Happily Ever After? Women's Perceptions of Their Relationships after the Desistance of Violence

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Abstract

A mixed methods qualitative design was employed to explore relationship satisfaction in women who are currently living in heterosexual relationships where violence has occurred and desisted in an attempt to understand this phenomenon from their perspective. The study examined the following two key areas of inquiry: 1) how satisfied are women with their relationships and what elements are important to them in determining relationship satisfaction, and 2) how do women who stay in relationships where violence has occurred understand changes in the violence and what impact does the meaning they make of these changes have on their current relationship satisfaction. A total of 15 women participated in the study. Women reported a wide range of relationship satisfaction. In assessing their relationship satisfaction, they identified factors commonly identified in existing literature on relationship satisfaction such as trust, good communication, closeness, support, and respect, but also emphasized the importance of relationship security and stability. The findings suggested a process in which perceptions of past violence shaped perceptions of changes in the relationship that further shaped the narratives the women chose to tell about their relationship satisfaction. Women who reported greater satisfaction perceived their relationships as aligning more closely to a dominant narrative of being in a changed relationship. This narrative included a) the presence of at least one pivotal turning point in the relationship that helped establish a sense of increased safety in the relationship, and b) a resolution of the causes that women identified as contributing to the occurrence of violence. Dominant social discourses on love were employed to help bolster relationship satisfaction through processes of minimization, denial, self-silencing, justification, and romanticizing. Findings suggest that women's perceptions of violence are pivotal in understanding relationship satisfaction in this population.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) against women has increasingly been recognized as a widespread societal problem requiring intervention, but to date, no clear consensus as to how to define it has been reached (Nicolaidis & Paranjape, 2009). According to Nicolaidis and Paranjape (2009), while different types of behaviours such as sexual assault or coercion, threats of violence, emotional abuse, coercive control, and stalking are sometimes included in different definitions of IPV, acts of physical aggression are included in almost all definitions of IPV. Recent literature on the nature of IPV suggests that IPV is a more heterogeneous construct than first believed (Johnson, 1995) and that in some couples who experience IPV, physical violence desists (Bowker, 1983; Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998; Horton & Johnson, 1993; Wuest & Merrit-Gray, 2008). Desistance of violence is defined in this study as the cessation of physically aggression for a period of time of at least one year (Feld & Straus, 1989). It is important to note that the term desistance of violence is not meant to be interpreted as being synonymous with the permanent cessation of violence.

With the acknowledgement that IPV does not impact all couples the same has come the expansion of research into IPV populations that have not previously received a great deal of attention. This study explored one such population. Specifically, women who have in the past experienced violence in heterosexual relationships, the relationship has remained intact, and currently there is a desistance of violence were studied. The study sought to learn more about how these women understand previous violence and its desistance and how this understanding impacts their perceptions of their current relationships, particularly with regards to relationship

satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction is thought to reflect relationship happiness and functioning (Zainah, Nasir, Hashim, & Yusof, 2012).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To help situate the scope of the problem of IPV as a social concern, a brief review of IPV in terms of its prevalence and impact is presented. Next, in order to explore possible reasons why so little is known about this population of women, a history of the research on the trajectory of IPV is reviewed. This includes a discussion of existing research evidence that male perpetrated physical violence in a relationship can desist (at least for some period of time) and what is currently known about relationships that remain intact following violence. In addition, a review of the literature on how women's relationship satisfaction is impacted by the desistance of violence is presented. The literature review concludes with the argument that a greater understanding of how women perceive the impact of their past experiences of violence on their present relationship satisfaction is necessary if, as a society, we are going to meet the needs of this unique population of women who have experienced IPV.

