, researchers are cautioned to avoid destroying the artistry, flexibility and sensitivity that characterize qualitative work (Sandelowski, 1993). At the same time the aim is to accurately reflect the phenomenon being studied. Emphasis is placed on the closeness between the actual words of the participant and the researcher's written description of the experience (internal validity). Though this method of study does not generalize to the entire population (external validity), these experiences could relate to other women who have had common experiences. Though no women's life is exactly like an others, all women share the common experience of oppression by virtue of being a woman however we do not necessarily share the same experiences of that oppression (Stanley & Wise, 1990).

### Internal Validity

Due to the inherent danger present for the women in this study, it was not possible to return to them for validation of their experience. This would have been the most effective way to ensure validation of the information they shared, as well as to engage in the multiple interview which characterizes much of feminist research (Reinharz, 1992). The safety of the women in this study however was paramount, and rigour had to be compromised in the best interest of these women's safety. However the audio tapes were reviewed and then transcribed. Then these written transcriptions were reviewed then summarized and reviewed again. Out of respect for the women and to reduce possible errors, the use of verbatim quotes to describe the experience were used whenever possible as a means of validation, emphasizing a close fit between the information and what they actually said. This also allows readers to form their own analysis.

### Objectivity

I have accepted my participants' knowledge of their experience as complete. As Smith (1987) observes "A sociology for women preserves the presence of subjects as knowers and actors. It does not transform subjects into the objects of study or make use of conceptual devices for eliminating the active presence of subjects" (p.105). It is in the process of sharing that knowing, of using it to expand our knowledge of who we are as women, that we begin to define our experience. As a feminist, I have attempted to provide women with an opportunity to describe their experience by accepting the standpoint of these women; I have accepted an "embodied" participant who is situated in a specific history and who exists in a world of her own uniqueness. "Objectivity means that the researcher remains true to the object" (van Manen, 1990, p.20). I have undertaken to represent the true nature of the object, in this case the women's experience, and in doing so show it, describe it and "define an understanding of the relations that shape and determine the everyday" (Smith, 1987, p.110), remaining both close and constant to the women I speak for. This understanding of the women, from their own point of view, is a crucial part of my feminist orientation for it "corrects a bias of non-feminist participant observation that trivializes female activities and thoughts, or interprets them from the standpoint of the men in society or the male researcher" (Reinharz, 1992, p.52).

### Risks of the Research

One specific limitation is the danger that, by making these women's experience visible I may be informing abusive men about the group of 'abused women', giving them insight into how they think and thereby giving them more information which they could use to control women. This is a risk that needs to be taken. I question not only whether these men will read this

document but how much validity such men will give to this research. Should they however read this thesis, they could possibly deny these experiences about these women as much as they deny and minimize the women who speak them. The greater possibility when dealing with controlling men is that they will attempt to sabotage the work that I, am attempting to do on behalf of other women. This limitation is yet to be determined.

Some may say that a limitation of this research is the small number of participants and the lack of generalizability. However phenomenological study is not an empirical analytic science. The intent of this research was not to show or prove that one type of program was more effective than another or that all women experience post-treatment life in the same way. The intent was to remain focussed on developing an understanding of these women which describes the uniqueness of their human experience.

This next section explores the outcome of my research, looking first at the struggle for meaning each participant experienced.

## CHAPTER THREE

Research Outcomes: What did I hear?The Struggle for Meaning: Making Sense of Their Lives

Linear thinking is a trademark of our scientifically based society, however, women tend not to think always in a linear fashion. As Langford (1994) suggests, "Women do not experience battering as a linear process and are unable to talk about the violence in a linear fashion" (p.72). Qualitative research, based on interviewing as a means of talking about an issue, provided the opportunity to explore this complex non-linear process. Women telling their stories tended to find a starting point, usually how they came to be involved with their partner, and to work randomly from there, eventually covering the chronological context.

By volunteering to be a part of this study and by telling their stories, women were continuing their attempts to make sense of their experiences. Speaking their own stories, made clear for them that their staying and ongoing caring about this person did not make logical sense. The women struggled with two seemingly unanswerable issues. The first is the unreconcilable confusion they are experiencing because they still care about a person who is capable of hurting or killing them. The other is the disparity between their acceptable attraction to their partners, who have good qualities, juxtaposed with the violence which they hate and reject. Their relationships appear full of intense positive and negative experiences.

Yeah. I think about those things and I think, no, this pig is not gonna hurt me anymore but I'm still with him.

I'm still in love with him. I still love him. I don't - but I'm really just sad about it too because I can't see it ever working. You know, I can't....I mean - I mean, I consider myself intelligent enough to know that that's not the way women are supposed to be treated but yet at the same time I've allowed it to happen...

So George and I we started talking and he was really good. He was back to, you know,

the original ...And that's what I always knew, you know, and that's what made me hold on as long as I did. Four years of hell.

These statements indicate the pendulum of emotions women experience - from love and hope to glimpses of anger, for example "the pig". It also alerted me to a similar shifting in men "he was back to ...the original", meaning he was sometimes the loving person she had originally met and not the person who continued to abuse her. This shifting of emotions shows how women's hope is based in part on the behaviors of their partners and how shifts in their behavior make it hard to make a final break. When he displays positive behaviors they hope these changes are permanent.

Related to making sense of this intense positive and negative experience in the relationship, women expressed a detachment from the abuse. Participants depersonalized the violence in their relationships by referring to "it" instead of naming the violence or the source of the violence. This depersonalization was extensive and was clear in such statements as "It started right away after we married". In this way women may achieve a cognitive distancing from the violence which allows them to deny or discount the abuse and in some cases to achieve a cognitive clarity in making sense of "it" as something that is not really his violence towards her.

Throughout the interviews these women struggled to find the words or the concepts that would describe their day-to-day experience when they did not understand the experience themselves. Parts of women's lives "disappear" in interviews and so are not easily translated into a language of identifiable words (Devault, 1990). The women I spoke with experienced difficulties in describing their own reality and finding the words that portrayed their lives, as shown in the following statement:

But I still don't trust him and...I don't know if it's, I don't know how to word it. I'm afraid of him because he can go off for no reason and....

Beyond finding the words to describe the undecipherable, women's confidence is so compromised



that they do not trust themselves to be saying or doing the 'right' thing to make him happy and keep themselves safe.

I'm afraid to speak sometimes, I feel like I'm not saying the right thing or the right words and then... Those are the things I've lost that I had before.

It also indicates that years of being hyper-vigilant and centering on his need and wants, make it difficult to articulate her own reality except in relation to him.

Describing the danger and fear in their lives, in the safety and quiet of my office could have contributed to making their experiences seem even more undescrivable. In an attempt to articulate the emotional confusion and the need for something or someone to intervene and make the situation 'normal', they reverted to using examples of incidents and issues to describe the moments of crazy thoughts and feelings.

Interviewer - "so in a way you have contact through your son.

Participant - " Yeah. Uh,Uh and I'm afraid to push him too much but on the other hand I have to protect my kid so, I have to sort of..... (She was silent for a few moments).

Interviewer - "find a middle ground maybe?

Participant - "Yeah and um, and then in another way, this is gonna sound really stupid but in one way, I wish he would come after me one more time.... because then he would go to jail and then he'd be outta my hair for awhile. And that sounds probably really stupid but, see....."

I don't want anything bad to happen to him....but I just had this feeling that something bad is going to happen to him and I mean to be honest, and I know..., I mean I've talked to my sister about it too...sometimes I've wished that something bad would happen to him because then it would be over...I would never have to see him again, I would never have to worry about him being with somebody else.

These statements further indicate conflicting feelings. While one woman struggles for a middle ground in her own behavior, another both worries about and hopes the violence will end by "something bad" occurring which would remove her partner. It is clear that both these women do not see behavior change in their male partners as the source of hope for their safety and quality of relationship.

Another way in which these women tried to make sense out of their experience was to create the context of the violence by describing how their relationship was prior to the group, the history of the abuse and how the relationship developed. It was as though a reconstructing of the past would allow them to make sense of the present.

How it started was, um, I never went to school. I could barely speak English. When I first met my husband I had a - I had a previous relationship before and he was married before too.

Uh, well the abuse started shortly after we were married and it progressively got worse and worse and worse and worse and um, he had no respect.... he had no respect for me...and he - like it was so weird, he wanted his own place. He wanted me to be waiting for him at home, he wanted his own place so that he could go and have his own time and stuff like that.

This man's belief that his partner should "be waiting for him at home" describes the role he assumed she should play. To be subservient, waiting and to be at his beck and call, was the standard he set and she must provide. This same woman speaks about his lack of respect for her as an independent person, "he had no respect", indicating his attitude towards her as a women.

Describing these past relationships also shows the power imbalances, control issues and double standards that existed living in this relationship. This recollecting assisted these women to revisit the early realities of being in the abusive relationship and in compare this to their present realities.

A few of the women who had accessed support services such as the abused women's group and individual counselling at the Elizabeth Fry Society, were able to make sense of their experiences by referring to their partner's abusive behaviors and attitudes as acceptable and unacceptable based on what they had recently learned from other women. Others, who had no support services, had a limited frame of reference in which to interpret the abuse. Both of these quotes however indicate that the plethora of information on abuse that we are told is available,

was not available to these women when they needed it.

I have where he used to shake me. He'd shake me and shake me to the point where he ripped my stuff and then he strangled me. Now, but that would be it but he never really, like hit me or, you know, I didn't think that was abuse. I know it was a form of abuse but I didn't know any better until I started going to Elizabeth Fry.

It took a long time to figure out but it wasn't me...I didn't know. It took along time to figure out but it wasn't me it was him. Yeah, it took me a lot of years to find a better relationship.

Each participant struggled to find the descriptors that best defined her experience. This was evident in their consistent use of terms like "you know" and "I don't know" as well as in their partial and incomplete sentences.

I said, or if it's like, you're kinda in shock or whatever - I said, when you get out of a relationship, too, it's not that easy sometimes to, you know, let it go. Maybe - I know that he had asked his ex to marry him...

These women were attempting to make understandable to me, something that they did not truly comprehend themselves. This struggle to find words that described "it" and to present in a coherent and logical way, a description of an incoherent and illogical experience, was labourious. A limitation of this research design was that it did not allow for the further exploration of these women's process of understanding and explaining the violence.

### The Core Phenomena: "Walking on egg shells".

In presenting the synthesis of my data information, I will first discuss the core phenomenon described by these women as 'walking on egg shells'. Subsequently, I will explicate the five core themes in the information interpretation that were common for all participants. These included: safety, the women's work of staying in the relationship, use of power and control by her partner, concern for children, and the role of the 'system'. Within each theme are a

number of sub-themes I have explored, each with an overall relationship to the central phenomenon of these participant's day-to-day lives.

