

SATISFACTION IN RELATIONSHIPS  
WITH A HISTORY OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

BY

DUANE LESPERANCE

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**Satisfaction in Relationships with a History of Domestic Abuse**

**BY**

**Duane Lesperance**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree  
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**MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK**

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## **Abstract**

The construct of "satisfaction in close relationships" was explored with for its applicability in relationships in which there has been domestic violence. Three couples with a past history of violence, and who identified themselves as "satisfied" with their relationships, were interviewed a total of nine times, to explore the aspects of their satisfaction with their relationship. The interviews were analysed through the use of Grounded Theory approach and Critical Discourse Analysis. Results indicated where the literature both fit and did not fit the couples' experiences. Understanding the complexities involved in relationships (esp. relationships with a history of domestic abuse), and attending to the social context, have implications for research and practice that will be discussed

## Chapter One: A Review of the Literature

Domestic abuse has since the 1970's become increasingly an issue of public awareness and concern (Arriaga & Oskamp, 1999). Previously considered a "private matter" between those involved, it is now recognized to be a matter that necessarily involves the public (dis)approval for (dis)continuation (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). To this end, the feminist movement has increased awareness of the presence and issue of domestic abuse and advanced tools for analysis and understanding (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Martin, 1976; Russell, 1982; Schechter, 1982; Walker, 1979). As a result, researchers have become more involved in comprehending the surprisingly common occurrence of domestic abuse. Although the prevalence, causes, and effects of domestic abuse were initially examined by researchers, they each still remain an issue of debate today. These and other issues linked to defining domestic abuse will first be explored in this chapter.

The focus of my research is on understanding the heterosexual couple (in which there has been abuse in the relationship) in context, that is, "who" is involved in the abuse, "how" the abuse happens, the consequences of abuse for the relationship, and understanding the social context in which the abuse occurs. Typically, it is believed that relationship dissolution will (or, at the very least, should) occur following abuse, or that the couple will experience a high degree of dissatisfaction with their relationship

(especially the woman/victim). However, relationship dissolution is as likely to occur as to not occur (Hansen & Goldenberg, 1993); furthermore, contrary to feminist discourse on why women stay in abusive relationships (see Jones, 1994, for a discussion relating to fear, poverty and systemic barriers preventing women from leaving), one study has found that the main reason why a women stays in relationships in which there is abuse is because of her love for him (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Schlee, Monson, Ehrensaft, & Heymen, 1998). Clearly, relationships in which there has been a history of abuse are more complex than we may have initially realized, that it is not simply a choice in which the man is the complete tyrant and the woman his passive and powerless victim. In the second section of this chapter, attention is given to what is known about relationships in which there has been a history of abuse.

Given the correlation of risk between abusive behaviour and relationship dissatisfaction (Margolin, John, & Foo, 1998), it is theorized that the literature on relationship satisfaction may provide insight into understanding how and why a couple chooses to remain together despite the experience of abuse. Thus, the focus of the third part of this chapter is on understanding what constitutes satisfaction in (non-abusive) relationships.

Finally, the chapter will conclude by reflecting on the implications of our understanding of satisfaction in (non-abusive) close relationships for our understanding of satisfaction in relationships in which there has been abuse. This has the potential to be instructive, both in how abusive relationships fail, and how they may succeed (despite the

experience of abuse), in promoting satisfaction for the couple. The hope is that such findings potentially could inform the development of effective strategies for intervention with couples who have experienced abuse in their relationships but wish to remain together nonetheless.

Before continuing any further, attention will initially be given to the philosophic impetus behind exploring the issue of satisfaction in relationships in which there has been abuse.

### **THEORETICAL OVERVIEW**

Initially, it may appear counter-intuitive to consider notions of satisfaction (as opposed to a discussion on dissatisfaction) in relationships in which a man has behaved abusively against his female partner. However, there are several influences that lead to an exploration of satisfaction in domestic abuse. First, there are my own experiences as a social worker working at a pro-feminist domestic abuse counselling program. This led me to become interested in the dialogue between feminism and postmodernism (to be discussed below). After discovering new possibilities from this dialogue, I became interested in the burgeoning literature on forgiveness and considered the relevance for couples who remain together after a history of abuse in their relationship. Finally, given that conjoint therapy is increasingly becoming recognized as a valid format of intervention for couples in which there had been abuse, I hope that understanding how satisfaction is attained for couples with a history of abuse may have practical application for therapists

who work with other couples facing the same issue.

## SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN A PRO-FEMINIST AGENCY

I was lucky enough to get hired at a pro-feminist domestic abuse counselling program after I graduated from social work in 1996. While in school, both feminism and domestic abuse became areas of interest for me. I came to understand issues of men's structural power and violence against women, and wanted to do my part in challenging these practices. Working for this domestic abuse counselling program, then, felt like a natural fit. I was prepared to "confront" men on their abusive behaviour, to "hold them accountable" for what they have done to their families, and, implicitly, to "rescue" their partners by "making" men change their "evil ways".

However, once I was working there, I began to see a different picture of abuse than what had emerged from the literature I had read. I met men who were genuinely remorseful for what they had done, and who, more than wanting to control their partner, wanted closeness with them. I met female partners who wanted to remain in the relationship, only wanting their partners' abusive behaviour to stop. I met children who, far from wanting no contact with their fathers, hoped that they could be with their dads more often and do more things with them.

This was not the picture that I was expecting nor had heard about. Although I supported the feminist goals towards equality, I began to find the analysis needing some pushing beyond the point at which we had arrived. It was not the case that I thought

feminism was irrelevant, I just began to think we needed to continue to build on our previous basic understanding of domestic abuse. Postmodern philosophy helped me to deepen my understanding further.

## FEMINIST AND POSTMODERNIST DIALOGUE

Feminism and postmodernism are the two most significant academic and intellectual currents today (Benhabib, 1995), and theorize domestic abuse in compatible and contested ways. Rather than “ironing out” the differences between the two approaches, my aim is to demonstrate that both feminism and postmodernism have much to offer in the understanding of domestic abuse specifically, and in freeing people from oppressions generally. For the purpose of this chapter, there is a need to simplify the feminist and postmodernist “positions”. In doing so, I recognize that, more accurately, I should be referring to feminisms and postmodernisms, as each philosophy is hardly coherent within itself (that is, not all feminists agree, and not all postmodernists agree) (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990). Feminism can be thought of an ideology with a goal-directed purpose of, ultimately, equitable access to material and symbolic resources (the distinctions within feminism have less to do with *what* feminism should do, but, rather, *how* feminism should see and accomplish this). On the other hand, postmodernism might best be described as a reaction to the limitations of the “modernist project” (Benhabib, 1992), the attempt to reduce all people and things to a basic core or essence. Postmodernism has concerned itself with the oppressive consequences of the search for

universal essences of human nature (Sampson, 1993). Instead, postmodernists often advocate for the legitimacy of subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980), and the accepting and celebrating of these differences between people .

For feminism, there is a belief that women are at least unfairly treated in the world by men (as is the case with liberal feminism), and, at worst, women are oppressed by men (as is the case with radical feminism as well as others who might not label themselves “radical”). As well, feminism has viewed women as sources of worth and strength, both for their contributions to the next generation (Kaschak, 1992), for their resistance to male domination (Okamoto, 1995), and by attaining power despite conditions of subordination (Goldstein, 1995). In this way, feminism has attempted to resurrect both historical and contemporary instances of women’s strengths and to assert the economic (Waring, 1988), political (Burt, 1993), and social (Surrey, 1991) worth of women. Later, feminism began to consider the “intersection of oppressions” by looking at how different women are differently affected by social practices (Collins, 1993; Elman, 1997; Evans, 1991; Ristock, 1997; Vinton, 1998). Thus, rather than privileging gender as the *most* affected social category, feminism explored ways in which oppression was further complicated by forms of exploitation beyond (although still including) gender, such as exploitation based on race, class and sexuality. It was no longer enough to speak of Woman as having a singular essence, but, instead, as many differences within the category. With these three aspects of feminism combined (women’s experience of male domination, proclamations of women’s worth, and the intersecting of oppressions), the ideology has been instrumental in promoting a cultural transformation through influencing a vast array of domains within



society, including the valuing of relationships (Gilligan, 1982), altering the workforce (Faludi, 1999), and legitimizing the issue of violence against women (Bass & Davis, 1988; Koss, Goodman, Browne, Fitzgerald, Keita, & Russo, 1994; Russell, 1982).

Just as to speak of a singular feminism denies the multiple perspectives within feminism, so too speaking of a singular postmodernism is equally inaccurate. Gergen (1999), in fact, identifies at least five different “groupings” of postmodernisms. However, similarities lie in disputing the “grand narratives” made by the modernist project (Lyotard, 1984). One narrative contested is that of the “coherent and autonomous self” (Gergen, 1991). According to this approach, there exists in all of us an “inner self” (composing of the “mind” and/or “soul” and/or “heart”, etc.) that is our “genuine” or “authentic” self. It is under here where we “really” are, despite whatever behaviours may be displayed “on the surface” (Shotter, 1993). Lost in here is the possibility of “multiple selves”. In postmodernism, there is no “core self”, but, instead, a “subjectivity” that “occupies many positions and has many voices” (Anderson, 1997, p. 220). Thus, no one individual is limited to only one “position”. Further, the modernist belief in the self as “autonomous” is problematic to postmodernists (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). Here, the emphasis is on the individual as removed from the context in which she/he lives her/his life. Consequently, relationships with others, and, indeed, society itself, are perceived as “artificial contrivances” (McNamee & Gergen, 1999, p. 11). In contrast, many postmodernists would argue that it is only in relationships that the individual is “constituted” through conversation and language (Andersen, 1993). As a result, the individual is seen as simply a byproduct of relationships. Thus, the concept of the individual or autonomous self is

replaced by *relational* or *social* selves (Gergen, 1999). The latter understanding recognizes the influences each has on the “creation” of others, but also the impact the discursive context has on all.

Furthermore, the modernist project has also advanced notions of a single objective reality. From this perspective, there is an “out there” that we can observe and understand, and that is separate from the observer (Gergen, 1994). “Accurate” observation of “reality” is considered “objective”, that is, a direct reflection of “what is”; an “inaccurate” observation is considered “subjective”, and, therefore, illegitimate (or, at least, of lesser value). Postmodernists challenge this conception of reality. Instead, they posit an understanding of reality that is socially-constructed/created. From the postmodern perspective, individuals are not in a position to know the world *as it is* but, instead, know the world through our experiences of it (Epston, White, & Murray, 1992). As we are not able to account for the full richness of all our lived experiences, we select experiences that are then “storied” into a coherent account of our experiences that have been called “narratives” (White & Epston, 1990). Narratives are constructed and revised in relation with others. As narratives can not fully represent all our lived experiences, or all the lived experiences of others, these stories both reflect and shape our subjective understanding (i.e., “reality”) of the world. In our society, some people’s narratives are considered more valid than others, such as in the case of the “expert”, who is purported to have preferred access to the “real truth”. Lyotard (1984) suggests that scientific knowledge exists *in addition to* other ways of (subjective) knowing but is privileged through a process of legitimation that excludes other knowledges. For Foucault (1978), this legitimation

process is linked to the issue of power through the creation of a “normalizing truth”, that is, what is conceived as “normal” and “usual”. In everyday life, then, the “objective reality” discourse that is circulated is experienced as being “truth”; anything that falls outside of this way of knowing is “subjugated” and considered illegitimate (White, 1992). Postmodernists attempt to resurrect subjugated or hidden knowledges by positing a perspective on reality that involves valuing other-than-dominant-discourses of what is.

Regarding domestic abuse, then, both feminist and postmodern discourses can provide direction for domestic abuse analysis and interventions. From feminism, attention is given to issues of gender, power, and the benefits that individual men accrue from their use of violence (Paymar & Pence, 1993). This is often referred to the “power and control” approach. The use of violence for the purpose of power and control is socially endorsed (Kaufman, 1993), especially for men (Johnson, 1997). These concepts, with traditional femininity being associated with passivity and nurturing (Brownmiller, 1984), inform feminist reasoning of the gendered nature of domestic violence. As well, the issue of responsibility is central to the feminist position. Here, feminists have been critical of theoretical approaches that are implicitly and explicitly blaming of women who have experienced violence in their relationships (Bograd, 1984). Instead, feminists have insisted that the man is solely responsible for any use of violence he chooses to use against his partner (Stordeur & Stille, 1989).

According to postmodernism, the issue of domestic violence may not be as clear-cut as feminism may suggest. Postmodern writers, too, may recognize the centrality of the

issue of power to domestic violence. However, this may not be in the same way that feminism might analyze power. Rather than suggest that “men have power” and “woman do not” (or, at the very least, have a lot less), postmodernism attempts to move away from solely a structural analysis of power and towards consideration of power as a relational process (Gergen, 1999). That is, power relations are not “given” from “The Top” but, instead, are “performed” (reproduced and/or resisted) at “local” levels and are shaped by discourse (White & Epston, 1990). Whenever a man assaults his partner, he is reproducing (and giving power to) an ideology of the entitlement of men and the disenfranchisement of women; whenever a man challenges another male on his use of abusive behaviour in a relationship, he is resisting this ideology. Whenever a woman calls the police when her partner assaults her, she is resisting the very same ideology; when she does not, she colludes with this ideology (whatever good reasons that she has not to call, such as fear of his retribution; this is not to state that she is responsible for the origin of this ideology or that she alone is the only person who can alter this ideology). Power, then, is not dichotomized under who has it and who does not, but, rather, is perceived as being performed at a local level and informed by discourse. “Powerless” women, then, do not exist, but, rather, women perform powerlessness (again, I wish to emphasize that this decision may be a strategic choice based on safety needs, and may be the best choice available to a woman who is facing threats to her life).

Not only has postmodernism considered the ideology associated with the difference between men and women, but it has questioned the very marking of men as different from women. Butler (1996) (borrowing from Foucault) distinguishes between

*juridical* and *productive* power, the former being practices of control that impose limits or restrictions, the latter being methods of control that are generative or constitutive of identities. These identities serve as the base for the ideology that justifies productive power regimes (i.e., “A woman would be too emotional to be president of America”; “Men can’t be nurturing as mothers, so it is better than women stay home to raise children”). As some types of feminism has organized identities according to biological sex by supporting notions of an essential “womanhood” , it may have inadvertently reproduced existing power structures. It is because of this challenging of the basic assumptions of feminism I believe that postmodernism allows us to further consider the complexities of power in a way that feminism has not been able to.

The effect of limiting some discourses about domestic violence in favour of others is two-fold: for one, there is the attempt to *universalize* all incidences of domestic violence as having a singular etiology (such as, domestic violence is always about power and control). This limits intervention, as it ignores the multiple interpretations that are available to understand what a particular man is needing to prevent further incidences of abuse. Secondly, the experience of domestic violence will be seen as resulting in a *universal* effect for those involved. Foucault refers to “the contextual framework of resources, forces and power that enables [the production of] effects” as “technology of truth” (McCallum, 1996, p. 84). In the “technology of truth” regarding violence, then, it is regarded that for the violence to “count”, the damage to the woman must be severe and long-lasting (Lamb, 1999). Women who have experienced abuse from their partners are deemed to have been “legitimately” abused only if they have surrendered their personal

agency for an innocent “victim-status”; that is, they acted “lady-like” and did not fight back (Renzetti, 1999). This has two unfortunate consequences: first, a fighting-back woman cannot be a “battered woman”, and, secondly, once properly qualified to be a “battered woman”, she will suffer interminably. Neither of these understandings further “empower” a woman nor fully represent the range of her likely experiences. To be an adequately battered woman, then, necessarily entails ignoring some aspects of her experiences in favour of emphasizing others. If it is true as Butler (1999) suggests it is, then identity is not the result of an inner core but constructed through performance. Clearly there are limitations that, to have one’s experiences accredited as having been legitimately abused, one needs to acquire long-term symptomology and perform Powerlessness. Performance of single word identities such as “victim” or abuser” is an extreme simplification of the totality of our experiences. We are all very much more than any *one* aspect of or identity (Marecek, 1999). Labels such as victim/survivor or abuser define the person only through occasional experiences related to abusive behaviour (most “abusers” behave abusively a small percentage of the time, that is, they are more non-abusive than they are abusive; “victims” who have experienced abuse have many other experiences that are unrelated to abusive behaviour; even “survivor”, the “positive spin” of victim, is still defined by experiences relating to the abuse). Young (1990) cautions us that those who attempt to establish a “community” based on political identity “tend to suppress differences among themselves or implicitly to exclude from their political group persons with whom they do not identify” (p. 300). Instead, she calls for recognition and valuing of the differences between people, their experiences and their perspectives. The attempt of

the feminist effort to establish a community of women has resulted in the silencing of some women's experience to present a pseudo-coherent unity.

Finally, postmodernist writers have questioned the utility and the ethics of an individualistic approach to understanding behaviour in relation to others (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). Individuals are assigned personal blame for supra-individual problems (e.g., the context of poverty and unemployment can be ignored when an individual "who does not want to work for a living" is charged with theft; systemic racism can be ignored when an Aboriginal community "is killing themselves with alcoholism"). What contexts get ignored when feminism suggests that women have no responsibility and the men have 100% of the responsibility for stopping future incidences of abusive behaviour? What discursive restrictions on her agency need to occur for her to become solely a target (rather than a participant) in the incident(s) of abuse? In doing this, do we lose potentially valuable information that might help keep her safe in the future? Is there a way in which we can recognize her participation in a situation of abuse, without continuing the unhelpful pattern of holding one individual personally responsible for an interactive process or duplicating the oppressive legacy in which women took responsibility for emotional well-being of men?

Although these questions are not easily answered, postmodernists have attempted to "move into the grey" and consider some of the blind spots that feminism has traditionally ignored. It will replicate power structures to suggest that women are 50% responsible for the abuse that the man used her. On the other hand, it will not likely be

empowering to suggest that women are merely targets-in-waiting for abuse, and that there is nothing that she can do about it. It may be that, combining a feminist and postmodernist perspective on domestic abuse can assist the understanding of abuse occurs in relationships and what can be done to prevent it from reoccurring. The postmodernism attention to discourse, and the replication of practices of power through the circulation of some discourses and suppression of others, provides new avenues for ending domestic abuse.

Similarly, we need to “move in to the grey” when it comes to a woman’s choice to remain in the relationship after the abuse has occurred. Clearly, some women have more choice regarding this matter than other women. However, for the women who prefer to work things out with their partner, how are we to understand how she reconciles to herself and important others about being with a man who has harmed her in the past? Does she has to “live in denial” about the abuse (pretend as if it never happened), does she have to remain angry and vigilant against any further attacks, or is there a way in which she decides to “let the past go”? My goal in raising the issue of forgiveness is not to encourage it as “the proper approach”, but, instead, as a framework for possibly understanding the process some women might go through.

## FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness has been a construct that clinicians have traditionally shied away from, based on, at least, the minimal attention it has received in the practitioner literature



(McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). This may be a result of its perceived religious connection, particularly the Judaeo-Christian tradition (Sells & Hargrave, 1998). As well, there is cultural support for the belief that everything must be paid for and that “nothing is given for free”. Finally, forgiveness is viewed with caution for fear that it relieves the perpetrator (particular in instances of abuse and violence) of culpability and denies the victim of legitimate feelings of anger (Walrond-Skinner, 1998). As a result, people may be urged (by themselves or others) to forgive prematurely or to forgive when it would not be considered an appropriate response in the circumstances. However, it has been stressed that forgiveness should not be used oppressively (Sells & Hargrave, 1998), and should be differentiated from concepts of “condoning”, “excusing”, “forgetting” and/or “reconciling” (McCullough, et al., 2000). Forgiveness can be better understood as a motivated affective, cognitive, and behavioural phenomenon (Gordon & Baucom, 1999), whereby one person (the victim of the transgression) forgoes his/her legitimate “right” to resentment and negative judgement, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion and generosity (McCullough et al., 2000).

The paradoxical nature of forgiveness has been noted: releasing oneself from the need for repayment actually has benefits for the forgiver (Walrond-Skinner, 1998). These benefits have been found to include a reduction in anger, depression, anxiety, restoration of self-esteem, and improvement in physical health (McCullough & Worthington, jr., 1995). Moreover, forgiveness has been linked with improved relationship adjustment (Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2000; McCollugh, Worthington, jr., & Rachal, 1997). Given the likelihood of transgressions in relationships,

in general, the skill of forgiving can be adaptive for the stability of the relationship (Walrond-Skinner, 1998). In relationships in which there has been abusive behaviour, in particular, and the couple is wishing to remain together, the level of their satisfaction will be affected by (among many other factors, not the least being his refusal to use abuse in the future) the willingness to “move on” from the abuse. This, however, is not to be confused with remaining in a unsafe situation, and should not be encouraged in situations in which forgiveness increases the risk to her safety. However, no research has specifically explored the construct of forgiveness within the field of domestic abuse.

### **DOMESTIC ABUSE OVERVIEW**

What had once been considered an unusual rarity has increasingly been acknowledged as a fairly frequent phenomenon. How frequent, however, has been a point of debate. Studies of the occurrence of abuse in the general population have ranged from as low as 4.3% (Zlotnick, Kohn, Peterson, & Pearlstein, 1998) to as high as 60% (Stordeur & Stille, 1989). Most studies, though, usually consider an occurrence rate of about 1 in 4 (Dutton, 1995; Leonard & Senchak, 1996). It is recognized that abuse is likely to be under-reported due to the stigma still attached to having been in an abusive relationship (Saunders, 1988). Although there is controversy regarding whether the gender of the perpetrator is likely to be male (Kurz, 1993), female (Straus, 1993), or bi-directional over time (Nakhaie, 1998), it is generally accepted that men’s greater size (Cantos, Neideg, & O’Leary, 1994; Langinrichsen-Rohling, Nedig, & Thorn, 1995) and

social authority (Miedema, 1996) produce a greater effect of men's violence towards women than vice-versa. Furthermore, men and women's use of violence is differently motivated, with men using abuse to attain control whereas women are more likely to use aggression for the purpose of self-defence or in retaliation (Jacobson, Gottman, Waltz, Rushe, Babcock, & Holtzworth-Munroe, 1994).

There is also a debate regarding the etiology of domestic abuse. Currently, there is tolerance for viewing domestic abuse as having a variety of factors that influence its presence in any particular relationship (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Although feminists have advanced perhaps the most widely-used analysis of abuse as an effective method for attaining power and control (Paymar & Pence, 1993), O'Neill (1998) views the instrumental use of abuse as but one of five discourses that is invoked in understanding the cause of abuse. Other discourses include: expressive (abusive behaviour is an expression of a build-up of stress or anger, and is not intended for any purpose other than the release of tension); pathological (men and women involved in abusive relationships are deficient in some way compared to the general population, such as having poor impulse control, are excessively jealous, have poor conflict-resolution skills, etc.); is the result of the family of origin (either learned through observing other's use of violence or treatment of women, or as a result of being traumatized by witnessing violence in the parental relationship); and/or promoted in a culture of masculinity and violence (in which aggression and dominance are glorified in the popular culture, especially for males). As O'Neill (1998) points out, all these seemingly incompatible constructs can be used in conjunction with others to provide a fuller, more complex and potentially contradictory explanation for why domestic abuse

occurs.

The effects of domestic abuse have been well-documented. They include both intrapersonal and interpersonal effects. For example, women who have experienced abuse are at risk for depression, increased levels of fear and anxiety, and decreased levels of self-esteem and trust (Thorne-Finch, 1992). As well, relationships in which there has been abuse are understandably characterized by dissatisfaction (O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994), hostility (Jacobson et al., 1994), and instability (Katz, Arias, Beach, Brody, & Roman, 1995). Child witnesses of the abuse are also likely to be severely affected with increased anxiety and depression, behavioural problems, decreased self-esteem, and impaired adjustment and functioning (Peled & Davis, 1995). In this way, domestic abuse certainly warrants the attention that it is currently being given, while at the same time, it still requires a more concerted effort to bring the abuse to an end.

Before proceeding, I would like to make a few notes regarding language. For one, I use the term *domestic* abuse reluctantly (and for lack of a better term), given that the term obscures the gendered nature of the abuse (that the "perpetrator" is likely to be male and the "victim" is likely be female) (McIntyre, 1984), and is linked with traditional notions of womanhood (e.g., the female/private/domestic sphere) suggesting a sort of irrelevance for men. However, this term is more inclusive for gay and lesbian couples, as well as for couples in which the primary aggressor is female (and her target is male). Likewise, I prefer to use the term *domestic abuse* rather than *domestic violence*. Given the popular association between the term "violence" and *physical* forms of violence,

psychologically abusive behaviours have increased potential to be ignored. This is unfortunate, given that psychological abuse is a better predictor of psychiatric symptoms than physical abuse (Katz & Arias, 1999). Finally, I prefer to view abuse as a behaviour rather a personality type or identity-defining experience; as a result, I will not use terms such as “abuser” and “batterer” or “victim” and “battered woman”, but instead will refer to “men who have behaved abusively” and “women who have experienced abuse”, respectively. Although this is arguably replacing old labels with new, up-to-date labels, my hope is that this language more closely represents my understanding of why abuse occurs and what we can do to put an end to it.

## **DOMESTIC ABUSE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

It is well-established by now that domestic abuse is not confined to any one group or segment of the population (Costa & Holliday, 1993). That is, domestic abuse occurs in all socioeconomic classes, cultures, age groups, and sexual orientations. However, it is also known that some groups are more at risk for abuse than other groups. These risks can be conceptualized as involving (1) macrosocial, (2) gender socialization, (3) biological, (4) psychological, and (5) relational variables (O’Neil & Harway, 1999). For example, being younger, in a low-status occupation, unemployed, and non-white all increase the risk for domestic abuse (Arias, 1999), likely a result of the additional stressors associated with being social marginalized. Furthermore, a man’s more traditional sex-role orientation coupled with any disparity in income, education, or status increases the risk for domestic

abuse (Harway, 1993), as does his having more conservative theological views than those of his partner (Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1998). Other writers have noted the risks attached to head injuries and deficient neurochemical levels (Greene, 1999). As well, attention has been given to risks attached with excessive alcohol and drug use (Leonard, 1999), low self-esteem (Gelles, 1999), depression (Real, 1997), intense feelings of jealousy (Stordeur & Stille, 1989), impaired communication (Brooks, 1998), and defective conflict-resolution skills (Ganley, 1991). Men who have witnessed violence in their parental relationship, or directly experienced violence, has been consistently identified as at increased risk for perpetrating abuse as an adult (Saunders, 1996). Recently, it has been suggested that this is less a result of social learning (given that this theory can not account for children learning the internal processes involved in abuse, i.e., cognitive distortions), and more likely, a result of childhood trauma, resulting in inability to modulate feelings of arousal and shame and having a disordered attachment (Dutton, 1999). Finally, there is recognition that there are risks associated with certain types of relating. Ineffectual problem-solving processes (including a pattern of demand-withdrawal, especially her withdrawal; Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993), low demonstrations of empathy and caring, high amounts of conflict, increased hostility, relationship dissatisfaction, and infrequent positive interaction in a relationship all contribute to risk for domestic abuse (Lloyd, 1999).

Clearly, relationships in which there has been abuse often have both similarities and differences compared to other violent relationships, contributing to the complexity involved in domestic abuse. Having some of the risk factors mentioned above does not

automatically result in a relationship in which there is abuse; on the other hand, an abusive relationship may involve very few of the risk factors. Further complicating the matter, there is growing recognition that not all men who have behaved abusively are as alike as it was once believed. In the past, researchers have portrayed men who have behaved abusively as a homogenous group (Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994). That is, they are, for the most part, similarly domineering, emotionally dependent and jealous, and traditionally gendered.

More recently, there has been increased recognition that different "types" of men have behaved abusively (differently) in their relationships. For example, Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart (1994) found a typology of three, and, later, added a fourth subtype (Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, & Stuart, 1999) of the kind of man who uses abuse in a relationship. These consisted of: (1) "family-only batterers", who engaged in the least severe forms of violence, restricted their use of violence to the family, and evidenced little psychopathology; (2) "low-level antisocial batterers", who resembled the "family-only" type, with the exception of an increased likelihood of a history of violence in relationships, higher scores on the antisocial tests, and were more likely to engage in generalized violence; (3) "dysphoric/borderline batterers", who engaged in moderate to severe violence, primarily targeted the family for their abuse, might have had problems with alcohol and drugs, and evidenced borderline and schizoid personality characteristics; this type was the most emotionally dependent on his partner and the most emotionally volatile; and (4) the "generally violent/anti-social batterers", who engaged in moderate to severe violence both within the family and generally, were most likely to have alcohol and

drug problems, and were most likely to be extensively criminally-involved, to have been exposed to the highest level of family-of-origin aggression, and to have an antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1999).

Jacobson and Gottman (1998) also identified different types of men who used abusive behaviour. They physiologically monitored men who had used severe forms of violence and discovered two different categories of abusing men, which they have named “pitbulls” and “cobras”. “Pitbulls” are described as being emotionally dependent on their partners and intensely jealous, to less likely be involved in criminal activity, and to confine the majority of their violence to the family. “Cobras”, on the other hand, use more severe forms of violence, have more traumatic childhoods, are more generally violent and are less physiologically aroused during conflict than the “pitbulls”. Interestingly, female partners of “pitbulls” are more likely to withdraw (rather than the usual gendered pattern of demand), are more angry and less fearful than partners of “cobras”, and are not as attached as “cobra” relationships (in the study, 50% of relationships with “pitbulls” ended within two years of the study, whereas in the same time period, no “cobra” relationships dissolved).

With the conceptions of different “types” of men who have used abuse in their relationships, however, is the concern that such an approach encourages an explanation for abuse as a mental health issue (Bennett & Williams, 2001). This may be demonstrative of the ideology of individualism that views abuse as a personal problem rather than a social by-product of systemic inequality (Bauman, 2001), given that support for pathology and the typology has been found lacking (Gondolf, 1999). Furthermore, a typology-



approach attempts to categorize according to universal essences (the hallmark of the modernist project), rather than recognize the intragroup variability among men who have used abusive behaviour. Still, at least a typology-approach is a step forward from when all men who had used abuse were lumped in one grand category: Abuser.

Just as there may be different types of men who have behaved abusively, it has been theorized that different types of violence are used in relationships for different purposes. For example, women's use of violence is seen as having a different intent than the violence of men (see, for example, Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; Jack, 1999). It has been noted that there are discrepancies in the literature regarding prevalence rates and gender of perpetrator/victim of abuse (Straus, 1999). For example, "family conflict" studies (e.g., Gelles, 1993) find relatively higher rates of violence in families equally used by men and by women. On the other hand, "crime studies" find low rates of "family violence" by both men and women in general, but much higher rates of violence by men when it does occur (e.g., the National Crime Survey, n.d.). This might be a reflection that most incidences of family violence go unreported to the police, save for the "serious" situations. Johnson (1995; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000) argues that it is a mistake to assume that both approaches measure the same phenomenon. Instead, he posits that there are two types of violence occurring in relationships: (a) "patriarchal terrorism" that a man uses involving a system of control against his partner, and, (b) "'common' couple violence", in which violence occurs as a result of a conflict "getting out of hand", leading to usually "minor" and, often, mutual forms of violence. If this is true, then an occurrence of violence does not necessarily involve a "battering" of the woman (or the male partner, as some writers

have suggested). This, consequently, has implications for intervention, as it challenges long-held beliefs regarding family violence, such as, "it always gets worse" (see Bradbury & Lawrence, 1999 for additional challenges to this belief), and relationships involving violence (and those perpetrating and receiving it in them) are permanently damaged (see Lamb, 1999, for additional challenges to this belief) and that it is best for both if they just end the relationship.

Although the literature on domestic abuse is rapidly growing, much of the research has had on a focus on *either* the man who abuses *or* the woman who has experienced the abuse (this may be a result of studies drawing from court-mandated treatment groups and from the shelter populations, respectively; see for example, Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981). As a result, we have little knowledge about relationship dynamics of couples where there is a history of abuse.

However, we are just beginning to gain more insight into relationships in which there has been violence. Much of this research is stemming from the "communications" perspective to family violence (see for example, Cahn & Lloyd, 1996). For example, members of relationships in which there has been violence have been noted to lack the social skills required to resolve conflicts peacefully (Christopher & Lloyd, 2000). These skill deficiencies include less gestures of support and caring, less pro-social attributions of the partner's intent, and less skill in being able defend one's viewpoint without the use of hostility and aggression (Lloyd, 1999).

In response to displays of hostility, each member of the couple have been found to

be characterized by high levels of aversiveness and belligerence (Jacobson, Gottman, Waltz, Rushe, Babcock, & Holtzworth-Munroe, 1994) and by negative reciprocity (that is, they were highly likely to respond to negative expressions with negative or non-positive expressions themselves) (Sabourin, 1996). Conflict in these relationships have been characterized by the frequent use of the strategy of withdrawal by both partners (Babcock et al., 1993), leading to a build-up of unresolved problems (Lloyd, 1999). Finally, we know that for couples who have a history of abuse in their relationships, there is consistently descriptions of a high degree of marital distress (Christopher & Lloyd, 2000). This should fail to be surprising, given the high level of hostility and lack of support that research has found exists in relationships in which there is a history of abuse. It is perhaps no wonder that in the research conducted by Bradbury and Lawrence (1999), they found that severe aggression approximately doubles the likelihood of marital dissolution after four years. High rates of relationship dissolution has been found in other studies as well (Gortner, Jacobson, Berns, & Gottman, 1997; Strube, 1988; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998).

Couples who stay together are faced with the task of how to account for the occurrence of abuse within normative standards that condemn the use of abusive behaviour against a partner. Eisikovits and Buchbinder (2000) found that couples attempt to shorten the distance between what is "normal" for relationships and the presence of abuse by downplaying the frequency (i.e., "I only sometimes hit her, it's not like it's everyday") or intensity of abuse (i.e., "I only slapped her, it's not like I beat her or anything") and by challenging the normative expectations for relationships (i.e., "All families fight, you just don't see it"). Whatever distance that is left between the abuse and

normative expectations are explained to be a result of circumstances beyond his control (i.e., “I have a short fuse”), or in the best interest of the couple (i.e., “I didn’t allow her to go out because I needed to protect her”) (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 2000). This thus allows the couple to make sense of the occurrence of the abuse in a manner that does not threaten the stability of their relationship. Ironically, it is this protection of the relationship that prevents the scrutiny necessary to make changes to move towards an abuse-free partnership. For couples who do examine their relationship, they are faced with the task of altering patterns that set the context for his abusive behaviour.

When comparing couples with a history of abuse to couples who have not experienced abuse, some differences may be attributed to the abuse that occurred. However, we know that not all relationships (even relationship with no abusive behaviour) last forever, and that for those relationships that do remain intact, they are not always easily maintained. It is here that I would like to turn the attention away from abusive relationships specifically and consider the factors involved in having a “successful” and satisfying relationship. I will return to considering the implications of these factors for couples who have a history of abuse in a later section.

## **SATISFACTION IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

Describing all that is involved in a satisfying relationship is no easy task. To start, it may be helpful to describe what a “satisfying” relationship looks like. It can be described as consisting of one person’s “trusting” of another person enough to be able to take

emotional risks with them (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). Furthermore, couples who are satisfied share time and activities, experiencing cohesiveness (Prager, 1995), a necessary component to satisfaction (Baxter & Dindia, 1990). As well, satisfied couples have a compatibility (Sternberg, 1998), if not a similarity (Duck, 1994). Satisfying close relationships involve a special kind of "love" for each other, a love that involves expression of commitment and connectedness (Hecht, Marston, & Larkey, 1994). Satisfied couples are more willing to "accept" the limitations of their partners (Jacobson & Christensen, 1996). Couples who are satisfied are more likely to have "egalitarian" arrangements of decision-making (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983) and domestic roles (Steil, 1997). Finally, satisfying relationships are ones in which the couple finds a balance between the competing needs of closeness/distance, stability/change and need to remain open/closed to each other (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Noticeably, this description of a satisfying relationship appears incompatible with the description of couples in which there has been abuse. In part, this may be a result of dichotomous thinking in much of the literature that categorizes couples as *either* satisfied *or* distressed. There is little room to consider the ways in which a couple's relationship may have satisfying and dissatisfying elements to it. In the case of relationships with a history of abuse, the category of dissatisfaction is often assumed and applied across the board to these couples. However, having a deeper understanding of what promotes (dis)satisfaction in close (and non-abusive) relationships may have applicability in interventions aimed at decreasing the risk for a woman to experience further abuse from her partner.

Although dissatisfaction is not believed to be *causally* linked to domestic abuse, it is theorized that stress from discordant relationships may be one of many contributing factors that lead to incidences of abuse (O'Leary et al., 1994). Furthermore, if it is true that some men are emotionally dependent on their partners (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1999), then relationship conflict may invoke perceived or actual threats of abandonment (Roberts & Noller, 1998). In this way, understanding what constitutes satisfaction in relationships may be helpful for some couples to alter destructive patterns of relating.