Review of the Impact of IPV on Women

A recently published report by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) found that worldwide, almost one third (30%) of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Furthermore, it is estimated that in the United States physical aggression occurs in approximately half of all new marriages (Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001, Leonard & Senchak, 1996; O'Leary et al., 1989) and that over half of American couples experience one or more incidents of physical aggression between partners during the course of a marriage (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). In Canada, of the approximately 90,000 people who reported to the police in 2013 that they were victims of IPV, women accounted for nearly 80% of reported IPV victims (Statistics Canada, 2013). In addition, the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS; Statistics Canada, 2016) reported that 4.4% of Canadian women surveyed reported they had experienced

IPV within the past year (0.8% within in their current relationship), while 19.1% of Canadian women self-reported experiencing IPV in the past five years (1.8% within their current relationship). Taken together these statistics suggest that IPV is present or has occurred in the past in a significant number of Canadian women's relationships. In addition, although the results of the 2014 GSS found that the rates of men and women reporting being victims of IPV were approximately equal (3.9% men, 4.4% women), it is important to note that research suggests that the impact of IPV on men and women is not equal, with women being more likely to be terrorized, injured, or killed (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Crandall, Nathens, Kernic, Holt, & Rivera, 2004; Kellermann & Mercy, 1992; Puzone, Saltzman, Kresnow, Thompson, & Mercy, 2000).

The data on the prevalence of IPV in women's relationships is particularly disturbing when viewed together with the growing body of research literature documenting the negative impact of IPV on women's mental and physical health (Bonomi et al., 2009; Campbell, 2002; Jordan, Campbell, & Follingstad, 2010; Vos et al., 2006). The negative impact of IPV on women's health is so severe that one Australian study (Vos et al., 2006) estimated that IPV accounted for 2.9% of the total disease and injury burden of women in Australia and as such was a larger risk factor to the health of women than some other well-documented risk factors such as high blood pressure, tobacco use, and obesity. In terms of specific health consequences, one review (Campbell, 2002) found increased incidence of the following health problems: physical injury, chronic pain, gastrointestinal problems, gynecological problems, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. A more recent review of the impact of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse on women's mental health found increased rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and other anxiety disorders, depression, substance use disorders, and low self-esteem in women who have experienced these forms of abuse (Jordan et al., 2010).

Even more disturbing and relevant to the population of women represented by this study is research indicating that the negative impact of interpersonal violence (including male partner physical/sexual or psychological violence) on women's mental health remains heightened even after women report the desistance of violence in their lives (Romito, Turan, & Marchi, 2005). Romito et al. (2005) found that women who reported past interpersonal violence, but no current IPV, were three times more likely to report psychological distress than women who reported no past experiences of interpersonal violence and no current IPV. Nur (2015) also found that women who had experienced intimate partner physical and sexual violence in the past, but not in the past 12 months were more likely to report psychological distress. The study found that women reporting past physical violence were 1.87 times more likely to report mental distress and women reporting sexual violence were 1.43 times more likely to report mental distress. Based on these findings, Nur (2015) has suggested that effects of IPV on mental health are long term.

The Trajectory of IPV

The history of research on the trajectory of IPV. Research has increasingly supported the idea that IPV is a more nuanced phenomenon than researchers had theorized in the past (Johnson, 1995). This perhaps is not that surprising given that until the 1970s, when the feminist movement brought about a greater awareness of IPV as a significant societal problem, very little scientific research in this area had been conducted (Nicolaidis & Paranjape, 2009). With the identification of a need for IPV interventions, researchers from different perspectives began to investigate IPV. According to Nicolaidis and Paranjape (2009), much of the early research on IPV was conducted by either feminist researchers or by family violence researchers, with researchers from the two perspectives not only conceptualizing IPV differently but also studying different populations and employing different data collection methodologies.

Research on "clinical" samples. Early feminist researchers conceptualized the problem of IPV as being rooted in the patriarchal structure of the family and society, analyzing IPV in terms of power and control, with emphasis on the effect of culturally constructed gender categories and the power struggles inherent in such constructions (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1979, 1984). In this conceptualization of IPV, women were viewed as victims (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). As such, most of the early research from this perspective employed "clinical" samples that represented criminal justice and shelter-seeking populations (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Walker, 1979, 1984). The majority of the studies conducted on clinical samples found evidence of clear gender asymmetry in terms of more men being arrested than women for the perpetration of IPV and more women than men seeking victim services such as shelters (Pagelow, 1981; Walker, 1979).