What they describe are little pieces of an overall context of safety. These bits and pieces are not always in and of themselves considered unusual or frightening, but when woven together, create an environment of intimidation, fear and danger that becomes the contextual experience of 'walking on eggshells'. Each individual woman's story is different yet each contains this central notion of danger described along a continuum. Kelly (1987) notes that the word continuum is not intended to be used in a linear fashion to define the seriousness of abuse. Instead, it is intended as a multifaceted concept, influenced by the victim's reaction, the duration of the abuse and the perceived danger to the victim. Framing this multifaceted concept, the continuum of violence can be conceptualized as an interacting arrangement of verbal, emotional, sexual, economic and physical abuses.

Because I had identified myself as a social worker and because I am a woman who has worked with abusive men, it was assumed by the participants that I understood this phenomenon of constant attendance to the emotional, physical and mental climate which allows for the women's immediate recognition and anticipation of the abusive man's needs in order to prevent and avoid danger. As Devault (1987) argues, women to women talk is the recovery of an unarticulated experience, a process which my interviews proceeded to accomplish in pulling out, over the full course of the conversation, the meaning of the term, 'walking on eggshells'. In using this metaphor, a common understanding was assumed as to the use of this term as a determinant of safety (safety being defined as the absence of walking on eggshells). To deal with the incomplete nature of everyday language to describe the fullness of the experience of living with an abusive man after his treatment, these women chose a term that relied on my 'listening as a

woman' to understand and make sense of it. Because 'walking on eggshells' does not completely say what this experience was, my listening as a woman helped me to understand the experience and continue to talk while providing time for further concrete examples to be articulated. This further articulation provided a more complete understanding of a life 'walking on eggshells'.

I mean, I was walking on egg shells all the time. I mean, you know....I'd try and make sure that - and I'm not a cook, I don't like to cook. He always bugs me about that and says, I don't know what's the problem is, anybody can cook. And I just said well I don't enjoy it...But I mean I would try - I got panicky almost.

This woman went on to describe how she would scramble to get the house work done but it was never good enough or how she went to the gym to lose weight but he criticised her for going out. All of these behaviors begin to create a context of fear for her. She anticipates his emotions, remains in close readiness to respond and develops this phenomenon known as "walking on egg shells" or hyper-vigilance. Women monitor and appear to continually interpret their partner's mood and hence their safety.

The meaning conveyed in this metaphor is the attempt to predict the unpredictable that a woman experiences day-to-day while living with abusive behaviors and attitudes. Use of this metaphor may not necessarily pertain to the actual physical violence in the relationship. Instead it refers to the perception of possible violence, the need to be in a psychological state of readiness and the resulting condition of cumulative stress. This metaphor also describes the woman's need to anticipate her partner's behaviors, however futile, and the hope that in doing so she will maintain some of her own power. "Walking on egg shells" becomes a precarious task.

This perception of violence is powerful; through it a man exercises control over a woman. This is apparent in one women's statement:

It's anything - no, it's anything I've done, you know...To me, it was like anything I did, nothing I ever did seemed to be good enough for him I mean, that was really hard to deal



with, you know... I felt I could never do anything right - I told him the way he talks to me and the way he talks to other people is that it's totally different. I said you have a tone of voice with me. Like, you're aggravated or irritated or condescending and all this, eh.

The perception of possible violence is seen by these women when they live in an environment where their partner is conveying the non-verbal message that he is constantly angry and therefore ready to explode, hence she needs to be vigilant. When he conveys the message through his condescending attitude that she is not worth speaking to, she has learned to be on guard for becoming the brunt of his displeasures.

Power perceived by women is power achieved by their abusive partners. By establishing an environment of 'possibilities' through the use of voice tone, silence, criticism or past violent behaviors, these men do not always need to actually use their power, the show of its presence is enough to warn the woman that she needs to adjust her behavior and guard her safety.

I could see it, the way his eyes go. The facial expressions, he just gets that - his whole face just goes tense and he just, you know, ... You know that you have to do something to protect yourself...because before the - the main assault there was a couple of other incidents that had happened and I wasn't even gonna let that happen again (voice and hands are shakey.)

These women believe their capacity to work, to interact in the family or society or to enjoy good physical and mental health, has been or still maybe threatened despite the fact that their partner has been in a group. They used examples of each in the following descriptors:

even if I .. worked at , let's say at 7 - Eleven or something like that, he would still find something.

I'm not totally letting him take control of my life. I shouldn't say that, I guess that he really is because I quit all of my travels.

I found I was really depressed and I didn't want to get up in the morning...I was twenty pounds overweight... but the stress was worse.

Attempts to describe the women's lives were often filtered through the daily living of



others, often their partners. The lack of words, or combinations of words, forced them to filter their experiences through descriptions of their partner's behaviors. Detailed descriptions of what he thought, said or did were used instead. This is not to say that all experiences emerged from their partner's perceptions, but that when asked to describe what life was like for them, descriptions of her partner's behavior, attitudes, needs and idea's were used as a means of describing a woman's own life.

I'd wake up in the morning and I'd say hi, you know, and morning, whatever and go to give him a kiss or whatever and he'd say, yeah, what's good about it type of thing. Sometimes he would wake up fine, others he wouldn't. I never knew. His mood would change within half an hour. He'd be joking around and everything and then just one thing would set him off... And I was always afraid.

This made it difficult to determine who my participants were as people, their lives, personalities and needs rather than their husband's. As Carol Gilligan (1982) found in her work with women, "identity is defined in a context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care" (p.160). Because these women's identities were defined in the context of the abusive relationship, relating their own experiences became enmeshed with that of their partners. When the topic of their day-to-day lived experience was introduced in the interview, the participants created a picture of their relationship, where their partner was, what he was doing, their family member's importance and the commitment they made to be married. Their individual identities became lost, fused with their partners. Identity became synonymous with the intimacy of the relationship, as a woman comes to know herself through her abusive relationship. For these women it seemed that it is not caring itself that becomes the problem but the additional aspects of the burden of caring for an abusive man (Baines et al, 1991).

But there's women like myself, where they grow up thinking it's been okay to be treated like this. Cause it's been - it's almost like I have to de-program myself and that's what I'm doing now.

This context also relates to the socialization of women in caring for the family. In this case to care for the emotional needs of the family, particularly their partner, they tended to frame their experiences through that of their male partner. While 'walking on eggshells', these women continue to be centrally involved in maintaining the well-being of the family members regardless of the continuation of abuse and the intervention of treatment. As one woman said,

You have to remember I was totally in love with this man and realized that he came from a family background where there wasn't a lot of love and everything, so I thought, ...you know... if I could just love him enough it would fix it.

This description indicates that she believes that he is abusive because he does not feel loved enough. This same woman spoke of this man's abandonment by his mother at a young age and how this led to his hating and distrust of women. "He doesn't have a lot of respect for women - it's his mother. His mother was an alcoholic. She left when he was eleven." She justifies his abusive nature by blaming his mother for not being there for him, and she attempts to be there for him instead.

Maintaining and managing nurturing and caretaking of the family is also a strategy used by women to prevent violence through control of their environment. Cooking, cleaning and other household management skills become a means by which women can control the possible onset of violence or abuse.

I got panicky, almost. You know, I would run around - I would look around the house and think, okay, I've got the dishes done, and I've got that done. Well at least it looks like I've done something and supper's on the table....you know other days the house would be done from one end to the other, kinda normal thing, right...I'd get these derogatory remarks at everything.

Inherent in this remark is the woman's belief that what she has done is never 'good enough'.

Whether the house is completely clean or not, she would "get these derogatory remarks at everything", nothing would satisfy him. She also felt there was a certain standard of care that she

must maintain that is “normal”. Interestingly, this woman worked a night shift job till 2:00 a.m., with few breaks, went home and woke at 7:00 a.m. to care for her twelve year old child. This rigorous schedule combined with the need for constant hyper-vigilance created immense stress for her. While she attempted to keep this stressful pace, her partner remained unemployed while still expecting her to perform the tasks of a wife. “He just said, you’re a wife now you shouldn’t be out running around”. His expectations appeared to be that she should not only work to provide economically, but that she should provide all that he expects in her role as a wife. This demonstrates that for women “the task is one of adjustment and reconciliation in order to create points of intersection among diverse sets of activities” (Devault, 1991). This woman’s work was to co-ordinate many activities, geared towards satisfying her partner and maintaining her home and family by adjusting and harmonizing their lives. She was able to do this by maintaining her vigilance to her partners needs and desires so she ‘walks on egg shells’.

This phenomenon that these descriptions explicate are explored in looking at the experiences that make up ‘walking on egg shells’. These are further defined under five themes.

### The Five Themes

#### 1. Women’s work of Staying in the Relationship

One of the first themes that emerged from my data was the concept of the work required of women in order to maintain their relationships. Women engaged in constant monitoring and anticipation of their partner’s emotional state in order to predict danger but this is not the only ‘work’ that women engage in to maintain a relationship with an abusive partner. ‘Work’ also becomes a number of other invisible activities, seldom defined and often remaining obscure. Some of this work was described as the necessity to accept responsibility for the abuse and

violence; to live with the guilt of fulfilling their own personal needs and to work at empowering themselves. These three tasks of adjustment and reconciliation become the means by which women not only attempted to increase the safety level in their relationships, but reassure their obligation and commitment to the relationship.

### Accepting Responsibility

A major aspect of the work of staying in the relationship is the need for a woman to accept responsibility for the abuse. That they are responsible is the only logical explanation for their partner's irrational, unpredictable and abusive behaviors. If they accept responsibility for the abuse, then they can do the work of changing. Paradoxically, this places the abuse within her control.

Yeah, *it was me. It was me*, I had to change first. That's why I said you have to change, you have to get strong.

I just kinda hold on to the door and *I let him* kick me. He just kept on kicking me....

He was really - he was just irritable all the time. *I felt like I was irritating him*. Like everything I said, irritated him and he was always telling me to, shut your f\_\_\_ing hole and it's your mouth - if you weren't so mouthy, we wouldn't have these problems.

This latter quote demonstrates not only how women consider it their work to take the responsibility and engage in self-blame but how men are continuing to abdicate their responsibility. Despite sixteen weeks of treatment, these women reported clear incidents of their partner's failing to take responsibility for his violence and abuse.

He had ruined three Christmases and I just thought, no, I'm not gonna let it happen again but I told him I was concerned about that and everything and he just said, oh yeah, well whatever, if you can watch your f\_\_\_ing mouth, he said everything will be fine. So, again he was laying - laying it all on me.

...but he - like even now he doesn't accept that he did anything wrong.... we were driving

downtown and he had the audacity to say he didn't know yet if he was going to plead guilty or innocent and I was like, you broke my nose (laughs), you broke my ribs, two separate incidents, but still.

This failure to acknowledge their role and responsibility in the violence implies their inability to change their belief systems and behaviors towards women. These men maintained their ability to abuse these women by holding on to the belief that they were not responsible and therefore, it was not their problem. It was her problem and it was her work to fix it.