Satisfaction in close relationships is a distinct concept from that of *stability*, *quality*, or *adjustment*. Whereas stability refers to outcome (whether or not the couple remains together) and quality and adjustment refer to measurable behaviours (what others refer to as having relational value), satisfaction refers to the subjective evaluation of the desire of a particular person to remain in his/her relationship (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1997). Conceivably, then, someone could be in a satisfying relationship that is neither "adjusted" or of "quality"; likewise, someone could be in a "stable" relationship without finding it particularly satisfying. Each individual's experience of what constitutes a satisfying relationship will vary according to that particular person's chronotopic needs/wants (ever-changing needs/wants that are context-specific to a given time and space; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), ideology (van Dijk, 1998), and subjective production of meaning in the relationship (Weingarten, 1991).

This does not preclude the possibility that there are also some elements commonly found in relationships that each member of the couple report as being satisfying. These

satisfaction-defining elements are influenced by a combination of (1) individual, (2) interactive, and (3) contextual factors that will each be discussed in turn. The extent to which any of these factors are relevant to a particular couple will vary according to the unique situation of that couple, but are aimed at producing an understanding of the type of variables that work for or against satisfaction in close relationships.

## INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

The first individual factor that influences satisfaction in close relationships is related to the notion of “gender”. Commonly, gender (or, socially acceptable attributes associated with being either male or female; Canary, Emmers-Sommer, with Faulkner, 1997) was considered either “natural” (Shackleford & Buss, 1997) or else a result of social conditioning (Gray, 1992; Tannen, 1990). However, both of these perspectives fail in their recognition of individual agency in which people are “active producers rather than passive reproducers of gendered behaviour” (Cameron, 1997, p. 50). Males and females do not simply “receive” their gender, but instead, “do” their gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), accomplished through the repetition of gendered behaviour that supports and/or subverts traditional gender roles (Butler, 1999). For example, males have often performed a gender that reflects an “instrumental-orientation” (an orientation that values competitiveness, hierarchy, and interpersonal control and domination; Brooks, 1998). Females, on the other hand, have often enacted a gender that reflects a “communal-orientation” (an orientation that values relationships, demonstrations of caring,

cooperation, and connection; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991).

Interestingly, Ickes (1993) found that both men and women are more satisfied when paired with someone with a communal-orientation. Similarly, Collins and Read (1990) found that the best predictor of satisfaction in heterosexual relationships for women is her male partner's comfort with closeness. Thus, the performance of certain kinds (instrumental-oriented or communal-oriented versions) of gender will have consequences for the relationship.

Secondly, attachment style has been found to be linked to satisfaction. Attachment theory was first conceptualized to understand the different type of bonds between an infant and his/her caregiver, initially characterized as either *secure* (the infant experiences the caregiver as available as responsive), *avoidant* (the infant experiences the caregiver as rejecting and hostile), or *anxious-ambivalent* (the infant experiences the caregiver as intrusive and inconsistent) (Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Further work by Hazan and Shaver (1987) applied the theory to adult attachments to their partners, finding beliefs and experiences to be predictable along attachment styles. Namely, securely-attached people are more satisfied in their relationships than avoidant- or anxious-attached people (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1996; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Koski & Shaver, 1997; Roberts & Noller, 1998). This is believed to be a result of securely-attached people utilizing more caring responses, being less threatened with closeness/abandonment, and tending to be involved with other securely-attached people.

Finally, an individual's "positive illusions" will affect the degree of satisfaction in



relationships. It has been found that people have an unrealistically positive view of themselves, believe that they have more control over their lives than they actually do, and have unrealistic optimism about their future (Taylor & Brown, 1988). However, it has been found that these “positive illusions” are actually adaptive in that they increase psychological functioning, enhance motivation, and increase the likelihood of success (Taylor, Collins, Skokan, & Aspinwall, 1989). In relationships, “positive illusions” can be accomplished through: (1) attributing a partner’s faults to situations rather than stable personality characteristics (i.e., “he only did that because...”), (2) viewing the faults as virtues (i.e., she isn’t stubborn, she has integrity...”), and (3) minimizing the significance of the faults (i.e., yes, but...) (Murray & Holmes, 1994). It has been found that the more a person idealizes his/her partner, the more satisfied he or she is (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Furthermore, it has been found that people compare themselves and their relationships to others for the purpose of self-evaluation (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Van Yperen, & Dakof, 1990). When people tend to perceive their relationship as superior to other relationships, and their partners superior to alternatives, it results in enhanced levels of satisfaction in their relationship.

### Summary

Although relationships are the processes involved between two people, intra-individual differences between people will affect the satisfaction of the partners in a relationship. Specifically, how one “performs” his or her gender, one’s attachment style,

and the attributions one makes about their partners have been found to influence the satisfaction in close relationships.

## INTERPERSONAL FACTORS

Although it was previously recognized that gender was an individual factor contributing to (dis)satisfaction in relationships, it is simultaneously an interpersonal variable as well. This requires acknowledgment that gender is a “situated” performance which is “carried out in the virtual or real presence of others who are oriented to its production” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). In this way, gender is not simply an individual act but an interactive one as well. That men and women initially seek out dating partners that enact traditional gender roles but then (especially for women) are happier with someone who is more communally-oriented (Ickes, 1993) suggests a need to “renegotiate” the gender arrangement in close heterosexual relationships. To the extent that the couple will do this will affect their perceived level of satisfaction.

Secondly, “self-disclosure” can be seen as both reflective and constitutive of the level of intimacy in close relationships. Self-disclosure can be seen as serving many purposes in relationships, including developing closeness in new relationships, maintaining closeness in established relationships, and attaining social validation for the speaker and increased liking by the listener (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). Although there are incidences in which self-disclosure does not promote intimacy (the speaker violates a social norm, discloses about a “taboo” topic such as any negative feelings about

a partner, or the self-disclosure is ignored or dismissed), there is ample evidence to suggest that self-disclosure is an important component of satisfaction in close relationships (Canary et al., 1997; Dindia, 1994; Hendrick, 1981; Koski & Shaver, 1997; Prager, 1995).

Thirdly, given the inevitability of disagreement and the endless range of topics that can be argued about, it is crucial both for the stability and satisfaction in close relationships that couples are able to resolve conflicts (Gottman, 1994). Christensen and Walczynski (1997) note that processes of *coercion*, *vilification of differences*, and *polarization* set the stage for escalating conflict... that destroy relationship satisfaction" (p. 258). One *coercive tactic* that in particular has gathered a lot of attention in the literature is the strategy of "stonewalling" or withdrawing during a conflict (Babcock et al, 1993; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Gottman, 1993, 1994; Heavy, Christensen & Malamuth, 1995; Mackey & O'Brien, 1998; Markman, Silvern, Clements & Kraft-Hanak, 1993; Winstead, Derlega, & Rose, 1997). Demanding is a method invoked in conflict designed to change an arrangement, and withdrawing blocks the possibility for change. Heavey et al. (1995) and Gottman and Krokoff (1989) both found that withdrawing patterns by male partners (85% of withdrawing is done by men) was significantly correlated with a decrease in long-term satisfaction for women. *Vilification of difference* is a process in which the differences between a couple are seen a result of the partner's deficiencies. It has been noted that distressed couples attribute positive occurrences to external variables and negative occurrences to their partner's enduring personality variables; satisfied couples do the very opposite (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Fincham, Fernandes, & Humphreys, 1993; Holztworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985). Attributing positive relationship occurrences to

external causes rather than to a partner (and attributing negative relationship occurrences to their partner's personality) is both a reflection of and a cause for decreased satisfaction about their relationship (Whisman, 1997). Finally, Cordova and Jacobson (1997) refer to "blame and defensiveness (as).. the hallmark of *polarization*" (p. 314). Gottman (1994) states that denying responsibility, making excuses, cross-complaining, repeating one self over and over, whining, defensive body language, and retaliatory attacks are other tactics that will result in increased polarization and defensiveness. Couples that polarize are less likely to resolve conflict in a manner that promotes satisfaction in their relationship (Cordova & Jacobson, 1997).

A fourth interactive factor worthwhile for investigation is equity and exchange. Exchange theory suggests that people attempt to maximize the rewards and minimize the costs of interactions in a relationship (Vanpereren & Buunk, 1990). Accordingly, people will be most happy when they attain relationships that are rewarding with the least amount of sacrifice. The theory of equity develops this notion further by positing that "people are most happy when they perceive that their own ratio between outcomes and inputs is the same as that of the individual with whom they have a relationship" (Buunk & Mutsaers, 1999, p. 124). Thus, unlike exchange theory, there is more consideration of the contributions both make in the relationship. Satisfaction decreases when one either feels advantaged (from guilt of getting too much) or deprived (from anger of receiving less than they deserve) (Buunk & Mutsaers, 1999).

Issues of equity and exchange are especially relevant to decision-making and the

division of household labour. Gray-Little and Burks (1983) reviewed the research correlating decision-making and relationship satisfaction and found that “marriages in which the wife is the dominant partner... are more likely to be unhappy than (marriages of husband dominance or egalitarian marriages)” (p. 531). Although satisfaction is highest in egalitarian relationships, wife-dominated relationships appear to be more dissatisfying than husband-dominated relationships, possibly because they most violate gender expectations. Relationships dominated by men may be interpersonally dissatisfying, but at least they are within social accord. Equity is also a point of contention regarding the division of household labour. It is rarely disputed that there remains an inequity in the division of household labour, with women performing a disproportionate amount of the work (Hochschild, 1989; Kiesling, 1997; Steil, 1997; Winstead et al., 1997), both in number of tasks, tediousness of task, and time spent on tasks (Canary et al., 1997). Inequity in the division of household labour exists not only for non-employed women but for full-time working women also (Winstead et al., 1997). This finding occurs regardless of how much money the female partner earns (both absolutely or relative to her partner’s income), or whether or not there is the belief that there “ought” to be equal sharing of domestic tasks (Major, 1993). According to equity theory, women should find this arrangement distressing. However, Pina and Bengtson (1993) found that “beliefs of the more traditional wives serve to buffer the potential detrimental effects of unequal family work” (p. 910). The more allegiance a woman has to traditional gender ideology, the more central to her esteem (and less important his) domestic labour is (Canary et al., 1997). Furthermore, a traditionally-gendered woman may be more willing to highlight his non-domestic

contributions to justify (and be satisfied with) the inequity in the division of household labour.

The final interpersonal factor influencing satisfaction is that of “relationship maintenance”. There has been recent recognition that “all mature relationships require maintenance or else they deteriorate” (Canary & Stafford, 1993, p. 240). Researchers have conceptualized relationship maintenance as *behaviours* that are employed to prevent a breakdown in relations, repair relations after they had broken down, or are routine interactions that do not have the intention but have the effect of maintaining a relationship (e.g., making dinner for the other). Being faithful and honest have been perceived as being the most important maintenance behaviours for both men and women (Bell, Daly, & Gonzalez, 1987). Baxter and Dindia (1990) found three categories of maintenance behaviours: (1) “constructive” (e.g., being positive about the relationships, sharing feelings) and “destructive” behaviours (e.g., threatening to end the relationship, telling the other person his/her faults); (2) occasionally used behaviours (e.g., surprises and gifts); and (3) proactive or assertive (e.g., addressing a conflict directly) and passive (e.g., giving in or refraining from criticism) behaviours. Other researchers have found that providing assurances (i.e., that the person has a commitment to the future of the relationship and demonstrates their feelings of love) and being positive (tries to create pleasant interactions, is polite, cheerful, and cooperative) were the two most important maintenance behaviours in relationships (Canary & Stafford, 1993; Stafford & Canary, 1991). Dainton and Stafford (1993) found that sharing tasks together was the most widely used maintenance behaviour.

It is helpful to employ a dialectic approach to capture some of the complexity that is involved in the maintenance of close relationships. A dialectic perspective on relationships views all relationships involving “contradictory and opposing tensions” that are in constant interaction with each other (Dindia, 1994, p. 42). Baxter and Simon (1993) have identified three dialectic tensions that arise from the fundamental centripetal (a sense of togetherness) and centrifugal (separation and division) forces: (1) autonomy-connection, (2) predictability-novelty, and (3) openness-closedness (for a discussion of other dialectic tensions, see Spitzberg, 1993). Domination is the critical occurrence in a dialectic struggle, as the domination of one pole “sets in motion efforts (by the other pole) to achieve equilibrium” (Baxter & Simon, 1993, p. 228). Unlike the Marx-Hegel conception of dialectic tension that results in the creation of an entity that has resolved the tensions (thesis-antithesis-synthesis), most relationship dialectic scholars recognize that the tensions cannot ever be resolved permanently but can only reach temporary equilibrium (Erbert & Duck, 1997). For example, the pull between autonomy-connection will not be resolved for a dating couple who decide to marry; instead, the autonomy-connection dialectic tension will be “acted into” in a different venue (e.g., how much time to spend alone with friends). Thus, relationships are seen as constantly “in flux” and changing. Research has tended to privilege centripetal behaviours (i.e., openness and honesty) over centrifugal forces (i.e., keeping something from a partner so as not to hurt him/her), ignoring the chronotopic utility of centrifugal forces (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). What will be effective in sustaining a relationship, then, will vary according to which dialectic pole is at issue and which pole is dominant at the current time. Spending more time

together, for example, may be an effective strategy for sustaining a relationship when couples are experiencing too much autonomy but less effective when a couple is experiencing a period of too much closeness.

### Summary

Satisfaction in close relationships is in a large part a result of the interpersonal dynamics of those who are relating. In particular, I have given attention to interactive processes involved in the performance of one's gender. Other factors influencing satisfaction that involve the interactants include self-disclosure, how conflict is handled, equity and fairness in decision-making, and the behaviours one uses to maintain positive feelings in the relationship. Unlike the individual factors mentioned above, interpersonal factors influencing satisfaction are the result of processes *between* the two individuals rather than *within* the individual. In this way, they are more measurable than intrapersonal processes. However, they do not yet account for the social context in which the interpersonal actions take place. The next section considers this further.

### CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Up to this point, gender has been presented as both an individual and interpersonal process. Although this approach contests the "socialization discourse" (i.e., people do what they are told to do; some learn this better than others), gender does need to be



considered as occurring in a context of constraint. That is, when a male is enacting an instrumental-orientation or a female is enacting a communal-orientation, he/she is not the first (fe)male to ever do this; his/her performance is situated in a historical, social, and political context (Wood, 1993). Thus, to assume that gender is *only* an individual and interpersonal process is to deny men's historical position of dominance in relation to women. If gender was only individual and interpersonal, then it could be said that the problem is not oppressive power relations resulting from men's social dominance, the problem is that women are "doing" their gender all wrong. They are being too self-destructive (or nice, depending on how one chooses to look at it) for their own good. Understanding the structure in which gender is performed does not downplay personal agency, but simply recognizes the constraints in which those choices are being made. Clearly, not all men and women are "free" (i.e., free in the sense that their "social value" would be unaffected by breaking gender norms) to make any choice regarding gender that they choose. Finally, gender is contextual in that, not only are individuals socially rewarded for "achieving" their gender, but they also contribute to the reproduction and legitimation of gender relations (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, doing gender is both a political and situated act.

Secondly, it has long been recognized that relationships are shaped not only by dynamics *internal* to the couple (i.e., what has been termed individual and interpersonal influences in this paper), but by *external* forces as well (Milardo, Johnson, & Huston, 1983). These external influences include not only family and friends, but normative ideology of what one "should" expect or not expect in relationships. Julien and Markman

(1991) found that to the degree that extra-marital friendships are “multistranded” (where one exclusive friend can meet a number of different needs for one of the partners) rather than “overlapping” (partners who share the same social network) will interfere with marital satisfaction. It is assumed that multistranded friendships encourage a dependency on someone outside of the relationship, thus reducing attachment between the partners and interfering with the development of intimacy inside the relationship. It also known that family and friends both support and interfere with relationships, with consequences to the development of relationships. It is contended that interference “increase(s) the probability of relationship decline” (Johnson & Milardo, 1984, p. 897). Conversely, support from both partners’ networks will increase the stability of the relationship (Surra, 1990). Finally, Klein and Milardo (1993) note that the social network affects the couple’s definition of what is problematic, what repertoire of behaviours are acceptable for the resolution of the problem and whether or not the problem was adequately resolved. If the network supports a “socially acceptable” resolution, there is a higher likelihood that current gender ideology will be reproduced and less likelihood that an idiosyncratic solution will be arrived at (both factors negatively affecting relationship satisfaction) (Klein & Milardo, 1993). If the network supports a more idiosyncratic resolution to the problem, then there is a possibility in making the relationship a source of social uncertainty and jeopardizing the couple’s social legitimacy (Baxter, 1993).

Finally, we unfortunately live in societies in which not all people are equally valued. For example, some people are differently valued based on biological attributes (i.e., skin colour, sex, facial features, etc.) or a result of social attributes (i.e., income,

occupation, education, etc.). Germain (1991) defines this as *social pollution*, in which growth and health of systems are impaired through the abuse of power by dominant groups over vulnerable populations. Spillover theory suggests that experiences in one part of an individual's life will affect another (Larson, Wilson, & Beley, 1994). Individual marginalization, whether based on economics, sexual orientation, racism, or any other basis of discrimination, is likely to affect satisfaction in that person's close relationship. Employment, for example, has been known to affect a person's satisfaction. Income loss has been associated with an increase in relationship tension and decrease in marital quality (Kinnunen & Pulkinen, 1998). Anticipating a job loss or working in an insecure job negatively impacts on satisfaction in close relationships as well (Larson et al., 1994). As well, living in an impoverished neighbourhood is linked to decreased assessment in quality of life and subjective well-being (Brown, 1995). Gay and lesbian couples face all the same pressures that heterosexual couples face (i.e., finances, division of labour within the household, family, etc.), with the additional stressor of homophobia. Gay and lesbian individuals must balance their expression of love and caring in a condemning social environment. Thus, homosexual couples encounter a social threat to their levels of individual and relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, any violence-related trauma threatens relationship satisfaction from the effects of the trauma, which include intrusive memories, hypervigilance and numbing out (Herman, 1992). This impact from the trauma can impair relationship satisfaction (Hendrix, Jurich, & Schumm, 1995). Finally, stigma can apply to any of the above discussed, as well as couples in which there is a mental illness, AIDS, or any other localized criteria for social exclusion. Stigma can negatively impact on a

person's perceived level of satisfaction, self-worth and efficacy (Rosenfield, 1997). Stigmatized people may withdraw from social interaction anticipating rejection, further contributing to and confirming their isolation (Markowitz, 1998). Thus, stigma and isolation will decrease a person's quality of life and will likely impair the satisfaction he/she experiences in a close relationship.

Not all contexts support the same belief in how a man/woman "should" be. It is important to consider expectations particular settings have about this as it shapes the how one "does" their gender. As well, the support of or interference from one's network will likely increase or decrease satisfaction, respectively. Finally, not all people are positioned similarly in society, and this "positioning" affects the likelihood of attaining satisfaction in close relationships. Social pollution and stigma will work against some couples to be able to fully enjoy their lives. Thus, it is not simply that intrapersonal and interactive factors influence satisfaction in close relationships, but we also need to pay attention to the ways in which the context will work for or against some couples.

### **DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SATISFACTION**

As noted by researchers, women often remain in relationships in which there is abuse (Harway & Goldberg, 1993), at least for a period of time after the abuse has begun. Although the woman who leaves an abusive relationship has unique demands on her (i.e., financial, familial, etc.) (Sullivan, Basta, Tan, & Davidson, 1992), the woman who remains in the relationship also faces burdens particular to her situation (Eisikovits & Buchbinder,

2000). For one, she must monitor her safety on an on-going basis. As well, the woman who stays in the relationship faces the stigma of deviancy remaining committed to the relationship because others (family, friends, professionals) may believe that she *should* leave (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 2000). Furthermore, she must find a way to justify (to self, others) her love for a man who uses abusive behaviour against her. Finally, she must relate daily to another person (the abuse notwithstanding) with the usual relational stresses that are in themselves difficult for many people. If couples therapy is to be useful in assisting the couple with these challenges, clinicians need to consider the possibility that the woman may decide to stay in the relationship for reasons other than dysfunction or terror. It is here where most can be learned from couples who have remained together and would describe their relationship as satisfying. Answering the question of how these couples were able to attain the satisfaction (what needed to happen?; what was the process?) may assist other couples who, too, have decided to remain together but who are struggling with feelings of dissatisfaction with their relating. The ultimate hope is that knowing this information will assist "staying-together" couples increase their satisfaction, and, concurrently, decrease the risk for further abusive behaviour.

Exploring the possibility of satisfaction in relationships where there has been abuse may mean letting go of previously-held beliefs regarding domestic abuse (Lipchik, 1991). One of these beliefs is that there can never be satisfaction in relationships in which there has been abuse. Given the combination of the impact the abuse has on the woman (see Herman, 1992) and the difficulty men have accepting responsibility for the abuse (see Ptacek, 1988), this does not bode well for the likelihood of satisfaction in the relationship. Discussion of

satisfaction in abusive relationships is not assumed to be the norm.

Although I feel a need to explicitly state that I do not believe the experience of satisfaction in relationships in which there has been abuse will fit everyone's description of their relationship, in some case, the two can co-exist. For example, Jacobson and Gottman (1998) found that women who viewed their marriage through the script of their dream were more likely to be satisfied with their relationships and point to their partners' other virtues to justify the continued existence of their relationships. Incidentally, these women were also more likely to have witnessed violence in their childhood. Furthermore, research has found that the more the woman attributes the cause of the abusive behaviour external to the man (i.e., alcohol, stress), the less likely she is to experience dissatisfaction within the relationship (Byrne & Arias, 1997; Katz et al., 1995). Finally, Lloyd (1996) found that what separated "distressed-aggressive" couples from "nondistressed-aggressive" couples was not the frequency of positive interactions but the frequency of negative interactions. Lloyd (1996) also found that relationships in which there was no cessation of the aggression were characterized by equal amounts of positive interactions as the non-aggressive relationships, but higher levels of negative interactions than relationships in which the aggression stopped, both at the beginning and the end of the 18-month study. Thus, it appears that the negative interactions are more potent in eroding the foundation of satisfaction than positive interactions are in their ability to build or repair it, explaining in part why the "honeymoon phase" is purported to be less effective in reestablishing closeness between the couple after a lengthy history of abuse.

However, these research findings have been incidental to other research (for example, in Lloyd, 1996, the purpose was to examine everyday interaction in the context of violent relationships), and have not explicitly considered the issue of satisfaction. Further, what little research there has been that have noted satisfaction in relationships with a history of abuse has been gathered through questionnaires and through researcher interpretation of the couples' interactions. There has not been any research that explicitly discusses satisfaction with couples, so we do not know the process by which couples are able to sustain satisfaction in their relationships despite the occurrence of abuse. Is there something particular to satisfied couples that distinguishes them from other couples with a history of abuse? How do these couples compare with other satisfied couples in which there has not been any abusive behaviour? Is satisfaction inversely linked with "severity" or frequency of violence? Was the process of "forgiveness" involved (and if so, in what ways)? If domestic abuse literature is still in its infancy, then research on satisfaction and domestic abuse is prenatal. Given the benefits for understanding this further, it is surprising that this has largely been ignored by researchers.

It is my hope that my research fills the gap in the research, in that I am explicitly examining interpersonal variables pertaining to satisfaction with couples with a history of abuse in their relationship. This research will not only continue the beginning of the work to document the co-existence of satisfaction and domestic abuse, but will go further than previous research by developing some initial efforts to account for the satisfaction. I will compare the factors that account for satisfaction for couples with a history of domestic abuse with the literature accounting for satisfaction in couples with no history of domestic

abuse. It is my hope that this research will challenge our thinking about domestic abuse but acknowledging the complexities that previously have been ignored.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter reviewed the literature pertaining to domestic abuse, relationship dynamics, and the understudied and uncertain role of satisfaction for couples who have a history of abuse in the relationship. For example, although nearly a tenth of women were found to be satisfied in their relationship in which they had experienced abuse, Horton and Johnson (1993) attended to the women who had left the relationship. This may be ideological in origin, in that there is common beliefs that men cannot stop their abusive behaviour, that the woman and the relationship is permanently damaged, and that women are better off leaving the man who had abused her (Lamb, 1996). As well, attention to relationship in a situation of violence invokes fears of blaming the woman for "her part" (read: responsibility) in the escalation towards abuse (see, for example, Bograd, 1984). In accordance with this, attention deservedly needs to be given to developing effective interventions for the promotion of responsibility for the individual man who uses abuse in his relationships (Thorne-Finch, 1992).

However, it is surprising that so little is known of relationship dynamics of couples who have a history of abuse in their relationships. Only recently has attention to understanding the dynamics of these relationships, with increased understanding of the mutual rigidity, hostility, and negative behaviours that frequently occur in abusive



relationships (Anderson & Schlossberg, 1999). However, little is known about whether these dynamics preceded the abuse (with implications for, at least partially, causality) or were the effects of the controlling and hurtful behaviour.

As little that is known about couples who have a history of abuse in their relationships, even less is known about couples who have renegotiated the terms of their relationships to include the experience of satisfaction for them. Perhaps the recent consideration of satisfaction in abusive relationships (Lloyd, 1996, 1999; Rogers, Castleton, & Lloyd, 1996) has begun a richer understanding of the experience of couples with a history of abuse. Thus far, however, this research has consisted of quantitative analysis of the couples' interactions. There has yet to be a study on satisfaction in which the participants interpret their experience of satisfaction. As a result, important information about relationships which include both the experience of satisfaction and domestic abuse still remains unknown to us.

We do not know, for example, are couples who describe their relationship as satisfying and have the experience of domestic abuse in their relationship like other satisfied couples? That is, how is gender performed in their relationships? Are they able to engage in acts of self-disclosure? How do they handle conflicts? Do they see their arrangement as "fair" and equitable? What does each partner do to maintain the relationship and his/her feelings of satisfaction within the relationship? What role (if any) does the process of forgiveness assume in these situations? Finally, what pressures external to the relationship support and undermine each partner's feeling of satisfaction? It would not be

inconceivable, for example, that relatives wish to see the couple separate for the good of one partner's well-being in particular. Or, perhaps, family members do all that they can to help the couple "work things out". Friendships, on the other hand, (and comparisons to these friendships) may too support or strain relationships, depending on whether or not they are the couple friends or only one partner's friends (Julien & Markman, 1991). What differences are there between, say, a white middle-class couple with a history of abuse and a minority couple with a history of abuse and living in poverty? Do these differences provide additional incentives or barriers to satisfaction in close relationships in which there has been abuse?

Similarly, because satisfaction has been a neglected topic of research in the area of domestic abuse (other than to report that it does not often occur), little speculation can at this time occur regarding the potential ameliorative effects of promoting satisfaction in interventions with couples in which there has been abuse. For example, would increased satisfaction reduce the risk or be irrelevant for future incidences of abuse in the relationship? Is satisfaction a pathway to or a result of making changes in the relationship? Is satisfaction related to the violence or is it more linked to other variables within the relationship? Indeed, is the construct of satisfaction helpful at all in the discussion on domestic abuse? Although we can speculate on some of these questions, no research has yet provided us with any answers.

The field of domestic abuse is a highly-charged political arena, as many believe that it should be. Men's abuse of women rightfully ignites passion and rage in many of us,

fueling the commitment of working towards its demise. Unfortunately, sometimes these political and social allegiances have constrained dialogue regarding domestic abuse (see for example, Renzetti, 1999), and, at times, simplified the complexity of the matter. This has contributed to a dominant discourse in the area of domestic violence in which it is viewed that men do not or cannot change, and that women, however understandable it is that they do not leave, are certainly better off without him. Of course, this may be true for many, maybe even most, men and women in which there has been abuse in the relationship.

However, the "regime of truth" becomes problematic when it falls outside of the lived experiences of individuals. According to this perspective, women who stay with their abusive partner and who would consider their relationship— despite the experience of abuse— for the most part satisfying either have to sacrifice their agency (i.e., as in the “internalized patriarchy” discourse) or their mental health (i.e., as demonstrated through the discourse related to “low self-esteem”). Similarly, a man who has behaved abusively is considered to be satisfied in the relationship only as far as he is able to control his partner and to make her subservient to his needs. Although this is undeniably a dynamic in many (some would say most) relationships in which there has been abuse, it is not with certainty that this is the reality for all relationships.

The purpose of the current study was to explore alternative realities of domestic abuse, realities that can include both the experiences of abuse and satisfaction, by exploring the issue of satisfaction in close relationships which have had the experience of domestic abuse. By employing a postmodern analysis, it could challenge traditional assumption

regarding domestic abuse by understanding the lived experiences of those outside the dominant discourse.

I researched the following questions in this study:

- (1) Can satisfaction co-exist with the experience of domestic abuse in relationships?
- (2) If so, what factors account for satisfaction experienced in relationships with a history of domestic abuse?
- (3) How do these factors compare with factors already identified in the literature on satisfaction in relationships (without a history of domestic abuse)?

I hope that with this increased understanding, the research can be used to inform domestic abuse interventions to increase the safety of women who remain in relationships in which there is a history of abuse, and open possibilities for women who want to stay in a relationship which can be satisfying for both of them.

## Chapter Two: Methodology

We know that many couples remain together despite the existence of abuse in their relationship (Harway & Goldberg, 1993), although not all of these couples can we assume the reason is due solely (or, even, mainly) because of satisfaction. Perhaps we have something to learn from couples who have “made it” that could inform conjoint therapy with couples struggling in their relating because of all the barriers abusive couples are faced with. In doing so, satisfied couples may help to assist other (dissatisfied) couples in reducing the risk for any further abuse. This study is designed to attain an understanding of the experiences of couples who have a history of abuse in their relationship but would nonetheless describe their relationship as satisfying.

My research consisted of the following steps:

- (1) Recruiting the participants through posted notices in counselling agencies;
- (2) After being contacted by six participants (three couples) and attaining consent, and doing an initial safety assessment, I interviewed the participants. This involved interviewing the woman first, then her male partner, and then conducting a conjoint interview. I used an interview guide (see discussion below) that included factors in the

literature pertaining to interpersonal processes of satisfaction.

(3) After the interviews were transcribed (I transcribed one interview, and a hired transcriber completed the final eight), I initially employed a “modified” grounded theory analysis (see “data analysis” discussion later this chapter). In doing this, I used line by line content *coding* of all nine interviews, then grouped the codes into broader *categories* (for example, in the women’s interviews, I gathered together statements that pertained to a sense of unfairness in their relationship). From these categories emerged *themes* (for example, in the women’s interviews, categories of unfairness, satisfaction, limited change, and progressed group together for a theme for the “relationship”; other themes included themes related to the women themselves, their partners, and to the abuse).

(4) After the first layer of analysis was completed, I reviewed the interviews, relying on an approach referred to as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (see “data analysis” discussion later this chapter). CDA involves exposing oppressive ideological practices grounded in the participants’ interviews through a critical reading of their interpretations. This involves scrutinizing what is accepted as “the facts” or “the truth”, and considering the ideological underpinnings to these statements. I then considered the consequences these ideologies could potentially have on the participants and their relationships.

(5) I followed up with all three couples to review the process of being involved with my research, and for the couples to review my findings.

## PARTICIPANTS & RECRUITMENT

I recruited couples for this study through the clinical population at different domestic abuse counselling agencies. I posted invitations for participants asking for "couples who have a history of abuse in their relationship" and who also feel "satisfied with their relationship" (see Appendix A). The couples self-defined the construct of "abuse" and "satisfaction" as it fit for them (they were not required to pass a "test" on their level of abuse or satisfaction to be part of this study). If any couples did not match both of the criteria, I was not going to involve them any further in the study.

Seven couples expressed an initial interest to me about participating in the research. Three of the couples did not call me back after attaining further information about the study. With the fourth couple, I was actively involved therapeutically with the man, making issues of consent less clear. I screened this couple out the research. Of the six participants (three couples) in this study, five had been involved in counselling of some sort, and all the men had attended group counselling specifically addressing their use of abusive behaviour against their partner.

There are some potential limitations in drawing from the clinical population. One is the risk that the couples that participated in this study are not representative of the couples that experience the phenomenon under study. Given the postmodern attention to localized and particular knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), however, this is less a concern, as no representation adequately represents all people's lived experiences. Understanding in one context is not directly applicable in another, but can serve as a guide to that situated understanding.

More problematic than relying on the clinical population is related to the

aforementioned stigma regarding domestic abuse, as well as other practical considerations. As it is distressed couples and individuals who seek counselling services, it will be more difficult to find people who will describe their relationship as satisfying in the clinical population generally (even in non-abusive couples). On the other hand, couples from the clinical population may have started out dissatisfied, and through the counselling process, attained a level of satisfaction due to changes in their relating. As well, they may have increased insight into their relationship experiences after attending counselling, which could be helpful for this study. Either way, it may not be likely that the experience of the couples in this study will reflect the experience of couples who do not attend counselling. Given the purpose of this study, however, this does not mar the value of the study but does, indeed, call into question its generalizability.

As anticipated, relying on a clinical population was further complicated when the couples who did come forward to participate were couples that I have been involved with clinically (either with him or them together). This in some way makes sense, as they already had (presumably) a trusting relationship with myself in which they experienced themselves as not being judged or devalued. As a result, they may have been more willing to discuss their experiences in the relationship than they may have been with, say, a hired interviewer. In this way, I might have been in a position to gain access to information that others may not necessarily attain. On the other hand, this may have undermined some of the perceptions of “objectivity” of myself and the participants, particularly in discussion (if any) related to the counselling process. For example, if the participants suggested that they had a wonderful counsellor (me!), it will likely be considered invalid in the research because I was also the person conducting the research. This does not deny that they may have had a wonderful counsellor, but only that this information in this research situation, will be



suspect.

Here again, a postmodern analysis is of benefit. One stream of postmodernism (social constructionism) suggests that our knowledge of “reality” is not direct but constructed interpersonally (Gergen, 1999). Thus, what is “objective truth” is not that which “mirrors” reality, but is discourse from those who are in a position to “circulate” their truth (Foucault, 1978). It is not expected that research participants will tell what, and how, things “really” happened, but, instead, will tell their stories as they understand it. It is this understanding that is most helpful for the purpose of this study.

The three couples who participated in this study are (all names are pseudonyms):

(1) Allison and Bryan are a middle-class couple in their 30's with three young children.

Allison and Bryan had been in this relationship for over ten years at the time of the interviews, and had had one physical incident of violence three years ago. There had been psychological abuse throughout their relationship. Bryan became involved in counselling at a domestic abuse counselling agency during the period of separation that followed from the abuse. There had been no police involvement related to the abuse. There was no physical violence in either of their families of origin, although Bryan discussed witnessing mutual emotional abuse between his parents.

(2) Connie and Daniel are a middle-class couple in their 50's. Daniel recently retired, and Connie intends to retire next year. At the time of the interview, Connie and Daniel had been involved in the relationship for over thirty years, and had two adult children. Daniel describes himself as an alcoholic, who quit drinking 20 years ago. He became involved at a domestic abuse counselling agency after Connie and a friend identified his behaviour as abusive. There had been no physical violence for 20 years, but there has been psychological

and sexual abuse in the relationship during this time. There had been no involvement with the police. Neither Connie nor Daniel witnessed any violence growing up.

(3) Elaine and Frank, a middle-class couple in their 40's. Both are employed full time. Elaine and Frank had been involved in their relationship for over twenty years, and had one adult child. Frank became involved in a domestic abuse counselling agency after he used the most amount of physical violence against his partner 18 months prior to the interviews. There has never been any police involvement as a result of the abuse. Frank described growing up in a home in which his father used physical violence against his mother.

On average, the men and the women in the study were 48 and 43 years old, respectively; and married an average of 24 years. All three couples were first-time married with their partners. All the six participants were Caucasian, and of European descent. All were (or had been) employed (Daniel recently retired), and living a middle-class lifestyle. Of the three couples, only Connie and Daniel were involved in any counselling at the time of the interviews (marital counselling), though the other men were on a wait list for follow up group counselling. One other couple (Allison and Bryan) had in the past been involved in couples counselling. Elaine had been the only participant who had never been involved in counselling at some point previously. All the men had not had any therapeutic involvement with me for between one and three years.

Although these participants are not typical of the people identified in the literature, I suspect that the literature is not representative of all the people who have the experience of abuse in their relationship. That middle-class citizens may be differently treated by police than people living in poverty is not inconceivable, just as shelter services are more like to be utilised by women with less resources than privileged women. Therefore, it should not

be surprising that the literature, and the law enforcement agencies, have not “captured” the characteristics of these participants.

### DATA COLLECTION

Jacobson (1994) warns that “inquiry into wife abuse must also include safeguards to insure that the research itself does not actually compromise the safety of female subjects” (p. 83). Given that this study included one conjoint interview per couple, I attempted to remain vigilant regarding the woman’s safety in several ways. Prior to any interviewing of the couple, I spoke with the woman first and assessed her perceptions of risk and fear, based on my experience from working at a domestic abuse counselling program for the last five years. Should there had been any threat to her safety, I would not have continued with the interviews and would have developed a safety plan with her if she was willing, and would have referred her to the appropriate crisis centres or woman’s shelter here in Winnipeg. Fortunately, there was no risk to safety for any of the participants, and I did not have to intervene in this matter.