In terms of the trajectory of violence, studies based on clinical samples supported the position that once violence has started in a relationship, not only will it continue, but it will increase in frequency and intensity until the woman is seriously injured or killed (Pagelow, 1981). This trajectory is highlighted particularly well in Walker's (1984) Cycle Theory of Violence that views IPV as a recurring cycle consisting of three phases: the tension building phase, the acute battering incident phase, and the kindness and contrite loving behaviour phase. Although Walker herself discussed the possibility of addressing and stopping violence within an intact relationship through couples therapy (Walker, 1984), it appears that more focus has been placed on viewing the Cycle Theory of Violence as repeatedly cycling until the woman either leaves or becomes so entrenched in the cycle that she may enter a state of learned helplessness. At this point she may require help to remove herself from the cycle of violence. Based on this trajectory, many researchers came to believe that once violence began in a relationship, the

probability of ending violence without terminating the relationship was quite low. This belief is captured in the following statement by Ferraro (1988):

> Unfortunately, there is little information on couples who have resolved the issue of violence in their relationship. Researchers in the field and service providers are unable to produce more than one or two cases, at most, in which violence has ceased, once begun. (p. 137)

This belief in turn shaped interventions for IPV that have traditionally focused on ending the violence by assisting women in terminating their violent relationships through the use of shelters, legal measures, and advocacy programs (Peled, Eisikovits, Enosh, & Winstok, 2000).

Research on community-based samples. In contrast to the feminist perspective, the family violence perspective grew from an interest in family conflict issues that led researchers such as Straus (1971) and Gelles (1974) to investigate IPV. Family conflict theory views IPV as resulting from escalating conflicts within the family (Straus & Gelles, 1988). The focus of research from this perspective has been on studying commonalities amongst the various forms of family violence such as the frequency of violence within the family, the role of stress in instigating violence, and public acceptance of the use of violence within the family context. This perspective led to research on IPV being conducted by employing quantitative analysis of large random community-based samples rather than on clinical samples. When studies are conducted using community sample surveys, regardless of the theoretical perspective employed, results tend to dispute the notion that the trajectory of IPV is a continuous path of escalating violence for the vast majority of cases (Feld & Straus, 1989; Johnson, 1995; Holly Johnson, 1995; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Woffordt, Mihalic, & Menard, 1994).

Some of the first community-based studies to dispute the notion that once IPV was

present in a relationship it would escalate were based on the results of the National Family Violence Surveys (NFVS). In 1975 and 1985 Straus and Gelles (1990) joined forces to conduct national surveys on family violence (including "wife abuse") in the United States. The NFVS consisted of telephone interviews using a random digit dialing method to recruit participants. In these surveys, minor violence was defined as behaviours such as slapping, shoving, and throwing things at a partner while severe violence was defined as behaviours such as punching, kicking, and using a weapon (Feld & Straus, 1989). Feld and Straus' (1989) analysis of the data found after a period of one year that a high rate of desistance of violence was reported even in cases of severe husband perpetrated violence, with the frequency of severe assaults impacting rates of desistance. In the 54 cases reporting one to two severe assaults of their partners in year one of the study, 58% of these men did not engage in any partner assaults, 23% engaged in minor violence, and 19% continued using severe violence in the follow up year. In the 22 cases of frequent perpetration of severe violence (cases reporting three or more severe assaults of their partners in year one of the study), 33% of these men did not engage in any partner assaults, 10% engaged in minor violence, and 57% continued using severe violence in the follow up year. These results suggest that IPV is similar to other forms of deviance and crime in that desistance of violence does occur (Feld & Straus, 1989).