### Guilt

Women who invest vast and intensive amounts of emotional energy in abusive relationships must deal with constant guilt when they attempt to fulfill their own needs and practice self-care. Self-care is the act of attending to one's individual needs - physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually - to ensure a healthy balance of one's own life. As women, we are not socialized to engage in self-care behaviors instead "we are encouraged to identify with others and to develop altruistic patterns of interaction"(Baines, Evans and Neysmith, 1991, pp. 17-18). Abused women give up many of their previous activities and attitudes, and experience changes in levels of self-confidence, physical appearance and ability to manage their stress and deal with the presence of depression. In continuing the work involved in the burden of caring, women seriously restrict the development of their own interests and independence.

Well he didn't like me suntanning. He didn't like me going to the gym. He didn't like me goin' and gettin' my hair done. All that kind of thing. So I stopped. I gained twenty pounds.

Its really hard on my self-esteem. I noticed that, yeah, and I got a lot of comments from my friends...they say you're not the same, you don't laugh anymore, you're not smiling anymore. You know you're jumpy. I'm always nervous somebody comes up behind me and I'd be like this - you know. And watching myself all the time.



...but then when I was starting to get stressed I found I was getting really depressed and I - I mean I didn't want to get up in the morning, you know, it was just kinda like, throw the covers over your head, I don't want to deal with it.

I don't drink, I don't even have a glass of wine anymore cause he'll use anything against me and try to find anything against me.

From denying their own physical self care "I gained twenty pounds" to deep emotional depression, these women were becoming less capable of dealing with the burden of living in the abusive situation. They were 'losing' themselves behind walls of fat and beneath blankets of denial. They were no longer who they had been. They became damaged women, less able to care for themselves or others, less capable of providing for their own needs. Which is consistent with the fact that none of the work mentioned by the women included self-care habits that would help them to build their self-confidence, for as Taylor (1991) states,

Women often do not perceive themselves as having the right to act or make decisions that would be for their own direct benefit. The wife in a subordinate position attends to her own needs subject to her husbands approval (p.212).

These women's subordinate position is magnified by the abusive conditions and their ability to care for their own needs is severely restricted.

The women I spoke with are caught in an experience defined by Langford (1994) as being in a whirlwind of social and emotional chaos where women internalize the chaos and join their partner in blaming themselves for the abuse. In response to this social and emotional chaos and the resulting suppression of their feelings, women begin to detach emotionally not only from their partners, but also from themselves. They don't trust themselves to correctly judge situations and to question their ability to determine what is normal and what is not. Under such dysfunctional conditions women have neither the energy nor the ability to identify their needs. Guilt becomes a consuming condition of their loss of identity. Pence (1989) likened the



experience of abuse to brainwashing.

### Empowerment

Battered women often feel powerless, a state that results in both negative self image and loss of control. Empowerment of powerless women involves both the process and the outcome of helping women develop skills, knowledge and influence that makes it possible for them to gain access to money, resources and support (Smith & Siegel, 1985).

By accepting responsibility for the abuse and thereby assuming more control over it, these women came to believe that the only recourse for safety left to them was to empower themselves. They unequivocally believed that they must become stronger in order to survive in the relationship or stronger so that they could leave the relationship. To work at empowering themselves, some women find the strength in entering another relationship for security and protection.

...like if he ever did anything, provided he didn't kill me like I mean, I would send him to jail and, and I've got a guy now who would like, you know, protect me and stuff like that.

Some women find emotional and spiritual strength in attending support groups in an effort to stay in the relationship and 'handle' the abuse.

I go to Alanon every week. Uh, I have books that I'm reading. I'm trying to get myself strong so that I don't - I went to Elizabeth Fry, I went to their meetings - I will keep going to them until I can get myself strong.

This suggests that she knows she does not currently have enough strength to stay safe in her relationship, nor does she have the personal resources necessary to deal with the abuse. Her empowerment will have to be fostered by factors other than herself.

Some women even fantasize about being physically strong enough to stop the

abuse."Yeah...sometimes I wish I was a man and then I could just beat the hell out of him".

This description shows how removed she is from her own empowerment. Her fantasy does even not include images which could become a reality.

Perhaps the genuine fatalism of their situation and faith in where the solutions lie are most apparent in one women's statement about the treatment intervention.

Like, don't just assume it's gonna be better because he's taking this program. Like that is the problem is that you always think he's gonna change and after years and years and years when it gets worse and worse and worse then you kinda have to wake up one day and say, he's not changing, so perhaps I will.

This woman describes the difficulty of coming to terms with the reality that the treatment hasn't changed him and that empowerment will only come when she finally accept that he will not change that she must act. This self-change is the work of empowerment these women struggle to define.

For some women this work of empowerment had to be done on top of the work of caring for the family. They will allow themselves to work at empowerment only if their partner or children maintain their position of priority.

I've done lots of things and I've quit all of them so that I can concentrate on my family right now. I've kinda put my life on hold for my family.

...he's not treating me right but what I'm doing now is I'm getting myself strong so when the time comes I could just leave. And I know one thing - one thing - women like myself, I keep going back and going back and going back because people like me - like women like myself, we're so forgivin' and understanding and - especially the way I was brought up.

These statements emphasize the enormous load of caring that must be shifted to allow a woman to care for herself by "getting myself strong". This woman's comments also address the reality that women are socialized to stay in their relationships, work at the emotional caretaking and maintain their role as nurturer (Baines et al, 1991).

Both church and family play a significant role in keeping women in caring and subservient roles.

He's never had that nurturing that a person usually gets from their mother. I mean, its always been that way. I mean, as far as I can see with family like and that, in most cases, it's the mom does the nurturing, dad goes off to work and all that, right?

I believe that you forgive, just turn the other cheek and be a good little wife. That's what - that's what the church teaches..... I've learned to use - I think that's what kept me going all those years.

At the same time, family also plays a distinct role in supporting these women and providing resources to becoming stronger. Some women turn to family members who can relate to their position,

I have a sister who is very supportive. She went through two abusive relationships, so she has been there, done that..

While others use existing support groups or Church networks.

Um. The way I handle it now. I go to Alanon. Right now and I went to see Mental Health. I'm on - actually this afternoon I got a meeting to go to a workshop called Change of Ways. I'm doing different things to get myself strong.

Both family and church act to restrict and to promote these women's ability to become more resourceful. These women have been socialized to care for and about their partners despite hardships and violence. This condition perpetuates the cycle of caring on which society relies to maintain the institution of the family. These women, through the years of abuse, have come to believe that their work is to become stronger and to empower themselves. They see this as the key to a safer family.

So I need to get myself strong. And I know that no one no one out there can give me advice. No one can tell me leave that a \_\_\_\_ hole. I need to decide that on my own. I need to get strong and that's what I'm doing now.....So the thing I tell a woman is get strong, get your self strong and then learn about the violence and about the behavior and all the cycles of it you know...

Paradoxically, in believing this, women continue to take the responsibility for the situation. By believing they must become stronger, they accept that true change will not be in their partner's ability to stop abusing but in their ability to become empowered. Whether women become stronger in order to stay in the relationship or in order to leave it, this requirement becomes a women's work.

Some of the adjunct work involved in her empowerment includes the need to break the emotional connection with her partner. Therefore a struggle between caring and hope versus facing reality ensues.

Women need to think about the bad things not the good things um, someone told me to write them down - I did once, I wrote down how many - what things I like about my husband, I wrote it down. And how many bad things out weighed the good things - there was not much good in it.

You see I have to remember - I have to make myself remember the bad times, I do, just bringing it back....that's what I have to focus on.

The concept of empowerment used by these women implies their ability to acquire emotional resources which would allow them to become safer. If these women have already experienced some sense of success in 'becoming strong' then it may not be difficult for them to understand the process involved in the achievement of power. However, they would need to "develop ability in choosing [which] involves assertiveness and a familiarity with the importance of choice. It requires moving from the assumption that there is no alternative, to accepting one's lot, to deliberation over what might be possible" (Rees, 1991, p. 93).

The work of becoming stronger can create a backlash effect when their partners feel threatened by the growing independence of the women. Her independence would mean that she was no longer dependent on him. If she was no longer dependent then his ability to control her is greatly reduced. The very act of becoming stronger leads her partner to feel that she is out of his

control leading him to reaffirm his position of dominance by becoming more controlling and manipulative. In making the following comment, the participant also talked about keeping her job, starting to see male friends and continuing to maintain a 'normal' life. Her partner on the other hand was doing drugs, living at his father's and owed people large amounts of money.

He's making me feel sorry for him and concerned. Yeah, I've thought about that, you know, because then he talks about suicide and stuff. Well, I should just do myself in and all this kind of stuff, right. Just another manipulation.....I told him I'm not going to live this way anymore. I'm not going to put up with it, GO! I haven't seen him since Sunday....I'm vibrating and thinking what's happened. Has he...?

This woman describes the manipulative behaviors that her partner uses to elicit caring from her for himself. It is this burden of caring, her own guilt and sense of responsibility that will hopefully ensure he can return to the relationship. Either the man or the woman leaving the relationship, does not guarantee an end to the violence and control. Many women find instead that learning to handle the abuse by engaging in this 'work' of staying, is the best option open to them. This issue of control as well as power is further explored in the next theme which focuses specifically on power and control used by their partner's.

## 2. Partner's Use of Power and Control

The majority of treatment programs in North America are based on the model developed by the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Minnesota (Pence and Paymar, 1993). This model specifies eight areas of power and control: using intimidation; using coercion and threats; using male privilege; using economic abuse; using children; minimizing, denying and blaming; using isolation and emotional abuses. These eight areas are discussed as a power and control wheel (Appendix D) and used as a means of reeducating men about their violence.

Having completed a group, one would expect that the abusive man would be less likely to engage in behaviors and attitudes that continue abusive power and control, however as I discovered through my interviews, this was not necessarily the case.

A lot of verbal abuse. And that was always the main thing of our relationship too was verbal and emotional abuse - very manipulative. Like he didn't want me going out. He always tried to make me feel guilty even if I went for lunch with a girlfriend or my sister or whatever. And yet he denied it. He said - he just said, you're a wife now you shouldn't be out running around doing this. That hasn't changed.

Given that previously the male partners were not only capable of but actively engaged in dangerous behavior, women are still controlled by the possibility of that violence. Even after treatment, the men in these relationships still used a variety of ways to control the women. For the purpose of explicating my data I have chosen to combine these into two areas; psychological and economic controls, which were the most common means described by these participants.