I interviewed the woman first, and again assessed for safety concerns. I was prepared to not continue with her interview and the conjoint interview if a safety concern was flagged at this point. Had safety issues been raised, I would have continued with the interview of her partner, but would not have conducted a conjoint interview. If there was no perceived threat to the woman’s safety, I interviewed her partner, and then consulted with my advisor regarding any safety markers that I may have overlooked. From here, I

interviewed the two of them together. This separate-then-conjoint process allowed me to access individual perspectives and information that may not be given in the presence of the other person. I was looking to see if one person's narrative is compromised or "lost" in the "couple narrative", especially when discussing an experience that the couple had together. Furthermore, separate and conjoint interviews provided me with the means for data triangulation (i.e., "the use of a variety of data sources in a study"; Patton, 1990, p. 187). This allowed me to witness the interpersonal construction of each couple's "story", as well as gauge the symmetry of the individuals' and couple's narratives. It would be useful information if one person's story is altered to fit the couple's story. Interviews lasted between 1hr15min and 2hrs each.

Given that the goal of qualitative research is to attempt to develop understanding based on the experiences of the participants, I did not pre-determine the categories of analysis or *themes*. Instead, I asked open-ended questions about various aspects of their relationship, and then, attempted to understand the meanings that they have created about that experience. To aid me with this, I employed an "interview guide approach" (Patton, 1990), which identified the topics to be covered but did not involve standardized questioning for each couple. This allowed me to explore topic areas that I was interested in while still allowing for flexibility to follow the interests of the participants. The topic areas that I intended to place on the agenda included the following (with the type of questions that I asked of the women as an example):

(1) What has been the history of abuse in the relationship? (i.e., Has there been physical

and psychological abuse in the relationship? How frequent were the occurrences of abuse? How long has it been since the last episode of abuse?)

(2) How would the couples describe their relationship [on factors related to satisfaction found in the literature]? (i.e., "Positive Illusion": How do you view your partner compared to other men in your friends' and families' relationships?; Gender roles: As a woman in the relationship, do you see yourself as having different responsibilities than your partner? How did these differences get decided?; Self-disclosure: Are there certain topics that the two of you have difficulty openly discussing compared to other topics? What do these topics pertain to? Who is more likely to openly share feelings?; Conflict management: How do the two of you handle arguments? Who is more likely to "give in" during a conflict?; Equity: Do you feel that it is a "fair" arrangement that the two of you have? Does one of you "give more" to the other person?; Relationship maintenance: What sorts of things do you do to keep the relationship "lively" and interesting for your partner? What do you do to show your partner that you care for him?; Social supports/interference: Do you believe that your friends and family are "behind" your relationship, or do they wish to see it end? How is it that you know this?; etc.).

(3) In what areas are the couple satisfied in their relationship? (i.e., From what elements of your relationship do you get the most satisfaction? Has it always been this way, or are these a relatively new developments?)

(4) In what areas are the couple dissatisfied in their relationship? (i.e., From what elements of your relationship do you get the least satisfaction? Have these areas had a history of

dissatisfaction, or are they a new development?)

(5) What has the process toward satisfaction been like for each member of the couples (i.e., Do you ever still think of the abuse? What do you think about it now? Is this different than how you used to think about it before? What did you require of him to get to the point to where the two of you are at today? Would you describe this as a process of forgiveness? If so, how would you describe the steps involved in this process?).

The challenge to this collaboration is that both myself and the couple had our own agendas, and the respectful negotiation of these agendas resulted in more honest and thoughtful responses by the participants. As such, I worked at respecting the timing and the needs of the participants as they created meaning out of a time that was difficult for both of them. These challenges meant that not all of the interview questions were similarly asked of all couples, and some discussions occurred with some participants that were not replicated with other participants.

However, doing this contributed to realizing the empowering potential and therapeutic value in collaborating with couples with a history of abuse. Ristock and Pennell (1996) have noted that within the feminist movement, “the primary means of empowerment has been women’s telling of their own stories” (p. 3). Similarly, Piercy and Thomas (1998) suggest research subjects are empowered when evaluators “invite participants to generate, own, use and share their knowledge and expertise” (p. 166). This participation and empowerment avoids “research colonization” and has direct therapeutic value in validating the couples’ narratives of togetherness, especially when couples remain together after the

abuse is socially invalidated. It is my hope that I utilized my position as a researcher to exercise the responsible use of power in supporting the empowerment of the individuals involved in this research project.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Given that traditional research has privileged the researcher's knowledge over the clients, I wanted a collaborative qualitative approach that would not replicate this unjust and irresponsible use of the researcher's power. Instead, I hoped to attempt to understand the *meaning* the abuse experiences have for the two people in the couple relationship "without imposing preexisting expectations on the phenomenon" (Patton, 1990, p. 44). This assumes that the couples are the experts who can best interpret their own experiences (Cheung, 1998). As qualitative research is "open-ended" and "unfolding", the categories of analysis "reveal" themselves in the data and are not predetermined. Thus, the researcher "does not set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at predisposed truths" (Patton, 1990, p. 55). However, I also recognized that people's viewpoints are influenced by social forces (though often rendered invisible), and, from this perspective, I also needed to situate the meanings the participants created so as to avoid reproducing individualizing ideologies.

Given the complexities involved in the process, I decided to use a double-layered analysis that allowed me to be both respectful of what the participants were sharing with me while at the same time creating some critical distance from them to consider larger

social issues. To do this, I employed both a modified Grounded Theory approach and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to make meaning of the data. The grounded theory was modified, in that I entered into the interviews having had extensive experience working in the field of domestic abuse while at the same time having read much of the research on satisfaction in close relationships; this no doubt affected how and what the participants spoke about; also, unlike a “pure” grounded theory approach, I did not reach a point of “saturation”, but was simply not able to gain access to any other couples who were willing to discuss their experiences of abuse. There are aspects to both of these approaches that are particularly relevant to this research study.

For one, grounded theory has stressed using this approach for the development rather than the verification of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Given that the literature on domestic abuse is really still in infancy (in regards to what we know and what we still need to know to prevent abuse in relationships), we have yet to fully account (indeed, it has to this point been unthinkable, notwithstanding theories involving masochism) for the presence of satisfaction in relationships in which there has been abuse. In this way, grounded theory is an appropriate approach for this subject matter. Furthermore, there is recognition in grounded theory for the social context affecting how the research is being conducted, and the conditions in which the studied phenomenon occurs, For example, one might assume that satisfaction is higher in more traditional pockets of society in which it is expected that the man is the rightful head of the household. Guba and Lincoln (1998) have termed this macroanalysis, and realize the need for this to be part of a qualitative research study. As well, the use of observation in grounded theory (in this case, watching and



making sense of the way in which couples interact) augments the data from the interviews (Morse, 1998). Finally, the process in grounded theory of "constant comparison" (transcribing the interviews and using them to influence and refine subsequent interviews) and "inductive analysis" (that the categories, themes, and patterns comes from the information that is collected), increases the likelihood that the understanding that is arrived at is more closely linked to the experiences of the research participants.

On the other hand, it is no coincidence that large pockets of people share the same beliefs and values about men, women, and relationships. This can be viewed as an effect of power and discourse in shaping people's lives (Gee, 1999). When these discourses get "naturalized" into "common sense" knowledge, they hide their ideological nature (Fairclough, 1995). As people speak, then, it is helpful to think that the words are not only originating from the person, but are also social "carriers" of ideologies (Gee, 1999). The task, then, is to challenge individualistic origins of the participants' descriptions of their experiences. This, I believe, is the usefulness of employing an approach that includes Critical Discourse Analysis.

CDA allows for a reading the transcripts is not so much to view the data as "truth", but as social accounts that draw from pre-existing discursive resources . That is, the participants did not just make sense of their experiences in a social vacuum but used understandings that are already in public circulation for them to draw on. These discursive resources not only reflect peoples' experiences, but give shape to people's experiences as well (Ristock, 2002). Discourses, however, are not value neutral but are shaped by power

relations (Fairclough, 1995). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) asks questions such as: “What ideologies are hidden in a discourse?”, “Who benefits from a discourse, and at whose expense?”, “What is allowed to be said and what is not allowed to be said?” Finally, CDA considers “the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 249).

It appeared to me that CDA was a good fit when considering the effects of discourse in the field of domestic abuse. Certainly there have been much discursive changes regarding domestic abuse in recent years, moving from “marital dispute” to “acts of oppression” (note that the behaviours have largely not changed, but that our understanding of it has). Accordingly, domestic abuse is seen as “more serious” in the general public than it was several decades ago, and, as a result, has become criminalized and generally frowned upon. This is an example of how shifting discourse results in social change.

All discourses have competition for legitimation of “reality”, in that alternative discourses are available and vie for “truth status”. Power is practiced when some discourses are considered “truth” and other discourses are subjugated (Foucault, 1980). It is no different with our understanding of domestic abuse, in which competing discourses vie for truth status. For example, consider the discursive competition between the extent to which women are “equally” (or, even, more) abusive towards their male partners (Kurz, 1993b; Strauss, 1993). It is conceivable, then, that some discourses will create pressures for change in our social relations, while other discourses will work towards maintaining an oppressive *status quo* (not that the *status quo* is always oppressive, but a *status quo* that is

oppressive). Critical reflection on the discourses of domestic abuse allows us to estimate the implications for social change.

Using a grounded theory approach with CDA was a good fit, in that it allowed me to both be respectful and “honour” the words of the participants, while at the same time gain some critical distance from the participants to draw links to the wider social context. That is, grounded theory forced me to “stay close” to what the participants were saying, and to recognize the very unique and personal experiences of domestic abuse. On the other hand, using CDA when considering domestic abuse works towards recognizing the social and political nature of the problem, rather than within the popular frameworks of individualization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Simply using one approach rather than both would have greatly limited the breadth of findings, reducing it to *either* a personal *or* a social experience. With domestic abuse, the experience is clearly both.

Note, however, that any researcher’s account cannot fully represent the perspective of the participants or challenge ideologies from a “value-free” position, as it is filtered through the perspective of the researcher/interpreter (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). For example, from the data, I utilized line-by-line coding (microanalysis), to be organized into categories and then into larger themes. How each line will be coded can vary from researcher to researcher, as in the following fictional lines:

001 I never thought about leaving, not once.

002 My mother always stressed the importance of wedding vows.

003 I feel like I would be letting her down if I was to get divorced.

One researcher may code the lines “thoughts of leaving” (001), “family of origin teachings” (002) and “pressures to remain together” (003), while another researcher may code the lines “commitment” (001), “traditional values” (002) and “consequences to leaving” (003). Similarly, we are much more likely to notice ideological origins when they are at dissonance with our own views. That is, I am much more likely to see "truth" as socially constructed when it is of a different ideology than when another version of the "truth" agrees with mine (in which case, I am more likely to accept this as simply "fact"). This does not detract from the value of the research, but simply recognizes that the interpretation of the data is filtered through experiences and values of the researcher. To traditional quantitative researchers, this calls into question the “validity” and “reliability” of the research. A focus on the “validity” (the extent to which it is assured that what is being measured is indeed being measured) and “reliability” (the consistency in which the measurement will be reproduced) of research may be an unfortunate distraction. This does not account for the dynamic and fluid nature of human changes. Wolcott (1994) describes the “absurdity of validity”, in that “there is no exact set of circumstances... no single and ‘correct’ interpretation” (p. 365). He instead finds “validity” in “identifying critical elements and wringing plausible interpretations from them... without becoming obsessed with finding the right or ultimate answer, the correct version, the Truth” (Wolcott, 1994, pp. 366-367). Such an approach recognizes that there is no “ready-made” social world to discover, but instead, a world that is continuously in the process of being constructed (Wolcott, 1994). In the case of reliability, there is an assumption of a static worldview, that *what is will always be*, that the phenomenon under study is unchanging (Guba & Lincoln,

1989). If it is not, then the measurement is not considered “reliable”. This negates the possibility that one’s perceptions are constantly influenced by internal and external changes in that person’s circumstances, and that these changes do not “prove” or “disprove” a prior assessment of the “facts”.

More pertinent to qualitative research are concepts of *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Trustworthiness can be viewed as the parallel process of qualitative research ensuring the “goodness” of methodology, and involve: (a) *credibility* (the perspective represented by the researcher “matches” those of the participants); (b) *transferability* (the degree of similarity between differing contexts); (c) *dependability* (the measure of integrity for methodological changes so as to allow for salient factors to become increasingly more sophisticated); and (d) *confirmability* (the extent to which the interpretations and outcomes are rooted in the participants and the context as opposed to in the researcher) (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Grounded theory is particularly apt to address issues of trustworthiness, as it is often considered the most “rigorous” of the qualitative approaches. In this approach, researchers do not enter into the research process wishing to prove a preconceived theory, but instead, come from the research participants themselves. In this study, rather than look to “prove” or “disprove” that, for example, satisfaction is inversely related to the male partner’s use of abusive behaviour (which may or may not be true), I set out to find out from the participants themselves what their satisfaction is linked to. This knowledge, in turn, informed future interviews with couples regarding their experiences of satisfaction. In

this way, if I “had it wrong”, then succeeding couples would be able to redirect the emerging theory. Although this addresses issues of credibility, dependability, and confirmability, I make no claims that the results are applicable to all couples who have a history of abuse in their relationship (as I am only drawing on a clinical population). Thus, representativeness is not assumed to be possible.

Although the criteria of trustworthiness is useful, in that it provides semblance of assurance that the research was conducted in a rigorous manner, the attention to methodology still has roots in modernist assumptions (that Reality can be “known” through “good” science). From a postmodern approach, then, evaluation of qualitative research must be rooted in the same ontological values and assumptions that sanction the research process and analysis. To this end, the alternative criteria of *authenticity* can be employed. In this approach, it is the outcome of the study that is the source for evaluation. Concepts that are central to this process include: (a) *fairness* (the degree to which different perspectives and values are represented in the research); (b) *ontological authenticity* (the extent to which the research participants’ own worldviews are elaborated, improved, and expanded upon); (c) *educative authenticity* (the degree to which the research participants’ understanding and appreciation for other worldviews are enhanced); (d) *catalytic authenticity* (the extent to which the research process has stimulated action in the participants’ lives); and (e) *tactical authenticity* (the degree to which the research participants are empowered to act) (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Taken together, it was my hope that while I would be able to gain increased understanding of one aspect of domestic abuse, the participants would benefit from the opportunity to reflect upon their own

positions, learn from their partners' conversations, and would feel sufficiently empowered, through increased understanding and recognition of their own and the other's competencies, to continue to work towards having the kind of relationship that both of them are wanting to have. Similarly, I hope that service providers who see this research will feel the discussions that arise from the data help them to understand the ideologies at play in our own work.

From this perspective, then, "good" research is the result of an "empowering" process. If the resulting theory is grounded in the understanding of each of the participants (rather than in the researcher), issues of fairness are accounted for in a manner that traditional quantitative research cannot (in which concepts are derived from the researcher). Borrowing from social constructionist idea that finding the "truth" is interactive and created (rather than individual and "found") (Gergen, 1999), interpersonal reflection on the experience of satisfaction of their relationship may help to assist couples in the creation of "the good" rather than a performance of what is "not working". Furthermore, as an "authentic" identity is a result of social processes that verify these identity claims (White, 2000), taped interviews and research reports "validate" the performance of the couples' satisfaction (in contrast to psychometric testing, which hopes to "find" the couples' satisfaction). By conducting both individual and conjoint interviews, I hoped that the research participants (through the mutual expression of their "satisfaction") experienced increased understanding of how to sustain the satisfaction in their relationship both for themselves and their partners. A brief follow-up call to the couple several weeks after the final analysis was completed questioning the effect of having participated in the research

allowed me to both assess for risk and attain a sense of the ontological, educative, catalytic, and tactical authenticity of the research. Although all three couples expressed an interest in the follow up at the time of the interviews, only Elaine and Frank participated in the follow up (the other two couples agreed to send along their comments via e-mail, but I did not yet receive these at the time of this writing).

The couple who did participate in the follow-up found that "in general, the findings were accurate" and fit their experience, in particular the importance for them regarding developments regarding equity within their relationship and the satisfaction stemming from changes in self-disclosure. They also noted that the interviews aided them in their ability to continue to work towards being open with each other. At least for this couple, then, my goal that the participants would have benefitted from their participation has been accomplished. It is difficult to say if the same holds true for the other four participants.

### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As noted earlier, the safety of the woman must be the primary consideration when studying domestic abuse, and has been accounted for as mentioned above. Furthermore, issues of confidentiality will be relevant to her safety. It has been noted that researchers are charged with the responsibility to protect the informants' identity (Madak, 1994). In domestic abuse research, however, this is even more important, as potentially he could use her words against her abusively if in her individual interview she can be identified in her statements. As such, it was important that all identifying information be excluded or



changed so as to minimize the possibility of this occurring. It is also common practice for participants to receive copies of the transcripts from their interviews. However, again related to safety, I decided not to utilize this practice, but, instead, only offered access to the couple's joint interview. No one accepted this offer, although several participants expressed an interest in seeing the final version of my thesis.

Informed consent requires that all research participants not only agree to be part of a research study, but also that they understand the possible consequences incurred to them as a result of participation (Madak, 1994). However, this is not always clear in a qualitative study on human relationships. It is therefore unpredictable what the particular impact of talking about abuse experiences will be on any given individual in the study. For example, will it bring up feelings of fear? Anger? Betrayal? I assumed that drawing from the clinical population would increase the likelihood of participants being able to manage feelings as well as decrease the intensity of these feelings, which, for the most part, did in fact occur. If either myself or any of the participants did not feel "ready" or "willing" to discuss any aspect of the research, then I was prepared to be respectful of the limits of what they were comfortable with. A consent form was devised and approved by the University of Manitoba's ethics board (see Appendix B), outlining the purpose of the research, which included counselling references within Winnipeg. It also informed the participants about the process that would be followed to ensure confidentiality.

Although research is a distinct human endeavor from therapy, Rosenblatt (1995) recognizes the "therapeutic possibilities" involved in interviewing couples or families. As

such, in narrating their stories, "there can be integration, crystallization, naming and the healing that comes with the story form" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 150). Furthermore, couples may say things for the first time to each other, confront their differences and identify their similarities (Rosenblatt, 1995) (this is similarly stated in the concept of ontological authenticity, as expressed by Guba and Lincoln, 1989). As a social worker who has practiced couple therapy, I anticipated that the skills used in conjoint therapy would be useful in managing the interaction between couples. That certainly was the case, especially when the couples disagreed with each other's perception, and I needed to find a way for both to feel listened to and validated. However, I wanted to keep the interviews distinct from a counselling session. In one interview, it came very close to "counselling", and I stepped into the role because of the intensity of the disagreement (see chapter six). However, I returned to a research format when the conflict passed enough to continue with the interviews.

Chapter Three: Interviews with the Women

I have decided to begin considering the content from the interviews with the women I interviewed in this study, following the order in which I conducted the interviews (women, men, and then couples). Beginning with the women, then, sets the stage for considering the context of the relationship and the abuse, and struggling with the description of the women's satisfaction in the relationship in respectful and non-reductive ways. As I will show, satisfaction with the relationship is not necessarily linked with changes experienced with the women's partners, nor is it a manner simply in which their fear/dependency immobilize them or creates a "false consciousness" of denial.

There were at least two potential roadblocks for me in conducting the interviews with all three women: one, I was a male, and all the women discussed the very personal aspects of their lives (in which two of the women did not even discuss with their friends or family). Given that the abuse they experienced was from a male, this likely increased the difficulty for the women to talk about their experiences with me. The second potential barrier to the interviews with the women is that in all cases I provided group counselling to all the women's partners. This presented as a possible impediment in at least two ways.

Firstly, as “his” counsellor, she may have had concerns that I was on “his” side, and secondly, she may have assumed, correctly, that I already had a great deal knowledge about her even prior to the interview. An example of this was with “Elaine” in the following exchange:

Elaine: The one thing (is that) Frank has to let go of his jealousy. That’s been sort of a reoccurring thing over the years and so when this trip came up last that you know about...

DL: I was pretending not to know.

Although this was the only time in which pre-existing knowledge was made explicit during the interviews, it may have affected the women’s participation (perhaps saying “too little” so as to skirt discussions that I may have had previous knowledge about, or saying “too much”, believing that I “already know about it anyway”).

These roadblocks may be problematic if approached from a different research perspective (i.e., they may be considered “tainted data” in that the researcher/participants are linked prior to the research as well as after the research has been completed). From the perspective that I am approaching this, I am less concerned with finding the “Truth”, recognizing that I am doing an interpretation of an interpretation (Fairclough, 1989). That is, I am interpreting (mine) the interpreting (theirs) of their relationship (dynamic). That another researcher (“less biased” perhaps?) would find something different when s/he interviewed the couples at a different time does not illegitimate my particular research at this particular time with these particular couples. Only, I wish to acknowledge that, as a researcher, I brought “stuff” (values, past experience, etc.) to the interview that undoubtedly affected the whole interview process.

Having said that, the women were (surprisingly?) candid with me, discussing their experiences of abuse in the relationship, their satisfaction with their partners, and their hopes and dreams for the future. At times, the interviews involved laughter, and, at other times, crying. I tried to balance my desires to get “good data” and to be human (not suggesting that these are in conflict with each other). In the end, “being human” took priority, and sometimes I decided not to pursue a line of questioning that clearly was too uncomfortable or painful for the women (or, sometimes, appeared inappropriate to me, given the social context of gender, such as discussions involving sex). Other researchers may have gone there; I decided not to, all things considered. Other times, I treaded delicately into difficult areas of discussion, trying to be alert for clues to “back off”. The last thing I wanted to happen was for the women in the study to consider the interviews violating. In the end, I think I accomplished my hopes to get “good data” and, above all, to “be human”. Here, then, is my interpretation of the women’s interpretation of their relationship....

### **THE ABUSE**

A place to begin, then, might be to consider the experience of abuse in their relationships. I do this cautiously, so as to not present abuse as *the* defining experience in the relationship but simply one of many important experiences in the women’s lives and in their relationships<sup>1</sup>. However, given the context of this study, I will reflect on the experiences of abuse of the three women I interviewed.

All three women had experienced physical violence of some sort. This ranged from a pushing incident to a severe incident of battering:

“He came over, and he just, you know- that was the first time that he’d ever been really physical. And he hit me so so hard” (Allison)

“(My daughter) was just a baby, and it was Christmas day, and he was not at his best. And I guess what had happened was, we were sitting down to have dinner, and I had invited his father to say grace, I think. I could have invited someone other than him, which was a very bad thing to have done. It was his house, I should have invited him to say grace... anyway, he was just furious. So after the meal, he went upstairs and said he was going to go out, and he pushed me, and I had the baby in my arms. And then he was gone. He walked around Perimeter Highway that night, came back, and told all our company to get out of there once he came home. Like, it's my house. Get out. I have rights!” (Connie)

“(We had) a small argument and just blown out of proportion. And at that point, he grabbed me and I actually went down on the ground and he kicked me” (Elaine)

Furthermore, the women experienced various types of financial and psychological abuse, ranging from violence against the environment to controlling money to yelling and the creation of exhaustion (Jones, 1994):

“I remember him throwing a piece of furniture across the room” (Allison)

“I remember being so angry and wanting to leave, like, really leave. And I got in to the car and was trying to leave, and he jumped on to the car, you know, on the window, 'You're not getting out! There is no way that you're going to leave!'” (Allison)

“The kid was in my arms at night, and just like, he needed to go to the hospital, and I was exhausted because I had just brought him to the hospital the night before, or I was up all night, you know what I mean? And I was like, “Bryan, could you bring him to the hospital?”, and he was like, “No!” And I was just like, “Your kid is, like, dying here. He has to go to the

hospital". He said, "You do it"... I felt that that was abusive" (Allison)

"There was definitely an issue about money at one time. He wouldn't let me buy a garbage can because for him, we didn't need one. We could hang the bag on a, you know, a counter. It was a waste of money. He had such a fear of us losing our money, had such a fear of us, that he wouldn't a- like, he basically would not allow me, and would become a big argument if I would do something, you know, if I would go and dare buy something that he felt like we shouldn't" (Allison)

"I had gone away to Expo. I arrived back in Winnipeg on the train, and he was meeting me there. I had traveled on a coach, so that I wasn't sleeping. The person sitting in the seat next to me was a fellow, and so we just ended up chatting, which was quite normal. So when I got off the train, I looked for Daniel in the crowd, and I didn't see him right away. So I just turned to say goodbye to this person I was speaking to. Well Daniel appeared; he just about yanked me out of there, like, 'Hurry up! Get your bags! We are out of here!'. And he was really very angry. OK, what's going on? So then we get into the car, and he had an engagement ring that he'd gotten, so he threw it in the back of the car, and he was furious, and sort of drove off. I guess that would be the first instance of abuse" (Connie)

"(Last) Easter Sunday, I'd been extremely tired the day before, and he was at the table reading the newspaper. We had planned to go to church, so I asked him, you know, if he was still going to AA prior to coming back to church. He said no, he wasn't. So I said, oh great, because I was really tired yesterday; I'd really appreciate some help, because with company coming over, and was he prepared to help me with it. And he just got enraged. Just stomped off, yelled and screamed at me, and went down and just fumed in front of the TV" (Connie)

None of the women's partners had used violence recently (the most recent incident was eighteen months ago), although all of them reported on-going use of psychological abuse by their partner in some manner (including yelling, criticizing, and withdrawing). This was reported as being less frequent than prior to his involvement in counselling. None of the six people in the study discussed the women as ever having used violence in the relationship.

Although two of the women said that she could tell when her partner was about to use abusive behaviour (Connie: “You can read his face like a book. He doesn’t have to say anything”; Elaine: “It’s like calm down, you can just see the veins popping in his neck. Like his blood pressure just, phoomph. It’s like why? I am just trying to talk to you about this”), all the women discussed the abuse as having a dangerous sort of unpredictability to it:

“Everything was, for me, everything was perfectly fine, like, finally, and then one day I was on the computer and I was asking Bryan, I was just asking him if he could help me with something. And he said, ‘No. You do it’. You know, like, ‘You do it’, you, you, you know, ‘You figure it out’. And I said, ‘No, if I could figure it out, I wouldn’t be asking you’, you know. And I was probably very sarcastic in my tone, too. And he came over, and he just, you know- that was the first time that he’d ever been really physical. And he hit me so so hard. And I was totally under shock. I wasn’t expecting it”  
(Allison)

“I don’t pretend I have this down pat, unfortunately, because I keep on thinking where does it come from? It’s never scripted; it sort of comes out of the blue. Like watch out, you’re gonna get hit” (Connie)

“It was just a small argument that got blown out of proportion” (Elaine)

“I don’t even remember what the argument was about or anything. All I know is that it was blown out of proportion and ugly things were said”  
(Elaine)

In this study, the very dual nature of both being able to predict and not predict the abuse created challenges to the woman’s understanding of her sense of responsibility for her partner’s abusive behaviour. On one hand, when the abuse is unpredictable at least results in the person feeling that there was “nothing she can do to stop it”; these notions get challenged when the abuse is seen as foreseeable, therefore, stoppable:



“He’d get angry and I couldn’t understand where all that anger was coming from. And I- and **there was no way of being able to prevent his, um, reactions, because I didn’t even know where it was coming from**, like I- it’d be, like, it’d be, one minute it was like nothing, and one minute, it was, like, you know” (Allison)

The assumption here is that being able to understand where it was coming from *could* result in “preventing his reactions”.

All three women indicated in some form a sense of responsibility (or, at least co-responsibility) for their partners’ abusive behaviour, or, at least, a shared sense of responsibility to end the abuse:

“**We’re both kinda victims**. Like I see, I think, both of us, when we have conflict, though, we don’t see one being, being... we see each other, we see each other as, uh, it’s neither really either of our faults. It’s like, he’s got this emotional stuff, I got this emotional stuff, and suddenly, what he says tick me off and what I say tick him off” (Allison)

“I think, see each other, like- it’s not like, I’m always right and he’s always wrong, or he’s always right and I’m always wrong. It’s like, we both know, right away when we’re begin an argument, we both know we’re wrong. You know, **we both know we both have our parts that we played**” (Allison)

“I am still amazed that he might be here, and then he is up to here, and I **could have contributed**” (Connie)

“I just wanted to be there for him to realize o.k. yes this is a problem, yes history repeats itself. **Let’s stop it**” (Elaine)

Sometimes blame for the abusive behaviour was assigned to external sources, as one woman explains:

“After the incident, I really found it hard because suddenly Bryan was

getting help and I felt that he was kinda being glorified for his actions. And then I was being made, even all of my friends were making me **as if I was the, the one who caused all this**" (Allison)

"So, he, you know, suddenly, I was made to look like the, like, the cause of all this, and he was the "poor man" who has a wife who doesn't let him think for himself, always puts so much pressure... you know, et cetera poor guy poor guy poor guy. And all for the fact that he was going for counselling, it was, just like- and his parents were like, you know the problem with me is that **I pushed him too much, I pushed him, you know, I went too far this time**" (Allison)

"Because everything happened, it was, like, it was obvious to everyone that **I was such a, it was me, like, the cause of all this**. Because, like I say, he was such a nice guy, everybody really liked him" (Allison)

With the increased everyday usage of the term "abuse" (witness the ease with which people refer to substance *abuse*, child *abuse*, self-*abuse*, etc.), I would have anticipated that the women in the study would be comfortable in naming their partners' abusive behaviour as "abusive". On the contrary, the women in the study used a variety of euphemisms to describe their partners' abuse:

"He'd get angry and I couldn't understand where all that **anger** was coming from" (Allison)

"There was no way of being able to prevent his, um, **reactions**" (Allison)

"A lot of what we have, like, a lot of why he has what he does has to do with after **that time**" (Allison)

"After that **incident**, it just kind of woke us up" (Allison)

"Um, after, after our, that **incident**, it'd be, after I started to, um, um, after I, after I went for counselling" (Allison)

"I was telling her, only because it just happened, that he had **blown a fuse** beforehand and then we had actually gone off to church" (Connie)

"It was just a small argument that got **blown out of proportion**" (Elaine)

"All I know is that it was blown out of proportion and **ugly things were said**" (Elaine)

All the women discussed having been affected by the abusive behaviour in various ways, including the physical effects, breach of trust, fear, and regret:

"He hit me so so hard, and then he- and I was totally under shock. I wasn't expecting it. And it caused a lot of fear inside of me because my two kids, my younger one saw it, saw it happen. And, um, my ears started bleeding. I was having- my ears were bleeding, and I was just like, I was like, I had to get to the hospital" (Allison)

"I felt that here suddenly I had to live with a handicap. Because I did, for the next little while, I was always very dizzy, my ears were always in pain, it was like having a constant ear infection. Every time I got any bit of a cold, I would, you know... it would physically, like, having a huge effect on me" (Allison)

"Connie: I'm still affected.

DL: Do you ever regret about being in the relationship with Daniel?

Connie: Un-hum (nodding)

DL: If you could do it over again, would you?

Connie: I don't know"

"Even then nothing clicked in my head. I guess I was frightened, I was paralyzed" (Connie)

"I actually went down on the ground and he kicked me. That's I... I ran" (Elaine)

Some of the effects include an on-going fear of their partners returning to abusive

behaviour. The women in this study disclosed this fear:

“There was always that fear of him (using violence) again and the fear of dying (from it)” (Allison)

“Connie: I’m not totally comfortable with his anger or where he’s at. I will fight to a point, and then, you know... more likely or not, okay, I’ll just sorta rationalize it however I can and then move on.

DL: When you get close to that point, what do you worry will happen after that if the conflict continues to escalate? What are you backing away from?

Connie: I guess I’m backing away from the rage. I’m so tired of the explosion”

Like Connie, Elaine also explicitly discussed not being fearful of any further abuse and then stated that she does not want to deal with him because of “where it might end up”.

“DL: Do any fears of past abuse come up when he’s yelling?

Elaine: No.

DL: So it’s the opposite, you kind of ignore him?

Elaine: I mean, I know he’s there because he’s in your face, you can’t help but hear him. It’s not that I ignore him, I don’t want to deal with him when he’s at that level because, and it’s not I think back on past abuse, it’s just that I know where it could end up.

DL: Right.

Elaine: And I don’t want it to go there”

This underlies the pressure on the women to both acknowledge and be alert to the risk of further abuse, while at the same time to “put away” the risk so as to enjoy other non-abusive aspects to their partners. Dichotomies that split these tasks into “either/or” categories like denial *or* tending to safety probably do not reflect the full experiences of the women in this study.

Before considering the women’s description of the relationship outside of the

experience of abuse, I wanted to highlight a difference between the women in the study in regards to the notion of secrecy. Two of the women discussed keeping the abuse secret from friends and relatives, or, at least, not actively disclosing the abuse to them:

“I’m not too sure that many would even be aware if the struggle... the only person would be Daniel’s folks, and I don’t think they’re aware of the difficulties. They know that he’s caused some difficulty in the past”

(Connie)

“DL: I am curious about friends and family knowing about the abuse? Are they ever aware of it?”

Elaine: Um, not really. Frank’s sister knows of one situation, and I went to her. I am very close with his sister. I think... I went to her because I know she knows what went on in her family kind of thing. And her and Frank are very close too. So it was just easier to talk to her. Frank’s mom probably has a vague idea that some things have gone on but...”

(Elaine)

On the other hand, one woman took deliberate steps to break the silence immediately after the one incident in which she was assaulted:

“Right away I wanted him out of the house. So I called his parents and I said what happened, and I said I am sending your son to your place”

(Allison)

Allison reports that her partner’s parents encouraged her to be secretive about their son’s abusive behaviour towards her for fear of the legal consequences to him:

“My parent-in-laws were, like, right away, they were trying to protect their son. So it was sort of like, uh, it was kind of like, “Well, don’t go to the doctor’s, or they will find out where...”, you know?...all they could care of was the legalities of protecting him” (Allison)

Allison expressed feeling betrayed by the reaction of her in-laws, which still lingers to this

day (the assault occurred approximately three years ago). Regardless, this did not deter Allison from talking about her experiences of abuse; indeed, it even gave her more motivation to be open about it:

“The more his family was always, like, trying to shut everything, like, trying to keep everything a secret... so what I did, I had the flight mode... and I did the opposite. I went and shared it with friends. I shared it with people. Because I didn’t want to keep it in a closet” (Allison)

Breaking the silence, then, can be seen as one strategy that at least one woman used to attempt to influence her partner’s decision to use abuse in the future, but one, clearly, that may come at a high cost (in Allison’s situation, it resulted in strained relationship with in-laws for both her and her partner).

Breaking the temptation to keep the abuse secret was not the only successful strategy that the women employed to make efforts to put limits on their partner’s abusive behaviour. Both Allison and Elaine made the relationship conditional on their partners seeking domestic abuse counselling:

“I told him flat out either you get help or I am gone” (Elaine)

“I wanted him to initiate it himself. I was not going to help him with it. He had to do it on his own. And I wanted confirmation that this in fact had been done” (Elaine)

Part of what made this strategy successful was their partners’ realization that Allison and Elaine appeared committed to their position of leaving:

“So and after that I stayed strong and said to Bryan, “You got to get help, you’re not, you’re not, we’re not... in this until you go get some help”. And Bryan, right... very short... like, within days, like he, you know, he suddenly

feared losing me” (Allison)

“(The last abuse) would have been a year ago in...no it would be going on two years. That’s when he got into the program. That was the last straw for me and he knew it” (Elaine)

“(I said) that’s it. Either you’re going to get help or I am out of here, and it’s sort of like if he didn’t get help then I think he knew that he had let the relationship down too” (Elaine)

It should be noted that the other woman in the study discussed her efforts to get her partner to make changes in the relationship, with considerably less favourable results:

“I read a magazine which really made me laugh, because I tried all the typical things– asking would you please do this, or, you know, leaving a note reminding, you know, whatever. Or setting up, you got a week to do this but please do that. It didn’t matter how I asked him, it met with resistance. There was no way” (Connie)

In Connie’s situation, her partner began to make changes in the relationship based on “internal” rather than “external” factors (that is, he decided to make changes when he recognized and named his behaviour himself rather than having consequences externally imposed on him).