In addition, Michael Johnson's (1995) analysis of the 1985 NFVS's one year follow up data found that of 380 husbands who had reported using violence in the previous year, 94% of the 304 perpetrators of minor violence did not go on to commit acts of severe violence and 70% of the 76 perpetrators of severe violence did not commit acts of severe violence in the following year. Johnson (1995) also concluded that overall the data did not support the theory that violence in most relationships tends to escalate.

Overall, results of a one year follow up study of the 1985 NFVS respondents suggest that so-called "minor" violence against women did not follow a pattern of escalation (Johnson, 1995; Straus & Gelles, 1990) and that most marital violence is transient (Feld & Straus, 1989). However, it should be noted that these conclusions are based on the results of a one-year follow up of participants and should be treated with caution given the possibility that violence may have reoccurred beyond the time line of the study. Furthermore, although the number of respondents reporting either minor or severe male perpetrated violence in the 1985 survey was 766, due to attrition, only 380 of these respondents were successfully resurveyed. Attrition was disproportionately higher for violent couples than for non-violent couples, suggesting a possible attrition bias. Attrition reduced the number of cases in the husband perpetrated severe violence category to only 76 cases, and it can be argued that the small size of this category makes any conclusions drawn from this subsample questionable in terms of generalizability to the population they may or may not represent. Another limitation of the study includes the use of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979), a measure that focuses on the presence of behaviours without examining the context of the situation in which the behaviours occur. As such the CTS does not provide information on whether a behaviour such as shoving your partner is offensive or defensive in nature. Also, given the CTS's focus on assessing behaviours primarily related to physical violence, as opposed to other forms of abusive behaviours such as controlling behaviour, the CTS fails to assess all forms of abusive behaviours (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992). Information gathered by these surveys is therefore limited by the studies' methodology. Nevertheless, despite the limitations of the NFVS studies, it is reasonable to conclude that in at least some relationships, violence is not continual.

In addition to the above NFVS studies, Holly Johnson's (2003) secondary analysis of the

Canadian Violence Against Women Survey implemented by Statistics Canada in 1993 that randomly sampled 12,300 women, also found support for the desistance of violence in some relationships. A total of 1326 women were identified as currently being in a marriage in which there had been at least one incident of violence. Of these women, 929 (70%) reported no incidence of violence in the past 12 months. Results of this study of Canadian women are in keeping with the National Family Violence Surveys (NFVS) conducted in the United States (Feld & Straus, 1989), suggesting that within a one year period of time violence in intimate relationships does not always repeat or escalate. Note that this study has similar limitations to those previously described in the NFVS study.

Another study that investigated the trajectory of IPV in a national sample over a longer period of time also found that that IPV did not always follow a trajectory of continuation. Woffordt and colleagues (1994) conducted a United States national sample of female victims (N = 155) and male offenders (N = 107) over a period of three years. Their findings indicated that approximately one-half of all marital violence over the three year period had been suspended. These results are not supportive of viewing the occurrence of violence as escalating over time and further challenge this notion through its extension of the research follow up period to three years. However, results of the study should be viewed with caution as an attrition analysis indicated statistically significant greater attrition amongst female victims who experienced severe violence in contrast to female victims who experienced minor violence.

Why the disparity amongst research results? One explanation for the disparity between research results may lie in how IPV is defined and measured. Researchers using community samples often use the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979) or the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). As previously discussed, this

measurement instrument focuses on measuring specific behaviours that are perpetrated by both partners and results of studies that use this measure tend to find that the perpetration of IPV occurs by both men and women at similar rates (Archer, 2000). Feminist researchers have disputed these results, arguing that by ignoring the antecedents, intent, and consequences of violent behaviours, the CTS and the CTS2 falsely equate behaviours that are inherently different and gendered (Dobash et al., 1992).