### Psychological control

There are many ways that a man can control a woman psychologically, some are so subtle that the woman is unable to recognize when this abuse is taking place. I feel that it is necessary to discuss the distinction between psychological battering and emotional abuse as this difference exists for women. Psychological battering has more destructive power than emotional abuse because that power comes directly from a woman's past experience of violence that has already occurred. She knows from past assaults that he is able to back up his threats with physical abuse (Ganley, 1982). In emotional abuse there may never have been any physical violence, only the continued threat or implied possibility. This has a different quality of effect on women, though no less debilitating. However, all psychological control described by these women is psychological battering as each had experienced physical abuse that would confirm their partners ability to



physically injure them.

The following quote would be recognized as emotional abuse if this man had never actually engaged in physical violence, however as this particular partner has physically abused this women, this is an example of psychological battering.

I remember being in Vancouver, on the back of the Harley, and him being angry, and him just zipping in and out of traffic, and twice my knees ....my knees brushing the uh, side view mirrors of vehicles. He's done it since [the group], he's done it before, tried to scare me, yeah, it worked.

This kind of abuse and control shows the male partner's ability to create fear through alluding to the possibility that it might happen and demonstrating his power to make it happen if he chooses. Whether psychological battering or emotional abuse, the primary function of psychological control is to keep women "walking on egg shells" and to maintain their subservience.

Threats by the male partner, that he will become sexually involved with other women, or actual involvements, are a means of psychologically abusing his partner.

Well, I still can't go on my [business] trips, um he tells me if I go on a trip he's gonna go out and do it again - screwing around and like that. I don't trust him. He's done it before. I can't go on my trips.

This form of manipulation suggests to the women that not only is his fidelity based on her ability to meet his needs in the home, but also that there is a deficiency in her that leads him to seek comfort with another woman. The threat of loss of the male partner is seen by our society as a problem of the woman's making not necessarily of the man's. Media advertising (Still Killing Us Softly, 1987) and other forms of socialization lead women to believe that if they were pretty enough, slim enough, caring enough, or available enough, the man would not want to seek to fulfill his needs elsewhere. It must be noted that this loss of her partner has not only emotional overtones but also economic, as his leaving for another woman may result in her loss of

economic stability and lead to possible poverty.

### Economic Controls

Poverty and fear of poverty are very real issues for women in today's society. In a job market with dwindling possibilities, low paying positions, down sizing and down loading, women are often times left with little possibility of employment and much insecurity. Despite these conditions, the women I interviewed recognized the control and power that finances had played in their dependance and vulnerability and each had taken steps to become more financially independent.

He used to get paid and go to the bar and blow all the money. He just gave me what he wanted to. Now we have a joint account, I have a job of my own and I am economically independent.

I'll get my purse and I'll go from him and I'll go somewhere...And that's one thing I'll never do again, I'm not gonna move from here. I'm gonna stand up. I'm gonna stand up against what I believe in and that's why I'm gonna buy this building and keep my business.

What this means is that the reality of previous economic dependence has contributed to their realization that economic independence is necessary not only for their individual survival but for any hope of an equitable relationship with their partners. These women are making sure that both partners benefit from the financial arrangements, thus establishing greater equality in the relationship.

Not all women have this option of economic independence however as they are faced with having to care for small children or they lack the job market skills needed in this technological age. Being without a male partner who earns better wages is a reality that keeps women bound to the abusive home.

Um, when I look at him, because he works very hard, he's in that way he's a good

provider. He always worked. That's one thing about Sam, he worked all the time.

The meaning of this statement seem to be that even though he has beaten her and continues to psychologically abuse her, she is willing to accept some of this in return for the economic security and stability of a partner who is a good provider.

Without some form of employment or guaranteed income, many women are not able to support themselves outside of the abusive marriage . This form of power and control over a woman shows how dependant and vulnerable, abused women are, both in and out of the relationship

...he's paying a measly fifty dollars a month for child support and he uh, like I was talking to him Friday and he wanted me to come down and pick the money up and I said no, its up to you to get it to me, I shouldn't have to chase after fifty dollars. (Voice mimicks low tone of husband) Well I'll put it away and see if I can keep it. I'll probably spend it.... So I went down on Saturday and picked it up..... In fact he said that when we first started the divorce proceedings and stuff, he said he wasn't gonna pay me any kind of alimony. I said whatever, he didn't support me the five years we were married why would I expect him to start now. But, uh and plus not only that but uh, I don't want him to have that kind of control over me. I don't want it, I don't want to have the money and rely on it and then have him not pay it anymore and stuff because that would be a control thing. I don't need the headache, so I'll just live on welfare until I'm done school.

As this last women describes, her need for an extra fifty dollars a month to care for her child keeps her tied into her ex-partner's control. The reality of life with children is that women have the extra financial responsibility of providing for their children as a single parent. Fear of being single, and the poverty that it often brings, keep women in abusive relationships

These descriptions of women's day-to-day lived experience's suggest that men's groups may fail to hold men accountable for their purposeful abuse vis-a-vis finances. Nor do they appear to have addressed the financial abuse inherent in manipulating and controlling money.

Though not always conscious or preplanned, economic abuse serve to keep women in a

subordinate position, restricting their freedom of choice and movement.

Of the current men's treatment groups, which primarily address cognitive behavioral issues, there is concern by women's advocates and feminist researchers that they create 'non-violent terrorists' (Holmes & Lundy, 1990). I did not find this particular phenomenon. I did find, however, that 'nonviolent terrorism' was present in these women's lives. Though the physical assault often had diminished due to legal intervention, psychological abuse still persisted.

What I'm trying to put a stop to is the verbal and mental abuse now. I always tell him that - do you know what you're doing Sam?

If group interventions were effective, as defined by the presence of safety and absence of danger for female partners, then one would expect to see a different pattern at work. Perhaps a reduction in physical violence or a more subtle form of emotional abuse would be evident. These descriptions suggest a phenomenon where the physical abuse had decreased and the psychological abuse had increased or stayed constant. Though not all women reported the presence of physical abuse currently, they did report a decrease of physical and the current existence of psychological abuse. These women report that the psychological abuse had increased or stayed the same, a phenomena consistent with the research previously examined in the literature review. These findings suggest that these women's lives are not necessarily safer as they are still "walking on egg shells", in fear of physical, sexual and psychological violence despite their partner's involvement in a program geared towards changing their psychologically abusive behaviors and attitudes.

### 3. Concern for Children

The presence of children in the relationship added a factor of concern for the women I interviewed. Not only were they living with their own danger, but they feared for the well being and lives of their children: "... when my son goes over there for the weekend, I worry because I honestly believe that he is going to die when he is there". This description of the fear this mother lives with when her child visits his father suggests that 'walking on egg shells' does not end when their partner leaves their lives, instead it continues through their children.

The care of dependent children is a woman's direct concern and, generally speaking, it is the presence or danger to children that most often convinces a woman to leave (Thorne - Finch, 1992). The man's use of power and control affects more than his relationship with his partner. It also affects other relationships within the family.

When Dick was born he was in the hospital for five and a half weeks because he was seven weeks early and we couldn't actually take him home, but anyway's, um, and I had to beg him to come down to the hospital to see - and I spent all my time down there because it was like he [Dick] was a piece of me for seven months and then all of a sudden he wasn't there but I didn't get to take him home my baby, it was a hard time (in hushed tones). And like he wasn't there for me he wasn't there to see his kid still....Anyway he left before Dick's first birthday, he left and went to live with his brother and that was kinda like go and come, go and come, kinda thing..... And when he last left and he was gone and I accepted he was not coming back, the tension in our house melted and Dick started to talk. Cause he hadn't really talked much before that and he started to calm down and he wasn't so wired all the time and stuff like that.

Her description of her child as "a piece of me for seven months" conveys a sense of connection that continues to grow and become a part of this woman's existence. Her partner's rejection of the child is like a rejection of her. When he does return to the family, his abusive presence becomes a source of danger not just for this woman but also for the child, and this child begins learning to "walk on egg shells" too. Because of a woman's primary caretaking role, her well-being is intrinsically linked with that of her child. Her sense of safety and resulting contentment

would both affect and be affected by her child's reaction to the abuse.

This woman voiced her concern that the messages she was giving her daughter about relationships was wrong.

Yeah, I not only have myself to worry about but I have my daughter too and I don't want her thinking - growing up thinking that, you know, that's the way, you know I mean.... that's the way a relationship should be because even though, I mean, I consider myself intelligent enough to know that that's not the way women are supposed to be treated but yet at the same time I've allowed it to happen though I don't want her - you know, she know's that it's not right...but I'm afraid that when she's a teenager, you know like, if she falls in love with somebody, you know, then the same thing, you know, she might let it slide for awhile too instead of saying right away at the start saying no, this isn't right."

This quote describes this woman's concern that her daughter will learn to be a victim. She recognizes that the family is one of the most important contexts in which children learn their social roles. She believes that her daughter is learning that violence against women is acceptable. A mother's relationship with her daughter is one in which a child learns about what it means to be a woman, how to treat others, particularly their partners, and about how the world should work. For young women growing up in an abusive home and watching the power inequity between her mother and partner, this means they will learn that abuse can be tolerated. For sons growing up watching this abusive relationship, they learn what it means to be a man, how to treat women and how their world should work.

As mothers, women realize that the mother-daughter bond is an important one for establishing future relationships. These women's relationships to their daughters appeared filled with regrets and worry about the negative impact of living with an abusive man.

I know I can't go back to doing it again because its going to take too long [for him to change] and in the meantime and in the meantime, its going to have too much of a detrimental effect on me and my daughter and on- like on both of our lives separately and on our relationship too.

My daughters heard all this. Till this day I promise my daughters, this my girls - this is



never gonna happen again. Ah... the things I've done.

It is this concern and regret that demonstrates the extent to which women may feel blamed by their children for their subordination to the violent man. If as previously stated, woman's identity is defined by her relationships, then her healthy relationship to her children becomes a paramount issue.

She said, you know mom, I know you really really love him and she said I know how sad you are and she said, he isn't good for you. Look at all the times he made you cry and everything you've gone through - she said you know you should leave him, get a divorce. I know it would be really hard but she said, it'll get easier as time goes on and I'll be here for you Mom.

This unstated, but ever present criticism, places pressure on women who may feel helpless to act. This contributes to their already low self-esteem and can further immobilize them for change. On the other hand it can often be a motivator for abused women to make changes for the generations of women to come and specifically for a better life for their own children. Recognizing that the weight of the responsibility for how a child is socialized does not rest entirely on the shoulders of the mother, we must ask how as a society we continue to give young women the message that her world is defined by her relationships. One such area of note described by these women is the involvement of the 'system' in their lives.

#### 4..The Role of the 'System'

The 'system' was a term used by the participants to describe the justice system composed of police, judges, probation officers and the men's treatment group itself. When women finally call the police for help, they are refusing to accept any further tyranny from their partners. It is their attempt to change the oppression. Most of their sense of protection however, stems from the system's intervention and its judicial control over their partner. A sense of safety did not

appear to be derived from the men's treatment group effectiveness in creating change in their partners, or their faith in their own ability to change the situation. While there appeared to be an ambivalent reaction to this entity known as 'the system', so far removed from their day-to-day experience, police and court intervention nonetheless directly affected the quality of safety in these women's lives.