### **THE RELATIONSHIP**

All the women that I interviewed explicitly stated that they appreciated their partners and wanted to remain in the relationships with them:

“I would choose him above everybody else to be with” (Allison)

“We don’t always agree on the physical world, our physical state of things... we almost agree 100% on the spiritual state of things. So, for me, that’s stronger, because, like, he’s the kind of guy that I want to stay with eternally” (Allison)

“(When) things are working well, I’m really feeling good about him, just wanna hold his hand, just wanna be with him, just wanna do things together, a good sense of well-being” (Connie)

“I’m surprisingly optimistic, and can even get excited. I just never give up, which is really quite silly, in light of everything. I just see Daniel becoming more laid back, and just go with the flow, and be sensitive, and just, I sorta want to say, acting his age... yeah, I am optimistic, and it’s only because the good times are really good” (Connie)

“At times I think that, I think that we have a pretty good relationship in comparison to a lot of other people” (Elaine)

“I honestly think he doesn’t think that I am really happy, but I am. I am happy with the way things are” (Elaine)

“I am just happy that we get along, we do enjoy spending time together doing things. I don’t know. He makes me happy, I love him” (Elaine)

These are not statements one would likely expect from women who have experienced abuse by their partners. In not wanting to pathologize the women for the seemingly incongruence between having experienced the abuse and feeling satisfied with the relationship, consideration needs to be given to how the women account for their love for their partner and their desire to stay in the relationship without simply relying on the “entrapment discourse” (women stay because of fear of and dependency on their partners)<sup>2</sup>.

Part of the answer to influences on women’s satisfaction in the relationship are in the changes that the women have observed in their partners. In the relationship between



Allison and her partner, she felt as if she was disproportionately picking up the responsibilities for the care of the family and household responsibilities:

“Probably right from the beginning, we didn’t, we had an unbalanced relationship. So it was kind of like...um, um, it’d... I’d be...um, I was making a lot of the decisions, and, and he was... he wasn’t having much say in it” (Allison)

For her, it became meaningful that her partner began to assume a fairer share of the responsibilities:

“I didn’t feel that he was picking up the tab. And probably to this day we still have (imbalances), but it is a lot more balanced than it used to be” (Allison)

This balance was assisted by their decision to each work half-time rather than one person (in this case, her partner) being the sole income earner:

“You know, like today, like, and more and more that he does, especially since he started working half-time, and we both share now the work, he’s doing a lot more” (Allison)

That the household chores were more evenly distributed was also a marker for the other two women in the study that things were changing in their relationship. Like Allison’s partner, changes in employment (in this case, retirement) assisted Connie’s partner in the process of participating in a more equitable arrangement:

“There was a time when I just did everything because it was easier. And it’s only been since he’s been retired that he’s cooking, and doing the vacuuming, and cleaning the bathrooms, and stuff. That would have never taken place prior to his retirement” (Connie)

Both Elaine and her partner work full time, but that did not preclude him from becoming

more involved in the household chores. For them, however, the process was more gradual over an extended period of years rather than abruptly coinciding with changes in his employment. Elaine discussed her partner's very initial efforts to replicate his own parents' relationship in which his father was solely the provider and his mother tended to all the household chores:

"In the beginning I think he kind of thought 'oh, well this is my wife she's going to be like my mother.' (*Laughing*)... no, no, no, that's not the way it's going to be. Just I don't know, through progression" (Elaine)

It should be noted that, although all the women described their partners as becoming *more* involved, this is not to say that any of the women perceived their partner as being *equally* involved in the household chores (this despite that all the women worked at least as much as their partner, and, in Connie's situation, was the sole full-time worker since her partner retired).

There are two other important changes to note, that of improved manner of handling conflict and that of an increased sense of emotional reciprocity in the relationship. In terms of handling conflict, all the women discussed that their partners were handling conflict differently and in a preferred manner. A part of this new preferred conflict style was addressing the issue at hand:

"We made a pact that we we're not going to go to bed angry with each other. Like, we need to work things out before we go to bed. And, um, and, and, and maybe Bryan is willing to do that" (Allison)

"DL: So you came to the final conclusion around that, that (it) felt like a different way of handling conflict than previous...?"

Elaine: Yeah. Normally we'd probably... he'd probably wouldn't have

decided anything and then a situation would have come up again and it would have been the same thing over again” (Elaine)

Connie and Allison noted that although their partners are not always responsive to their needs immediately, they are more apt to do some “reflecting” and then give what they are needing from them:

“When he went to sleep on Sunday night, he sensed that I was angry. It was surprising, because his usual defense when I’m angry is for him to get angry. But this time he decided not to, and sort of did some reflection, I guess, and then on Monday, he was a caring, sensitive person again” (Connie)

“For him, he doesn’t, he still doesn’t deal with (conflict) that well. But at least you can tell that he doesn’t deal with that that well” (Allison)

Connie and Elaine have noticed that their partners have continued to make “progress” in demonstrating caring for them during a conflict:

“I want someone to be sensitive. I mean, the difference between caring and not caring... there’s been a huge improvement over time, I would say in the last couple of months, progress has even been better” (Connie)

“I think he’s starting to think about things more... I think he actually stopped and thought about that situation... just realization, maybe he’s... he looks at things from the other side for a change” (Elaine)

Finally, the last significant area of “improvement” the women have noticed is in the growing sense of emotional reciprocity with their partners. In some cases that means being more expressive:

“We still don’t handle conflict well. Um, when we, but a lot better than we did in the past. Um, Bryan at least tells me when he is angry, like, right away. He’s not- it doesn’t drag on, like, for months. So, in that way, he’s more open about the way he feels” (Allison)

“I was always the one to initiate conversations, but he’s been a lot better”  
(Elaine)

In other situations, increased responsiveness involves increased efforts in listening to and understanding her perspective:

“I’d say something, and he’ll say something else, and then I’ll say, “Daniel, would you please listen to what I’m saying?” because he’s not hearing me. I keep on saying, "Just listen to what I am saying." And then we have a way of communicating after “ (Connie)

The rewards for these “improvements” in being more emotionally reciprocal is as Connie describes it, increased feelings of closeness and connectedness:

“I think he has more awareness of me as a person. And I told him that I really appreciate that I’m thinking he’s getting to know who I am now”  
(Connie)

The women’s descriptions of satisfaction are both confounding and complex. It was not the case that the relationship “magically” improved beyond recognition since he entered into counselling. In fact, all the women discussed contending with a history in which they have done a disproportionate amount of the (physical and emotional) labour in the relationship:

“Probably right from the beginning, we didn’t, we had an unbalanced relationship. So it was kind of like...um, um, it’d... I’d be...um, I was making a lot of the decisions, and, and he was... he wasn’t having much say in it” (Allison)

“I pretty much did everything around the house. There was one point in our lives together where he didn’t even do the manly things, like cutting the grass and stuff. There was a time when I just did everything because it was easier” (Connie)

That history lingers with a continuation of those patterns today:

“When there is a crisis, like a family, like, an emergency, like a basement gets flooded or some kid gets ill or something like that, then I find that I always kinda have to be the supermom. And things go unbalanced” (Allison)

“A typical example would be if we were both working, and up until a couples months ago, on a Saturday morning, we would get up and he would have his routine. His routine is to read the newspaper and do his exercises, and then he would be ready to do whatever it is we were going to do. Meanwhile, I've gotten up and done the laundry, and vacuumed the house, made the bed, got ready for lunch or supper, you know, done all those things. And then, you know, I'll say, "Okay, how come you're not ready to go?" "Oh, I've been busy!" sort of thing (laughs). Wait a minute, have you noticed that I've been doing anything? I don't know. I like to have certain things done, but it would be nice if there was a little bit of teamwork” (Connie)

“He’s involved in a lot of things, like social activities, bowling, stuff like that. So when he was bowling full time I would offer to him...o.k. I’ll drive you to bowling and then that way you can have a few drinks after, whatever and I’ll go visit whoever and do whatever and I’ll come and pick you up... I said when was the last time you offered to do that for me? And that stopped him dead in his tracks, because he said ‘never’” (Elaine)

Far from having an idealized version of their partners in the relationship, the women in this study reported taking a realistic assessment of the changes that they would like to see in the relationship. Without it being perfect, the women nevertheless described themselves, all things considered, as happy to be in the relationships with their partners.

### THE PARTNER

All the women in this study described their partners in one form or another as being a “good man” who is easy to talk to:

“Bryan was a great psychologist, a very great listener, so when I was having problems and everything, he could spend- you know, I could talk to him for hours and he could always come up with really good solutions” (Allison)

Connie described her partner as someone she was able to feel close to, even after a prolonged period of tension between them:

“He was a caring, sensitive person again. Which, that’s the person I can relate to” (Connie)

Elaine described a quality that she finds particular satisfying about her partner:

“He’s very nice, very easy to talk to” (Elaine)

These are not qualities that get overlooked by the people in their lives. Allison, for instance, noticed that people found her partner a likeable person to be around:

“He was such a nice guy, everybody really liked him. Like, they couldn’t, you know... and, um, because he was, he is a nice guy. He really is a nice guy” (Allison)

Connie’s partner had been asked by the domestic abuse counselling agency that he attended to volunteer to help other men address the issue of abuse in their relationships:

“I knew why (they) would ask him to help to come back and facilitate this last (group). Because I think he probably does a very good job” (Connie)

Elaine’s partner has been dubbed “Mr. Perfect” by her friends:

“As a matter of a fact, Frank got very embarrassed a few times because (my friends) think he’s just such a great guy” (Elaine)

Keep in mind, for most of these people to whom the women are referring were

unaware that the men had used abuse against the women. Allison explains:

“Nobody, nobody sees what happens at home. They don’t see the couple, they don’t see each other’s needs, they don’t see what, who’s doing what or whatever. So all they can see is this nice quiet guy, who’s good with just, to everyone. And he would, you know, put hundreds of people in front of him. He would give everything, to listen, give advice, and stuff like that. In his own family, it was a little bit different” (Allison)

Connie expressed her disappointment that her partner continued to use abusive behaviour while volunteering at the domestic abuse counselling agency:

“It’s just been awful around here. I find difficulty with that. How can it be so awful when you’ve got all these tools, but he doesn’t use them because it’s he’s using them for other people supposedly. That’s what he tells me. I don’t know” (Connie)

For Allison, that her partner kept himself closed off from her resulted in less feelings of closeness with him:

“Bryan had tons and tons of baggage that he was always trying to protect and keep closed to me. So I always felt like I was really opening up, and then suddenly, I felt I was getting nothing back, like he was never opening up with me about his life and things in the past. And eventually I kinda felt like I was living with a total, in some ways, a stranger because it was just like, you know, I couldn’t get in” (Allison)

Connie described her efforts to get her partner to “open up” to her was like “pulling teeth”:

“We’re not very good in terms of-- I like to think that I’m better at saying how I’m feeling, and it’s sorta like pulling teeth for him to say how he’s feeling” (Connie)

The women differed in their theorizing of the experience of their partners in not being more expressive with them. Allison, for example, believed her partner’s

inexpressiveness resulted from his feeling overwhelmed:

“There were a lot of things that really stressed him. Like, things like mail. Somebody would think, well, that’s no big deal. I don’t like getting bills, either. But it stressed him to a point where he really shut down” (Allison)

What would have (should have?) been “no big deal” for anybody else was overloading for her partner, who lacked the sufficient skills to cope with stress. Elaine, on the other hand, linked her partner’s reluctance to be vulnerable with her as wanting to keep himself protected and in control:

“I’ve always shared my feelings. He was more apprehensive. I think he just didn’t want to let his guard down” (Elaine)

Not all of the women reported their partners’ inexpressiveness affected their level of satisfaction. Part of the complexity of this may stem from the belief that the woman can read her *unwilling* partner’s moods, as Elaine discussed:

“Elaine: But I know him so I knew what the situation was anyway.

DL: You could read it.

Elaine: Yeah. So it’s like even though he wasn’t saying it, I honestly think I knew what he was thinking” (Elaine)

Believing that one “knows” what her partner is thinking certainly offsets the need for, and the frustration for the lack of, the partner’s expressiveness.

Furthermore, the matter of inexpressiveness is complicated by the fact that the women’s partners are not *always* inexpressive. Therefore, a distinction can be made between a partner’s *situational* inexpressiveness and *trend towards* expressiveness to make meaning out of the times in which her partner emotionally withholds from her. Allison



points out the former, linking it to stress:

“I think he’s more open than a lot of men, in terms of, he likes to talk. Like, when things are not going stressfully, he’s, like, really open, he always wants to know details of what’s happening here and there” (Allison)

The *trend towards* expressiveness is the viewing that her partner’s occasional expressiveness is indication of how things will be in the future:

“In the last year, he, he started to go to (religious activities). And, um, it just totally opened him” (Allison)

“I know he’s been talking more lately and I think by talking, he’s letting his guard down and that might make him feel a little insecure because, you know he’s always had that wall around him (Elaine)

A lack of expressiveness is not the only complaint the women had about their partners. Allison has found her partner to be too passive and unreliable, especially during times of stress:

“I felt that that was abusive, like I found him, his inability to pull his own weight in the relationship when we were under so much stress” (Allison)

“When there’s too many outside demands on our marriage, I find that, um, um... um, at that point that he’ll sometimes he’ll, it makes him a little bit handicapped” (Allison)

“When it’s, there’s too many demands, and suddenly, he becomes, at times, kinda, even reverses, he almost becomes numbed up, even a little bit less, so it’s like... LIKE RIGHT NOW WHEN THINGS ARE REALLY TOUGH I NEED YOU TO BE PADDLING with me. And that probably is when he feels he can’t” (Allison)

“Bryan never satisfied me in his approach to parenting. I always find him way too passive” (Allison)

Connie has found her partner to be irritable and impulsive:

“I characterize him as a very irritable personality” (Connie)

“I guess he's, his anger is a lot higher than most people...his irritability”  
(Connie)

“Well, he's very impulsive and he will go and buy whatever he wants. Not as bad as he used to be, but, you know, if he thinks that he needs something, he needs it right yesterday” (Connie)

Elaine experiences her partner as being insecure and jealous:

“The one thing: Frank has to let go of his jealousy. That's been sort of a reoccurring thing over the years” (Elaine)

“So if I want to go out, well why not. ‘Well you're going to a bar with guys, I know what they're like.’ Yeah but you got to trust me. You got to know what I am like. You don't have to worry about them, it's me, and if you don't know by now... and well, that's the whole thing about jealousy, right?” (Elaine)

“Things that I think he's good at he'll feel really insecure about. To me I just can't figure it out. It's like, why?... quite frankly, at times his insecurities are driving me nuts” (Elaine)

What is striking about these women's description of their partners' limitations is that it so readily fits the “profile” found in the literature of the characteristics of men who have used abused in their relationships (Dutton, 1995b; Stordeur & Stille, 1989). Although the women's description of their partners' limitations certainly fits the “batterer profile”, I am also mindful that the “profile” does not tell the whole story. That if the women's partners were *always* or *only* jealous/impulsive/angry/passive, then it is likely that none of the women would still be in the relationship. However, the women have also found their

partners to be resourceful, sensitive, and enthusiastic about life:

“He is also a very able person, like, he can do things, like, a real handy-man. He knows how to fix faucets. He knows how to fix toilets. He knows how to fix- there is nothing that Bryan doesn't know how to do. Um, and anything that he doesn't know how to do, he takes a book, he reads it, he figures it out. He's very dependable that way” (Allison)

“Bryan is extremely sensitive, a really sensitive guy, who **loves** his children. And what I really appreciate is that he likes to be home. He likes to be with me. He likes to be with the kids. Um, it takes very little for him to be- he's never stir-crazy, like, it takes very little for Bryan to be happy, you know. A good meal (laughs). A video. Some time alone, et cetera. He's very very simple to please in terms of, you know, he doesn't have to go, go out with the guys, you know” (Allison)

“He was a good breadwinner, that was a stable aspect of our life. Enthusiastic, he loves sports, he loves a number of things that I like to do and, ah, and is not a sit in front of the television and "jump when I say jump" kind of guy. He likes being out and about, thirst for knowledge, that kind of stuff” (Connie)

Connie summed up the dilemma that she is (and I would argue, the other two women in this study are) in, that the “good” aspects of her partner are better than other men and the “bad” aspects are worse than other men:

“I guess he's, his anger is a lot higher than most people...his irritability. But I guess his good characteristics are better than other people's” (Connie)

Perhaps, then, we should not be all that surprised when Elaine states that:

“He's very...if he didn't have that one thing [violence], he'd probably be perfect” (Elaine)

## THE WOMEN

The women's accounts of themselves were the most varied of all the accounts in all of the interviews. Compared to the other categories in this study, the women's description of themselves had the least amount of overlap. In this section, then, I will speak to a few of the commonalities in how all the women described themselves, as well as try to reflect some of the important differences between the women.

Most striking, all the women talked about having good relationships with their fathers, or at least having a high degree of admiration for their fathers:

"I was very close to my father, I still am" (Elaine)

"My dad's business went bankrupt, and it wasn't because what he did. Somebody stole, like, stole whatever, and left. Everything closed. There were like 40 stores, and it was devastating. And we lost everything... we lost our house, we lost our privacy, we lost everything... we lost everything. You know what? My dad never declared personal bankruptcy. My dad has always had a job. He's always had two, three jobs. He's always had possibilities" (Allison)

This close relationship with their fathers was in contrast to a somewhat strained relationship with their mothers for at least two of the women:

"My dad was sick for two years, and he died in '91. And that was fairly traumatic. Basically, for the next five years, I had to deal with a mother who was, like Daniel, very irritable and very demanding. So I had two demanding people that I was trying to deal with" (Connie)

"DL: Were you close to both of your parents?"

Elaine: Closer to my dad.

DL: Was that all the way through your childhood, you were closer to your dad?

Elaine: Pretty much” (Elaine)

All the women described themselves as providing nurturing to their partners as a way to demonstrate to them that they care for them:

“I take time to notice things that he does... I show caring when I make, uh, when I know that he is working really hard, and I mention absolutely nothing about the mess or whatever. Let’s say, like, he’s doing his work and I would show the opposite if I was to come in and complain about something. When I, when I make the effort to not complaining about anything, that kinda shows, that shows caring. And it is totally, like totally, like... yeah, ‘cause it’s not always like that, like you know, sometimes it is the opposite will be there. I’ll get home and I’ll really be stressed ‘cause I had hundreds and one demands. And I know that he’s had demands because I’ve been home too, and I know what it’s like. And I’ll go, like, ‘Aren’t the kids fed yet?’ That’s, for me, not showing caring. That’s doing the opposite because I know that that could lead to an argument (laughs). So when I do things or say things that don’t lead to an argument, that’s showing caring” (Allison)

“I try to be supportive of him and I try to make his life the best I can, but also I’m trying to get interested in what he’s interested in” (Connie)

“Probably at home I would be the one to go sit on his lap and give him a kiss or something like that, while he’s reading or whatever” (Elaine)

This contrasts with the ways in which their partners described how they show caring, to be discussed further in the next chapter.

The final noticeable similarity between the three women is in their descriptions of themselves as being “open” with their partners about their lives and what is going on for them. This was described in contrast with their partners’ discomfort with expressing themselves:

“If I don’t talk to Bryan about personal and private stuff, he’ll wonder

what's wrong. Okay? Like, he'll be, then he'll start to pry, like, "So... so what was your conversation on and on about?" Like, he'll want to be part of it but he doesn't necessarily want to tell me that he wants to be part of it. I usually just, I just like, I just share with him what's on my heart. He usually doesn't have to ask" (Allison)

"I've always shared my feelings. He was more apprehensive" (Elaine)

One of the differences that I noticed between the women is in terms of long-term friendships outside of the relationship. Allison, on one hand, described never having had long-term relationships with anyone anywhere:

"I don't know how. I don't have a single kid-friendship, high-school friendship. Any friendship. University friendship. No one that I continued interacting, keeping a relationship going with" (Allison)

Elaine, on the other hand, explicitly discussed having the same friendships throughout her life:

"My best friend I've known for 30 years... we met in junior high ... most of my friends I met in junior high and those relationships have been maintained" (Elaine)

Elaine described these relationships as invaluable for providing support for her relationship with her partner:

"I find our group of friends are like the support to for each other's relationships. Holding each other together. If there's somebody fighting about one thing, it's like everybody's kind of there for them, and that's a big, big help" (Elaine)

Connie's friends were described as being, for the most part, indifferent to her relationship with her partner:

“Some of my friends see him, and they know he can be angry, but they don't have it as life or death whether we're together or not” (Connie)

What this means to a woman who has experienced abuse to have friendships that are supportive of the continuation of the relationship is difficult to say simply from these three interviews. However, one of the aspects that might potentially arise for the woman is a greater reliance on the relationship to get her emotional needs met. This may be problematic for the women, as it has been suggested that, because of men's incompetence when it comes to “emotional work”, as both men and women look to other women in the lives to get their intimacy needs met (Steil, 1997). A woman who has few female friends to access support from may be in the unfortunate position of either denying her emotional needs or hoping that her partner's efforts at closeness “improves”. Allison uses both of these strategies:

“Allison: My needs are a little bit different than his needs in regards to (the things that I do being noticed).

DL: For you, do you require as much him noticing when stuff is working well that you are doing?

Allison: : Um, no. Not in... no, I don't think, no” (Allison)

“However, I wish there would be more stuff that he would notice, like I do... sometimes, I make a surprise, and I am **waiting** for him to say, you know, ‘Hey! That was really good!’ And, you know, I better stop waiting. It's been 14 years, you think I'd learn by now. And the thing is, but, it still kinda gets me angry... I would kinda like it if someone, you know, open the door for me. Give me a valentines. Buy me a gift. Buy me a bouquet of flowers... But you know what, it doesn't really bother me all that much. It's not a big deal, but...( Allison)

Finally, more than in the interviews with the men, I noticed that the women in this study included discussion pertaining to their children, including assessment of their own

and their partners' (in)adequacies as parents. This should not be surprising, given the centrality of "motherhood" as a social prescription for women and not for men (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). All the women viewed themselves as more "involved" with their children than their partners:

"He won't go throw a baseball, or like, "let's go swimming" or tobogganing. Um, the kids get that all from me. If there is going to be activity, it's only because Mom goes tobogganing, and Mom brings me skating" (Allison)

"I guess, in terms of a father, I think that he's not, he's spent very little time with the girls, and he's really regretted it, and even now, doesn't relate to them, because he doesn't take the time to listen to them, or be sensitive to where they're coming from" (Connie)

"As a father, when (our son) was young Frank was very good. Did the hockey dad thing, tobogganing, you know whatever physical activities he wanted to do, he was there. A lot of times, if he was working out of town he made special attempts to be there for special occasions. It was when (our son) got older that their little conflicts began" (Elaine)

Notably, two women described their partners as unwilling to spend prolonged periods of time with the children by themselves:

"He doesn't like to take the three kids alone. Like, he'll go for a walk around the block or something, but that doesn't last for more than an hour. But he, he, he, he's like, "I won't do that! I won't do the pool thing with them, I won't do" (Allison)

"He'd take our eldest out, and want to teach her to play ball or something, well it was very much a coach-- I'm gonna keep you here 'til you do it right, and it became painful. I mean, there were certain good things-- he read them stories and stuff, but he would never ever take them out on his own on an activity. I always had, I'd say, "Look it, I'm having company coming, take them--" "No, no. We got to go as a family," you know? He'd never do anything on his own" (Connie)



Despite this, both Allison and Connie described their children as having loving relationships with their fathers:

“I know that Bryan's kids love him, and, uh, he’s a good father. And I know that the time we were apart, even that 6 months, it was very devastating on my oldest son” (Allison)

“Both of the girls really like their dad. I mean, he is their special person” (Connie)

Connie questioned her own role in how their children were affected by her partner’s abusive behaviour:

“(Our oldest daughter) was the one who was most affected by Daniel when she was young. I have to clarify that: she was more affected by me, because if you ask her, she’ll say that I was a real bear for the first seven years of her life because I was walking on glass; I wanted everything to be perfect when Daniel came in the door so that nothing would upset him, and I took everything out on her... it was my damage on her because of the relationship. And so that, she still has difficulty” (Connie)

Connie expressed regret for having made the decision to remain in the relationship and to “take” the abuse:

“I guess that's what I felt bad about, the role model that I was for them, not standing up to him” (Connie)

“I didn’t have the guts to do it on my own. But in terms of the treatment for the kids, I think it would have been better (to have left the relationship)” (Connie)

In the interviews with the men, we do not see the same extent of consideration given to their roles as fathers, or how their abusive behaviour might have affected their children. I don’t believe that this should be interpreted as the men having “no concern” about their

children (we should be mindful of the women's description of their partners' close relationships with their children), but that it appeared to be less central for the men compared to the women when discussing their experiences of being in a relationship with a history of abusive behaviour.

### SUMMARY

In writing this chapter, I tried to be cautious in my depiction of the women in this study and avoid simplifying their experiences of being in a relationship in which they had been abused by their partners. All the women have clearly been affected by their partners' abusive behaviour. However, abuse is not the totality of their experience in the relationship, and all the women actively worked to make sense of the experience. The women described their partners as someone with whom they are both satisfied and dissatisfied with, and the relationship as not perfect but "improving" to a point at which they can be hopeful about their future together. Specifically, their partners' increased involvement in household chores and an increased sense of emotional reciprocity from their partners were significant changes they witnessed in their partners. The women all viewed their partners as someone who has much to offer them in relationships, while *at the same time* someone who can act in a manner that the women experience as oppressive. Although I do not believe that the three women I interviewed are necessarily representative (indeed, how well can one person's experience "represent" another), I do think that the interviews point to the complexity of the relationships in which there has been domestic abuse.

Clearly, there are dynamic tensions and contradictions that, previously, have been overlooked. This research that it is possible for women to both have fear and not have fear of their partner, to have both satisfaction and dissatisfaction within the relationship, and to both value and be disappointed with their partners.

Notes:

1. I would like to thank Terry Wilson for her helpful discussions with this matter.

2. In being critical of the reductionism of the "entrapment discourse", I do not want to give the impression that I do not believe that some women do indeed stay in relationships in which they are being abused because of fear and dependency. I believe that this is the case for many women who are being abused. My criticism comes in relying on this discourse for all women generally, or the women in this study particularly.

Chapter Four: Interviews with the Men

Interviewing the male partners for this study was both challenging and rewarding. All the men who agreed to be interviewed for my research were men with whom I had previously been involved therapeutically as their group counsellor of the domestic abuse groups that they had attended. Furthermore, within a peer support program of the agency, I also co-facilitated one domestic abuse counselling group with one of the participants in the study (Daniel). Plans had been made for me to co-facilitate another group with another study participant (Bryan), which did not occur only because I changed employment.

My point is that none of the men were strangers to me. In fact, I would say that I knew all the male participants in my research quite well, and, indeed, would characterize all my relationships with the men as positive and pleasurable. I have no doubt that pre-existing relationships greatly influenced their decision to take part in my research (and for this I am much appreciative). Although I don't think that these previous relationships "invalidate" the study, I do believe that it has to be accounted for in my "interpretation of their interpretation".

One of the ways in which this pre-existing relationship might affect the data is

through the emergence of biases that present the men in a favourable light and their partners unfavourably. I am hoping three influences have protected against this: one, that those who have read earlier drafts of this project will have alerted me to excesses in this regard; secondly, my commitment to social justice generally (and equality for women in particular); and thirdly, my reading of, and support for, feminism which, I hope, has sufficiently armed me with the ability to keep a critical distance from my social location and privilege. I am hoping that the reader will take comfort in my efforts to account for this. However, I am under no illusion that I have been completely successful in this, and would caution the reader to be critically “on guard” for any biases that still show through.

Another way in which I am assuming that my pre-existing relationships with the men in this study have affected the research process is through the men’s willingness/unwillingness to share information with me. I believe that this probably went both ways. On one hand, the men may have been more unwilling with me (than with another researcher) to disclose their “failures” for fear that they would be judged as not having followed their counselling plans to avoid future incidences of abuse. On the other hand, considering that the pre-existing context of our relationship is based on trust, the men may have been more willing to disclose with me (as compared to another researcher) because they may have faith that I would treat their experiences with respect. If the latter is the case, it raises ethical questions that perhaps the male participants’ disclosures were “given” under conditions of coercion (as I was in a position of power given my counsellor position). How much all this actually did affect the interviews is impossible to judge. However, it should be noted that none of the men were concurrently involved as a client at

the time of the interviews, so none of them would have benefitted from being involved in this study in any way (i.e., having special status in the group compared to other participants, etc.). As well, assuming one man's decision to participate in the study was indicative of the "voluntary nature" of their participation (which involved an initial expression of interest but was not followed up by him for another eight months until he felt the changes that he had made "stuck"), then it would suggest that the men felt that they had the freedom to participate or not participate as they wished.

Finally, I found the interviews challenging to remain in the "researcher" mode when I heard things from the men that, as a counsellor, I would have challenged, such as statements of blame or denial of their abusive behaviour (Frank stated that one of the benefits from attending group counselling is that he learned that his abuse was "not as bad" as some of the other group members; as a counsellor, I would have challenged the helpfulness of a belief that someone's abusive behaviour was "not that bad"; as a researcher, there is less "legitimacy" to doing this, and potentially jeopardizes any further collection of information that is important to understanding men's violence against women). Although it did not happen in these interviews, I was fully prepared to stop the research and intervene if I felt that his partner's safety was being jeopardized. As I will discuss further, in one conjoint interview, I stopped the interview to process some painful feelings with the couple. Thankfully, there turned out to be no risks to any of the women during the interviews that required safety planning.

As challenging as the interviews were from a personal and professional perspective,

it was also very rewarding to hear the men's stories of personal change and to hear their insights on themselves, their partners, and their relationships. At times, I caught glimpses of the end rewards of the men's diligent work in counselling, and felt honoured to know they were willing to share their stories with me and trust my handling of these stories. I hope that I have been mindful of this and respectful of their stories as I offer my interpretation of their interpretation of their relationships...

### **THE ABUSE**

Much like with the interviews with the women, I have decided to begin the interviews by exploring the relationship context of abuse for the men. This includes beginning the discussion with descriptions of the types of abuse that the man used in their relationships, the men's understanding of responsibility for the abuse, and the effects that their abusive behaviour has had on their partners. Also like with the women, I believe that there is much more to men's experience in the relationship outside of the perpetration of abuse, and that will be discussed later in the chapter.

Overall, the men talked about using physical, psychological, and sexual abuse against their partners throughout their relationship:

“As far as my own behavior, I tend to avoid conflict at all costs” (Bryan)

“The turning point was the one physical incident that we had... My intention, I was standing behind her, and my intention was just to give her a tap on the cheek to get her attention, and I guess I was angry and then I realized she was kinda falling off the chair” (Bryan)



“The time that I was basically sexually pawing her (was one of the worst incidences of abuse). She was trapped in the back seat, the older brother driving us back after a long nice day of canoeing and sailing and exploring the Whiteshell with her older brother who had done a lot of fishing and guiding in that area. That was sexual assault at the time. I didn’t see it as that at the time, but I knew that she wasn’t happy with what I was doing. When I started, I thought that she’d liked it. It was clearly an abuse of power and an abuse of circumstances, an abuse of trust” (Daniel)

“Her back was to me, she was going downstairs, and I pushed the door against her back quite violently. I mean, she could have gone into the wall at the far end for all I knew, or she could have hit badly on the stairs and stumbled” (Daniel)

“Elaine and I had...went out to the cottage with friends of ours and we had left...I had left a piece of luggage behind... we didn’t realize it till we got to the cottage and then we started to argue in front of our friends about who had left what and it was stupid and I went right up to her and pushed her with my chest, right in front of my friends and everything” (Frank)

“I became very physical with her by hitting her...and more like slapping her. I never hit her, I slapped her, I pushed her, I dragged her” (Frank)

The men acknowledged the impact that their abusive behaviour has had and still has on their partners. Daniel, for example, recognized that his behaviour has a huge effect on his partner and their relationship:

“The abuse permeated every aspect of our relationship, and certainly had an impact on Connie’s personality” (Daniel)

The long-term effects were devastating:

“Unfortunately after the abuse happened piled up and piled up and piled up, she became quite depressed and ...she became more withdrawn” (Daniel)

This led to a decreased responsiveness on the part of his partner:

“I think she was just beaten down and there was no point in being warm if there are no opportunities to be warm and didn't have the energy to be as warm. Sort of, you know, blunted. An awful lot of her abilities were blunted and driven down by the subsequent depression” (Daniel)

Daniel, who accounted for the effects of his behaviour much more than the other two men in the study, recognized that not only was his partner's responsiveness affected in their relationship, but in his partner's relationship with their children as well:

“It even affected her relationship with our (children) and I think there were times when they were almost as afraid of Connie as they were of me” (Daniel)

“I think she's learned now, she feels, I think, she's betrayed her responsibility as a woman and as a mother, as a role model” (Daniel)

Bryan saw that his partner's trust was most affected by his abusive behaviour, which he has just recently started gaining back:

“When I talk to the guys in the group, I'm thinking it took me three years to recover from one physical incident, and I try not to say, I dunno buddy, but you're going to be waiting a long time, you know, because the level of destruction of trust” (Bryan)

Without trust, Bryan found, there was very little intimacy in the relationship:

“I think safety is the first issue that has to be answered, and until it's 100 percent most of the time, it's hard to get other things going, like romance and a physical relationship” (Bryan)

Bryan talked about the need to build on positive experiences over a period a time before his partner started trusting him again:

“We established safety parameters and visitation with the kids. Over time, that interaction with the children continued to be a positive experience, and

I think that was the beginning of building of trust as far as our relationship”  
(Bryan)

Bryan discussed having to contend with his partner’s suspicions while he was earning back her trust:

“Of course, (putting off a discussion to another time) didn’t work at the beginning because she didn’t trust I would (return to the topic later). Again, it’s about building trust. The first time you do that, you have no backup or precedent for having actually come back to it– no credibility at all. So, you got to do it perfectly the first few times, and obviously you can’t go.... it’s kinda iffy. It’s like, it’s a thing of taking chances, and being successful”  
(Bryan)

It was only once he had a basic level of trust that he could start making requests of his partner so as to get his own needs met:

“As soon as the trust-building had reached a certain point, I started negotiating” (Bryan)

This can be an instructive process that Bryan tells us about, for it has the potential to assist other men in what they might expect (or not expect) from their partners as they work towards rebuilding the relationship with their partners.

Possibly linked to the knowledge they gained from counselling, the men all had insight into the patterns involved in their abusive behaviour. Similar to findings in the literature (Mahoney et al., 2001), all the men reported that their abusive behaviour began with emotional abuse, behaviour initially that they did not define as abuse:

“It started as a form of emotional abuse that I was a long time recognizing as abuse” (Daniel)

“The verbal I am sure was even before the physical because I really didn’t think that much that being verbally abusive to somebody was destructive in...or in any way. So I am sure that it’s got to be that the verbal was before the physical” (Frank)

Prior to the use of any abusive behaviour in the relationship, all the men spoke about a “build-up” process that occurred for them that is similar to the cycle theory of violence first expounded by Walker (1984):

“I think there was kind of a linear progression of my being more and more frustrated, feeling like I wasn’t being heard, feeling more and more like what I was saying, didn’t make a difference, the decisions weren’t mine. You know, she would propose something, I would say no, I don’t want to do that, and then I would always end up doing it out of pressure” (Bryan)

“I often don’t take enough care, in terms of self-care, so I let all those other little things build up and suddenly I’m behaving the way that I used to” (Daniel)

“I think it had been building up for at least six months prior to that. I was frustrated for whatever reason...I just fight in my mind” (Frank)

As Bryan described it, this “build-up” process was actively negotiated by the men, which, in Bryan’s case, meant avoiding any conflict. However, this was experienced as unsatisfying for his partner, who would “insist” that avoided issues get addressed. In response to his partner’s “insistence”, he described himself as using abusive behaviour against her:

“I tend to avoid conflict at all costs. So rather than have a discussion about something, my tendency was always to avoid the situation. So what would usually happen in a relationship was that my partner would insist and insist, and I would either start yelling or blow up” (Bryan)

All the men in this study made explicit (and unsolicited) statements reflecting their

belief that their abusive behaviour was wrong:

“Let's just announce that on the radio everywhere. Guys, when you're about to slap your wife, go for a timeout, tell her when you'll be back, you'll call her in an hour. How long could it take? It could do so much good” (Bryan)

“Given the (counselling) and my desire to stop it, it still hadn't ceased utterly. I'm now of the mind that it should. There really is no reasoning to behave abusively at any level of abuse” (Daniel)

“I've always known the physical and it wasn't right” (Frank)

Bryan was so convinced of the wrongness of his abusive behaviour, that he was certain he will never repeat it in the relationship again:

“There certainly hasn't been a physical incident since then, and there won't be. Whatever it takes, there will not be” (Bryan)

All the men discussed the changes they underwent as they struggled to understand their responsibility for their abusive behaviour:

“The relationship that I was in before... there were, over a period of time there were 3 slapping incidents... the last comment she made to me ...she said “I wish you the best... may you not slap her” ... It was kinda, and it was then that I realized that it had been an abusive relationship, on my part, because I'd always seen it the other way” (Bryan)

“That really put me through like turmoil too. A good one, but it seemed to bring out all these feelings... you know like taking responsibility for my actions, or at least acknowledging my actions” (Frank)

One of the acts of resistance the men reported their partners engaging in was re-defining his behaviour as abusive. Bryan discussed the ways in which his partner still until this day defines what is abusive when it is unclear for him:

“It’s really hard for me to define when things were--having an argument once in awhile and it defining it as abusive from the point of view of Allison. At which point was it more than an argument” (Bryan)

Daniel discussed developing skills of expression within the confines of his partner’s definition of what is or is not abusive behaviour:

“If it’s an honest expression of my response at the time, and in any way justified by the circumstances, just to label it, this is unfair, this is inappropriate, this is, you know, strikes me as inexplicable. I can even say it quite easily without it being abusive, and without, in that case, Connie considering it as abusive” (Daniel)

Note that Daniel, the “abuser” in the relationship, works within his partner’s (“the victim”) definition of what is acceptable. Powerful/powerless dichotomies may have been initially helpful in understanding patterns, but have limited our view of the complexity of power relations in relationships in which there has been violence.