To assess this hypothesis, Johnson (1995) identified a number of IPV shelter agency-based studies that employed the CTS in its research. He found that, in these agency samples, IPV was more frequent, more likely to escalate, more severe, less likely to be mutual, and most often perpetrated solely by men in comparison to findings using national representative samples that also used the CTS. This led Johnson to hypothesize that the disparity between the findings of research on IPV lay not in measurement issues alone, but in the sampling strategies. Johnson (1995) found that research conducted from a feminist perspective was typically based on clinical samples (shelters, hospitals, court systems) while research conducted from a family violence perspective typically was typically based on national or community samples.

Johnson (1995) has suggested that the differences in research findings reflect that rather than being a unitary entity there are different types of IPV that are represented differentially in different types of research samples. These types are based on distinctions in general patterns of seeking control over the course of a relationship and are rooted in the motivation of the perpetrator and his or her partner. Johnson and Ferraro (2000) have described four types of IPV: common couple violence, intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and mutual violent control. Common couple violence, that Johnson (2006) now refers to as situational couple violence, refers to a type of IPV in which individuals can be violent, but are not engaging in an overall

pattern of coercive control of their partners in the relationship, rather the individual is trying to control a specific situation. Their partners in turn may be either violent or nonviolent, but are also not engaging in an overall pattern of coercive control. Situational couple violence involves conflict over a particular issue and is the type of IPV most often associated with bilateral violence (Stith, McCollum, Amanor-Boadu, & Smith, 2012). In intimate terrorism, one partner is violent and engages in a pattern of coercive control of his/her partner while the other partner is neither violent nor controlling (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). In violent resistance, one partner is violent but does not engage in coercive control, and is involved with a partner who is both violent and controlling. The violence in this type of IPV results from either attempts to protect oneself or as an expression of anger or resistance to the partner's coercive control (Stith et al., 2012). Finally, in mutual violent control, both partners are violent and attempting to coercively control each other (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000).

Johnson (2006) has argued that situational couple violence is the dominant pattern of IPV in community surveys, while intimate terrorism and violent resistance are the dominant pattern of IPV in agency samples. This argument is supported by research that has found that victims of intimate terrorism are more likely to seek formal help than victims of situational common violence (Leone, Johnson, & Cohan, 2007). Since Johnson (1995) published his hypothesis that different types of IPV exist, there has been a growing consensus amongst many researchers that IPV is not a unitary phenomenon (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Lanhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010). Johnson has further argued that situational couple violence, in comparison to intimate violence, is not as likely to escalate over time (Johnson, 2000)

However, contrary to Johnson's (2006) hypothesis, it should be noted that at least one study employing a clinical sample found that not all women who remained in abusive

relationships experienced physical violence (Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2007). This study on the implications of women leaving or staying in their abusive relationships compared women's experiences of violence over a one year period beginning when they left a women's shelter. The study compared women who separated from their male partners completely after leaving shelter and women who returned and remained with their male partners for the entire period of the study and found that there were no significant differences in their experiences of physical violence, with only 16% of the women who remained with their partners reporting the occurrence of violence. Unfortunately this was not true of psychological abuse. The odds of experiencing psychological abuse for women who remained with their partners for the length of the study were significantly higher than the odds of women who completely separated from their abusive partner, with 55% of the women who remained with their partners reporting psychological abuse. This indicates that even though the physical violence may have ended for the majority of the women who remained with their partners, other forms of abuse often continued. It also found that women who were fluid in terms of reporting being in and out of the relationship at different times throughout the year, in comparison to the two other groups of women in the study, experienced significantly more violence. This study supports the idea that even within a clinical sample of women, some women are able to establish physical safety while remaining with their partners (Bell et al., 2007). However, the study does raise concerns that the desistance of physical violence in itself does not equate to women living in abuse free relationships and that the quality of these relationships may remain an issue.

Summary. In summation, there is a growing body of research that suggests that violence can desist within the context of an intact relationship and that IPV does not always follow a trajectory of increasing frequency and severity. However, it remains unclear if these findings

apply only to couples experiencing certain patterns of IPV or to all types of couples as opposed to just heterosexual couples. It is also unclear what percentage of violent relationships are able to achieve this result, if the desistance of violence in these relationships remains permanently or not, and to what extent other forms of abuse may continue after physical violence desists. Although greater clarity with regards to these issues is clearly needed, it does seem reasonable to question the assumption that violence always continues.