He got four months, so he did three - three months, something about four months - and while he was there there was nothing for him there....I looked into what they've got for men out there - totally -nothing..... What do they got. These men only got like two , three months - that's still a lot of time for them to get something in here to help them and he told - and when he came out, there was nothing in there - there was nothing in there - there was nothing in there for him. He says, it didn't mean nothing. Uh, he got ordered to see his probation officer and I said, Listen I says, here's this Judge that puts my husband in your hands and whatever you say he has to do and I says, these are the things that I would like to recommend but she never listened to me, never listened to me. I said, once a month for my husband to go to a spousal assault, that's p\_\_\_ all, it doesn't do nothing..... Cause I got angry and I said f\_\_\_ the system. F\_\_\_ it. I'll go back and I'll go do what I can do for myself. That is the attitude I have and I told that to the Probation Officer and I says, you guys are not doin' nothin'. Oh, well our hands are full, our load is too big.

The frustration and anger at the legal system's inability to listen to her concerns were obvious.

This woman knows her husband and feels that once a month in an assaultive men's group is not going to make her life safer. She seems to be struggling to find solutions, yet no one listened.

She was not included in the process of determining effective intervention and her opinion was not valued in her attempts to create safety for herself. She was clearly saying that what they had to offer would not work, yet she received only excuses and a marginal intervention plan. This woman believes that the power of the government to intervene on her behalf and provide her with more than token assistance is not being used. Her faith in the ability of the system to protect her was diminished. The probation officer's statement "our load is too big" shows that this woman's dilemma is not an individual one. It is shared by front line workers who attempt to

address this crime. Their job is to deal with the question of deterrence from crime and not the long term issue of personal growth and change.

In spite of this, the fact that their partners have been charged gives women a certain degree of safety and short term ability to protect themselves from the physical abuse. These women believe that fear of being charged is a strong deterrent, yet they are given no voice in the structure that determines what happens after that deterrent is imposed.

Before I was scared, always scared. Now I call the police, he knows that. He takes a time out.

He came back and he apologized and I said, listen, maybe you got away with it this time. The reason you got away with it is cause you're on Probation, I said cause of the first time you beat me up - next time you touch me, I don't care, I says, you better not touch me again. Next time, I will call the police.

These women had no recourse for threats of post-group violence. The only defence they were able to utilize was to threaten back, using the power of the court system to prevent danger and enforce safety.

I said, you touch me one more time and you're not gonna get away with anymore hitting me because I'm gonna report you. I says, no one other person - no one's ever allowed to hit another person.

Even though all the participants partners had completed the court-ordered treatment program, the immediacy of violence and abuse was still present in their accounts of their experiences.

But he didn't learn anything but, if I hit her, I could go to jail. He didn't learn that it was wrong to hit me, he didn't learn how to control his temper, he didn't learn anything in fact, he did hit me a couple of times afterwards. The one time, the last time, which was like pretty much what ended it, he had his hands around my neck and he was pounding my head into the arm of the couch....and he was calling me all kinds of names and he wanted me dead at that point, he told me that and I believed he was going to kill me.

Nothing could be more obvious than this description of the failure of the group intervention to change this man's behavior or attitude. His abuse did not become more psychological, it became

more desperately physical. This woman's safety was in no way assured or even improved by his attendance at an abusive men's group. While this description indicates this man's ability to take her life, it also describes an actual attempt to do so and her inability to prevent that. Clearly, this incident demonstrates there has been no increase in physical or emotional safety for her. This description of the post-group relationship shows that "successful" completion of groups for assaultive men did not consider success in terms of this woman's safety.

These women spoke of the violence and abuse, both physical and psychological, as it was occurring post-group and as an active presence in their lives today. They voiced direct perceptions as to whether the group was effective in changing the abuse in their lives.

And he had to take the sixteen week counselling but I find that -that didn't work because he was angry. He was always angry. Like the course would start Tuesday night. He would start getting angry Monday night and say, I have to go to this f\_\_\_ing thing because of you. He's be angry Monday night, he'd be angry Tuesday, he'd be angry before he left, he'd be angry when he came home and he wouldn't be alright again - usually until about Wednesday morning and then something else would come up, you know?..... Yeah, and the group facilitator confirmed that and so did his probation officer.

Right, like he never learned nothing in that group...all Ted learned is if he hit's me he could go to jail.

These descriptions of daily life for women, suggest that men are not victims of a dysfunction which prevents them from controlling their ability to be violent. This man was able to control his anger when he wish to, beginning to get angry the day before group and ending the day after or in the case of the other man, being able to stop hitting if it means jail.

One concern voiced by all women participants, regarding the lack of change in their partners, was that mandatory attendance at these groups was not effective in stopping violence.

Um, I said, the Judge put my husband in your hands, whatever you say he has to do and can you please make an appointment for him to go see Mental Health so that he can have one-to-one counselling. That's what these men need. People need to know where they're coming from. Oh, well, he's going to a group -one in here- there's a whole bunch of men

in there. And I said, that's no good, it's not doing anything. Even himself said, hon, I never learn anything, everybody sleeps there. It has to be up to the man, he's got to want to change.

When even the abused woman is able to recognize that the group intervention is ineffective, the system is unresponsive to that statement of ineffectiveness. The group then becomes a means to maintain the status quo, whether successful or not. Men benefit by staying out of jail and the community benefits by having a solution in place to refer to. Men's dominance stays intact and society is assured that the family institution is maintained.

Given that the perceived mandate of groups is to provide safety for women and change men's abusive behaviors, it is interesting that the women are saying that their partners did not learn anything and little has changed. This statement seems to suggest that women accept the notion that men's groups work for most men, simply because they have seen them work for some men. This suggests that women feel their partner's failure is the exception. Women accept the same belief that courts, funding agencies and general society have accepted, namely that the groups generally do work. These women describe groups which didn't work for them. This belief that they are the exception, further isolates these women. This isolation reinforces their belief that they themselves are responsible for their partner's failure to change.

If he gets into trouble, if something bad happens cause I didn't take him back, I hope that I'm not going to feel guilty or responsible...I know I'm going to but I'm going to have to deal with it.

Many women stay because they believe the group treatment intervention, supported by the system, is an alternative they should try in order to effect change in their partners and because they were hopeful. They had been reassured that treatment would be successful.

That's why I hung on because I really thought - see they had said that they had had a lot of success with men that were like Robert. That, um, that they had a lot - well a lot of

success in the group with men like him and - and that gave me hope and I thought okay, well, I'm married, I've made a commitment, you know, I'm gonna try and I thought okay, well, I'll give him that sixteen weeks and see if I see a difference and then at the end of September, you know, we'll see what happens.

Yeah, I thought a light bulb would go on. I really thought that if he got there in a group with other men, I mean, because I know myself when I went into those - that group, you know, it triggered the light bulb going on for me a couple of times, you know.

These two quotes describe the illusion of hope discussed in the literature (Gondolf, 1987; Holmes & Lundy, 1990), and is perhaps the greatest danger of depending on groups as an intervention tool for eliminating violence against women. Women want to stay and are constantly looking for ways that will help them maintain their relationships and yet stay safe. Groups offer them a possible solution but obviously not one that can be consistently relied on to provide the safety that they require. The concept of safety is discussed at length in the next theme.

## 5. Safety

This theme of safety, encompassed four sub-themes in which women described their lived experience of safety. These include unpredictability and the presence of danger, actual incidents of abuse, the use of drugs and alcohol and provoking violence. This concept of safety is most closely related to the central phenomenon described by all participants as "walking on eggshells".

### Unpredictability and the presence of danger

The fact that all participants felt that they were still 'walking on egg shells' despite the attendance of their partners in treatment suggests that the climate of unpredictability still exists for these women. They remain hyper-vigilant, monitoring warning signs such as physical or



emotional changes. In order to predict danger, women feel they are required to stay close to their partners, paradoxically placing them at greater risk of danger. Women found that this was necessary, however, to monitor change of voice, eyes, facial expressions or physical manners.

I could see it, the way his eyes go. The facial expression, he just gets that- his whole face just goes tense and he's just, you know, like that (scrunches up her fingers and hands to suggest tense and tight).

In addition, women anticipated trigger events; situations, words or people that would set off the anger and abuse.

He still does what he wants, keeps watching T.V. if he wants to. He is still only involved when he feels like it. If he is upset or mad we just stay away from him, I keep the kids away. You have to really watch.

This indicates that the woman is always attempting to predict when there may be a presence of danger.

Women continue to respond to actual or potential threats of escalating violence. The following exemplifies the time consuming and labourious task of 'walking on egg shells' to ensure one's own safety and that of her children.

But at the same time I'm always watching myself. I'm always watching him. Um, the things I'm watching for now is, um, if I find that he is going to go drinking, I'll go home and pack my little bag, get my daughter. I'll go stay at Elizabeth Fry. But if I find that he is drinking, it seems like that I'm watching for him when I know that he's out there.

These behaviors of monitoring and anticipating are attempts to foresee the unpredictable nature of their partners and the presence of danger.

#### Actual incidents of abuse

Previous attempts by the women to anticipate and predict violence had failed. In fact, women reported feeling that violence was inevitable despite their efforts. Ultimately their

partners resorted to the strongest and most life threatening form of abuse, physical violence, as the following statement cogently illustrates

I said, leave me alone. I said, get out of here. I told him that and I knew - I can see it in his eyes and he grabs a hold of me and then he start beating me and he grabbed me by the hair and he threw me on the floor and it was the most humiliating thing that ever happened to me that he - he really beat me - started kicking me , was in the hallway in the - in our trailer and there was the washer and dryer there - it was narrow so he could get a hold of my face. First time - when he first time when he hit me and he did this to me here (motions to her cheek bones). I wasn't gonna let him hit me on my face. Uh, he kept on trying to get me. I just laid down there, I kinda hold on to the door and I let him kick me. He just kept on kicking me, booting me until he couldn't kick me anymore and somehow I went sideways and he kicked me in my ribs, and I couldn't breathe. I was gasping for air. I think that's when he finally stopped because I couldn't breathe. I was just (gasping breathing noise) I was going like that and I couldn't breathe. I got scared myself and I jump up and I go (gasping breathing noise). I was going like this and he says, what the heck is wrong with you bitch! He says and he followed me to the bathroom.

This description of the before-group relationship shows that women were not able to ensure their own physical safety. Post-group, men's control was maintained mainly through the use of threats to physical safety with actual incidents of physical abuse reduced though not eliminated. Having proved that he could physically injure her in the past, as this quote indicates, threats and subtle allusions to violence were enough to convince the woman that the potential for abuse was still present, however the men's fears of being charged and returning to jail often acted as a deterrent to the acceleration of threats into full blown assaults. This reduction of physical violence produced the often mentioned side effect of treatment, namely increased psychological abuse.