Similar to the women in the study, the men frequently refrained from labelling their actions as “abuse”. Instead, the men invoked terms that assigned co-responsibility for their abuse, relabelled their abuse as a disagreement, and as an eruptive force overtaking them:

“There were many **exchanges** over the years” (Bryan)

“DL: With Allison, when did the **abuse** begin?”

Bryan: When did we start having **arguments...?**” (Bryan)

“(I’d) jump to conclusions and do all that awfulizing stuff and really accelerate myself. Dig up all the resentment, run histories, tapes of histories in nano-seconds. **Explode**” (Daniel)

I am assuming that other-than-“abuse” descriptions of their behaviour are more palatable.

Yet, it not always an easy thing to make sense of, because the men also described their behaviour at other times in no uncertain terms as abuse:

“It started as a form of emotional **abuse** that I was a long time recognizing as **abuse**” (Daniel)

“The last time there was physical **violence** was I’d say about eighteen months ago” (Frank)

Again, this demonstrates that this is no clear marker about when a man is or is not “taking responsibility”.

Finally, to further “trouble” the concept of “taking responsibility”, all the men talked about the shift from using abuse to not using abuse as not an “either/or” position. The men (and their partners) all recognized that they have made significant changes, yet, at the same time, they have continued inequities in their relationship with their partners:

“I’m gonna say we’re not at the point where we both feel that it’s fair. But I am gonna say that we both acknowledge that. I’m gonna say that I do. I acknowledge that despite the fact that I think it’s fair, I accept that, unless we both feel that way, then probably not” (Bryan)

“I’m trying to be more of a homemaker, do more cooking, and so on, than I had before, more housekeeping. But I have to confess, I’m not a great success at that yet. But if you were to graph it, compared to what it was, it’s a dramatic improvement, but still falls short of fair or ideal” (Daniel)

Frank discussed making efforts to take his partner’s perspective into consideration more, but feeling as this was “unnatural” for him:

“I try to be thoughtful, when I am thinking about it. It just doesn’t come natural for me. I really have to work at it” (Frank)

These discussions on the men's unjust and abusive behaviour towards their partners, I believe, sets the context in which to begin to understand the men's experience with their relationship, and, ultimately, their satisfaction in their relationships. To do this means, as in the interviews with their partners, also understanding the relationship from outside the context of abuse.

### THE RELATIONSHIP

It was evident that all the men in the study were happy to be with their respective partners, and wished to remain in and be part of these relationships despite the difficulties that arose from their past abusive behaviour. Bryan, for instance, discussed being happier now than he was previously in the relationship:

"Really, overall it's been great, wonderful. I know that I've talked to you a few times, on a scale of one to a hundred, this is where I am, you know. I've been kinda hovering around **60-70 percent**, you know? It used to be below fifty, so we made progress... yeah, things are better, and I'm comfortable most of the time" (Bryan)

Later in the interview, this "60-70/100" rating changed to "8-9/10":

**"On a scale of 1 to 10, I'm somewhere between 8 or 9 now** as far as being happy where things are going, where even a year ago, it was like, fifty, fifty-five" (Bryan)

His growing satisfaction is viewed as the result of choices that they have made together as a couple recently:

"DL: What are some areas that have been a source of joy for you when you



think about the good things with it, all things considered?

Bryan: Oh, all things considered? Our surviv(ing) the trauma that has been our life together and before we were together. A growing ability to deal with conflict. Our choice of religion is a major, major resolution for us. That I'm totally satisfied with our choice that we made there. Our perception of how we should raise our kids, not that we always managed to do it, but we're very much in agreement on how we should do it" (Bryan)

Daniel also cited that surviving his abusive behaviour induced a mutual sense of loyalty in the relationship that he finds particularly satisfying today:

"DL: What parts of your relationship are you proud of? That other people look at and say, those are good qualities to have?

Daniel: A kind of persistence, a kind of loyalty despite of the difficulties. I don't think that people would recognize that because I don't think that they would recognize what an ordeal it has been for my family. I think in some ways we're tight, in some ways we're loyal, but there's an awful background underlying and a price that's been paid on the part of my daughter and on Connie's part. I think there is a caring, I didn't own 20 snowmobiles. I did give up drinking and smoking and things that were detrimental to social, emotional, psychological health of the family. And I did try to curb some of my obsessive behaviours, you know, the self-indulgent and spending... I guess some people felt my kids were always well-clothed, and we got credit for that which basically Connie was responsible for" (Daniel)

Similarly, Frank discussed experiencing satisfaction from the interdependence and intimacy between himself and his partner:

"DL: What areas of your relationship are you really happy with, you're really satisfied, you don't want to see any changes really, pleased with where things are at?

Frank: I love the way I can depend on Elaine and she can depend on me. Right now I really enjoy the way we talk, how we're communicating. I enjoy our closeness. I enjoy our truthfulness with each other. I like the way we share common interests with each other. Things I don't want to change. Hell, there's just about everything in our relationship that I don't want to change" (Frank)

Both Daniel and Frank expressed feeling comforted by believing that their partners felt similar to how they were feeling in their relationships:

“I think Connie is more and more sharing. I think she's feeling more optimistic of our being able to do that. She's become more hopeful too”  
(Daniel)

“Elaine told me just the other day, that I was worried that all my help seeking had come too late in the relationship, I was worried. And she said to me our relationship has never been stronger” (Frank)

The men not only expressed a current enjoyable level of satisfaction in their relationships, but also an anticipation that their closeness in the relationships will improve:

“DL: So you're hopeful about the future?”

Bryan: Oh, absolutely. I'm quite confident that things are gonna, that they're gonna progress in a positive way as much over the next 3 years as they have over the last... I think it's gonna be that much better” (Bryan)

“So I see us doing more and more of that, more team work, more planning, more sharing and discussion, and talking to the other person, and really taking responsibility on my part rather than just sort of drifting along, like the kid in the family” (Daniel)

Frank expressed such a state of current happiness that he would actually prefer the relationship largely going just as it has been in the last year-and-a-half:

“Some of the other things I'd like to see changed? Not much, not much really. Just the way we are” (Frank)

Understanding men's satisfaction in the relationships in which they had once used violence in (and all the complications that stem from that) means accounting for the source of that satisfaction. Contrary to social expectations, men's source of satisfaction stemmed

not from dominating their partners into submission but, instead, stemmed from a sense of increasing mutuality in their relationships:

“I think we’ve negotiated to the point where she is now motivated to do that-- to keep things going the way they are. Now she sees that as a valid request on my part where before it was ‘I can’t do that; that’s not a reasonable request given what else you expect me to do’” (Bryan)

“I haven’t involved myself enough-- is probably a fairer way of putting it-- in terms of, this is what I would like to do; how are we gonna go about it? And just in the last 24 hours, we’ve sat down, and that’s beginning now” (Daniel)

“I don’t think she’s...well within the last 12, 10 years or so, I can’t even say that. For the longest time now I don’t think she’s felt intimidated by me, physically, like you know I am going to blow and let her have it. Which is a big... which is great, because she can express herself.. we do talk about things a lot better now. More is said because there’s no threat, as much threat” (Frank)

In part, the men discussed improving their relationships by their approaching conflict differently. In Bryan’s situation, that meant moving through phases from avoiding to trying to “deal with every little thing”, to trying to be more comfortable in letting things go when necessary:

“There was a point somewhere in between where I insisted on dealing with every little thing. Now I try to judge whether or not it’s really necessary. I think it probably was, you know, for me to be able to stay and not be abusive. I needed to.. it was actually necessary for me to discuss everything at the time because I had never had that opportunity to just talk about stuff. A lot of it had to do with my fear of the relationship ending, so I wasn’t taking any chances... I want everything to be settled and resolved because I didn’t know what my tolerance was for stuff building up. So now I’ve moved into a stage where I’m comfortable saying, you know, it’s really late, and I don’t feel that this is productive. Something I do which I never did before is I say I do want to talk about this some more; can we try tomorrow? That helps. It works” (Bryan)

For Daniel, he found that taking the time to do some reflection was very helpful for him to handle conflict differently than he had in the past:

“This is very, very new in our relationship, when I started to get exercised, I look at what’s behind the anger and then deal with that rather than just react” (Daniel)

Frank found that just having an increased willingness to sit down and talk with his partner helped resolve some of the bigger issues to which he had given previous consideration:

“We do discuss things a lot more. And we just have idle chit chat which brings things out more because as I talk it’ll remind me of something and then it just keeps going from there so then it brings you up on a subject that you wanted to talk to her about, but I might have forgotten. And then I am able to discuss it with her and I don’t bottle it up. So that helps” (Frank)

To say that the men were satisfied with their relationships and that there some important changes that have occurred (including how the men approach conflict differently) is not to say that the men viewed the relationships in idealized terms. All the men recognized areas in which they would like to see change in the future. The most common complaint by the men was feeling as if they lacked influence in the decisions that get made in the relationship. As Bryan pointed out, this has had a historical context in the relationship:

“I think there was kind of a linear progression of my being more and more frustrated, feeling like I wasn’t being heard, feeling more and more like what I was saying, didn’t make a difference, the decisions weren’t mine. You know, she would propose something, I would say no, I don’t want to do that, and then I would always end up doing it out of pressure” (Bryan)

“From my point of view, when things went well was because I shut up, and I wouldn’t say anything or argue or discuss. I just said, “Yeah, okay, let’s do

that", and whether I liked it or not, we did it" (Bryan)

Daniel felt that he abdicated decision-making responsibilities to his partner throughout and now views this as unfair and wants to be more involved in making decisions related to the finances:

"I haven't enough input on the planning and stuff, I haven't felt that I had enough input" (Daniel)

Frank, too, viewed his partner as having more influence than himself:

"She has more, you don't want to say control, but it is, or it's authority or we do more of the things she says" (Frank)

In Frank's situation, however, he simultaneously held contrary views about the perceived unfairness in the relationship. On one hand, he believed this is a fair arrangement because of the damage he did to the relationship. Frank continued:

"She definitely, and I've told her too, I've told her that she can be... well I mean she's pig-headed. She can want her way more of the time and the way I look at it, she has... she's put more into the relationship than I have, so she deserves it. She's the one that's tried to keep it together and I am the one that's trying to pull it apart" (Frank)

On the other hand, he would like to see this "deservingly unfair" arrangement altered:

"Some of the things I would like to see changed would be a little less... even when Elaine does make most of the decisions, I would like to have a little bit more input into the smaller decisions... some of the smaller things, like she can be quite dominating and I just... I would like to... I think the relationship is probably about 70% maybe 65% in her favour. I'd like to see it come a little more to 50-50" (Frank)

In some ways, this dilemma articulated by Frank of how to account for the past

experiences of his abuse in terms of “fairness” in the relationship reflects the dilemma of how much should the participants promote the abuse experience as the primary filtering experience for the relationship? This is clearly not an “either/or” or final resolution, but instead, is constantly in flux. At times the abuse experience guides the men’s sense of themselves in their relationships, and, at other times, the abuse history is almost like it never existed in the relationships.

### THE PARTNER

All three men greatly valued their partners, and appeared willing to go to great lengths to make their relationships work. From the literature (i.e., Dutton, 1998), we have understood men who have used abusive behaviour to be angry, jealous, and blaming of their partners. Although a composite of the men in this research would match that description, there is also an “untold” side to the men that is gentle and nurturing. Typically, when these qualities have been acknowledged, they are viewed as manipulation tactics to keep women in their relationships. Such a view suggests that the women who stay in their relationships get “duped” by the men. Therefore, it would be instructive to understand the women’s experiences of being in the relationship [see chapter three].

One way of understanding women’s experiences is through her partners’ interpretation of “who she is” in the relationship. This is not to suggest that he has the “inside scoop” of “who she *really* is”, but that he has a unique viewpoint that could be helpful for us in developing our understanding of women who have stayed in relationships

in which they have experienced abuse. In trying to understand men's experiences of their partners, I am not suggesting that it is up to women to stop men's abusive behaviour, but, instead, hope that this information will help service providers be more respectful than we have been in the past about "women who have stayed", rather than simply assuming that they are trapped, should go, and/or will go in a matter of time.

A place to begin, then, is to understand that all the men in the study characterized their partners as nurturing in a variety of ways. This includes viewing the partner as thoughtful, the overseer of the family, and a support person during trying times:

"She bought me a little rose plant awhile back; that was nice. And the nicest thing wasn't that she brought me a rose plant. The nicest thing about it was that she brought me something alive. Cut flowers are pretty, but she knew me enough to know that I would want something that would grow in my garden. I thought that was great" (Bryan)

"She really picked up the responsibility for an awful lot of the nurturing of all of us as well as the material needs that they be attended to, and what we've done was appropriate" (Daniel)

"She always knew how to calm me down, talk to me, and she'd make sense to me and she'd bring me back down" (Frank)

Frank suggested wryly, and probably accurately, that his partner is responsive to his unreasonably "big needs":

"Elaine can be very kind and nurturing for my selfish personality" (Frank)

All the men discussed their partners in terms of being a mother. For example, following the sole use of his physical violence towards his partner, Bryan and his partner separated for approximately six weeks, with Bryan moving into his brother-in-law's

residence. During this time, he began counselling and also started regular visits with his children. From his perspective, his interactions with their children was a key element to their reconciliation:

“We had an initial meeting (after the abuse), sort of a neutral place to discuss my spending time with the kids at that time. And then **she started to see how I was with the kids**, that she was comfortable with that” (Bryan)

Shortly after, they reconciled. Bryan informed me later that he believed that if he had directed his early interactions towards her and not their children, she would have interpreted that as his not caring for his children, and this would have jeopardized their reconciliation. Bryan’s partner’s attention to the children was so involved that he often felt neglected by her:

“That was one of my top 5 issues throughout the relationship, is that everything came before the couple time-- **family, kids**, parents, grandparents, total strangers, damn it” (Bryan)

Daniel’s partner paid attention to the relationship with the children in ways that he did not:

“If shoes were to be bought, you know, Connie, you know, checked out with (our children) what kind, what colour, and then what they had in the closet and what would go with what and so on” (Daniel)

This increased attention and contact led to a closer relationship with their children than the one that he had with them:

“She’s been more nurturing of the children, has had much more contact with them than I did, and probably more positive relationships with them more often than I did” (Daniel)

Both Bryan’s and Daniel’s partners expressed worry about the impact the abusive



behaviour had on their children. Similarly, both Daniel and his partner (in her separate interview) discussed his partner's worry that by "taking the abuse", she had "let her children down":

"She feels, I think, **she's betrayed her responsibility as a woman and as a mother**, as a role model. So I think she feels it incumbent upon her, and maybe even on me, too, to stand up to me" (Daniel)

This might be a reflection of how compelling the motherhood ideology, and what constitutes a "good mother", is in our society. There appears to be little space for Daniel's partner to say Daniel (also?) betrayed the children through abusing their mother. Instead, she is the one who let their children down. Frank similarly suggested his partner's mothering is natural and was top priority for his partner:

"Elaine is a very... she's a great mother. She's always had **natural** mothering instincts... **she's never put herself ahead of being mother**. Mother was the **most important job** in her life at that time" (Frank)

Frank compared his partner's mothering to other mothers he knows (including his own), and "rated" her favourably:

"Most of the people we hang around with are all pretty levelheaded. They're all good mothers that I know. I really don't think I've come across any bad examples. Elaine's tops" (Frank)

"She's been... she was as good as a mother as my mom was a mother to me. It just doesn't get any better than that" (Frank)

It is likely no coincidence that none of the men explored the effects of their violence on the children, nor spoke at length about their role as fathers.

A common theme for the men when discussing their partners is that of their partners shouldering a disproportionate amount of the practical responsibilities for the relationship. We can draw all kinds of conclusions about this, but, as Daniel says, it must include the interpretation that it might be in response to the men's own lack of willingness to act responsibly:

“(I am likely to) just go with impulsive gesture. Connie was not prone to do that. She was very much making up for those things by being very down to earth and practical” (Daniel)

Undoubtedly, the men have benefitted from their partners' organizational abilities. For instance, early in their relationship, Bryan's partner helped him gain hope and plan for the completion of his university degree:

“She sat down for 2 evenings and looked at my transcript from university, she said, well, you have this course and this course, you can finish your BA if you do this, and you can finish it in this much time if you did this, and I thought, wow. She actually showed me something that I assumed was impossible could be done, and what time frame it could be done. She laid it out in a way that it became possible to do. Nobody had ever done that before. That really impressed me” (Bryan)

Daniel's partner did most of the financial planning for them throughout their relationship, which helped make their current financial situation comfortable:

“Our savings needs were being met, our material needs are being met, she's a very good planner” (Daniel)

He contrasted how he approaches the finances compared to how his partner approaches the finances, and is thankful that she was in charge of their books:

“I'm more prone to buy on impulse, and research for three days rather than

on three months if purchases were to be made and funds were available. Whereas Connie is much more willing to bide the time and to do the savings over a period of years before she makes a decision and makes a move on something" (Daniel)

Frank discussed his partner as thankfully having all the "common sense" in the relationship:

"I mean, (Elaine's) got all the common sense, basically, in the relationship. I am the passionate one, the crazy one and she's got all the common sense. She's the one that initiates things and most of the time what she says makes sense" (Frank)

He noted his "passion" sometimes comes into conflict with his partner's "common sense" on occasion, with both of them arguing for their respective positions:

"Dominating. She can be. And I can too, but mine is more driven by passion, where her's is driven by common sense. I know she's right, but I just don't want to give in" (Frank)

From the above descriptions, it is easy to see how the men's partners have assumed a position of responsibility vis-a-vis their partners. However, this has consequences when the men considered the issue of responsibility for the deterioration of the relationship. Bryan, for instance, viewed his partner's unwillingness to "deal with" her experience of childhood sexual abuse as having negatively impacted on the potential "forms of expression" in their relationship:

"Because of the sexual abuse that she suffered outside of our relationship, like when she was in high school and stuff-- I've always contended that **that's something she hasn't really dealt with**, and that in our relationship, it's put the brakes on a lot of forms of expression" (Bryan)

Bryan believed that her experiences of childhood sexual abuse interrupted a "natural"

order of increasing intimacy in the beginning of their relationship:

“Every other relationship I’ve been in, things have progressed in a certain direction, from holding hands, to kissing, to whatever, and with Allison, **the order is totally different because of the experiences (of sexual abuse)**. It was straight into an intercourse kind of situation. How can you be ready for that when you haven't done all this, and this, and this” (Bryan)

To be clear, this “order of progression” was negatively evaluated as being “ill”:

“What I thought I should be giving her, which was romance and friendship, and stuff, was exactly the opposite of what was going to make her feel worth something (sex) at the time. But **it’s also not healthy**” (Bryan)

Daniel, in hindsight, recognized that he too had considered his partner to be the cause of the direction their relationship had taken:

“I felt Connie had become a very poor partner to me, and I hadn’t looked into why” (Daniel)

Frank, who probably had the fewest complaints of his partner compared to the other men in the study, was far from idealistic in his perception of his partner. However, unlike the other men, he appeared to be more accepting of his partner’s faults:

“I do have some beefs about her but she’s not perfect” (Frank)

These faults include a “stubbornness”, mirroring his own “stubbornness”:

“She can be pretty stubborn herself. When she’s got something planned in her way, I’ve almost got to prove it a 100% and then she’s still doesn’t want to admit she’s wrong” (Frank)

Importantly, Frank’s near-lack of willingness to focus on his partner’s faults coincided with his unusual willingness (compared to the other men in the study, compared to the men

discussed in the literature) to assume responsibility for the challenges faced in the relationship:

“I am the one that dragged (the relationship) down... If there is any weakness in the relationship it's just me“ (Frank)

“If there's been anybody that's ever dragged our relationship down it's me” (Frank)

“She's the one that's tried to keep it together and I am the one that's trying to pull it apart” (Frank)

Not that the partners of men who have used abuse are angelic, but it can be seen as a stand of strength and courage for a man to not get distracted by his partner's imperfections (Jenkins, 1990). For, as the men told me, they recognized that they themselves are not perfect.

### THE MEN

I was struck in the interviews with the men that all three men believed that they could greatly influence their partners' feelings of satisfaction through changes in their own behaviour. In talking with the men about themselves, this was not just a hope but a “fact”. This might in part explain the men's explicit statements regarding their desire to create change in the way that they act in the relationship. Separating from his partner because of his abusive behaviour was the impetus that Bryan needed to finally get himself to counselling:

"I would never say that I'm glad the incident happened, but I didn't know at the time how to make something happen that would force the issue of me getting counselling, which I desperately have wanted for a long time"  
(Bryan)

It was in counselling that Bryan attained support and acquired new, more effective approaches to deal with the stressors in his life:

"I didn't want the incident to happen, but the positive result, which is the fact that I got the support that I needed, and I had the opportunity to have somebody hear what I was feeling and had to say, and I had an outlet for my frustration, and I got some tools" (Bryan)

Daniel found it helpful that he remained embarrassed by his treatment of his partner in the past, as it kept him motivated to continue to work on making changes:

"Obviously, if I wasn't aware of it, if I didn't have the experience of feeling chagrined, I would still be acting out in those manners. And there would be less hope of addressing it, therefore, I think there's more willingness for me to dedicate myself to making that change and to accelerate that change"  
(Daniel)

Not only did Daniel want to avoid discomfort, but he also envisioned being someone who others would enjoy being around:

"Who knows? Maybe someday we'll have grand-children, and I want to be someone who's fun to be around, someone who is relaxed and calm, and I want that for Connie's sake, too" (Daniel)

This twin combination of embarrassment of the past and a vision for the future kept Daniel hopeful about the direction he and his partner are headed in:

"I'm feeling more optimistic now in terms of our growing as a couple, and my being able to make the changes" (Daniel)

Frank's desire to change is clouded with a fear that he will not be able to accomplish the changes that he recognizes he needs to make:

"It's not frightening to change. I want to change, but it's scary because I feel... I feel like I am just rekindling our relationship... I am nervous about grabbing hold again because I don't want... I want to change as much as I want... as much as I need to and I know I should. I just think what happens now if everything starts going good, we... everything is great and then I regress back into who I was before" (Frank)

However that gets individually expressed, the men all clearly indicated that they did not wish to continue their abusive actions against their partners, and all of them expressed the belief that they were "making progress" towards this goal in recent years. For Bryan, greater awareness helped him to identify patterns in his life, including decisions that he made to be passive during an argument with his partner:

"I always assumed that all the arguments initially had nothing to do with me; it was just something I'd always been subjected to. It was just something I'd have to learn to live with" (Bryan)

Bryan now recognized that the well-travelled road of having an "irrational argument" was not going to bring about positive results for him and his partner:

"But now I know that when you're having that irrational argument, it's never going to get better" (Bryan)

Consequently, that he began making choices to be less passive with his partner and to "set boundaries" with her was a major marker of change for Bryan:

"But we've reached a point now where I've started setting boundaries as far as what is acceptable to me or not. An argument where I have to sit there and be berated for 40 minutes, I just won't put up with that" (Bryan)

Sometimes, that meant taking unilateral action to avoid abusive behaviour, which included a technique that he learned in counselling:

“So now, I've done it once or twice, I've gone for a time-out<sup>1</sup> at 1:30 in the morning now” (Bryan)

Daniel also described his “progress” as involving both greater awareness in combination with behavioural changes. He shared with me some of his big “discoveries” in recent years, which included understanding the impact of his abusive behaviour, new understandings of his feelings, and conflict alternatives to using abuse:

“I threw enough curves and roadblocks at her that there's really no way any human being could have fulfilled (my expectations of) them or wanted to. In my eyes, I see that now” (Daniel)

“I made a startling discovery that I don't need to stuff the anger. At times it's even appropriate to express anger but it doesn't have to be done in an abusive manner” (Daniel)

“I'm gradually learning there are other ways of dealing with circumstances that have upset me rather than just reacting” (Daniel)

These new insights brought out increased feelings of obligation for Daniel to act differently than he has in the past. In an individualistic society, notions like *obligation* imply constriction and burden. Seen differently, feelings of obligation can also point the direction of change, as it does for Daniel:

“I have a responsibility and I more and more clearly see that now” (Daniel)

Based on his feelings of obligation, Daniel discussed implementing changes in the way that he interacts with his partner and family:



“To be fair, to be more complete, perhaps, there are times with (my children) and Connie, you know, I won’t confront them in the ways I have in the past” (Daniel)

“There might be times when I’m feeling sexual and wanting intimacy of a sexual kind with Connie, and if it doesn’t seem like things are ideal, I won’t push it now, whereas there was a time when I would have” (Daniel)

“I think probably now I’m doing a little bit more, not an awful lot, of more nonsexual touching and comforting. I try to talk about her and her things more often than I used to. It was very much the other way most of our wedded lives” (Daniel)

“I’m trying to be more of a homemaker, do more cooking, and so on, than I had before, more housekeeping. But I have to confess, I’m not a great success at that yet. But if you were to graph it, compared to what it was, it’s a dramatic improvement but still falls short of fair or ideal” (Daniel)

Frank’s changes also included greater awareness of himself as well as seeing possibilities of being able to do things differently in relation to his partner. This included greater awareness of the impact his abusive behaviour has had on his partner:

“I am starting to realize the things I’ve done, the person that I was” (Frank)

“I don’t think I’ll ever really know who I am, but as long as I know the bad things and try to weed them out then the rest of me will probably live with” (Frank)

For Frank, the most noticeable change he described making was his newfound willingness to talk openly with his partner, which concurrently assists him in remaining de-escalated:

“Since I’ve actually been going to (domestic abuse counselling), so within the last eighteen months I’ve started opening up” (Frank)

“I am trying to talk and tell her things I’ve kept bottled up forever. Things that I thought I would never tell anyone” (Frank)

"I mean there are certain things that I think people should keep to themselves, and that's all part of being vulnerable, and I don't know if it hurts or if it helps the relationship. I think... to me I think it helps and then at least you know where you stand, rather than keeping it in yourself and wondering 'what if I would have talked about this or that?'" (Frank)

"I wasn't bottling it up. I wasn't frustrated and I felt I was making so much progress" (Frank)

Although all the men were encouraged by the changes that they have noticed in themselves, they all *also* expressed feeling inadequate as a man and/or as a partner. Bryan, for instance, discussed feeling incompetent in being able to use the information he learned in counselling at home:

"My own perception is like, this (argument is going) awful, I wish I wasn't, I don't feel very good at this yet" (Bryan)

Daniel kept his feelings of inadequacy to himself about his fears that he was not "measuring" up to social expectations of what a man "should" be:

"I didn't talk an awful lot about intimacy or lack thereof between me and (my partner) because it was a source of great humiliation for me, great embarrassment. I felt that it was a measure of my inability to be a good husband, father, and lover that this happened. So I did my best to keep that under my hat" (Daniel)

Frank's feelings of inadequacy stemmed from his realizations regarding the abusive nature of his treatment of his partner over the years:

"I've just felt I have no confidence in myself anymore because I am starting to realize the things I've done, the person that I was. I am beginning to not understand who I am anymore... everything I've done in my past is doubtful and I ask why Elaine is with me" (Frank)

Given the pressures attached to being “masculine” (read: competent and confident) for men in our society, attending group counselling as these three men had is an effective antidote to the oppressive techniques of self-surveillance. There, men learn that other men also share, and mask, pressures to live to a certain ideal.

Finally, I just want to make a quick note about sex, as it quickly became a noticeable theme in discussion with the men (this was not a topic that I explicitly asked the women about in the study). All the men wanted more sexual activity with their partners, and feelings of frustration arose regarding a perceived sexual infrequency in the relationship. This is a common complaint from men in general (and the participants in this study specifically), reflecting a view that perhaps men sexualize their need for closeness, limiting expressions of “true intimacy” between men, and between men and women (Brooks, 1995). All the men appeared beginning to experiment with alternative ways of experiencing intimacy (e.g., increased levels of communication, spending time together) with their partners while at the same time privileging the sexual aspects of closeness. Further conclusions about the sexual aspect of the participants’ relationship are not possible given that the issue was not explored in depth with the men, and was not explored at all with the women or in the couple interviews.

## SUMMARY

In interviewing the men about their experiences of the relationship in which they had previously used abusive behaviour, I saw a struggle for the men to be acknowledge

their abuse and, at the same time, finds ways of moving on past the abuse. This means scrutinizing the concept of "taking responsibility" while accounting for personal agency, interpersonal and social power, and the unique circumstances of an individual context. That the men expressed satisfaction with their relationships is not the same as believing that their partners or their relationships are perfect, but, much like the men themselves, were assessed as having limitations that were outweighed by the positives. The interviews I had with the three men for this study both contested and confirmed previous literature and beliefs about men who have used abuse in their relationships, pointing to complexities that previously were frequently ignored.

1. Time-outs are popular teaching tools common to domestic abuse counselling programs that encourage men to leave when feeling escalated and to return during in a designated time period once he has calmed down. The time-outs tend to be more popular with men than their partners, as it leaves her at home when he gets to leave (he is active, she passively remains in place); furthermore, his time-out might mean additional child-care burdens for his partner.

Chapter Five: Interviews with the Couples

At the time that I conducted most of these interviews with the couples for this study, I was employed at a domestic abuse counselling program, and providing couples counselling to couples with a history of abuse in their relationship. Although this research was not in any way connected to that counselling project (only one couple volunteered from all the couples that I had worked with, and I had worked with the man in this couple previously providing him group counselling), I found the skills that I had developed during my three years there invaluable in conducting this research. Not that I believe that research is therapy (though I do think that there is a therapeutic element to it), however, being able to “manage” intense feelings as they arose in the couple interviews was a necessary skill that I possessed.

This was most dramatically illustrated in the interview with Allison and Bryan in which I stopped the tape during an escalated conflict that arose from our discussions. Eventually, Bryan calmed down, and he and Allison were generous enough to complete the interview with me. Although this was certainly the most difficult situation of all the interviews conducted for this study, it did underscore the potential unpredictable

explosiveness that is part of domestic abuse.

I take Jacobson's (1994) warning to heart, that all domestic violence research must be careful not to jeopardize the woman's safety. Prior to all interviews with the couples, I interviewed the men and women separately and assessed for potential risk of a couples interview. Further to my own assessment, I did consult with another professional to ensure that I was approaching the conjoint interview responsibly. I was fully prepared to cancel the couple interview if a risk appeared to exist.

In assessing the couples for risk, I considered the most recent use of violence (which ranged from 18 months to over 20 years ago), the extent to which the men blamed their partners for the violence (there were no overt blaming statements, e.g., "she made me do it"), any alcohol or drug use (only one couple drank with any regularity, and that was in social situations), and any current levels of agitation (only one couple delayed their interviews, as it was around a holiday season and things were "hectic"). In good faith of the belief in the low risk for violence, I conducted conjoint interviews with all three couples.

The conjoint interviews were more "loosely structured" than the individual ones (I did not use an "interview guide" as I had in separate interviews), but instead responded to themes that arose both from the individual interviews and from preceding couple interviews. All conjoint interviews lasted between 1hr 15min and 2 hrs. Once the interviews were over, I stayed behind and "chatted" with the couples to ensure that there was no further risk for any violence (in one case, I was invited and accepted to stay over for dinner). In every situation, I left believing that there was no risk to safety once I left.

As you read through this chapter, I noticed several themes that continued to develop from the individual interviews. First, we have typically characterized relationships with a history of abuse as oppressive and dominating, and noticed the couples describe aspects of loving and caring for their partners *as well as* the ways in which the relationship has been dominating and oppressive. Also, I noticed the ways in which power is not simply resting in the hands of one person (i.e., the man), as evident in the ways in which the women resist his power and exercise their own power in the relationship. Finally, I realized that all six participants in this study are hopeful about the future of their relationship.

### THE ABUSE

As I had in the individual interviews, I will begin the couples discussion by giving initial consideration to the context of domestic abuse in the relationship. I asked about the abuse in the conjoint interviews not necessarily to attain information that had previously been undisclosed (this did not happen, regardless), but to see *how* the couples talked about the abuse *in front of each other*. Specifically, I was looking to see if they talked about it differently in front of their partners than they had separately. As far as I could see, this did not occur. This was curious, perhaps, because as I will show, most of the couples (purposefully or “accidentally”) did not talk to each other about the abuse that had happened in their past.

As the couples outlined the emotional fallout that had occurred as a result of the abuse, a curious distinction occurred between the one couple as compared to the other



couples. Both Allison and Bryan and Connie and Daniel explored the effects of the abuse on the *women* and on the *children*; Elaine and Frank (or, more accurately, Frank) explored the effects of behaving abusively on *him*. Notice the difference as Allison considers the impact their separation (because of the abuse) has had on their oldest children:

“I know that the time we were apart, even that 6 months, it was very devastating on my oldest son. He still, to this day, still acts out. He never used to act up before. At that time something happened in him, and it was just like he was running all the time. He’d get angry and walk out of the house” (Allison)

Allison described feeling pressured to accept Bryan back into the house because the children were missing him so much:

“I know that they missed you a lot at that time... it got to be very painful. It didn't make sense for you not to be there when they wanted you to be there so much” (Allison)

As a result of the pressure, she allowed Bryan to move back in, but found that this has personal consequences for her:

“I felt really cheap after (Bryan moved back home), because I felt that when I did accept him back in, my whole self-esteem was down, because I was thinking, I'm accepting the one thing I promised myself I never would. Like, there was a lot of things that I took, you know. There was a lot of even abuse that I took... but the one thing that I said was that I was worth more than this, and I thought, if ever somebody would physically harm me, I'd be out; I don't need them. So I felt I really compromised the one thing I promised to myself. I felt really cheapened” (Allison)

Bryan was noticeably quiet throughout this discussion. Connie and Daniel both spoke of the effects the abuse has had on Connie and the children:

“I began to start to address (the abuse), I think, in more focused ways. But,

meanwhile my family really, really suffers" (Daniel)

"DL: Is there still outstanding resentment about stuff that happened in the past?"