What I'm trying to put a stop to is the verbal and mental abuse now. It's gotten worse if anything. Now that he knows he could go to jail for hitting me again, its worse. Ah, He told me, he said, I'm not gonna f\_\_\_ing go to jail for any woman.

It's like I should be seen and not heard type of thing. Ah, he's ah, very verbally abusive. I am a cunt and a bitch and you know...A lot of verbal abuse. And that was always the main thing of our relationship too was verbal and emotional abuse - very manipulative.

This describes her feeling that her partner wished her to be a nonentity and to be non-existent,

juxtaposed with his belief that her role was to cook, clean and provide for his needs. Despite this myriad of tasks, he did not want to give her a voice in their lives. For women, this psychological abuse means that they are living in a context of continuing violence which creates an environment of fear. This form of violence is above the law, so the woman has no recourse to prevent this form of control.

### Alcohol and Drugs

A further theme within the larger category of safety is the use of drugs and alcohol, or both, by the women's partners as a recurrent sign of the presence of danger. This was commonly shared by all participants. The abuse of these substances was seen by the women as a main reason for the violence yet we know that alcohol, while often involved in violent incidents, does not on its own cause male violence (Thorne-Finch, 1992). Drug or alcohol use, however, was a source of considerable stress between the couples as the women noted the increased likelihood of violence, with an increase in drug or alcohol use.

When he drank he was more abusive. He doesn't drink now, its been over a year and its better, but I won't lay my life on it always being that way.

I said... I want you to quit drinking, please quit drinking and things will be okay.

It is important to note that though alcohol and drug use are not the sole reason for violent behavior, they can complicate and escalate the situation. These women I spoke with believed that drugs and alcohol escalated the violence. Knowing this trigger provided them with a necessary clue to anticipate the increased danger when their partner was abusing drugs or alcohol.

You know its not really life threatening, but it escalated...And that's the scary thing that you don't know! And like at first I always said, no, no, no he wouldn't do that, he wouldn't do that but possibly with the alcohol and the drugs combined.....

No, but he doesn't drink - hasn't drank for one month. But during the breakup I know he will again. So, I'm always - preparing myself for that.

On the other hand, incidents of violence were also described when alcohol and drug use was not present which supports the idea that these women are aware that drinking is not the only reason for the abuse.

...but there were times too when he wasn't drinking where he's driven the car or the truck so close to me, like missed me by half an inch...

This statement suggests that drinking was not the only time when her partner used intimidation to remind her of his ability to determine her life and death, or at least her physical safety.

Substance abuse and use of alcohol were a universal condition warning women of increased danger and potential violence. In all cases, their spouses were not required to attend concurrent alcohol or substance abuse programs, even though every one of them reported substance and alcohol abuse as a precipitating danger.

#### "Provoking" Violence

The fourth aspect of the safety theme was the very dangerous but sometimes necessary skill a woman had of provoking the violence in order to have some control of the outcome. In these cases women felt that the only means available to them to effect a safer climate was to bring on the violence, and this way be better prepared for the abuse.

And what I do now is trick it off myself first before - sometime- its just - its just a habit I got into with him - with me and him fighting and I know that for awhile we haven't fought. I know that it's coming, I can feel it - the build-up. So, I say, okay what's your problem? I'll say that, I'll say that - I'll say what the - what are you thinking of, why aren't you talking. You know, I'll just....

This woman's description, speaks clearly of her provocation to violence as a safety-oriented



strategy used by women to defuse and maintain some degree of control and therefore safety in the circumstances. That a simple act of requesting their partner's communication is seen as provocative, shows how much both partners take the violence as inevitable. Yet, it can be seen that what "provokes" is not in itself, an invitation to violence, it is an invitation to communicate.

The other element of provocation is the personality changes that women feel have happened to them after living with the abuse for years. Women themselves become an element of the abusive environment and react to aggression with behaviors out of character for them, especially the use of aggression.

I never used to talk this way, I'd never say those words. But I'm spoken to like that all the time, you hear that. Um, when I'm not with him, I'm a very positive person. I try to think positive even though that all these things are on me, man, you can lose that pretty fast when you're around people like that and all you hear is f\_\_\_ this and f\_\_\_ that. I would never normally have said that. Like, in any of - either of my other relationships, I've never ever even been angry or whatever, you know, you know how you can get - you can have a screaming fight. I've never said something that rotten or hurtful, you know. You may think something like that but you don't, you know, because once it's said, you can't take it back. So you end up becoming a person who you would never have been otherwise.

...he was the abuser and I mean, I, I hit him. I would strike out. After awhile it's like, I may as well get one punch in 'cause I'm gonna get it anyways so, may as well have the satisfaction of getting one punch in. Or, when he is like, pounding on me then you do like, automatically react so, he's got scars on his face cause I scratched him. Yeah, but the thing like, like the guy I've been with for two years, I've never even had the urge to hit him or anything. Like, we've never even had heated words, Well, like disagreements, like I said but....

These statements illustrate the women's common reactions to living with abuse. Each describes her own violence, anger or use of verbal abuse as a reaction to living with their partner's abusiveness. They see these behaviors as uncharacteristic, yet necessary to ensure their own safety. These quotations suggest that women's violence is a reciprocated defence, existing only within the context of the abusive relationship. They indicate that, 'when pushed to the wall' and

if, "I'm gonna get it anyways", these women will strike out as a rudimentary survival tactic.

These phenomena are a part of the much-debated issue of violent women. The fact that women provoke or use violence is used against them by people interested in a gender-neutral perspective (Giles-Sims, 1983). What is not discussed is the reasons for that provocation and the gender context inherent in this issue.

Male partners argue that women provoke the violence, therefore, they deserve it. One woman described a television show in which a woman was arrested for a traffic violation and was physically abused by the police officer.

And Sam's lying there in bed with me as we're watching this and he says, yeah, just shut your mouth [speaking to the t.v.], she's a stupid woman, you know. Geez, what a stupid bitch, right? Talking like this, eh? I said, don't talk like that. I said, you know I don't like it. Look at the way he is treating her. He said, well, she's asking for it.

These comments by her male partner had a powerful impact on this woman. It was then that she realized that not only had his behavior not changed but that his basic belief about women was misogynistic.

My back was up, like the hair on my head rose and everything and just like, whoa and I mean, I think he realized he had done something wrong but he was so defensive and everything about it. And that's the way he is. And that's a deep down inside thing. That's his - yeah, that's his belief.

This man's deeply rooted belief in a woman's worthlessness is a shocking testimony to the ineffectiveness of his treatment group. To change such a deeply embedded belief will require more than the forty-eight hours of group work he completed. Effective change can not occur unless the beliefs that support, maintain and justify abusiveness are changed. Fundamental to effective change for abusive men is the ability to take responsibility rather than getting defensive. It would require that her partner acknowledge that the responsibility to change his abusive behavior is his and not hers.



### The 'Exception'

In contrast to the other participants one woman interviewed described her day-to-day experience as

Oh, 100% better, definitely, he's so different now - you're not afraid to be around him, he, we communicate, we actually talk without fighting.

This suggests that the treatment program was so effective that her life is completely changed and there is no longer any evidence of violence or control. Yet as I conducted this interview I was struck by a number of aspects that left me feeling confused. There was no negative information here. This woman's life had changed completely. Her 'glowing' terms were unusual and suggested that there was not only nothing left to change but that there were no conflicts. Her husband had not only made some positive changes but he had changed altogether.

The absence of any negative information caused me to speculate whether this woman was in denial. Not surprisingly, she had questioned this, asking herself,

Okay, am I blind - has he really not changed and I'm just thinking - he has, but he has. I think it's so weird.

In further discussion, this woman described her husband's work schedule and their living arrangements as very occupied.

And now he talks to his boss when he's upset or before he gets upset he tells him that something's bothering him and that's so nice too...he works six days a week. He works like ten, twelve hour shifts every day. So he works hard.

This overwork and absence could be his strategies to avoid abusiveness. By investing his time and energy in paid work he maybe avoiding the stresses of everyday family life. Regardless however, she appears to be satisfied with this arrangement.

She described a mother and a sister and a friend that were all in actively abusive

relationships. Relatively speaking her relationship had not been as physically dangerous as theirs. She had coping strategies which indicate her ability to avoid the anger of her husband and perhaps speak to the level of danger she was in.

You know if he was upset or something I would take the kids and go for a walk, or I would just, I don't know it was just very protective of them, I still am.

The fact that she was unrestricted to leave the house, with the children, and go for a walk suggests that the level of danger and control was perhaps not quite so acute and that use of this type of coping strategy was sufficient to defuse a potential argument.

According to this participant her husband no longer controlled her and he now "allowed" her freedoms previously denied. What was determined to be a new freedom to her however, may have been considered unremarkable for many.

For years I never went anywhere in the sense of a holiday. And in the last two years I've been away - how many- four times I've gone away on my own. I went to my sister's. I went to a wedding. I've been all over the place. Out of town for a week at a time to visit my sisters.

This freedom to visit family members suggests that after years of being denied the opportunity to even visit family, she views this "allowance" as generous. She is now allowed to go alone on her holidays to family, but her husband had requested to come to the interview with her "to tell me what he thought about the group". This does not necessarily suggest a man who is able to allow his partner indiscriminate freedoms. The possibility exists that there is a more subtle form of control present in his request to speak to me.

Her description of safety was not defined as the presence of something positive as much as it was defined as the absence of something negative but even this lacked substantial details.

You know, and I think you both gotta want it or you know, I keep asking myself like...how did I just all of a sudden decide [that the relationship was better], like you know, you just know I guess, and just, I don't know.

I sensed that there may have been more, but ethically I did not want to push the issue and open up an area which may require ongoing healing. In the time frame of the interview and my research I could not provide this individual with the support to look carefully at her partner's 'complete' change.

After years of marriage it is possible that her desperation to have the 'normal family' she talked about, contrived to keep her in denial about other abuses. As this next quote indicates, she was unable to participate in the rescue from her own home, relying on a neighbour to determine the unacceptability of his abuse. Even during the violence she was not able to acknowledge the necessity of breaking the denial that her life was not ideal.

...after I went to the neighbours and they called them [police] actually if I remember, but that is something I would never have done, I'd never have told anybody, that this was happening in our house, Oh no, never!

This denial is characteristic of abused women and this firm belief that her life was going to be okay and not a tragedy like her mother's, appears to have held her in the relationship long after other determined it was not safe.

I have chosen to discuss this participant as the exception because she describes herself in this way. Our society currently chooses to believe that this woman's description of her life after her partner's treatment is the norm. My research shows it is an exception and even this participant acknowledges this. "Like I said, I think we are the lucky ones, the exception...". If this woman is indeed the exception, then the implication is that groups, as a form of effective treatment, are offering false hope to most women who rely on this intervention to assure them of safety.

Similar to the other participants, this woman felt very strongly that men have got to want to change before the groups will be successful. She acknowledged that her partner was

motivated by the possible loss of his family.

Today, we talked for about an hour, he said, you have to want to change, he wanted that. And he said you have to figure out what is important in your life and he said he realized what he could have lost, what he was doing was wrong - how he could change it, how he could deal with his emotions, his anger.

Originally I accepted this woman's information as the picture that those of us working in the field have all been waiting to hear. I wanted to accept this description at face value but after puzzled reflection I realized this information was an anomaly. The excessively positive outcome clashes so strongly with the other participants statements that I was felt it credible to present this as the exception and attempt to describe what she experienced that lead me to these conclusions. The following remark could indicate that it is primarily her perception of herself as no 'quitter' and her situation as 'not like her Mom's', that she experienced an acceptable level of safety.

Cause it worked for us, you know, and we were so happy that it did work, you know, and I think, wow this is so strange. Like people can change and it helped, you know. It saved our marriage, our family. Like, I - I've never been a quitter. I always think I'm not stupid. I'm not gonna be my Mom. Can't have blinders on you know - I want to work this out. You know we can't expect the men to change without thinking, okay - I mean, I always think you can't blame them - like, living in the past, pointing fingers, like, are you gonna hit me again, like, whatever, you can't constantly keep bringing it up either or he's gonna think, oh I tried and I tried and your gonna keep throwing it in my face.

This woman's strong need to achieve happiness and be seen to be in a happy and safe marriage may have lead to her viewing any changes as effective. Her strong belief in her ability to "not be a quitter", may have resulted in her acceptance of any change as desirable. Her socialization of viewing men as victims described in her comment, "I feel sorry for men", and her willingness to absolve them for their minor transgressions, leads me to conclude that there was more to this interview than could be addressed in this thesis process.

### Summary

Communication between researcher and participant can be constructed through the use of metaphorical imagery or a metaphor. This is the use of figurative language to convey an image that is thought to be a shared image. It reduces two terms to their shared characteristics and allows the communicators to share understanding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). As previously mentioned, abused women used the metaphor of "walking on egg shells" a theme recurrent in the literature (Langford, 1994) and a theme they assumed I understood because I am a woman and counsellor. Despite the fact that these women's partners were or had been in group treatment, all participants expressed the experience of still "walking on egg shells" because the unpredictability of their partners actions was still present in their lives. The threat of danger and lack of sense of safety were still experienced in varying degrees. Women came to believe that the intervention of a group was ineffective based largely on their continuing experience of "walking on eggshells". Although their experiences differed, each participant was able to articulate a range of dangerous episodes that reinforced the daily reality of unpredictable danger.

For some women that danger was a physical reality. In some cases 'walking on eggshells' was experienced as the perception of danger based on past incidents with their partner. For others, that danger went beyond the physical violence experienced in a relationship and extended to their children caught in access conflicts. These women engaged in specific 'work' to stay in their relationships and to ensure their own safety. They provoked the violence, accepted the responsibility for the abuse, struggled with guilt and acted to empower themselves. They also relied on the 'system' to protect them and yet acknowledged that the 'system' did not consider their need for changes to their partners.



## Documentary Data

### Supporting Information

A significant source of data which was accessed during the period of my information collection was a meeting for agencies and individuals bidding on the court-ordered treatment program for spousal assault in Prince George. While these committed probation officers were attempting to be effective and creative with the limited dollars provided by their Ministry, they were unable to avoid the reality that funds were extremely limited and expectations were higher than with the previous contract.

The document, "Guiding Principles for Service in British Columbia. Wife Assault Intervention: Programs for Men" (Bell, Browning & Hamilton, 1992) is the standard expected of all contracting resources. Based on my research however, I believe that there are two areas in this document that could improve with regard to women's safety. One is its cursory attention to the definition of safety for women. Though the document does recognize a continuum of violence and the need to broaden the goals of treatment, it leaves the decision to individual treatment providers to determine what they will address beyond physical violence. It also states that "The service is indirectly aimed at achieving safety for women and children..."(1992, p.6), and in providing that indirect service, it stipulates that provision of supportive counselling, for women, or *referral to* such counselling should be undertaken but again is not a required condition. This leaves room for arbitrary decisions regarding contact with women. As well, ongoing contact with the women is required for intake assessment purposes *only*. This document does not clearly state who will monitor the maintenance of women's safety nor how that safety will be determined on an ongoing basis. Discretionary loopholes are evident in these principles.



The second area of concern pertains to program evaluations. These principles stipulate that all programs need to be able to monitor their effectiveness in an ongoing fashion, yet they fail to consider several key points. The first is that with very limited funds contracting services will be unable and unwilling to evaluate their individual program beyond the required self-reports by abusers and facilitators. This is in spite of the fact that we know that men, when asked directly, under-report their levels of frequency of violence (Thorne - Finch, 1992). Secondly, the principles also call for standardized evaluation formats, many of which fail to realistically consider the lived experience of women (Straus, 1990). Third, evaluations that are done demonstrate to some extent the effectiveness of that particular group and is not generalizable to other groups due to the diversity of treatment approaches and lack of a standardized format. The reality is that a standardized evaluation has not been developed which qualitatively describes the day-to-day realities of group effectiveness from the experience of women partners. Finally, these principles are guidelines only and not considered rigid rules. Variations of the guiding principles are to be monitored by the contracting government service, at their discretion. With limited funds and a greater demand for direct service to offenders, who will ensure that women are considered safe? Who will define that safety and who will continue to dialogue with the women, post-group, to ensure their lives are safe? A combination of the government's reliance on this document and the limited funds for provision of treatment groups, leaves the individual probation officers at a disadvantage to ensure the provision of quality and effective groups.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusions and Future Research

In a federally funded document, Wife Battering and the Web of Hope (1989), a question was posed which appears to have been left unanswered despite eighteen years of accelerated growth in men's treatment groups. MacLeod (1989) asks whether or not "...the woman's faith in such groups prolong her own process of finding ways to stop or escape the violence, by giving credibility to her hope that the man might change"(p.49). This was not the first time that this concern has been voiced nor is it the last. Others have stated this same concern in various ways and my research results reinforce this key theme. I found that these women remained in dangerous relationships in the hope that treatment would end the violence. As well, it became clear that the men's abuse programs were falsely perceived to assure these women of their safety. Participation in groups is perceived as a sign that the abuse was being addressed. My research determined that women do put their faith in treatment groups to provide safety. It also established that women work hard to stay safe and maintain the relationship of the family. Whether or not these factors combine to prolong women's process of leaving or stopping the abuse is not as clear. We have still failed to find an adequate answer.

In an attempt to further explicate this question, I proceeded with this research with a number of goals. First, I wanted to elucidate women's experience of "staying". I feel that the best way to validate that experience is to give voice to it, if for no other reason than for women to feel that they have been heard and understood.

Second, I did this for myself, because as a past facilitator of men's treatment groups, I questioned the effectiveness of the group treatment interventions. In my view, well meaning

people or agencies that continue to provide groups for men without the knowledge of the experience for each individual women are operating with only part of the necessary information. All treatment programs must have ongoing contact, from assessment through to longitudinal follow-up evaluations with the female partners of these men, if real effectiveness and safety for women are to be realized. Qualitative and quantitative evaluations of groups should be a mandatory requirement for anyone contracting with government to provide services. Though these alone will not ensure safety for women, they will directly inform the facilitators and sponsoring agencies about the level of safety for women that their group provides.

Thirdly, as a feminist social worker, I have a commitment to work towards the elimination of oppression. "Research with disempowered groups on a value laden topic such as violence against women is not only a scientific endeavour it is also an ethical and political act" (Hoff, 1990, p.252). It is the political nature of this endeavour that gives meaning to my academic exercise.

I have undertaken this thesis with the intent of opening up the discourse on woman abuse specifically on the effectiveness of men's treatment groups as seen through the eyes of women. The social discourse about treatment groups should not become stagnant. Definitions, measurements, research methodologies, perceptions and responses change over time and are affected by social context such as government ideology or political action. It would appear however that the discourse about group effectiveness and women's role in determining that effectiveness is resistant to radical change. It would appear that the current discourse has not varied in a way that challenges the fundamental tradition of 'family violence' towards including a revised concept of treatment as inclusive of women's lived experience.

The provision of men's treatment groups is one solution that at first appears to be able to



meet both requirements of women's safety and of maintaining a family, however, I am suggesting that, in fact, it does not generally meet the requirement of keeping women safer. It meets the requirement of keeping families together and of maintaining the status quo but at cost to the women who stay. The lack of open discourse around safety does not benefit the women who choose to stay or who ultimately may choose to leave. Perhaps one of the reasons why we cannot seem to revise the discourse and provide women with a solution which gives them a greater sense and experience of safety is because such a situation would conflict with the need to keep families together. This latter is a fundamental element of social tradition which is not open to exploring alternative forms of the definition of "family".

Who benefits from the promotion of group treatment as a means of providing safety for women from woman abuse? This is a fundamental feminist question. The results of the data I analysed suggest that these women did not necessarily benefit.

My findings indicate the need to review current treatment options for assaultive men. We appear to have only one part of the picture necessary to ensure safety for women. Because men's treatment for abusive behaviors is a relatively new field of study, we must continually be adding to the body of knowledge regarding effectiveness of groups. My work adds to the ever-growing body of research into eliminating the oppression and abuse of women.

In reviewing this research one might ask how these post-treatment experiences are different than those found in other studies that have examined the experience of abused women. The disturbing reality is that they are not different, the quality of life has not changed, these women are "still walking on egg shells".

### Future Research

In moving from research to action as a method of feminist research, my goal was to widen the discourse on the effectiveness of treatment groups. My hope is that in hearing from the women who stay in relationships after these groups, researchers will begin to actively include women in the research process of determining group effectiveness. In 1989, the Federal Government discussion paper Changing the Landscape, reviewed the progress, dilemmas and visions of preventing wife battering. It stated that research should be undertaken to look at the long-term problems and experiences of women who made different choices (McLeod, 1989). Women who chose to stay in their relationship when their partners have completed group treatment are one such group of women. My research has attempted to provide a voice for these women and an opportunity for those who provide services to abusive men to hear what women who stay are saying. This piece of the larger picture is necessary for treatment providers to ensure that group process is not being enacted which is ignorant of women's experience. (Holmes and Lundy, 1990).

Men's belief that they can control women and that they are entitled to dominate and force women to remain oppressed must be addressed in every treatment approach currently utilized across North America today. "We must ensure that programs like ours do not become another specialization that encourages our society to view violence as a matter of individual pathology rather than addressing what is in fact a problem of patriarchy and men's power over women in all spheres of life" (Holmes and Lundy, 1990, p. 17). We cannot reduce violence to an individual level, nor can we create change by addressing only the relationship. We must address the violence directly as a societal problem. We must consult with women about the many areas of their lives where we can begin to make structural changes to structural oppression and the

resulting violence.