Daniel: I think the short answer is yes" (Daniel)

"Just to show you where I was at one point, this is really embarrassing but, (I took our oldest child) down to the community club for awhile. That was fine. It wasn't horrible, but it was a particularly low period in my life, and the instructor would look at me, and treat me with real kindness, and I'd start crying, as if someone would treat me nicely" (Connie)

In contrast to the previous couples' exploration of effects, Frank expressed feelings of guilt that have come up for him as a result of using abuse against Elaine, and in this situation, Elaine contributed little in this discussion:

"After I hit Elaine, I was back to square one and I didn't... I was out of control again and I was scared" (Frank)

"Taking responsibility for what I did by trying to change, really change (*starts to cry*) and I just... I never realized that being verbally abusive was abusive. She's always been there. I feel guilty" (Frank)

It is difficult to know how to make sense out of this seemingly self-absorbed statement (after all, it was his partner who was abused). Certainly, one can think that he is putting his partner in the role of nurturer by focusing discussion on his needs, thereby replicating traditional gender roles. Alternatively, Frank had been the one who had most recently used violence compared to the other men in the study, and perhaps he will move to a point in which he will be more reflective of the impact his abuse had on his partner. Perhaps the reason also (note that I am not suggesting "instead of") lies in Frank's fears that he will return to using abuse at some time in the point in the future:

“Sometimes I worry that it’s going to last. I haven’t the confidence in myself yet to reassure myself that I am okay. That’s what bothers me. Get her hopes all worked up and flip out again” (Frank)

“You don’t want to be an animal. She says I am not, but I know what I am capable of. I can be a wacko. Yeah. I think everybody can be if they’re put in the right circumstance. But for me, it’s easier for me to become that out of control person than most people, and that’s frightening” (Frank)

Although this fear is a major pre-occupation for Frank, it is a fear that Elaine, rightfully or wrongfully, did not report sharing:

“I think basically maybe stupidity but it was like it wasn’t going to happen again. Which I am sure every woman thinks, or wants to hope for” (Elaine)

It is also a worry that the other women in the study did not share:

“I said to him fairly recently, okay, I’m not afraid of you” (Connie)

“I remember I kept telling you that if you came back home, then, that would be putting my kids, kinda, in danger” (Allison)

This is not a fear that Allison still has:

“You are there day in and day out, and I know if I’m not home in the evening, the kids are going to be perfectly fine doing et cetera” (Allison)

It should be noted that simply because Frank (nor Elaine) did not delve into the considering the ways in which his abusive behaviour affected her, this does not prevent him from understanding the need to change the way in which he treats Elaine:

“(I started) taking responsibility for what I did by trying to change, really change” (Frank)

Issues of responsibility for his abusive behaviour have a history of being blurred for

the couples. Responsibility is both assigned and assumed inside and outside of the relationship, preventing demands for change. This was discussed at length by Connie and

Daniel:

“I guess, in retrospect, it's really a shame because up until the last 6 months, even though I'm supposedly should have recognize all this stuff and said that it really has nothing to do with me, up until 6 months ago, I always looked, okay, **what did I do wrong? What could I have done better?**” (Connie)

“The only reason that possibly it has gone on for this long... It seems abundantly clear why in '86, did you not call a halt and say that this is unacceptable, and start— because I kept on taking responsibility for it, thinking that **I had a part to play in it. That I was contributing to this action**” (Connie)

Notably, Daniel talked as if his blaming *contributed* to, rather than *caused*, her self-blame:

“Connie's penchant for blaming herself was **encouraged** by my response. As soon as I was getting out of line, I mean, I was looking for something that triggered it. I was always looking for the external. I was able to twist things often enough that, yeah, I was fully convinced that it wasn't my fault that this had happened. The circumstances, or somebody said the wrong tone of voice, or she used the wrong words” (Daniel)

Assuming and assigning blame are two strategies people in our society use to make sense out of their abuse and abuse in other relationships, so concerned are we with “underlying motivations” (White, 2000). It has not been uncommon in traditional understandings of domestic abuse to think of self-blame as being an *effect* of the abuse (e.g., Koss et al., 1994), something which happens *to* (passive) women. This potentially limits opportunities to notice resistance to oppressive interpretations of responsibility that the women have used. Allison, for example, reported to how she had interpreted being assigned blame

friends and family :

“I was just having a hard time keeping my head up, because everybody was like, kinda like, "Oh, poor man" and stuff like that. And he's taking this course now, and everybody liking Bryan because he's such a nice guy, and everybody caring about Bryan, and I'm-- **because I'm the one who's up and moving and doing things**, I'm not saying that you're not Bryan, I'm just saying because it looked like the one, people always think that I could do 101 things altogether, and I can't. But people have this idea because I gave that image sometimes. I always feel that people misjudge me and, just, **it's easy to blame somebody who seems to be up**” (Allison)

Allison shifted the self-blame from something negative (i.e., “she nags”) to something positive (she is blamed because she is more capable). In articulating this, I am not suggesting that self-blame is not *also* an effect. It is *both* a strategy (active) women use to make meaning of the abuse experience *and* an effect from the abuse that happens to (passive) women. This approach understands women to be both active and passive participants in their lives (Ristock, 2002).

Finally, it was notable to me that all three couples avoided explicit discussions regarding his abusive behaviour towards her, as Frank reported:

“DL: Had the two of you talked about the incident of abuse since it happened?

Frank: No... we've never talked about it” (Frank)

All the men expressed a (admittedly reluctant) willingness to discuss the abuse *should their partners feel a need to*:

“(Talking about the abuse) would be extremely difficult. That's right. We've... I guess in our own way we've kind of, not swept it under the carpet, but I am not... Elaine's not comfortable with it. I think I could talk about it. I am not comfortable with it either, but I think I could talk about

it” (Frank)

However, all the women discussed preferring not to engage in this conversation:

“DL: Did Connie ever talk about the abuse that has happened in the past?

Connie: We talk about it after it happened, but no.

DL: But you wouldn't go back over a period of time, and both of you talk about it from each of your perspectives?

Connie: I'd feel really uncomfortable doing that, because even now, like, I will point out, or I will voice my feelings and what I think is happening. But at times, I feel like I'm giving a report card, and really feel uncomfortable with that” (Connie)

For several of the women, they preferred the approach of “leaving the abuse behind” and “moving on” from it:

“What I would like is to see is a positive— leaving that stuff behind and positively moving forward in a positive manner” (Connie)

“DL: You've been less willing to talk about that or feeling a need for it?

Elaine: I don't really feel a need for it. Knowing that he was going to group and getting the support and help there that he needed. That was, to me that was sort of his way of talking about it” (Elaine)

If these women's responses are typical of other women's responses, then this would have implications for considering discussing abuse in any couples counselling sessions. The women in this study, at least, preferred listening to “actions” rather than “words” in assessing the future of the relationship:

“DL: Would you describe that process of making amends is more kind of what happens in response, just being aware of what's going on and responding to it right away?

Connie: Yeah, I see that as a more positive thing than saying "I'm sorry". "I'm sorry" only goes so far. He says he's sorry after, after every incident, and then...” (Connie)

This explains the significance, then, of the "turning points" in the relationship.

## TURNING POINTS

Part of what I looked for when interviewing the couples was the events that occurred in the past that they could look to and mark as having major implications for their current levels of satisfaction in the relationship. For both Connie and Daniel, this involved a series of stages that culminated in Daniel taking steps to stop his abuse. For them, it began with his attending AA to address his excessive drinking:

"I guess I could say that if I hadn't gotten into AA, there wouldn't have been a relationship. I would have been dead, or Connie would have thrown me out" (Daniel)

"Daniel: (AA) subsequently led me into (domestic abuse counselling). You know, that was another series of changes that had to be made, and two steps forward, one step back. Two steps forward, two steps back (laughs).

Connie: I felt that his going into AA would make a difference for me because I learned a number of things in Al-anon that I didn't learn before. That was really important, but it wasn't a miracle, but it was a necessary step in the right direction" (Connie & David)

The second turning point led to his behaviour being labelled as abusive:

"I guess the second plateau, so to speak, was in '86 when we did identify that he was abusing us. That was a time in which the light bulb went on for both of us simultaneously really what was happening. It didn't get dealt, really, with right away, but it did get identified, so that it was out in the open" (Connie)

"She just looked at me, and all of a sudden, and sorta said, "Daniel, this feels like abuse." That was a turning point, here it was, it was labelled, it was named. I think I then made a date with (a counsellor). He asked a series of questions, and all I can remember is, they all led up to the final question,

what does that make you? And that makes me an abusive man. He referred me to (a domestic abuse counselling agency), and I stopped by on my way home from his place, and got the brochures and got in touch" (Daniel)

"That was the first time that I heard her say, "Daniel, this looks like abuse". It had power for me in that" (Daniel)

The third stage involved learning about the impact of his abuse and addressing the behaviour in a "more focused way":

"The whole idea of even emotional abuse is as destructive as sexual or physical abuse in terms of impact of the victim, that was important for me, but again, it didn't have a meaningful impact on changing my behaviour enough. And then I would say, getting into (domestic abuse counselling) after Connie, for me, labelled that for me, you know, this feels like abuse. Shortly after that, then, having taken the fifth step, and getting involved with (a domestic abuse counsellor). Then I began to see that, there were tools" (Daniel)

"Between AA meetings and the (domestic abuse counselling), I began to start to address (the abuse), I think, in more focused ways" (Daniel)

All the couples discussed a period (or periods) in their relationship in which they had to consider what the future could and would look like for them. This included consideration of whether or not they would/should continue the relationship. It was during this time that, the women in this study in particular, looked for "significant actions" on the part of their partners to commit to more future together. Sometimes these actions were actions that the men did on their own:

"DL: Was that when you began to re-establish trust with Bryan, is the way he handled the situation (involving your interest in another man)?

Allison: Uh huh.

Bryan: I think that it had more to do with what she had observed in my relationship with the kids. Or, that there was that too, I guess.



DL: That you had made some changes in the way that you relate to the kids?

Bryan: No, it's just that my first interaction back with the family was with the kids, it wasn't with Allison" (Allison & Bryan)

"Why are we together? Because of the stuff that I've learned, and because of choices that I've started making. I started making choices that are my own choice that I control. So it's made it easier for me to function because a lot of things that I do now, I'm doing because they're things that I choose to do, as opposed to what I used to. The mistake that I used to make was to give the responsibility of my day to day choices to someone else. Whether it was Allison or somebody else. You know, it's been both" (Bryan)

"DL: When did you become involved with (spirituality)?

Allison: Bryan just last January. And I would say that's when our relationship started going up

Bryan: There was a big jump there.

"DL: How do you explain that jump from, um, that big jump?

Bryan: Well, from my point of view, the huge difference was there was a big thing that we no longer needed to fight about, or discuss, or try to come to terms with. Which was the whole thing of the Catholic religion because we now agreed upon something which was a major thing, and becomes a lot more major with children, obviously, as they got older. Because, um, that's sort of the gist of it.

Allison: I fell head-over-heels over this guy because for the first time since we had been married, it seemed like Bryan just knew who he was, and knew what he believed. And he came up with it, because it was a self, kinda like, self-discovery, interpretation, and it was the first time I had seen him really hunger for information, too. And I saw him just like craving things like I craved things. But he was doing it on his own" (Allison & Bryan).

At other times, the significant actions were induced by ultimatums:

"Elaine: I think deciding factor too, because I told him that was the last straw. That was it. Either you get help or...

DL: So that was a condition of staying in the relationship as well?

Elaine: Mmhmm. For me yeah" (Elaine)

"DL: What tells you that was the last time? That Franks not going to use

violence again?

Elaine: There's no guarantee, but I think I've made it pretty clear to him if he wants the relationship, that's in his hands" (Elaine)

In fact, all the women used ultimatums as a strategy to create limits on their partners' behaviour. Frank discussed the pressure he feels as a result of the ultimatum:

"Elaine: I am thinking maybe that's what's scaring you (the ultimatum to change)?

Frank: Maybe. I know that a relationship can't go on the way ours was going on. It's just not healthy. Sure it scares me that I am not sure. I'll never be sure, but... I am not kidding myself either by saying that I am cured or anything like that. I am just... I just know that it scares me that if I fail" (Frank)

Counselling was another significant action that had both symbolic and practical value to the couples in sorting out the future of their relationship. In some ways, it meant acquiring "tools" and insights:

"Bryan: There had to be some building of trust between us. It was completely destroyed.

Allison: Oh yeah, I was never one that was trusting. At that time, I went to counselling for myself, which was something that had been needed for a long time. Like why, I needed to start understanding what I was going through

(Allison & Bryan)

"I have to get a different perspective. I have to get out of my head and get listen to somebody else and what they've got going on in their head. Just like in group it... sometimes someone will say something and it just clicks and then it seems to bring so much into focus and into perspective and that's what helped me to advance, to this" (Frank)

In other ways, counselling took on a symbolic aspect for the women of their partners' willingness to change:

“DL: What did you require of Bryan at that time to be able to come home again and feel good about that?

Allison: At that time? Other than, I had said for him to get into a course or whatever, to do something, to go get help or whatever” (Allison)

“DL: So then when Frank’s going to counseling, was it a kind of actions speak louder than words kind of thing for you?

Elaine: Yeah, yeah that’s pretty much it.

DL: And that was enough he was in counseling?

Elaine: Yes” (Allison)

“DL: You had faith in that he wanted to change? What told you that?...

Elaine: I just knew. I just knew. It was different, him taking that step to do something” (Elaine)

So important was the symbolic value of attending counselling, it is described by Elaine as the “biggest forgiveness point”:

“I think for me the biggest forgiveness point was when he started going to group. It was like he’s doing something this time different” (Elaine)

It is meaningful that Elaine discussed forgiveness, as neither of the other two couples framed their experiences in terms of having involved forgiveness. Clearly for Elaine, this was an ambivalent and ambiguous enterprise:

“DL: Have you ever thought in terms of forgiveness as in forgiving Frank? Has that ever come up in any way?

Elaine: I’ve never said...he probably needs to hear that. **That I have forgiven him**, but I think he knows” (Elaine)

“DL: Can I ask a little bit about that, forgiving him? Was that a gradual process..?

Elaine: For... I’ve forgiven him for a lot of things. That’s just my nature. Probably the last time there was abuse that took the longest.

DL: How long did that take?

Elaine: **I am probably still going through it a bit.**

DL: So it's still a process?... What was that process like?

Elaine: That's a tough question. (*laughing*). I don't know how to answer that. I don't know, I guess there is stages to it where first you're angry. It's like a trust is broken again... um... I don't know. Time heals" (Elaine)

Elaine viewed forgiveness as a solely intraindividual, rather an interpersonal, process. This view of forgiveness has significant ramifications for couples, as it categorically excludes any mutual involvement:

"I don't know, for... to me, forgiveness is just, **it's something that's in you**. Like you either can or you can't, and it takes different time frame for everyone... it's just something within" (Elaine)

Similarly, she encouraged Frank to engage in a parallel intraindividual process of forgiving himself for his past abuse:

"DL: Had there been any talk about... or, the use of the word 'forgiveness' in any way? Is that something that come up between the two of you?

Frank: What are you looking at me for?

Elaine: Cause you used that word.

Frank: Talking about my dad?

Elaine: No, about you.

Frank: What? Forgiving myself?

Elaine: Mmhmm.

Frank: Help me out here. How can I forgive myself if I...

Elaine: That's what you have to work on."

(Elaine & Frank)

For Frank, the thought of forgiving oneself was both new and holding of promise:

"I am just beginning to think, just beginning to even ponder with the idea of forgiving myself. Just starting to...getting in there" (Frank)

"I am just beginning to ponder with the idea (of forgiving myself). I would

rather... well I don't know, I don't know what to say. It's hard, it's very difficult. I want to forgive myself because I know I have to. I can say I forgive myself but if I really do forgive myself, that another thing. I don't... and I don't know how much time I've got" (Frank)

Frank equates forgiving himself with stopping any further use of violence:

"I just feel so low sometimes. I want to be able that when I am feeling low, that I am still able to manage my life. That's what I want to be able to do. With that comes a feeling of security. Knowing that you're not going to do something crazy, and with that... that's the process of forgiving yourself. Once you put yourself through a certain little step, a test, you gain a lot of confidence with that. Then you can really begin thinking that, looking good" (Frank)

Until then, Frank tried to find ways of making up for the past abuse:

"DL: Has there been any efforts made to make amends in some ways? Kind of to make up for past stuff?"

Frank: I over compensate a lot.

DL: How?

Frank: Buying Debbie stuff. Just trying to do more. Suck up (*laughing*). Be super nice. Stuff like that" (Frank)

As significant as these "turning points" have been for the couples, they also do not tell the full story about the couples' sense of satisfaction. In some ways, they were meaningful events that kept the "relationship dialogue" going, but they were also one component of many aspects that sustained the satisfaction in the relationship.

## COMPLIMENTS

Much like in their individual interviews, all the participants spoke of their feelings of satisfaction with being in the relationship. Allison described herself as "more in love" with

Bryan now than at any point of their relationship:

"I'm totally in love with him. I would think today I'm a lot more in love with my husband than I was in the first few years" (Allison)

She stated that she could not even imagine being with any other man:

**"I can't even imagine being with anybody else but him"** (Allison)

"We valued something bigger than ourselves, something more important than the day-to-day stuff. What colour should be the curtains. And it was nice and refreshing, because when we realized that was in ourselves, every time we'd go anywhere else, we hear people, "What kind of shoes did you buy?" Bryan and I are totally not part of that! And we go, whew! And we wouldn't want to be with anybody else. And it's true, **I don't want to be with anybody else"** (Allison)

Allison even described her partner in terms of perfection:

"The thing is, he's a very attractive man, and I know that he's very attractive, and there is nothing, nothing nothing wrong with him" (Allison)

Coupled with feelings of satisfaction, commitment emerged as a theme for the participants that affected their decision to stay in the relationship despite the challenges of some of the effects from the abuse. Commitment stemmed from three sources: (1) a belief that it was in the best interest of the children, (2) qualities that the participants were raised with, and (3) qualities within the relationship. It should be noted that none of these categories were mutually exclusive, as some of the participants cross categories. For Allison, this included believing that she is acting in the best interest of her children:

"Have I ever thought of ending the relationship? Not after we had kids. Well, no, actually I did after the abusive situation there, when Bryan hit me or whatever. Then after that, I thought no. I really actually thought that maybe we should separate, but it didn't last too, too long because, no,

**there's kids involved. I just don't feel that would be right to do"**  
(Allison)

"Allison: We're together because of the kids.

Bryan: I'm not together because of the kids.

Allison: Well no, but in terms of when you make a commitment, you make a commitment. I don't want the kids to learn otherwise. And, not only that, it's not like, look at all these kids that are growing up in divorced families and stuff like that, and you go, they could have worked on their relationship" (Allison & Bryan)

Others spoke about how the sense of commitment that they had was a characteristic with which they entered the relationship:

"The commitment is important to us, and it's certainly important to me. When I got married, I got married despite whatever came afterward"  
(Bryan)

"DL: Did you have thoughts of leaving?

Elaine: No..

DL: You seem to have had lots of faith in the relationship all the way through... and I am trying to understand where does that come from?

Elaine: I don't know. I don't know. I think I told you in my interview that I come from a strong family background and so I am just not willing to give up" (Elaine)

Still other sources of commitment resulted from qualities within the relationship:

"That's why I'm with you in the good times is for all the great things. You're good-looking, you're funny, you're great with the kids, I love you a lot, you're my best friend, I can share anything with you, you always think about me" (Allison)

"We stayed together because of the potential that we see in the relationship"  
(Bryan)

Some of what made the relationship worthy was not, surprisingly, only that the man

had made "some" (more about this later) changes in the way that he relates to her, but also, that he was wanting to or willing to change:

"The fact that he was always wanting to make some changes was always a really positive" (Connie)

"You're always making steps, and I'm thankful for that" (Connie)

DL: Other than the counseling, was there anything else that you kind of look for, signs saying that things would change?

Elaine: I knew... No, I knew he wanted to.

DL: You had faith in that he wanted to change? What told you that? How did you...?

Elaine: I just knew. I just knew" (Elaine)

Sometimes, this belief in the willingness to change came in a context when there was little evidence of change:

"So I thought that, recently I really appreciated I thought he was seeing me like a person, I wasn't just a thing, that I had feelings, and that he could take that into account. That was all that I was asking for, to be treated like a person with feelings. Then Daniel goes and buys books (on sex) which has absolutely no identity to them, in terms of, how to treat me as a person. Which really fries me. Wait a minute. I'm not asking you to read a book on how to treat me. I want you to treat me how your heart tells you and how I deserve to be treated" (Connie)

Still, for most of the participants, there were noticeable changes upon which their sense of commitment was anchored. Some of the changes have been in their intraindividual reactions, including feeling more secure, more attraction to the other person, more positive feelings, greater comfort with feelings of anger, and less feelings of depression, as mentioned by the participants:

"Bryan: Allison's often put pressure on me about flirting, or about you're



going to have an affair, or you'll leave me.

Allison: Not for a long time. **I used to always think that was going to happen**" (Allison & Bryan)

"The few people that I found a little bit attractive, I'd think, ah, you know. Now, those thoughts don't even go in my mind at all. It's like, they go in and they go out, et cetera. They don't, **I can totally focus on Bryan**" (Allison)

"**I'm a lot more comfortable in my own skin.** I guess now that's starting to happen in other areas as well. More can do, more a will do, more a let's do approach" (Daniel)

"I have seen some positive results. Driving with you used to be abominable. You turned the corner. You realized that you're not an A-1 driver, you're just an average driver. There are times when it's quite laughable, because I'm expecting him to do his explosive stuff, and, no, he's just cool, laid back and let the other people fight it out. Which is really a treat... that's a really positive thing" (Connie)

"I think I'm dealing with stuff a lot better now, making a list, and the piles aren't getting as high. From that perspective, I'm feeling a little more comfortable. I think that **I'm feeling a little more comfortable when I do get angry**" (Daniel)

"Like I said, I am just really up and down lately. It's getting better" (Frank)

"I think I am at a stage where I can express myself, not to the point of violence but, I mean I still get my blood pressure up and everything, but then, **a few minutes or a little while later, I can kind of put it in perspective**" (Frank)

Some of the other important changes that the participants noticed are in the areas of interpersonal processes, including more of a relationship focus, accounting for the other person's experiences during a conflict, and increased willingness to talk and be vulnerable with each other:

"I think today we're more on the ball when it comes to (parenting). Today, we're still aware of each other's presence, and what the other person is expecting" (Allison)

"There is a certain amount of investment in something other than himself is really positive. And it's really happening. In the past, I'm sure, I'd try talking to him, and it'd be, what's in it for me? Why would I bother doing that?" (Connie)

"It seems to me that we have tended to deal with (conflict) fairly well. I'm using examples from the last weekend we were at the cottage and we were just going, missing each other. When we got back from the cottage, I was quite comfortable talking to him and he was quite comfortable listening. You give him a couple of days, and he's got this different perspective, and he doesn't have his defences up, we can have a decent discussions. And it's none of the excuses, just, "Oh, I see, yeah, this is how I was feeling, and that's why I was feeling, I see where you're coming from." I think that, that is often what we do. But we don't belabour the whole thing. We have a discussion and then move on" (Connie)

"We're communicating more... well I am revealing myself a little bit more" (Frank)

"I have to express myself. Can't bottle things up and I feel that before I used to and it used to make me... I would think by bottling it up it made me a stronger person. That I wasn't showing my vulnerability to Elaine and that if we ever got into an argument she couldn't use that information against me kind of thing. That's how I feel vulnerable. I feel vulnerable more towards Elaine that I am letting her know what's going on in my life. How what things I do affect us. How things she does affects us. How things we do together affect me" (Frank)

"It's kind of nice to see him more emotional at times. Where he used to bottle a lot of stuff up and at least ... now he's not. I am sure he still bottles some stuff up but for the most part a lot is being talked about. Where he's telling me about it at least. Which he never did before" (Elaine)

"I thought about the other day about when after (our son) and I had our... raised our voices with each other and I... but until Elaine said it that I used to take days to forgive or to start talking again. Some of the things I do I don't even realize I do it, good and bad. So talking really makes me realize

that, 'hey I did do something pretty good'. Now I can work on that" (Frank)

These important changes were built on, and helped maintain, the friendship that the participants discussed having (and relying on) in their relationship:

"Given everything that happened, who I am, who she is, the vast differences, at the core we have the same values. We wanna end up in the same place" (Bryan)

"I find that if I just get thinking too much and negative thoughts that when I come home and I start talking to Elaine, then everything is okay, most of the time" (Frank)

"DL: What's good about the relationship...?"

Elaine: He's a good friend. I love him. I like doing things with him. Common interests.

Frank: We just enjoy each other's company" (Elaine & Frank)

"Frank: Elaine has a way of just reaching me. Sometimes I think I can reach Elaine with some of the things I do or a look and she can reach me like nobody else. If I am... when I am withdrawn she can drive it out of me...draw it out of me.

Elaine: It goes the same for me. If I am in a bitchy mood he can get me out of it... I don't know, we just feed off each other" (Elaine & Frank)

"I've got a lot of buddies that they want to... let's go here for a guy's weekend. Let's do this and do that. And some of them do that and I think that they think I am a wuss for wanting to do things with Elaine. They don't have that in their relationship" (Frank)

Taken from this angle, it is understood that the relationships which the participants described are far from being based solely on domination and oppression, also include aspects of "genuine" commitment, caring, and concern.

## COMPLAINTS

None of the participants, however, avoided discussion of some of the disappointments that they had with the relationship. Perhaps this was a testimony of the fact that, as Frank described it, "more is said because there's no threat". Also, it was not the case where only some of the participants consistently expressed complaints, but that all participants had their say about what they did not like about their relationships. These complaints of the relationship ranged from not seeing many changes in the relationship, to some participants feeling neglected in the relationship, to lacking influence in the decision making, to having differences that give rise to tension, and, finally, to complaints regarding jealousy and insecurity.

There was also great diversity among the complaints of the couples. Of all of the couples, Connie and Daniel, appeared to give the most balance between compliment and complaints. Elaine and Frank probably "under-complained", all things considered, but they also "under-complained" in their individual interviews as well. I was struck by the conjoint interview with Allison and Bryan regarding their complaints relative to the other couple interviews. Although I knew that each of them had their grievances with the other, I was not prepared for the level of hostility that emerged in the first half of their interview specifically. Reading through the transcript of their interview revealed even more hostility, such as:

"Allison: Sometimes I feel he's not letting me be. Why can't I just have fun and meet people?; Why does it have to become an issue? An issue between me, because for me it's like, no answer—

Bryan: Not if it doesn't get brought back to the relationship.

Allison: It doesn't get brought back to the relationship when you're sulking. And I got to, it's hard. Then I tell him that he's sucking all my energy"  
(Allison & Bryan)

"Bryan: I can't get excited about stuff you're excited about if my basic needs aren't being met. I can't go there—

Allison: I can't meet your needs; you've got to meet them yourself.

Bryan: That's what I've done at work, but I haven't gotten it from you.

Allison: Yeah, but nobody at work is living with you" (Allison & Bryan)

Later, during a discussion about Allison's parents, Bryan complained about their lack of financial responsibility:

"Bryan: When (your parents) retire, and they can no longer work, I'll be supporting them.

Allison: No, because my parents are so independent, they would never—

Bryan: Then they'll die of hunger"

Bryan described Allison's behaviour as "insane", and was taken aback when she didn't agree with him:

"Bryan: To me, saying no to me is as extreme, as insane, and **you should be able to see that.**

Allison: No, because it's not—

Bryan: No?

Allison: No. It isn't. Because if you see the kinds of things on tv these days...

The conflict culminated moments later when Bryan, who earlier complained about feeling neglected by Allison and believing that she was at higher risk to have an affair than him, angrily responded to her statement that it is okay that he does not agree with her because of the alternatives available to her:

Allison: Kids don't need to watch TV, watching a movie once in awhile is one thing, but...

Bryan: Anyways, off topic. All this time talking, and we're not making any real progress.

Allison: I can always find a stranger that'll agree with me.

[Bryan gets up suddenly]

Allison: Bryan. No! What's up? I was just, I was just--

Bryan: That's not funny!"

Shortly after this point, I turned off the tape for probably about twenty minutes as I helped Allison and Bryan sort through the escalation of anger. When the tape resumed, both Allison and Bryan were noticeably calmer than at any point throughout the interview, and even joked about the interlude:

Bryan: You know that this will be great, when you go home and listen to it, and you listen to the difference. [*everybody laughs*] You'll have to lie about how much time between tapes.

DL: Short pause.

Bryan: (laughs) Short pause

Allison: You'll have to erase that" (Allison & Bryan)

To be fair, this was a late night interview that was "squeezed in" around a busy period for both of them, and the topic included looking at, among other things, their past history of abuse. Surely this was a difficult situation to be in. However, it also spoke to some of the underlying tensions in their relationship that each were clearly affecting their relating. For the purpose of this study, then, I encourage you to be mindful that both Allison and Bryan spoke about feeling satisfied in their relationship. Unless we are prepared to suggest that they are "just kidding themselves" or are in denial about their relationship (which I am not prepared to argue), then we are left with the understanding that satisfaction is not an "all-

or-nothing” topic of inquiry. It also has room for co-existing *dissatisfactions* in the relationship.

A place to start when considering complaints, then, might be to acknowledge that the participants’ relationships are not timeless or transcendent. All of the relationships face doubts and uncertainty. For Allison and Bryan, the cyclical nature of their closeness-distance created doubts for both of them:

“I was constantly falling in and out of love with Bryan at that time, actually. Like, one moment it was really high, one moment it was really low”  
(Allison)

“I was really confused. Every time Bryan and I were apart... during that time, I became very independent. And when he came back, it was like I didn’t want him there. So then I’d start to question the whole relationship”  
(Allison)

“Did I want it to end at that time? No, I didn’t want to it to end. I never wanted it to end, but I have wanted to leave, which is a very different thing, in my mind... It had more to do, when I was feeling it was going to end anyways, I’d have that debate: Is it easier for me to leave or to be told that it’s over? What’s gonna be easier to handle? Kinda those kind of thoughts”  
(Bryan)

Connie and Daniel faced numerous points in their relationship in which they have considered ending the relationship. It is only recently that Connie began to believe that she will be able to live without the relationship:

“I kept asking myself for the last 20 years, when will enough be enough? But I guess, and I said to him fairly recently, okay, I’m not afraid of you. If you want to leave, then just leave. It’s no longer going to be as painful”  
(Connie)

Frank faced a stern ultimatum by Elaine that she will leave the relationship if he does not

change his abusive behaviour. Frank took this to heart, and was frightened by the possible *inability* to stop his abusive behaviour:

Frank: It's scary. And you have something like a relationship that I've been in with Elaine. We've been going on for 25 years, we've known each other. And I am faced with an ultimatum that if I don't make it succeed I am tits up, and then what? I am not even thinking about that. I mean how many times can you say I am sorry. It's frightening... I want to change, I am just not sure if I can do it.

DL: And you fear for the consequences of what will happen if you don't?

Frank: Oh yeah. My whole life will change. This is like facing your fears head on and trying to tell yourself 'don't be worried'. It's crazy. I'm shit scared" (Frank)

Frank described the relationship that he is in as what motivates him to continue to work on making the changes that he would like to do:

"DL: You're worried, not that the relationship won't last, but that the changes won't last?

Frank: *And the relationship*. That's what's important. Changing me is important too. That's the most important thing, but Elaine's right there. You know I mean my relationship with Elaine is... sometimes it's what's drives me to make my changes. It's for myself, but if I don't have anyone to share that with, it's for nothing" (Frank)

Daunting, then, are the observations, that little is changing in the relationship, as has been the situation for all the three couples at some point in their relationship. Bryan discussed feeling stalled prior to the situation in which he used violence:

"I had feelings of frustration and of a situation that was very difficult, and that wasn't really changing for the better or for worse. But it had gotten to a point where it didn't change very much" (Bryan)

Even currently, Bryan felt eclipsed by feelings of discouragement, as he did when he learned in the conjoint interview that Allison "did not love him when they married" (in



actuality, Allison said that one of the reasons that she first got into the relationship was because it was convenient):

“When I find out stuff like well, I married you, but I didn’t love you, I’m like, OK, well nothing’s changed. I’m still just convenient” (Bryan)

Daniel acknowledged that his change process was a long time in the coming, and is something that he still is working on:

“You know, I still am slow to monitor my cues, and slow to respond to them. And still think that the behaviours are sometimes acceptable. I’m still sometimes shocked when my tone of voice or behaviour has been pointed out to me. The old practiced response. That’s the initial response. I think that that’s a symptom that I really haven’t got as far as I would like to think I have, in terms of the self-monitoring. I’m still very strong in what I would call denial. Minimizing my input” (Daniel)

Daniel contrasted his limitations with Connie’s capabilities:

“I’m still not a really good listener, and I’m still not an organized thinker. Connie’s very organized and very realistic and doesn’t have layers of emotions coating most things the way that I do” (Daniel)

Like Daniel, Frank acknowledged that he still has to make some important changes:

“I am not really good at (remaining respectful during a conflict) yet. I still get escalated. The other day with our son we had a discussion. A discussion that should have just went off like a piece of cake, and I come into the picture and I raised my voice. It didn’t lead to any--... well, here I go again saying it didn’t lead to anything. Everything leads to something, and what it did was it showed me that I am still very emotional” (Frank)

In particular, Frank noticed that his feelings of jealousy are straining his relationship:

“I know it’s not good to have these (jealous) feelings, but I am not very good with changes, you know, I am set in my ways. I do things and I’ve been doing them for so long, it takes a long time to change and I know I

have to get my ass in gear and make these changes because certain feelings are coming out and they're not good in the relationship" (Frank)

Although feeling neglected in the relationship was a theme across all the relationships, it was a big enough complaint for Allison and Bryan (more specifically, for Bryan) that it warrants investigation. For Bryan, this has been a complaint for many years:

"I'd look forward to the summer all year, and in the summer, I really thought that when I was there it made absolutely no difference. I spent more time with her sisters than with her, with other people. So, I'm, okay, why do I wait all summer, what am I doing now? I spent the whole summer building stuff and keeping myself busy because there was no relationship with you. Year after year after year" (Bryan)

Bryan did not see his requests for attention from Allison as unreasonable, either:

"She was always focused on anybody and everybody else but me. It's not like I want Allison to do nothing else but cater to me. I just need a little dose every day" (Bryan)

He described this as limiting the extent in which he is able to enjoy spending "family time" together:

"Really what's lacking a lot of the time is feeling like between us, that's the most important thing. It's not the stranger that we meet in the park that she'll strike up a conversation with for 40 minutes. I'm like, please, strike up a conversation with me. Do I have to disguise myself as somebody else? I'm never as exciting, as important, or worth spending the time talking to, and then when we do have conversations, we have fights, because we're going over 'this is how I feel' again. A whole evening will go by supposedly with family. She'll interact with the kids a couple of times when there's a crisis on a slide or something, and the rest of the time, I'm doing it, and I'm sitting there, and I can't enjoy being with my kids, because I'd like to be with my wife, and she's talking to strangers, and having conversations, and having a great old time, and I'm just not involved" (Bryan)

The only other participant who discussed feelings of neglect was Daniel, who recognized

that his feelings stemmed from having unrealistic expectations of his partner:

“I realized that, not totally set to my satisfaction as I see it now, but I realized, okay, I had decided this was something that I'd do, I got a great rush of energy and anticipation of doing it, all systems go, let's do it. And when it wasn't on Connie's help menu, much less put aside all, everything else, you know, for the next two hours while I did this, I got frustrated, and that came out as anger” (Daniel)

Feminist writings (e.g., Pateman, 1988) have made important use of the idea of men's feeling of entitlement to access to their partner's emotional and physical attention. This has been a difficult concept to define and use, but often plays a huge role in relationships between men and women (Steil, 1997). It raises the question as to what extent are feelings of neglect a result of “actual” neglect, and to what extent are feelings of neglect about infringed-upon “entitlement”? It is conceivable that both exist in the relationship, thereby heightening the effects of one on the other.

Another potential area in which entitlement is enacted is through the decision-making processes. I noted with interest that all the men felt as if they had little influence on decisions their partners made that affected their lives, leading to increased feelings of dissatisfaction for the men:

“It wasn't really about wanting to leave the relationship; **it was about not having control** over it anyway. Like, it didn't matter what I thought one way or the other” (Bryan)

“I mean, she was the gate keeper of a lot of the planning and organization. I guess **it often felt like I was working for a boss** that I lived with... at times there was resentment there. I'd mention something of a holiday idea that I had, and nothing would come of it. Connie would come up with an idea for a holiday, and it would be workable, and we'd do it. I think I felt uncomfortable about that at times” (Daniel)

Although Frank mentioned feeling as if he lacked influence in the decision-making processes in his individual interview, this was not raised in the conjoint interview (as a researcher, I wonder how much to make out of these occurrences...). When discussing decision-making, issues of control and power surfaced. I once counselled a man who earnestly told me, "Duane, I want a 50-50 relationship... I just want to have final say on everything". In this man's situation, if he had "final say" on half of the decision made in his relationship, it would feel unfair to him when "objectively" it would have been fair. What sense are we to make of the male participants' feelings of under-representation in how decisions get made? Much like feelings of neglect, it is conceivable that both processes could be happening (one partner making more of the decisions and entitlement being infringed upon). As discussed earlier the women were often placed in a position (or put themselves into the position) of being over-responsible, thereby infringing on their partners' sense of entitlement. I do not raise these questions to say either, yes, the women are making all the decisions, or, yes, it was simply an exaggerated sense of entitlement at work here, but, instead, to problematize both perspectives as overly simplistic.

We live in a society that frequently privileges similarities over differences, and, furthermore, *construct* in-group members as different from out-group members (Sampson, 1999). One only has to look at humanistic psychology to consider how there is an attempt to suggest that, underneath it all, we are "all the same" (and differences are "deviations"). Therefore, it is interesting when couples billed themselves as having important differences, especially when these differences were a source of tension between the couple. This was most markedly the case between Allison and Bryan:

"I like adventure, I like change, I like constant excitement. I married somebody who doesn't want to leave to leave Manitoba (laughs). It was hard to move everything; I didn't do any move or change, or dream of anything. I think sometimes that's where a lot of our tension comes, because I tend to dream a lot, and I'll say stuff. I don't care if it happens or not; I just like to dream, "Hey Bryan, wouldn't that be neat if we could go overseas and work for so many years, and go out to Cleveland, and work", and Bryan is, like, "No, I already told you. You knew when you got married with me that I'm staying here" (Allison)

"That's probably where we're not quite the same because Bryan's more introverted. He's extraverted, there's a part of him that needs to be a little bit more on his own. And that's perfectly fine. There's nothing wrong with it. But we're both like total extremes when it comes to that, so it's hard to. Sometimes I feel he's not letting me be. Why can't I just have fun and meet people? Why does it have to become an issue?" (Allison)

"Bryan has a lot of stress about money that I absolutely don't, and that probably puts a lot of stress on the relationship" (Allison)

What is notable about this attention to differences is that they have rhetorical value in refuting earlier accusations Bryan made and increase Allison's influence in the direction of future relating. In the first situation, Allison billed moving as growth and staying as stagnating; in the second quote she suggested that her joy at interacting with strangers (excessive by his standards) is simply a result of their different "natures" (and there is "nothing wrong with this!"); and in the final quote, she described his concern with their budget as a characteristic of "who he is" (as opposed to his complaint that she is not financially responsible). In this way, then, marking differences created points of resistance to his attempts to make the decisions for (against?) her.