The process of this thesis has been both an exercise in comprehensively educating myself in the area of woman abuse as well as an attempt to hear women's voices. In hearing the description of these women's lives post treatment group I have attempted to create more questions around the issue of oppression in order to further education and social action. Perhaps, it will also lead to a process of reflection on the part of people involved in providing services to men and women around woman abuse. It is this reflection that I hope begins to "push men to uncover, analyse and transform their patriarchal attitudes and practices" (Maguire, 1987, p.72). Further qualitative research that asks questions pertaining to the day-to-day world of staying after abuse treatment as well as further studies on the 'work' of women who stay in an abusive relationship are needed.

Russell (1995) recommends, "Greater use of qualitative measures to assess the impact of various assaultive men's treatment programs on female partners"(p.45). Qualitative measures could begin to address the concern that the definition of safety for women is too narrow. It could also begin to define the quality of life changes which men's treatment groups are assumed to provide.

Each of the participants I interviewed spoke of the aspect that the men must want to change before any help is effective. This consideration leads to the question, what factors contribute to an abusive man's desire to change? What motivates him both individually and socially? This area needs further examination, as the effectiveness of group treatment intervention may be determined by these factors.

The implications of my research for social workers are more structural in nature. My research supports the concept that the oppression of women is primarily a societal construct so



the solutions are to be found in societal change. This does not mean however, that the individual women can be ignored. Human services workers who allow women to bear the full burden of responsibility for this abuse, who continue to ask why she stays and who place further responsibilities on her to protect herself, do not understand the societal nature of woman abuse. Instead we must begin asking men why they abuse and hold them accountable for that abuse. Social workers who try to change the women instead of the situation in which they are trapped appear to support a reductionist view of abuse. Social workers who avoid political change and instead work solely at referring women to therapy and welfare instead of working to change the institutions that hold them oppressed, are themselves enforcing oppression. Both approaches are needed. The central task of social workers who work with women is to increase women's access to opportunities, resources and the resulting rewards. This approach to social work begins to address a balance of power and ultimately assists in freeing women from their oppressive positions.

Several researchers have stated the need for outcome success to be measured by the improvement in the context of the lives of abused women (Eisilovits and Edleson, 1989; Hart, 1988; Gondolf, 1987; Pence and Paymar, 1986). Hart (1992) states that "outcome investigations have not measured women's reality as a measure of treatment success to date" (p. E-4). My research has been an attempt to correct this shortcoming. Further research measuring women's reality is needed.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix A**  
**Letter of Introduction**

## **LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW**

I am writing this letter to ask if you would be interested in becoming apart of a research project where I am studying the impact of men's treatment groups on the safety of women who stay in the relationship after their partner have completed treatment.

I have worked in men's treatment groups and with abused women for the past five years. I have worked as a social worker, activist and counsellor in this community for over fifteen years. I am very interested in knowing more from women about the quality of their lives now. I believe that women's voices are not heard when it comes to evaluating how successful these groups are and I require women who are willing to be heard.

This would entail a completely confidential in-depth interview. Your decision to participate in this research would be completely voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any time. Your identity would be protected.

It is important to the research that :

- 1) your partner has completed a treatment group.
- 2) you are still with him or had stayed for a period of time after wards.
- 3) you are prepared to seek support should the interview process be a difficult one for you to handle emotionally.

If you wish to contact me, I am available by phone at 562-9217. Out of town, you may call free of charge by dialing 1-888-562-9217. There is an answering machine on this line and you can leave a message with a false name for me to call you back. You may also contact either Diane Nakamura at the Sexual Assault Center 564-8302 or Bev Zorn at Elizabeth Fry Society 563-1113 and leave a message with them for me to contact you for an interview.

Should you have concerns about my research and wish to speak with the individual responsible for University research you may contact Dr. W.R. Morrison, Dean of Research and Graduate Studies by telephoning, 960-555 or toll free, 1-800-667-8622.

I would like to add that I understand that your safety level is of utmost concern. If for any reason you feel that your personal safety would be jeopardized by your involvement with this program then please, carefully reconsider your involvement.

Thank you ,

Chris Leischner

**Appendix B**  
**Participant Information Card**

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION CARD**

Name:

Pseudonym:

Identifier Code:

***SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT CONTACTING:***

Partner completed a treatment group?

When and Where?

Support systems for participant?

Physical Safety Plan in place?

Participant would like a copy of the following information:

\*\*\* Information collected on file cards will be password protected in the researcher's computer program.

**APPENDIX C**  
**Consent and Release Form**



## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW AND RELEASE FORM

I understand that I am being asked to participate in in-depth interviews about my experiences with remaining in my relationship after my partner has completed treatment. I will be a part of these interviews under the following conditions:

1. The interviewer has my permission to tape record and/or take notes during the interview, however, I can stop the interview at any time and decide not to continue. I can also ask that certain pieces of information not be recorded.
2. The interview tapes, transcripts, consent forms and any personal information will be kept by the researcher in a secure and locked place. This information will be securely stored for a period of two years during which time the researcher has my permission to use quotes in a planned publication providing I am not named.
3. I will have the choice of reviewing the transcripts of the interview. At this time any new or relevant information can be added or changed.
4. Chris Leischner will use the information from this interview for her thesis report, presentations or publications. This may include the use of lengthy quotations from my interview. I understand that every precaution will be taken to protect my identity but that it particulars and incidents may appear familiar to someone who knows me.
5. I can contact Chris Leischner at any time and withdraw from the project.

Both the researcher and participant have discussed the above conditions and agree to proceed with the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix D**  
**Interview Guide**

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Discuss the purpose of this research and the area we will cover
- Discuss and sign consent form \*N.B. confidentiality
- Reach an agreement on participating in the research
- Discuss any concerns/ questions/ conditions

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### Opening Question:

“ Please tell me about your experience of living with your partner since he has completed his treatment group?”

“ How would you describe the level of safety for you in this relationship?”

“ How would you describe the quality of your life since you decided to stay in the relationship?”

“ Are you physically and mentally safe?”

“ Do you believe that treatment has made a difference for you in your day to day life?” “Can you give me examples?”

“ Have you been involved in any ‘healing’ programs since he joined the treatment group?” How did this come about and why did you go for support or counselling?”

“ What would you tell other women who are thinking of staying with an abusive partner because he is going to attend group or is in a group?

“ Is there anything I haven’t asked that you would like to discuss or add?”

“ Could you comment on this research process from your experience of it?”

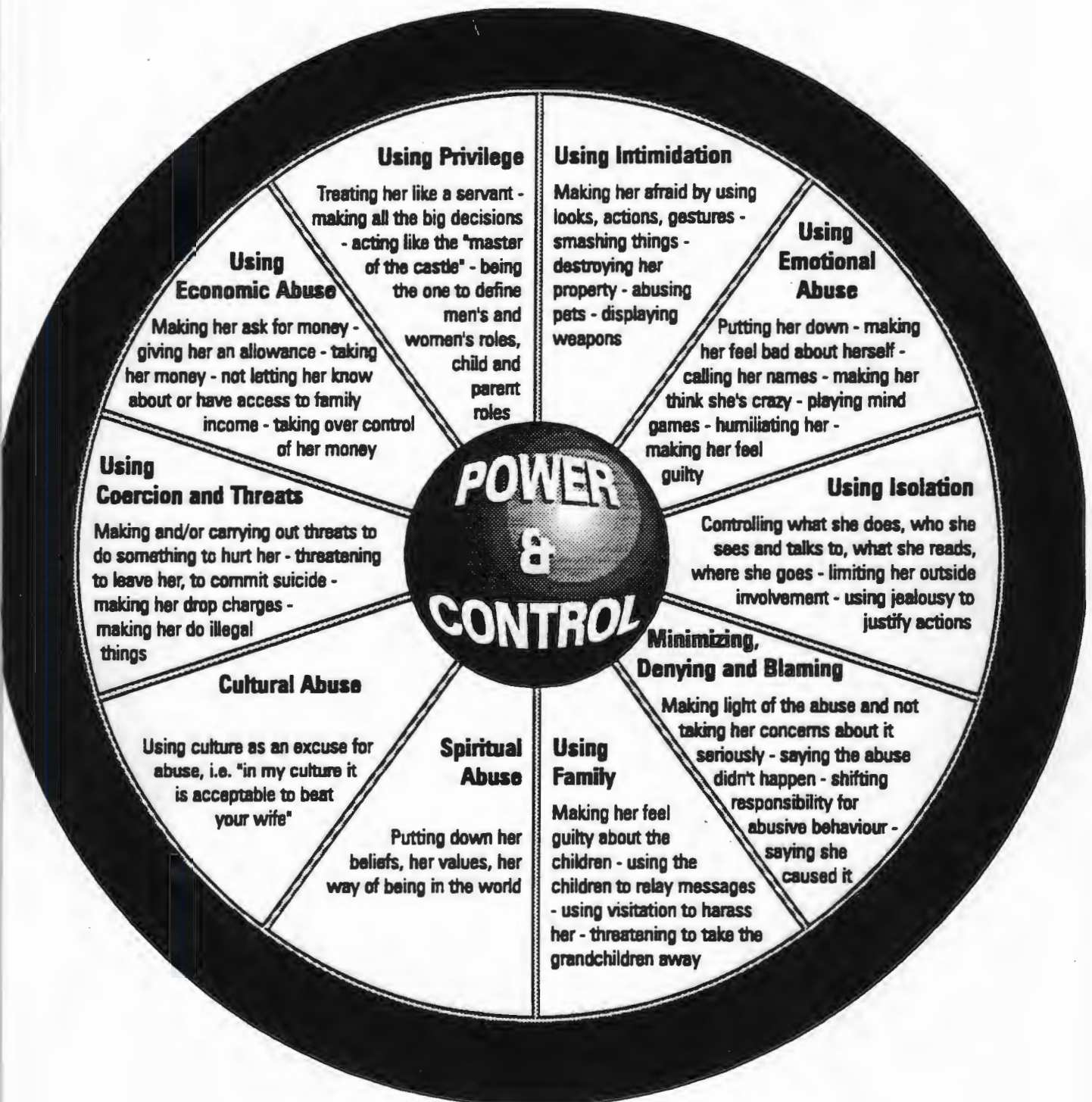
OPTIONAL: “Do you know of anyone else in a similar situation to your own that would be willing to talk to me?”

- Does this participant wish to review her transcript?
- Any further questions/feedback/comments
- Any special instructions for contacting this participant.

- **NOTES:**

**Appendix E**  
**Power and Control / Equity Wheel**

## Power and Control Wheel





## Wheel of Equality