Finally, complaints of jealousy and/or distrust were common. Allison described her difficulty trusting generally, and then, trusting men particularly:

"I was never one that was trusting" (Allison)

"Bryan: You were there before we even met.

Allison: What do you mean?

Bryan: Trust in men in general.

Allison: Oh, I didn't trust men. I thought that all men were weak"

(Allison & Bryan)

Similarly for Connie and Daniel, trust was difficult for them even prior to the start of their relationship:

"I think Connie would agree that both of us have a lot of trouble with trust. If I give my heart to you, will you handle it with care? That old song is really syrupy and sappy, but I think that both of us have been very very slow to put our confidence and trust in other people. Or in each other" (Daniel)

Sometimes for the couples, this difficulty trusting gets expressed through jealousy:

"Bryan: Allison's often put pressure on me about flirting, or about you're going to have an affair, or you'll leave me.

Allison: Not for a long time. I used to always think that was going to happen.

Bryan: But it's really her who has the most potential to do that.

Allison: I don't think so.

Bryan: **I know so. I've seen it too many times"** (Allison & Bryan)

"Elaine: (His jealousy has) gotten worse.

Frank: It's gone way, way worse. Way worse. I used to just show it a few times a year maybe. That's what's really bothered me. I don't know how to... sometimes I don't know how to get rid of some stupid thoughts. Just dumb. Unproven. I work myself up into a lather in my head There's no reason for it"

(Elaine & Frank)

Elaine admitted that his jealousy "pushes her away" from him:

“His jealousy thing right now and all that, that pushes me away. I’ve told him that. I think he wants to get closer to me but it’s just those insecurities that actually work in the reverse” (Elaine)

After meeting with the three couples, I would not be able to describe their satisfaction with the relationship as a result of “false consciousness” or a result of denial. Clearly, all the participants were able to assess and express their dissatisfactions in the relationship, and yet, at the same time, remain hopeful about the future.

### A HOPEFUL FUTURE

A theme consistent across all the couples’ experiences is that of hope. I believe an extensive range of statements reflect that the participants are hopeful in regards to their future together:

“DL: Allison, as you were falling in and out of love with Bryan, did you ever have doubts about the relationship, that it would work out?”

Allison: Oh, I figured the relationship would work out from the beginning, like when we first met each other” (Allison)

“I still have the patience that I’m gonna get what I want, what I need eventually. I keep telling myself that as long as there’s improvement in program, there’s hope” (Bryan)

“Why else are we together? I stick with it because I still believe that, given the right circumstances, we can get past all the things that don’t work” (Allison)

“What keeps me in this relationship at that time is the belief that we can work” (Allison)

“We stayed together because of the potential that we see in the relationship”

(Bryan)

“The fact that he was always wanting to make some changes was always a really positive, in terms of, to bring it on, shall I say, an even keel. Then I certainly always have hope” (Connie)

“I think that both of us have been very very slow to put our confidence and trust in other people. Or in each other... I think, you know, we're doing more of that. Maybe I'm not always aware of it, but I think we are doing more of it, and I'm finding that encouraging” (Daniel)

“I don't know why I didn't think trust was important. Maybe I didn't want to admit it, but I'm realizing now that's a huge issue for me, and I can understand it a lot more from Connie's perspective. So that also is encouraging to me. It's embarrassing at 59 years of age, university degree, and a supposedly professional communicator, to have been so far out of the basic loops about what it is to be a person in a relationship. Here we are, having been married, and raising children really with goggles on, and with really limited insight into what was going on. Humbling, but it's encouraging” (Daniel)

“Connie: I'm looking for a whole human being that I can love, someone that I can trust and rely on and know what his reactions are going to be and be comfortable around...”

Daniel: Having just heard what Connie just said, and she has said this before, and I think in the past when I heard that list my heart just sunk. I had the feeling that I'd love to be that man. But I guess there was just something inside me that just was despaired of ever being able to measure up to that. I just feel bad now, but I don't feel any of that despairing weight anywhere near the same extent. There's just this sorrow that gee, that's too bad that's been our history, that she couldn't feel she could trust, couldn't rely, couldn't count on all of those things... but as I said, I think I feel a little glimmer of hope personally that I am becoming that man, that I am becoming that person... so I guess I am feeling less intimidated by that list of the ideal. And it really isn't so ideal; it just strikes me now as reasonable and human, and, you know, I am human. I should be able to do those things. I think I'm growing closer to being someone who can do those things” (Connie & Daniel)

“DL: Connie, what do you think about when you think about your future relationship with Daniel?”



Judy: It seems quite positive. I think that it's going to be good. I can be enthusiastic and look forward to things going really well.

DL: Any doubts at the back of your mind?

Connie: No. I guess, I've always had hope that at this point in time"  
(Connie)

"I think we do have enough of the tools now that when we are using them that that really I don't think is taking a disproportionate area of the horizon. I think we're able to look around it, over it, through it, however you can put it, and realize there are other things we're getting on with, and they're positive things. And we can be optimistic" (Daniel)

"DL: The feeling of hope, would you say that you have more hope now in the relationship than (the last incident of violence)?

Elaine: I think I always had hope" (Elaine)

"We have plans together, we have dreams. We've worked for them, and I am looking forward to it" (Frank)

Hope might be defined as holding a positive view about the future even when there might not always be good cause to do it. If such is the case, then one would think that the word certainly fits for couples with a history of domestic abuse in their relationships. This might also be seen as to the case for outsiders of those couples who participated in this study.

Getting to know the couples who participated in this study allowed me to get to know, and share in, some of the hope that they had in their lives. Not only is the hope understandable, but I, too, have high hopes for their relationships (am I being an unbiased researcher again?). Perhaps all this can be summed up through a brief interchange between Elaine and Frank, in which she expressed what she would like for them in the future while Frank tried to acknowledge the debt he owes from his past abuse. She replies with a simple, but a poignant, response of hope:

“DL: What’s in store for the future of the relationship?”

Elaine: The future? Obviously I have my heart set on growing old and gray with him. I’ll shoot for that...

Frank: Yeah, I’ve got a lot of ground to make up.

Elaine: No you don’t. Just grow old and grey with me” (Elaine & Frank)

### SUMMARY

I interviewed the couples expecting to find a pretty clear correlation between satisfaction and the men stopping their abusive behaviour. The couples have taught me that it is not that simple. Despite the abuse and the effects that still might persist from the abuse, all the couples found a way of being hopeful about their future. All the couples discussed meaningful turning points that they could look back on while acknowledging those turning points were not also “the answers”. The answers, they found, existed in the struggle between being in a relationship that was both their dream come true and had elements of their worst nightmare. With one eye alert for new dangers and the other eye turned hopefully to the future, the couples hoped for a better tomorrow.

Chapter Six: Critical Discourse Analysis

Up until this point, I have chosen to read the transcripts with a hope of being able to “stay true” to the words of the participants. I have attempted to reflect on important similarities and differences between the couples and between the men and women within those couples. It is my hope that any one of the participants in the study would read the previous chapters and be able to “see themselves” in the categories that I wrote about. In this way, I hope that I was able to capture “The Truth”, or at least the participants’ version of it (filtered, of course, through my own “truth”).

That, however, is not the only way to read the transcripts. In this chapter, I rely on the words of the participants, not to “deepen” our understanding of the actual participants, but as representation of the cultural discourse surrounding men, women, and domestic abuse. I take some critical distance from what the participants are saying, not simply to capture some personalized version of the “truth”, but to tap into popular ideologies that dominate our thinking about men, women, and our relationships. In problematizing their words, I hope that the reader will reframe practices of individualization and see this not as criticism so much of the participants, but criticism of a context that continues to support the oppression of women. This chapter, then, is more about what kind of society that we

live in, more than the actual lives of the participants.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

One of the aspects I was struck by even as the interviews were unfolding was the extent to which the participants relied on psychological discourse to understand their experiences, a phenomenon that others have noticed as well (Parker, 1997). This will come as no surprise for some, given that five of the six participants had been in counselling of some sort previously. However, there are other influences at work here. As Moskowitz (2001) observes, our culture has increasingly become enamoured with psychological discourse, to the point of neglecting pressing social issues. The participants of this study relied on psychological and counselling discourse in accounting for themselves, their partners, and their relationship.

Many notions of "the self" included notions of depth and interiority:

"Every single time that I have the opportunity to move, I grew. You know, **deep down inside of me**. And a lot of the moves were really hard, like, each one, **something inside me**, I discovered something about myself that I didn't know before" (Allison)

"I think that I'm feeling a little more comfortable when I do get angry, I'm looking for the feeling **behind** the anger" (Daniel)

"Frank: (I've) been crying like crazy lately.

Elaine: It's all that **bottled up** emotion" (Elaine & Frank)

The "inner-ness" which the participants described possessing remain a source of mystery

that is still being “discovered”, or needing to be discovered (or else it will have a disruptive force):

“For the first time since we had been married, it seemed like Bryan just **knew who he was**, and knew what he believed. And he came up with it, because it was a self, kinda like, **self-discovery**, interpretation, and it was the first time I had seen him really hunger for information” (Allison)

“Allison: When I’m angry though, I don’t feel (like being close to my family). At the moment when I’m angry, I could give everything up at that moment.

Bryan: That’s the problem with anger. You’ve gotta figure out why you’re angry. What’s the **real emotion**?” (Allison & Bryan)

“**I hadn’t monitored my emotions** at the time and deal with them. All of a sudden, I was accelerated” (Daniel)

“It’s old **repressed feelings** that have **resurfaced** and I know that they’re not positive. I know they don’t do anything good. They just hurt and I want to get rid of them” (Frank)

“I would imagine a lot of men go through, maybe, round one of counseling or whatever, and they think it’s a cure. And I think going to counseling, I think he’s realized that it’s not a cure, **it’s something that you have to learn to control** and live with... forever, **it’s in you**”(Elaine)

Such constructions of an “internal self” might not strike one as unusual, certainly at least in our North American culture. Notions of the “isolated self” are not value-neutral, and belong to the philosophy of liberalism (Cameron, 2000). Constructions of the “self” as “inner” as removed from relationships necessarily need to hide the extent to which we *require* others for our “selves” to *be* (Shotter, 1997). An alternative way of viewing the self, then, is not as isolated individuals who are *in* relationships, but as relationships which, through discourse, have *created* the ideology of the individual (McNamee & Gergen,

1999).

This may appear to be solely an academic debate rather than actually meaningful. However, the trend towards backgrounding mutually dependent relationships and to individualize experiences has huge political consequences, not the least being weakened resistance to the demands of capital and globalization (Bauman, 2001). This is not to say that there are no “individuals”, but instead to consider how we have made sense of the individuals and how that might limit us as a group of people. What alternatives (if any) are there to this practice? Followed to its logical (and contemporary) conclusion, one individual is separate from another individual, and that, as Allison suggests to Bryan in the following passage, affects our sense of who is responsible for what:

“Allison: Once in a while, when I see you bursting my bubble, or I’m trying to stay up, or I’m trying to get things done, and you’re like, why are you doing something else? It’s like, it’s a constant struggle because I want him to get excited about stuff, I want him to get excited about stuff that I’m doing, too.

Bryan: I can’t get excited about stuff you’re excited about if my basic needs aren’t being met. I can’t go there—

Allison: **I can’t meet your needs; you’ve got to meet them yourself’**

(Allison & Bryan)

Anybody who has been involved in counselling will recognize the flavour of Allison’s statement, that “only me can make myself happy”. Recognizing ourselves to be much more invested in others’ well-being would certainly alter the terrain of how we conduct our day-to-day business. Counselling discourse often encourages an “everybody-on-their-own” approach with its exaggerated individualization of the difficulties people face.

Counselling discourse infiltrates into the participants’ language, spoken as fact,

“matter-of-factly”, with continued consequences for the relationship. Allison and Bryan engage in “scaling” questions made popular by solution-focused therapy (O’Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989):

“So, if, my own temperature, however, you know... **if I was at a ten or whatever and I was really angry...**” (Allison)

“Well part of it is I’m very afraid of being alone, although I’m not anymore. Well, not totally true, but **on a scale of 1 to 10, where it was a 10, it’s now a 1 or a 2**”

(Bryan)

Connie “learned” that she had a right to her feelings in a self-help group, which, from this perspective, speaks more of an individual process rather than a validating interpersonal experience:

“It took me until I was in Al-Anon to realize that I had a **right to my feelings**. I had to learn that” (Connie)

Elaine expressed the belief made popular in AA groups that people will not change until they “hit rock bottom”, ignoring the many ways in which people make changes in their life:

“Yeah, from day one (he was committed to change), but I guess **you have to hit rock bottom**” (Elaine)

She taps into some well-known cultural beliefs about men and intimacy as well:

“I love him, even though... here’s the even though again... **he has a really has a hard time accepting that** and I’ve told him many, many times you know, like maybe that’s his way to keep that little distance and not give into it entirely. Like I said why can’t you accept my love? And he has a hard time with that. I don’t know why” (Elaine)

It is not the case that the ideas generated from counselling are not helpful (they

might or might not be). What I am concerned about is what relational consequences result from putting into practice psychological discourses? One of the effects that I see is the obscuring of complicated power relations when the explanation “hides” how someone benefits from the psychological position that is arrived at. For example, Allison accepts that Bryan will not take the kids out by himself (to give her time alone) because he “knows his limit”:

“He doesn’t like to take the three kids alone. Like, he’ll go for a walk around the block or something, but that doesn’t last for more than an hour. But he, he, he, he’s like, “I won’t do that! I won’t do the pool thing with them, I won’t do-”. **At least he knows his limits** because he knows that, you know, if he can’t function in that, there’s no point in putting himself in a situation where he knows he’s not going to stay afloat, right? So, I’m glad that he does that” (Allison)

By her partner “knowing his limits”, Allison is not able to access time to herself (and Bryan disproportionately benefits from this arrangement).

Connie described a breakdown in “communication” in a situation involving getting a boat motor fixed:

“It’s amazing that **it all comes down to communication**. It’s really quite laughable when you look at it... in the back of my mind I was thinking, well, we could make it a joint trip, we could just go and drive the motor in but we’ll see, we’ll take my mom and see the countryside, make it a pleasure. At least it will not be just a business trip, but hadn’t verbalized it. And he had done his own thinking about it, and hadn’t verbalized it. So we were both working in opposition. Wait a minute! Why are you mad?” (Connie)

Contrast the communication breakdown explanation with Daniel’s description of his behaviour:

“I realized that, not totally set to my satisfaction as I see it now, but I



realized, okay, I had decided this was something that I'd do, I got a great rush of energy and anticipation of doing it, all systems go, let's do it. And **when it wasn't on Connie's help menu, much less put aside all, everything else, you know, for the next two hours while I did this, I got frustrated, and that came out as anger**" (Daniel)

Connie's explanation of the incident as a communication process minimizes the hurtfulness of Daniel's behaviour and the outrageousness of his entitlement that she be available to him when he wants her to, and suggests a mutual responsibility for what Daniel describes as demanding and punishing behaviour more than a problem in communicating.

Similarly, Elaine described "being able to let go" of her anger, unlike Frank:

"I probably have just as bad of a temper, but I can let things go. You know, you get mad, you blow up and then **10 minutes later I am fine**. That's not what it's like with him. **He will hang on to it, and hang on to it**" (Elaine)

What gets labelled as characterological can also be viewed as an effect of power, that is, there are few constraints on Frank's anger. Elsewhere, Elaine spoke about "not wanting to go there" when Frank was escalated because she knew it might end up in acts of abuse.

Certainly, fear can be seen as a motivation for "letting things go"; however, this is obscured when it is translated into psychological discourse.

Moreover, not only are power relations often hidden by psychological discourse, but it also obscures other contextual factors in operation. Allison, as an example, discussed people needing to "work" at being happy:

**"I work so hard on being happy**, and I always have. Today I'm not working as hard on being happy; I'm actually happy. But in those days, I used to work so hard on being happy, because my father never allowed us to be otherwise. It's kinda like, when Bryan would get depressed, it'd get me so angry, because I'm working so hard to be happy, you pull your own; you,

too, you work hard on being happy, because that's life. We all have to"  
(Allison)

Viewed from this perspective, it is no surprise, then, that she feels frustrated when Bryan feels depressed when things become difficult:

"I think that's when I think that he's depressed or **he chooses to be depressed**. I think that, um, **we choose to be happy or not**. And I think that sometimes he chooses not to be because it is more comfortable. And, um, you may not agree with me, but **I really believe that you make a choice to be happy or not**. I'm not saying that you can't have a chemical imbalance, but even then, **you can change the chemical imbalance with your frame of mind**. There's been lots of proof for that, you know? So **you have to choose to be happy**. And I tell you, **for me to be happy, into it, et cetera, means I have to put in a lot of effort**. Especially when it gets tough" (Allison)

The "logical" (psychological-discursively speaking, of course) answer to problems? Know yourself "more" and "better":

"Bryan: I felt that I needed counselling and Allison needed counselling for herself.

Allison: (laughs)

Bryan: No, I'm being honest! Because of all the crap that you went through, and because of the crap that we've had in our relationship for a number of different reasons.

Allison: Right, everything that you go through and the stuff you bring it upon yourself, too.

Bryan: Yeah, but that's part of it too, how to choose not to bring it upon yourself, or **figure out why you're doing it**, and is there a good reason to want to continue" (Allison & Bryan)

"What would it take for me to be happy? It's just... **I have to have a better understanding of myself**. I have to believe more in myself. I do but a lot of it's just on the surface" (Frank)

"I just want to be somebody that she can depend on, that I can depend on.

It's just going to take a little bit of time, that's all. I want to be normal if there's such a word.... I don't know what else to say. **I just have to understand myself a little bit better**" (Frank)

As Houghton (1995) has commented, therapy reflects dominant cultural values. Problems are individualized, as are their solutions.

### NORMALIZING

I use the term "normalizing" in the manner discussed by Michel Foucault (1977), who wrote that a shift has occurred in how power was maintained in modern society. According to Foucault, power was previously maintained by law and repression. Increasingly costly and ineffective, it became evident that power could be successfully maintained through self-surveillance rather than by the state through five normalizing techniques: (1) comparison of individuals, (2) differentiation of worth between individuals, (3) a creation of hierarchy of worth between the individuals, (4) homogenization through the incitement to conformity, and (5) exclusion of the "abnormal" (Foucault, 1977).

Certainly we could include Foucault's analysis of psychology as a tactic of normalization (1965) with the creation of what is "healthy" and "normal" and which is "sick" and "abnormal". Similarly, I listened for moments when the participants engaged in acts of normalization through any of the five techniques discussed above. Not surprisingly, the participants commonly engaged in practices of normalization, especially the couple who, notably, engaged with the highest level of hostility (Allison and Bryan). The participants competed against a standard of what is "normal" and what is "healthy". For

Allison and Bryan, they invoked normalization techniques regarding the status of their relationship:

“What I thought I should be giving her, which was romance and friendship, and stuff, was exactly the opposite of what was going to make her feel worth something at the time. But **it’s also not healthy**, and she was offering me a physical relationship, which I didn’t want, but what made her worth something was that I would be interested” (Bryan)

“We were always going very high emotionals or low. Bryan was a great psychologist, a very great listener, so when I was having problems any everything, he could spend- you know, I could talk to him for hours and he could always come up with really good solutions. But again, there was an imbalance in our relationship. It was either he was the expert or I was the, you know, the saviour (laughs). It was way extremes, **it wasn’t like just a normal relationship**” (Allison)

“When my parents would come... it was, so, at that time, probably things got a little bit unbalanced, because they were like, “my poor daughter” (laughs). You know what I mean? And my sister, “my poor sister”, you know, like. And so all the, everything would fly. And I was protected and he was, kinda like, on his own. **Not very very, um, healthy**” (Allison)

“I don’t think that we had had time to really develop a **real friendship**” (Allison)

“I was criticizing. I was talking about the negative things. I wasn’t looking at what’s positive. And **that’s not healthy**” (Allison)

“We got in to the relationship maybe not for **the right reasons**” (Allison)

Connie described herself as “normal” in the following conflict, and, therefore, her partner’s reaction was “abnormal”:

“I had traveled on a coach, so that I wasn’t sleeping. The person sitting in the seat next to me was a fellow, and so we just ended up chatting, **which was quite normal**. Well Daniel appeared; he just about yanked me out of there, like, “Hurry up! Get your bags! We are out of here!”. And he was

really very angry" (Connie)

Daniel described his interest in sex as "obsessive", as it was not "emotional" enough:

**"I was probably clinically obsessed with sex.** Before I even met Connie... I don't think that my approach was a particular balanced one. Connie already alluded to it. My approach to sex left out the whole idea of it being relational. It was something people did to each other. With each other in a physical sense, but I didn't see it being with each other in an emotional sense" (Daniel)

Both Frank and his partner concurred on Frank's status as a "wimp" because of his unprecedented feelings of vulnerability since completing domestic abuse counselling:

"How do I get over feeling insecure all the time? I am in a secure relationship with a woman who knows, you know, what she wants, she goes after it. Why do I feel like this? Why do I feel that I am so needy and wanty and it really pissed me off. I mean **she hit the nail right on the head when she called me a wimp**" (Frank)

Similar to a Foucauldian analysis, normalization techniques are used to encourage a certain type of behaviour, either from one's self or from another person. For Allison and Bryan, this involves speaking in the "proper way":

Allison: The money issue is deciding factor.

Bryan: In your opinion.

Allison: Yeah, because--

Bryan: I don't feel that money should be the deciding factor.

Allison: So you don't get it?

Bryan: No, I'm saying **that's how you should word it**" (Allison & Bryan)

"If really I have a problem, I can talk to someone about how it's affecting me. So I *change* the way that I talk about it. "I feel this way" or, you know, **the proper way**, or, "I'm feeling tired", "I'm feeling this or that" (Allison)

This also involved Bryan's parents, who were deemed as requiring openness:

"I'm constantly reminding my parents that it's **inappropriate** to keep secrets from each other or from their family" (Bryan)

Connie tried to problematize her partner's interest in sex, just as Frank tried to problematize his partner's lesser interest in sex:

"I see Daniel in his rocking chair, old and grey, surrounded by these books on sex. His **preoccupation** is he's gonna get it right because he's read all these books" (Connie)

"Sex, everything seems to revolve around sex for me and I am trying not to but I am just... I am pathetic, I am just a very sexually motivated guy with his wife, and I think **that's part of a healthy relationship** and sometimes Elaine just doesn't agree with me" (Frank)

Understanding normalization in this way, then, might be a useful concept in future understanding of domestic abuse.

### NATURALIZING

Naturalization is the process in which ideological representation comes to be viewed as non-ideological "common-sense" (Fairclough, 1995). Naturalizing ideology is a key aspect of maintaining relations based on domination, both within close relationships and within the social order, for it obscures ways in which power gets invoked and used. I listened for when the participants spoke of "facts" that actually reflected an ideological stance and power position. Statements like "that's just who I am" were commonly used, typically in justification of actions that enacted domination (or resistance to domination).

Both the men and women naturalized their actions and their partners' actions. For example, Allison naturalized her partner's lack of responsiveness to her and his involvement with the children:

"I wish there would be more stuff that he would notice, like I do. Like when I make a meal, like, courtesy is more- German, um, Germans from Germany is very different than German-Canadians. There's, it's not that they're impolite, it's just that they don't say please and thank you... so the mannerism is different. I guess that's what I would like to change in my husband but I can't, because **that's who he is**" (Allison)

"(Bryan)'s not an out-going guy, like, in terms of, with his kids. He's not running on his feet, playing frisbee, and stuff. He's doing a little bit more activity, but Bryan, **he is just not like that**" (Allison)

In the following passage, Allison uses "cultural differences" as an explanation for why her sister (who is aware of the abuse Bryan used against her) does not get along with Bryan:

"I think that if there is anybody who pulls the relationship apart, I would say it is my sister, I mean- fortunately for us, she comes in once a year, like, she comes in for the summer and we were sharing a cottage with her. We are no longer sharing a cottage, like, we have to pay, you know, get a cottage on the side, like, we'll use the cottage before she comes and after she comes. But while we are together, we decided we're not going to. It is too stressful. **Just too many cultures**" (Allison)

Bryan explained that his partner's experiences of childhood sexual abuse is the reason why his partner is not more sexual with him. In doing this, he "hides" any reference to the physical abuse he utilized against her:

"Another issue that I've had with Allison, because of the sexual abuse that she suffered outside of our relationship, like when she was in high school and stuff— I've always contended that **that's something she hasn't really dealt with**, and that in our relationship, **it's put the breaks on a lot of forms of expression**. It's that whole thing of women who have been sexually active or abused, and how they're very, um, how they'll at least get

physically involved with somebody, but there's no emotional component to it. Then once the emotional component starts to be there, then the physical thing doesn't work because they're segregated" (Bryan)

Both Connie and Daniel naturalized Daniel's oppressive behaviour as a character trait, obscuring the very real rewards that result from being in a position of power over someone else:

"I use my temper. I hadn't known it was an abusive use of temper. But I just never did control it, and I guess I assumed **this is the way I am**, Connie knows **this is the way I am**" (Daniel)

"There really is no reasoning to behave abusively at any level of abuse. But I haven't mastered that flaw in my **temperament**" (Daniel)

"I characterize him as a very **irritable personality**" (Connie)

"(Our daughter's) **personality** is quite like Daniel's in that she can be really irritable" (Connie)

Similarly, Elaine and Frank characterized Frank as "naturally" possessing qualities that strain the relationship:

"I try to be thoughtful, when I am thinking about it. **It just doesn't come natural for me**. I really have to work at it" (Frank)

"I think the relationship is very solid. It's like a relationship that everybody wants. If there is any weakness in the relationship it's just me. It's my insecurity and I really don't have any reason to be insecure. **It's just my chemistry**" (Frank)

"Sometimes I am jealous. I try not to say anything about that because I know all the jealousy is in my head. **I... naturally I have some suspicions** about certain things, but I would never bring them out on the table" (Frank)

"We still have the arguments. **Frank's very hot tempered**, very" (Elaine)



The women also relied on naturalization when referring to their own “character”, that of someone who is outgoing and forgiving, qualities resembling the social prescription for women. Put another way, the women described themselves to be “naturally feminine”:

“It’s through interaction with other people. That’s what keeps me whole, alive that is what keeps me going. When I don’t have that, I get depressed. If I didn’t have interactions with other people, I’m just that person... Bryan’s more introverted... there’s a part of him that needs to be a little bit more on his own. And that’s perfectly fine. There’s nothing wrong with it. But we’re both like total extremes when it comes to that, so it’s hard to. Sometimes I feel he’s not **letting me be me**” (Allison)

“I’ve forgiven him for a lot of things. **That’s just my nature**” (Elaine)

Naturalizing these qualities (not that they are “bad” qualities, that is not my point) obscures the social pressure on women to conform to the “feminine ideal”. As such, the gender ideology backing these pressures remain hidden. That was why I looked for how the participants discussed “gender” in the interviews. Not surprisingly, the participants relied on popular and *mythical* images of men and women to make comparisons to, rather than making comparisons of *actual* men and women. Note Allison drawing favourable comparisons of Bryan compared to these images:

“**I think Bryan does more than a lot of men**, like, he’s not stereotypic. He, he would, like, today, like today the way that it is, he helps, like, right now, he is doing the dishes, you know. He watches the kids. Um, he, the basic needs of the kids he wouldn’t neglect” (Allison)

“**I think he’s more open than a lot of men, in terms of, he likes to talk.** Like, when things are not going stressfully, he’s, like, really open, he always wants to know details of what’s happening here and there” (Allison)

“**He really works hard.** So, I really appreciate that. It’s not that stereotypical, you know, like, the other guys come home, put their feet up,

their wives run around giving them coffee, and they read a newspaper and stuff" (Allison)

From this ideological perspective, men are not involved in household chores or the children, and are withdrawn and do not talk. This is not to say that this is not the "reality" for a lot of men in relationships (just because it is ideology does not mean that it does not get put into practice). Simply, these popular images of men are an ideological position of how to be a man in the world, and "men are..." statements naturalize a way of being that maintains male privilege, and relieves men of pressure to act in a more relationally-responsive manner. It is no wonder, then, that her conclusion of men was not flattering:

"It was like, my god, I could say anything, and this person is just going to be disciplined, self-disciplined, and I had tons and tons of respect for that. So I was just feeling very, very safe. It was actually building my whole trust on the whole other sex called men, because I think I had kinda lost total faith in that species... I didn't trust men. I thought that all men were weak. That all men, deep down, didn't really have backbones and couldn't make decisions for themselves. They're always being influenced by whatever they were going to blame and not take responsibilities for themselves" (Allison)

Of course, the dominant gender ideologies remain a source of ambivalence for most men and women, for there is a flip side to the ideologies that are also a source of attraction, as

Bryan explains:

"I was thinking today, several times, that in the end— something you said the other day— after everything, after all this education, breaking down stereotypes, what is attractive to her; what turns her on? A man who's a manly man. You know, a man who is handy, do stuff, he can fix stuff, he's athletic, you know, attractive, strong... I can't believe it!" (Bryan)

Not only did Bryan feel pressure to both be and not be the "manly man", but Allison expressed not wanting to be in traditional gender roles, while at the same time wanting to

be “treated like a woman”:

“I think sometimes he thinks that if he treats me too much like a woman, that I am suddenly going to change and I am going to become weak. And the thing is, I would kinda like it if someone, you know, open the door for me. Give me a valentines... buy me a gift. Buy me a bouquet of flowers”  
(Allison)

I highlight Allison’s words not to suggest that she has any “gender identity problems”, but as a reflection of the ways in which we live in a society that has an equivocal stance on gender and the politics that get attached to it. It is much easier to say, as Elaine does, that men *do not* talk rather than to suggest that men *will not* talk:

“Guys always have more problems with friendships, close friendships. Frank and his best friend, well what he would consider what was his best friend from childhood, they don’t really talk anymore. They talk once and a while. He does have another close friend, and I’ve asked him... guys are weird. Women can sit down, meet each other, talk for 10 minutes and basically almost talk about anything in their lives. Guys it doesn’t work that way. It doesn’t!” (Elaine)

## TALKING ABOUT THE ABUSE

As I mentioned earlier, “taking responsibility” is a term needing scrutiny (like a hyper-inflated dollar, it is much in circulation with little real value). Whatever it *is*, it might be easier to spot what it *is not*. I am going to assume consensus here that many people would see blaming and discounting as indicative of the lack of “taking responsibility”. It is therefore significant when these tactics were employed. Later, I will contrast the “discourse of intention” from the “discourse of non-intentionality”.

There are many ways to blame, from forsaking full "responsibility" to assigning partial "responsibility" (of some degree) to another agent. Although the latter was certainly more common, both were employed by the participants (though mostly by Allison and Bryan). Bryan explains his lack of involvement with the children to Allison:

"Being told constantly that you don't want to do things kinda makes you wanna, well, why bother doing them, or trying to do them, or learn to do them. Since the assumption is that you don't want to do them anyway, why fight it?" (Bryan)

More commonly there were "shared blame" explanations:

"My tendency was always to avoid the situation. So what would usually happen in a relationship was that **my partner would insist and insist, and I would either start yelling or blow up**, or, you know, there were many exchanges over the years" (Bryan)

"Neither one of us had the tools to set up a discussion about a hot topic" (Bryan)

Sometimes that blame for the abuse got assigned to family upbringing:

"Allison has some real insight into that one. My mother was over one day and just went right into a rampage. Allison went, "That's why you have no ability to deal with that". I explained to her: what you just saw?-that was 24-7 in my house. All the time it was like that." The whole time growing up until I left the house, I had that every single day. And that doesn't mean (Allison) can stop doing it, but somewhere she has a better understanding of why I can't deal with it, why I refuse to deal with it" (Bryan)

Notably, blame assigned to upbringing was not equally distributed between fathers and mothers:

"And with my **mom**, I remember **my parents screaming at each other** 'til 1:30-2:00 a.m. in the morning" (Bryan)

"I lose respect for my mom because she stayed with him during those times. You know she didn't care for herself. She didn't respect herself and then when this happened **I lost a little of bit of respect for my mom because she never forced my dad to apologize to Elaine** for what he had said to her" (Frank)

Discounting occurred in a few ways throughout the study. In one way, there was a minimizing of the abuse or effects of the abuse on the woman:

"(The abuse) was a line I wasn't supposed to cross... **I'm still amazed that I survived that.** I'm very surprised. When I talk to the guys in the group, I'm thinking it took me three years to recover from one physical incident, and I try not to say, I dunno buddy, but you're going to be waiting a long time" (Bryan)

From his perspective, safety was about being able to express himself to a calm partner:

"To me, the first benefit I'm looking for is feeling safe. Maybe you don't get that from a guy much, but for me it's feeling safe to express what I'm thinking, and **feeling safe that I'm not going to be yelled at**" (Bryan)

Surprisingly, it was not just the men who discounted the abuse:

"Have I ever thought of ending the relationship? Not after we had kids. Well, no, actually I did after the abusive situation there, when Bryan **hit me or whatever**" (Allison)

Frank: It was me that was... that had an affair.

Elaine: If that's what you want to call it" (Elaine & Frank)

Discounting also occurred in the couples interviews, in which the participants disregarded the contribution of their partners. Although this happened in all the interviews, it was a notable theme in the conjoint interview with Allison and Bryan:

"DL: Was that when you began to re-establish trust with Bryan, is the way he handled the situation (with your interest in another man)?

Allison: Uh huh.

Bryan: **I think that it had more to do with** what she had observed in my relationship with the kids” (Allison and Bryan)

“DL: When did you become involved with (your spiritual community)?

Allison: Bryan just last January. And I would say that’s when our relationship started going up.

DL: Oh yeah?

Allison: yeah.

DL: There was a big jump there?

Bryan: **Is that thing [tape] still spinning?** You said half-hour, and I think it's been a lot longer than that...” (Allison & Bryan)

“Allison: Like, the food thing or whatever. You know, I just wouldn't do that. And I understand where they are coming from. The thing is for me is that it gets kind of ridiculous don't have to, you don't have to-- (F)irst of all, cake is not good for you. So what's this thing about saving the cake? For me, it's not even food.

Bryan: **Are we still on topic?**” (Allison & Bryan)

I also noticed that the participants frequently spoke about the abuse in probabilities, “as if” the abuse had occurred:

“When things didn’t start to go as I thought they should, I **probably** became more abrasive and less someone that would be a partner with whom you were prone to communicate if you were involved with that partnership” (Daniel)

“As the relationship deteriorated because of my drinking and my abuse, I think I **probably** became more abrupt and more abusive and less constructively communicative” (Daniel)

“DL: Do you remember the first time that there was violence in the relationship?

Frank: No, I really don’t remember that. **It would have probably** been something quite subtle. Similar to what had happened just prior to the last physical abuse. I **would have probably** just been pushing my weight around and being very intimidating, lowering my voice, yelling or getting right in

Elaine's face. **I would have done** something like that" (Frank)

The participants also demonstrated that intentions are not simply one thing or another, but a mixture of desires and influences, as Connie discussed:

"(I said to him) 'I'd really appreciate some help, because with company coming over, and was he prepared to help me with it?' And he just got enraged. Just stomped off, yelled and screamed at me, and went down and just fumed in front of the TV... he gets really angry, stomps off, and **his little game is** to... now I'm just gonna be the mad one here, and **whenever I feel like getting out of it, I will**, and you suffer, and just work around it, and whatever" (Connie)

As the above passage suggests, Daniel was purposely using his "rage" presumably to avoid sharing in the responsibilities, and could decide (and did decide) when he would no longer be in his "rage". This discourse of intention can be contrasted with her comments that Daniel is prone to be overtaken by his rage:

"Connie: I characterize him as a very **irritable personality**.

DL: And he has been that way throughout the relationship, easily irritable?

Connie: Yeah. It doesn't matter what...I'm not sure. **His ego gets in the way, controls what he says and does and how he acts**" (Connie)

Sometimes that "inability" to refrain from using abuse was explained not from a personality predisposition but a result of family of origin learnings:

"I didn't know a lot of Frank's family background. And that sort of came out over the years, right? And then I guess I knew...I mean I knew what had gone on in his family at that point, and it was like, o.k, **history repeats itself with stuff like that. I know this**" (Elaine)

We feminist-informed service providers cringe when we hear explanations like this, for we worry that suggestions that men are not completely responsible for their abusive behaviour

will only serve to perpetuate men's violence against women. Certainly, we need to be mindful of the forces of backlash against the gains that women have made in recent decades.

Yet, we have long recognized that men's violence against women is embedded in a patriarchal social structure. At what point did we begin to see individual responsibility as the answer out of that structure? Such an individualistic notion of responsibility and change works to keep oppressive structures in place. Individualizing psychological discourses such as the "ego" controlling a person's actions present as if the social context is not at all an influence on people's attitudes and behaviour. It should be no surprise that "talking about the abuse" is not as straight up as we would think or like. It, too, is layered with competing social influences and ideologies that impact on what is said and what is not said. These tensions are dialogic (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), in that they do not reach any neat and final conclusion (synthesis), but are on-going and fluid, and are dealt with differently at different times in different contexts. Other tensions are similarly dialogic, making it difficult to group aspects of peoples' lives in discrete and unified categories. It is these tensions that I would like to turn my attention to next.

### **DIALOGIC TENSIONS**

We live in a society that privileges coherence and is suspicious and scornful of contradiction (consider the accusation that "you just contradicted yourself!", or that somebody is "talking from both sides of his/her mouth"). Yet, in reality, most of us have



“mixed feelings” about different people and events that we encounter, being able to both find redeeming qualities and concerns that get raised. The desire for an “either/or-ness” in the world simplifies complexities just as the colours black or white do not adequately describe the colour “grey”.

Certainly the participants in this study held competing perspectives concurrently on matters they discussed. This is not to suggest that the participants are “wishy-washy” in their opinions, but, rather, their contradictions captured the complexities in which we live our lives. It is these very contrary positions that are held simultaneously that I believe we need to get a fuller appreciation of in order to get a richer understanding of relationships with a history of domestic abuse. The participants, in taking these multiple positions, reflect the competing discourses available to people in making meaning of their lives. Listen to Daniel tap in to the multiple discourses available about anger:

“You know, just, getting upset, getting angry, and knowing that upsets Connie and yet not cooling, not getting a handle on my temper right away. I think that it's not abuse in the sense that it used to be, and I think Connie realizes she doesn't have anything to fear from me physically, but nevertheless, I have a responsibility and I more and more clearly see that now, not to be upsetting her emotionally whether or nor in some sense it is seen as abusive, it certainly is emotionally abusive at times. I am getting irate, and she 's getting upset”

[vs]

“I made a startling discovery that I don't need to stuff the anger. At times it's even appropriate to express anger” (Daniel)

He also reflects three different discourses about the origin of his abusive behaviour as stemming from (1) personality flaw, (2) build-up of tension, and (3) power and control:

(1) “There really is no reasoning to behave abusively at any level of abuse.

But I haven't mastered that flaw in my temperament"

(2) "I often don't take enough care, in terms of self-care, so I let all those other little things build up and suddenly I'm behaving the way that I used to"

(3) "I use my temper. I hadn't known it was an abusive use of temper. But I just never did control it...I never acted that way around other people consistently"

(Daniel)

My intention in pointing out these dialogic tensions is not to create mutually-exclusive categories or dichotomies, but rather, to suggest that all people struggle with complexities that get lost in reductionist approaches to understanding people. Many people have many ambivalences that are often ignored and simplified. Elaine struggles with both forgiving and not forgiving Frank for the abuse:

"I've never said...he probably needs to hear that. That I have forgiven him, but I think he knows"

[vs]

"I've forgiven him for a lot of things. That's just my nature. Probably the last time there was abuse that took the longest... I am probably still going through it a bit" (Elaine)

If Elaine was to discuss this matter in a counselling session, what risk might there be that "one side of the (forgiveness) story" gets privileged over another (we might be able to think of a few counselling scenarios in which this might happen)? What does that mean for the person when her whole experience gets narrowed into neat and simple conclusions?

There are huge implications to erasing contradictory experiences. Allison discusses being both grounded and a dreamer:

"Funky things happened 'til we had kids. After we had kids, my feet were pretty grounded"

[vs]

“It's myself, I've always been in the clouds” (Allison)

I suspect that there are both of these elements to Allison, that she is *both* grounded *and* a dreamer. Privileging one aspect over another not only dampens opportunities for Allison to perform both elements of her identity (and thus, limiting her own complexities), but we also lose out on our understanding of the very complexities that make her an individual. Bryan similarly acknowledged and erased that there have been good times throughout their relationship:

“Before the incident, I'd say before the incident, it was more up and down. Fabulous, horrible, fabulous, horrible... it wasn't a steady decline like growing apart. It was more like everything was perfect or everything was hopeless (laughs). Nothing in between. Either everything was fine or it wasn't”

[vs]

“(The relationship) was bloody awful the whole time” (Bryan)

Having *no* good times to draw on devalues that which might have been wonderful in the relationship prior to the current situation, potentially undermining levels of commitment.

Finally, erasing dialogic tensions limit understanding the complexities of need (we often do not simply need one thing *or* another, but a unique combination of), the changing nature of needs, and what (contradictory) actions might fulfill needs at any particular time and place:

“My main focus is I'd like to spend time with a) my kids, and a) my wife; not a) and b)... but I don't want to put them in a specific order”

[vs]

“But really what's lacking a lot of the time is feeling like between us, that's the most important thing”; or, “I'm sitting there, and I can't enjoy being with my kids, because I'd like to be with my wife” (Bryan)

Here, Bryan both purported to equally value time with his partner and children, and then, later(s), suggested that spending time with Allison is paramount. From a reductionist perspective, we may try to figure out which statement is "true", and, considering the suspicion we have of men who have used abuse, may suggest that the former statement is simply a manipulation tactic. Another explanation might be that both of these statements reflect a need that changes for Bryan, that there are times in which he equally values time with Allison and time with the children, and times in which he wants to spend time exclusively with Allison. Understanding the changing (and contradictory) nature of needs allows for acknowledgment that both of these statements are "true" in the time and space in which they were spoken. Similarly, Allison has contradictory experiences of what she needs from Bryan:

“Allison: My needs are a little bit different than his needs in regards to (getting attention).

DL: For you, do you require as much him noticing when stuff is working well that you are doing?

Allison: Um, no”

[vs]

“And the thing is, I would kinda like it if someone, you know, open the door for me. Give me a valentines. Buy me a gift. Buy me a bouquet of flowers”  
(Allison)

Here, Allison expressed both needing and not needing. Likely, it is a mixture of both of these, in that we all likely need nurturing, yet Allison has learned not to rely on her partner for meeting this need. Privileging the discourse of unified and coherent experiences undermines social legitimacy for Allison to ask for one thing in one situation and another in another situation. What is difficult about this is that it means that there are no hard and fast

"rules" on what is responsive behaviour for people in relationships. It pushes us to have a more contextually-bound understanding of people's experiences.

So what exactly does "taking responsibility" really mean?

### SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have tried to create some critical distance from the participants, and to look at what they said as a reflection of ideologies in circulation in our society. My hope was to de-individualize their statements, and, instead, suggest that they are drawn from discursive resources that are likely familiar to many of us. Psychological discourse both reflects and shapes understanding of the "self", and, consequently, devalues the important relationships between people and important differences between people. Practices that normalize and naturalize invoke notions of health while censoring discussions of power and replicating constraining ideals of gender. How the participants talked about the abuse invoked discussion of the limitations of how we have used the concept of "responsibility". In its place, I discussed preferring "responsiveness" to capture the complexities of dialogic tensions.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

I initially began this research hoping to explore the construction of satisfaction in relationships in which there has been violence. Of course, the participants spoke about so much more than simply satisfaction; they spoke about their lives, their fears, and their disappointments. I am deeply indebted to all six participants, who continue to find new ways of being brave with their experiences of abuse in the relationship.

The words of the participants have been helpful in exploring an area not well known to researchers, that is, understanding satisfaction in relationships with a history of abuse. For many practical and ideological reasons, this has not been well researched. In part, understandably, researchers have prioritized documenting the existence of abuse, and examining the factors that would aid practitioners in reducing risks to safety. Ideologically, it has also been inconceivable that there could be satisfaction in relationships with a history of abuse, preferring to instead totalize the experience as involving domination and oppression. Further, references to satisfaction has the risk of dangerously invoking victim-blaming stances that the woman "enjoyed" the abuse.

This really underlines the need to understand the relationship as having experiences

that are removed from the abuse. This is not the same as suggesting ignoring the abuse, but, instead, to think that the totality of the relationship consists of all the experiences in the relationship including all the painful and hurtful ones, and all the great and exciting, and all the mediocre and ordinary experiences. Accounting for some experiences in the relationship means putting those experiences in the context of the other experiences. Or, at least, that was what I tried to do in understanding the participants' satisfaction in their relationships.

In approaching this research, I was informed by values and philosophy that undoubtedly affected "what I saw" and how I responded to it. Primarily, I was informed by, and supported, the goals of, feminism and the need for women to live free from men's oppression. As such, the women's safety remained the paramount concern throughout every interview that I conducted. Furthermore, the philosophy of postmodernism freed me up to "go" to areas that were still in the shadows of feminism. Not to minimize the important differences between feminism and postmodernism, I found both valuable in trying to understand domestic abuse in the (social and interpersonal) context in which it occurred. I will attempt to put into some kind of perspective what I saw the participants as having said, and relate these findings to previous (if limited) discussions concerning satisfaction in relationships. It is likely helpful to think of satisfaction beyond the terms of a singular entity that either exists in the relationship or not, but as fluid, dynamic qualities that come and go, overlap, and linger. Perhaps it will be helpful to think of "satisfactions" rather than "satisfaction".

In my research, there were four major findings that warrant further consideration of

the implications for practice and future research directions. These findings include: (1) the fit (and lack of fit) between the participants' experience and the existing literature on domestic violence and on satisfaction; (2) the recognition of the dialogic tensions and complexities involved in relationships with a history of domestic violence; (3) the possibilities of moving away from the language of responsibility and towards responsiveness; and (4) the importance of highlighting the social context in discussions pertaining to domestic violence.

#### **THE "FIT" BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND THE LITERATURE**

Although my research centered on interpersonal aspects of satisfaction, there were some unsolicited and notable (ir)relevance to factors I earlier identified in chapter one as personal and contextual. For example, the research done on "positive illusions" may have relevance for couples with a history of domestic abuse in the relationship. As noted earlier, "positive illusions" can be achieved by attributing faults to situations rather than stable personality characteristics (Taylor et al., 1989). This was done when Elaine attributed Frank's abuse as originating from his family of origin, and when Connie believed that Daniel has an "irritable personality". Yet, as Allison noted when believing Bryan can choose to be happy or not, his faults were ascribed to personality rather than situation, and she still expressed feeling satisfied in the relationship. More so, this does not even tell the full story, as both Allison and Connie *also* saw their partners' faults as situational (stress for Bryan, wanting to avoid responsibilities for Daniel). Finally, this aspect of the literature fits in that



all the couples viewed their relationships as favourable compared to other relationships, as satisfied couples tend to do (Buunk et al., 1990).

Similarly, previous literature acknowledged the influence of social network on the couple relationship (Klein & Milardo, 1993). Certainly, Elaine spoke about the value of their friends in supporting their relationship. Yet, the research assumes that the network is informed about events in the relationship. Clearly, most of the participants in this study kept the violence hidden from important others. Still, that does not mean that (even uninformed) friends have not been positively influential in other ways not related to the violence. It just might mean that the influence is much more compartmentalized than previously recognized.

In terms of interpersonal factors, much like suggested by the literature, all the participants preferred partners that were more communally-oriented (that is, open, caring, nurturing). However, the women in this study *also* expressed appreciation for their partners' instrumental orientation. For example, Allison wanted *both* a cooperative and caring partner, *and* a partner who "took charge" and was more traditionally masculine. Connie praised her partner's ability to be a good provider over the years. Elaine characterised Frank as a "wimp" for his increased expressions of vulnerability. Seen this way, it cannot be viewed that there is a preference simply for a communal-orientation.

Self-disclosure is one of the most studied aspects of relationship dynamics, with ample evidence of its influence on feelings of satisfaction (Canary et al., 1997). As I noted with the couples, there was not consensus on the extent to which the couples reported

being able to talk about things openly in their relationships. Even though Allison and Elaine believed that they could be and were open about "anything", their partners did not agree. Sexuality was identified by all the men and by one woman as a topic that was difficult to broach. In the current research, I found something that I had not previously seen in the literature, that which I noticed was a trend towards expressiveness. That is, it was a source of satisfaction for the women not that their partners necessarily self-disclosed, but that they *appeared* to be opening up more and more. This dynamic element of *change in self-disclosure* has traditionally not been identified in the literature on self-disclosure as a possible source of satisfaction (regardless of the actual measurable "output" of self-disclosure). Possibly this indicates increased vulnerability for women, and the hope that their male partners will as a result interact with them in ways that are less hurtful in the future. If this finding holds true with other couples with a history of domestic violence in their relationship, intervention practices that support men's naming and expressing feelings when addressing issues related to stopping the violence may have some interpersonal benefits for their partners.

How couples engage in conflict has consequences for satisfaction (Gottman, 1994), and, I am going to assume, particularly more so for couples in which there has been violence in the relationship. Essentially, couples need to make room for each other's uniqueness while needing to come together to share their lives. The common pattern of "man-withdraws, woman-persists" was relevant for one of the three couples, and as the literature suggests (Heavy et al., 1995), was a huge source of dissatisfaction for the woman. That many of the participants discussed developing a preferred method for dealing

with conflict (i.e., dealing with things directly, or, alternatively, giving oneself some time to “cool off” and to consider the issue further rather than enter into the conflict escalated) speaks to the importance of managing conflict. This might be particularly the case for couples with a history of violence, given that previous difficulty resolving conflict jeopardized feelings of safety.

Yet, the participants defied pre-existing literature in their proclamation of satisfaction despite having relationships that involve some of the very characteristics that work against satisfaction. What is interesting is not that the couples feel satisfied with how conflict is handled all the time, but that they feel satisfied *despite* how conflict gets handled during tense times. It is not the case that all conflict is handled in ways that promote satisfactions, but that, sometimes, it is handled that way, and that this is a very rewarding experience for the participants. Similar to expressiveness, both the men and women in this study saw changes in how conflict is handled as an indication of better things that will come, and anchored some of their hopeful feelings for the future.

Equity is an ubiquitous aspect of relationships (Vanpereren & Buunk, 1990), particularly in relationships in which power imbalances existed and were contested. Moving towards (or not moving towards, whatever the case may be) "relationships of equality" (often an explicit goal for domestic abuse intervention programs, included the one attended by all three of the men in the study) appeared to have huge consequences for satisfaction in relationships with a history of domestic abuse, as it does for relationships without violence (Buunk & Mutsaers, 1999). I was quite struck by the similarity of the pattern of the women being "over-responsible" compared to their partners. This resulted in not only additional

burdens and resentments for the women, but also led to the men feeling that they lacked influence in the relationship. As the literature suggests, this was a major source of dissatisfaction for both the men and women in this study. That the three men in the study appeared to be accepting additional responsibilities in the maintenance of household chores bodes well for all the couples' feelings of satisfaction.

Finally, all the participants discussed using certain behaviours (or avoiding certain behaviours) for the purpose of maintaining harmony in the relationship, what previous researchers have identified as "relationship maintenance". Not surprisingly, maintenance behaviours are linked to levels of satisfaction in the relationship (Canary & Stafford, 1993). In this study, the participants used strategies previously identified (including being positive, spending time together, sharing feelings, surprising a partner with nice gestures, and avoiding conflict). Bryan, Connie, and Elaine described "not doing enough" maintenance behaviours. Although we may assume that "more is better" when it comes to doing nice things for your partner, how much is enough is likely very individual. For example, Allison believed that she and Bryan do spend enough time together; Bryan, on the other, stressed the need for more "couple time". So, in actuality, "not enough" maintenance behaviour might be enough to sustain a satisfaction in the relationship (particularly when one considers that people often have a dialogic tension between wanting to feel close to their partners while also maintaining a feeling of autonomy within that relationship; Baxter & Simon, 1993). A potential area for future research might be in attending to the individual differences between people in their desire in, and performance of, maintenance behaviours.

Clearly, *either* "fitting" with previous literature *or* not "fitting" with previous

literature is itself a gross simplification because of all the contradictory experiences in the relationships. Ickes (1993), for example, found that both men and women prefer communally-oriented partners, "fitting" with most of the participants; yet, *also*, Allison expressed wanting Bryan to take charge of more decisions and be more self reliant (characteristics association with an instrumental-orientation).

When comparing my findings to previous literature on domestic abuse, again there were points where there was a fit and where was not a fit. For example, that women engaged in practices of self blame was similar to other findings (Thorne-Finch, 1992), as was the externalization of abuse to factors outside of the man for his abusive behaviour (Mahoney et al., 2001). That the men were described as impulsive and jealous also fit pre-existing literature. However, attention to the men's caring qualities (other than gestures of manipulation or remorse) differed from previous composites of men who have used abuse against their partners. Similarly, the importance of commitment (and steps that have been taken) towards change have previously been under-acknowledged in existing literature.

Being able to identify interpersonal processes for the development of satisfaction in relationships underscores the potential value of conjoint therapy as a legitimate intervention for couples who wish to remain together after there has been abuse. Couples who are able to shift to more effective problem solving, and work towards re-establishing closeness and optimism for the future of the relationship, will likely experience reduced levels of stress in their relating. This may prove to reduce the risk for any further abuse in the future. If a man attends individual or group counselling separate from his partner, these findings indicate the importance of encouraging the men to see the value in more equitable arrangements in their

close relationships, including increased self-disclosure, as well as more involvement in household chores.

We would benefit from research that considers whether interventions specifically designed to promote satisfaction actually work towards decreasing the risk for further abusive behaviour, whether that intervention occurs in an individual, group, or conjoint setting. It would also be valuable research to see if couples, where the man has not received any previous counselling (and would still describe themselves as satisfied), would have similar and/or different factors and process that influence their feelings of satisfaction in their relationships.

### **RECOGNISING THE COMPLEXITIES OF DOMESTIC ABUSE**

Part of what has made the work in the area of domestic abuse so difficult is that the stakes are so high, leaving little margin for error. A mistake could mean (and has meant) a severe beating, or, in the worse case scenario, could mean (and has meant) a murder. Given the urgency of the matter, I can see how tempting it is to want to create an overarching theory of How Things Are. This research, however, argues against attempts to universalize the experience of domestic abuse, and instead, the need to pay attention to particular circumstances in which the abuse occurs.

Simply, it would have once been inconceivable to speak of satisfaction in relationships in which there has been abuse (outside of the masochist framework). Knowing that satisfaction and a history of abuse can, indeed, co-exist, forces us to move away from

“the man is a monster and the woman is weak and passive” approach, and to look at what else is occurring in the relationship in conjunction with the abuse. The participants told me that both satisfaction and dissatisfaction co-occurred in their relationships, with fear and love concurrent factors that defy simple explanations.

Similarly, women experienced both fear (when Elaine spoke about “not wanting to go there” in arguments) and safety (Elaine convinced that the violence will never occur again). They also spoke about being able to at times predict the abuse, and other times, unable to see when the abuse was about to occur. Finally, Elaine spoke about both forgiving and not forgiving Frank for his violence. These examples suggest that there are many complexities in relationships with a history of domestic abuse. Relying on simple interpretations disregards experiences the participants told me are also part of their relationships, whether or not we are able to conceptualize it in our own minds.

If we are going to have a clearer understanding of domestic abuse, we need to be able to understand the context in which the abuse occurs, and the meanings that get ascribed to behaviours within this context. As in my research, that the men referred to their behaviours in terms other than abuse might indicate a lack of willingness to “take responsibility”, as Hearn (1998) suggests. However, given that they also refer to their behaviour in the framework as abusive (and expressed also feelings of responsibility for the abuse) suggests that there may be more to the story than we initially conceptualized. It may not be such a clean “either/or” process.

Having a greater appreciation for the need to understand the context may influence

some types of interventions in domestic abuse, specifically in limiting a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Current standardized and structured psycho-educational groups for men and women have recently come under challenge, with greater recognition for the need to vary the intervention according to the person’s circumstances (Holtworth-Munrow & Stuart, 1994). This occurs in conjunction with the literature recognising that there are different types of men who have abused, and that these men may require different types of interventions (i.e., Johnson, 1995).

Research that recognises the complexities involved in domestic abuse are well underway (e.g., Augusta-Scott, 2002; Ristock, 2002). Clearly, there needs to be more research that attempts to grasp the dialogic tensions involved in relationships, generally, and into domestic abuse specifically. Researchers need to ask themselves what they are missing by viewing their data in a certain light, and what other possible explanations there might be. It is only with this openness that the field of domestic abuse will continue to evolve.

### **THE LANGUAGE OF RESPONSIVENESS**

Part of this research troubled the concept of what “taking responsibility” entails. Given the variety of ways in which the term gets utilised, it is not surprising that there is a great deal of confusion about the extent to which men change. If “taking responsibility” is the marker, then how does that get measured? *What do we mean when we say that men need to take responsibility for their abusive behaviour?* As Frank stated in the interviews, “what I am going through, you know like taking responsibility for my actions, or at least



acknowledging my actions". Initially, he described his process as taking responsibility, then downgraded the process to simply acknowledging his abusive behaviour, indication that responsibility encompasses more.

What, exactly, then, would "taking responsibility" look like? Is it public acknowledgment that there has been abuse? (If so, who should the acknowledgment be directed to? Who decides this?) Does "taking responsibility" mean taking steps to ensure that abuse doesn't happen again? (If so, what "steps" are considered responsible steps?) Is "taking responsibility" an individual process, and/or an interpersonal process? (If an individual process, what accountable might there be? If an interpersonal process, what is the role of his partner?) Finally, to what extent can we expect individuals to take responsibility for social problems (Lesperance, 2002)? (If we consider, as some of us do, men's violence against women a social problem, what expectations do we have of individuals "taking responsibility" for social structures, even the part they play in supporting the social structure?).

Thorne-Finch (1992) outlines one model which identifies twenty-six ways in which "a man who has battered a woman" can become accountable, which include telling her friends and family that he has used abuse, that he intended to control and punish her, and he acknowledges that he is at risk to batter "any" woman in the future. Such an approach obscures the ideological nature of the ways in which a man can become accountable (for example, that all abuse is always about power and control; see Augusta-Scott, 2001, for a critique of the power and control story). As well, we know from the literature that most men who have behaved abusively do not randomly victimize women, but, instead,

selectively use abuse according to the context of permission (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Finally, such an approach is indicative of a problem that has plagued domestic violence research since its inception: that of universalizing people's experiences. This is the assumption that one approach or one framework fits *all* incidences of abuse. Note the dominance of the "power and control" story as an excellent example of universalized experiences (Ristock, 2002). That a man "properly" becomes accountable through public confession assumes that making the abuse public would be a welcome act on the part of the woman. This may be the case for some women and not the case for other women. If it is not welcome, then potentially such a public approach may be a source of humiliation for the women.

Probably a more helpful way to view "taking responsibility" is by understanding the relational context in which the abuse occurs, and to locate actions in these contexts that would promote a reduction of the effects from the abuse for the woman and her partner (I am assuming that his abusive behaviour negatively impacts on the man's sense of "who he is"). I think it is a more helpful concept to think about responsibility in terms of being "relationally-responsive". Responsiveness could encompass notions of "taking responsibility" as traditionally-defined, while at the same time having the potential to be so much more than that. This has the promise of relating in manners that are contextually-defined, and, therefore, meeting of individual needs rather than "normal"(-ising) needs. Being more "relationally-responsive" means recognizing (and valuing) the changing needs of people at different times and places, and the complexities involved in having dynamic (and sometimes contradictory) needs.

We can use the concept of “responsiveness” when the men spoke cautiously about their abusive behaviour in front of their partners. It is tempting to suggest that the men are not taking responsibility and “owning up” to their partners about their abuse. Here again, I think the concept of “responsiveness” is a more useful concept than responsibility.

Conceivably, a man might discuss his abusive behaviour in “disguised” terms because he is aware of his partner’s discomfort when talking about the abuse. He might, therefore, be *responsive* to the needs of his partner but be perceived as “not taking responsibility” by professionals. Discomfort when talking about the abuse is certainly the case for two of the women in the study, who explicitly stated not wanting to or needing to talk about the abuse, while the third woman preferred to talk about the one act of violence as “The Incident”.

One of the areas in which responsiveness added to feelings of satisfaction was the male partners’ greater willingness to be involved in household chores. It makes sense that the women experienced their partners’ increased involvement in the household responsibilities as significant. Baines, Neysmith, and Evans (1991) have observed that the distinction between *caring for* (the tangible and instrumental tasks associated with tending to another person’s well-being) and *caring about* (the expressive and affective aspects of one person’s concern for another) have been collapsed, especially for and by women. Therefore, their partners’ increased involvement in household responsibilities not only reflects a physical but a symbolic benefit for the women:

“It’s coming closer to being equal now. I don’t think that it was close for many years, but I think he has a better awareness now, and a better sense of participating... not only just in work around the place, but just being more

sensitive” (Connie)

Responsiveness, therefore, may have more of an impact on satisfaction than “responsibility”. To understand what is or is not *responsive* to the needs of others, we need to look at the other person’s needs. All the women found it meaningful that their partners were opening up and talking more, and were also taking greater initiative in household chores. Being able to more effectively respond to the emotional needs of their partners, in part, explains the women’s experience of satisfaction in their relationships.

Interventions that would include “responsiveness” may be more applicable for relationships that continue after the occurrence of abuse. Rather than encourage the men to “work towards” taking responsibility (a process that implies an end-point), responsiveness is a much more dynamic and on-going process that encourages more of a relationship-orientation as well as a focus on positives. This may be even more important when trust is at issue for a relationship, for it focuses on interpersonal reactions to needs rather than an individual process of “owning up” for past transgressions.

Research into the area of responsiveness may find a correlation with the concept of satisfaction. Particularly, research could examine how couples who remain in relationships with a history of abuse have met and not met the changing needs of their partners after the abuse has stopped. In what ways did the needs of the men and women change, and how were their partners able and not able to meet these changing needs? This research could inform conjoint therapies in domestic abuse, and provide a guide for couples who wish to remain together.

## ATTENDING TO THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

All along, I have emphasized the importance of knowing the context in understanding domestic abuse. This not only includes the interpersonal context, but the social context in which domestic violence in relationships continues. In this research, it became clear how certain ideologies were being tapped into and relied upon by the participants that were not necessarily always helpful in the prevention of future abuse.

Notably, gender ideology was both supported and resisted by the participants. Qualities of openness and nurturing meet the social expectations of women that we have in our culture (Jack, 1991). In particular, and especially, women's nurturing of children is not only expected but policed and punished harshly for transgression (Myers & Wight, 1996). All the women (and their partners) greatly valued the women in the role of mother, while the man's role of father was considered secondary for most of the participants. Further, such as with Allison, it could be the case that women may want their male partners to become more open and expressive, while at the same time wanting some aspects associated with traditional masculinity. Given the connection between traditional practices of masculinity and domestic abuse, making explicit the influence of the culture on people's lives and their relationships avoids blaming individuals for social problems.

Sometimes this gender ideology was used to explain behaviour, as Elaine did when she discussed that men do not share their feelings because it was a "man-thing". There has been much debate whether or not men don't share their feelings because that is the way that men have been socialized and therefore lack the know-how of expressing, or that men

do not share their feelings to maintain their position of power and privilege (see for example, Sattel, 1998, and Johnson, 1997; for a discussion on finding that men do, indeed, self-disclose, see Canary et al., 1997).

Similarly, I was struck by the extent that the participants relied on psychological discourse to account for their behaviour and the behaviour of their partners. Bryan spoke about his partner's experiences of childhood sexual abuse as limiting their sex life; Connie spoke about Daniel having an "irritable personality"; Elaine discussed Frank's violence as stemming from his family of origin. What is striking about all of these uses of psychological discourse is that in all instances, the man's own violence goes underground in favour of another (more palatable?) focus. It is a reminder that power and benefits get accrued through the use of violence against a partner; ignoring these may result in ignoring important factors to account for when trying to stop the abuse. Furthermore, use of psychological discourse often privatizes problems that are embedded in the social structure. The danger of viewing abuse as a personality type as opposed to purposeful behaviour is that it brings into question possibilities for change (what exactly is a "personality" and how does one go about changing it?). Furthermore, it completely ignores a social context in which women are marginalized and sanctions against using violence against women have been minimal (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). Individualized solutions (i.e., Frank having to "get more in touch with his feelings", or "know himself better") do not go far enough to alter the social problem of domestic abuse.

Both popular gender and psychological discourses may have the effect of hiding practices of power, which then get "naturalized" into "common sense" ideology. Like the

practitioner's reliance on the power and control story, alternatives cannot be seen, other options closed down. The costs and benefits attached to choices are more likely to remain hidden.

People who work in the field of domestic abuse are reminded of the importance of the social context on the lives of the men and women with whom we work. It is not simply "the background" to the *real* story, but that the context remains a vital aspect of the whole experience surrounding the abuse. These means movement away from standardized interventions, and towards interventions that fit the experience of the individuals. Further, those who are not receptive to traditional interventions into domestic abuse could be viewed not simply as "resistant" or "in denial", but, instead, requiring something different from the service provider. Finally, attention to social context expands the scope of the problem. Individual solutions arrived at in therapy will not resolve the issue of domestic abuse in our society. Attention to community development and anti-violence networks may, in the long run, augment the effectiveness of any form of therapy.

Finally, research of "context" is much more ambiguous than research into individual lives. However, I am encouraged by recent efforts to also explore the contextual factors in abuse (i.e., Harway & O'Neil, 1999; McWilliams, 1998) rather than remain at simply the individual level (such as research into "abusive personalities"). Although we know that there is great individual variation to people's experience of violence in their lives, we need to remain mindful of the social structures that support these relationships. It is my hope that this research does strike that balance between being respectful to individuals and their experiences, while at the same time look to challenge societies that allow the abuse to

continue.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conducting this research, I had hoped to, first, document the co-existence of the experience of relationship satisfaction with a history of domestic abuse, and, secondly, account for the variables that produced the experience of satisfaction for the couples. In considering, I hoped to find to what extent the current literature on satisfaction “fits” or does not “fit” with the experience of domestic abuse. I found that the literature, at times fits the experience of the participants, and, at other times, the literature does not fit so well.

Specifically, although the literature suggests that both men and women prefer a communally-oriented partner (Ickes, 1993), all the women in the study appreciated aspects of their partners that were more instrumentally-oriented *as well*. In this research, it was not output of self-disclosure that produced satisfaction for the women in the study, but the trend to becoming more expressive (indicating that further self-disclosure was going to come in the future). Similar to self-disclosure, conflict was perceived as *beginning* to be handled differently, which promoted satisfaction. Unlike the literature, however, which suggested that abusive conflict would undermine satisfaction, the participants in this study appeared to more influenced by the positive new trend towards more respectful use of conflict rather than their current negative experience of abusive conflicts. All the participants felt disadvantaged when it came to equity of the current partner relationship, which, according to the literature, should negatively influence their feelings of satisfaction.



However, it did not appear so for several reasons. One, the current arrangement is less inequitable for the women than it used to be (i.e., he “helps out” more). Secondly, there was a belief expressed by the men that their partners “deserved” to be in a privileged position because of the abusive behaviour used against them in the past. Finally, the literature on relationship maintenance suggests the importance of these behaviours to preserve the relationship. Although all the participants spoke about using behaviours for maintenance purposes, half of the participants spoke about “not doing enough” maintenance of their relationships and wishing to do more. However, the levels of maintenance being used appeared, for the most part for most of the participants, to be sufficient enough to protect feelings of satisfaction in the relationship.

These findings have some important implications for service providers and future research done in the areas of satisfaction and domestic abuse. First, that there can be a co-existence of satisfaction and domestic abuse pushes us to realize the complexities involved in relationships, generally, and in domestic abuse, more specifically. We cannot assume that simply because a man uses abuse against his partner that there are not personal and relationship qualities that their partners experience as rewarding. In fact, as the women in this study have illustrated, there were many admirable qualities about their male partners, and this is why the women remained in the relationship. Service providers and researchers need to acknowledge these complexities to avoid simple reduction of important experiences for both the men and the women.

Furthermore, that the current literature (both on satisfaction and on domestic abuse) both fits and does not fits implies the danger of attempts to categorize and

universalize peoples' experiences. Attempting to "know" someone's experiences without paying attention to the context of his/her life inevitably leads to misunderstanding. As service providers and researchers, we need to recognise that the "background" to the story is as much part of the story as the "foreground". Reducing phenomenons to simply variables and factors will not tell the whole story.

This study, of course, is not without limitations. The small sample size (three couples, a total of six participants), and the socioeconomic homogeneity of the participants, limits the extent to which these findings can be assumed to be generalized to other couples who have experienced abuse in their relationship. Furthermore, that I had been involved in a therapeutic relationship with all the men and one of the women in this study no doubt greatly affected my role as researcher in this study, and impacted on my findings. Finally, I entered into this research with my own values and ideologies (unabashed support for the goals of feminism, the usefulness of a postmodern analysis, and the valuing of men and the belief in ability to make change). Someone of a different ideological perspective, undoubtedly, may have reached different conclusions than the ones that I have.

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Appendix A: Poster Notice of Research

My name is Duane Lesperance, and I am doing research as part of the requirement for the completion of a Masters degree in Social Work on:

**Couples who have a past history of abuse in their relationship**

and who have

**Decided to Remain in the Relationship**

I am looking for couples who would willing to be interviewed to discuss the satisfying aspects of their relationship that influenced their decision to stay in their relationship.

Participation would involve one separate interview and possibly one interview together with your partner lasting about an hour to an hour-and-a-half each. All interviews are confidential, and no identifying information will be part of the research. It is my hope that the insights gained from this research will assist professionals to better understand how to help couples who have experienced abuse in their relationship.

If you are interested in being part of this research or would like to know more about the research, please call me and leave a confidential voicemail message at . Thank you for your interest.



Appendix B: Consent Form

**"Satisfaction in Relationships with a History of Domestic Abuse"**

Consent Forms

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in this research project on the satisfaction in couples with a history of abuse in their relationship. This research is being conducted by Duane Lesperance ( ) as part of the requirement for the Masters of Social Work degree at the University of Manitoba. His advisor is Dr. Diane Hiebert-Murphy (474-8283). I understand that this project is intended to understand the experiences that couples have in their relationships after abuse has occurred. Participating in this project will allow me the opportunity to share my experiences and express my views on satisfaction in my couple relationship. The insights gained from this project may help professionals better understand how to help couples who have experienced abuse in their relationship.

I agree to be interviewed regarding my experiences and will allow the interview to be audiotaped. I understand that I will be interviewed alone and that up to two joint interviews with my partner may also occur. I understand that any notes or records of the interviews will not contain information that would identify me and that this material will be stored in a safe place where only the research team will have access to it. The tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project.

Only the researcher will have knowledge of my participation. No information about my participation will be released and no information about me will be obtained from nor given to the agency from which I received service. I understand that action will be taken to prevent harm to myself or others if disclosure of such information occurs in the interview. By law, any disclosures of child abuse must be reported to authorities.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not want to. I have been told that the interviews may result in some emotional distress as I will be asked to talk about the abuse that has occurred, and that a list of community counselling resources has been provided by the researcher to assist in dealing with these issues and is provided on the back of this consent form.

I understand that when completed the research will be compiled in a thesis report and may be presented to professional audiences and may be written about in professional journals. I was informed that the findings will be based on information grouped together from all who have participated in the research, and that all names will be omitted from the presentation of the findings. I have been told that all efforts will be made to conceal the identities of all participants. I understand that I will be sent a summary of the research findings.

This research project has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba. Any questions or concerns about the research may be directed to the Human Ethics Secretariat (474-7122) for referral to the research ethics

board.

I have read the information contained in this consent form and agree to participate in the study.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C: Demographic Forms

Background Information

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in this relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your marital status? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have children? (y) \_\_\_\_\_ (n) \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, How many? \_\_\_\_\_ Ages \_\_\_\_\_

What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently employed: \_\_\_\_\_ full-time \_\_\_\_\_ part-time \_\_\_\_\_

casual/seasonal \_\_\_\_\_ unemployed/retired \_\_\_\_\_

not employed outside of the house \_\_\_\_\_

What is current family income:

\_\_\_\_\_ less than \$10,000 \_\_\_\_\_ \$10,001 to \$14,999

\_\_\_\_\_ \$15,000 to \$19,999 \_\_\_\_\_ \$20,000 to \$24,999

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25,000 to \$29,999 \_\_\_\_\_ \$30,000 to \$34,999

\_\_\_\_\_ \$35,000 to \$39,999 \_\_\_\_\_ \$40,000 to \$44,999

\_\_\_\_\_ \$45,000 to \$49,999 \_\_\_\_\_ \$50,000+

How would you define your ethnicity (i.e., Aboriginal, German, Irish)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe your religious affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

In your relationship, has there been:

- physical violence that involved punching or slapping?
- physical violence that involved pushing or grabbing?
- verbal abuse that included yelling or putdowns?
- psychological abuse that included threats or other acts of intimidation?
- sexualized abuse that included forced sexual acts or threats related to sex?
- economic abuse that included controlling the finances?
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What has been your involvement in counselling? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been charged with any offences related to domestic abuse?  
y \_\_\_ n \_\_\_

If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If yes, did it result in a conviction? y \_\_\_ n \_\_\_

As a child, did you witness any abuse between you parents or caregivers?  
(y) \_\_\_ (n) \_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time for completing this background information form.