Impact of assuming a fixed trajectory of IPV on research, services, and social discourses.

The assumption that IPV is a homogenous phenomenon involving a pervasive pattern of power and control in which the frequency and intensity of violence increases has impacted research, intervention and social discourse on IPV.

Research. It appears that most research regarding women's experiences of violence has focused primarily on issues relevant to the study of IPV as a phenomenon that, once begun, persists until the relationship is terminated. Although research on women's experiences of IPV that follows this trajectory is important work, research on other groups of women who are or have experienced IPV differently has been neglected. In particular, research on how to meet the needs of women who are in a relationship where there has been a history of violence, but no current violence, has been neglected. Peled and colleagues (Peled et al., 2000) have noted the following:

> Thus far, little professional energy has been devoted to the study of relationships that have remained intact through violence and have successfully brought about its cessation, nor has attention been given to the ways in which women have managed to free themselves of the abuse without terminating the relationship.... Furthermore, only a few

> existing intervention models have been designed to support women who wish to end the violence while staying with their abusive partner. (p. 13)

Although, Peled and colleagues published this statement in 2000, a review of the extant research by this writer on research as to how to meet the needs of women in relationships with a history of past violence suggests that research in this area is still lacking.

This lack of research appears remiss given that research suggests that most victims of IPV stay or leave and return to their abusive partners (Lerner & Kennedy, 2000). One review study estimated that between 18 and 74% of women who left a violent relationship returned (Strube, 1988). Based on their review of previous studies, Peled and colleagues (2000) have speculated that 50 to 60% of battered women return to live with their abusers after leaving domestic violence shelters. These researchers, while recognizing that a woman's choice to remain in an abusive relationship is often limited by situational constraints, note that the decision to stay or leave an abusive relationship is the prerogative of that woman. They acknowledge that for the women who choose to stay there exists a troubling gap between recognizing the right of a battered woman to choose to remain in the relationship and the availability of coordinated institutional support for her decision.

Services. Lack of institutional support for women who remain in relationships where there has been past violence may be due in part to the fact that many services for IPV operate on the belief that freedom from violence is best ensured by terminating the relationship (Peled et al., 2000). However, as discussed previously, there is considerable disagreement amongst IPV researchers with regards to the trajectory of violence in relationships, with some researchers suggesting that not all cases of IPV are characterized by escalating violence (Johnson, 1995; Straus & Gelles, 1990). Regardless, as recently as 2000, only a few intervention models had been

designed to support women who wish the violence in their relationships to end while remaining in the relationship with their abusive partner (Peled et al., 2000). Furthermore, this lack of alternative service options can lead these women to feel stigmatized and unsupported. The lack of serious consideration given to the development of a full continuum of services for all women experiencing IPV regardless of whether they choose to leave or remain in their relationships has been questioned as paternalistic by some researchers (Yoshioka & Choi, 2005).

Social discourses. In addition, the idea that IPV interventions require the woman to terminate her relationship appears to have led to be a widespread belief amongst the general public that once IPV has begun, it will persist until the termination of the relationship. For example, results of the New Jersey Public Opinion Survey Regarding Domestic Violence (Irving Crespi & Associates, 1987) indicate that the public sees IPV as a reoccurring event. In response to the survey question "which do you think is more likely to be the case with domestic violence – that it is something that repeatedly happens between two people, or, that it is an isolated incident that will pass over?" 83% of respondents said that it "repeatedly happens." A more recent public opinion survey that questioned 1,200 residents of New York state also found that the majority of respondents agreed (slightly over half agreed and approximately 20% disagreed) with statements that characterized violence as escalating and unchanging (Worden & Carlson, 2005). In short, the results of both surveys appear to suggest that the accepted dominant discourse on IPV is that once violence occurs in a relationship then the violence continues.

Nettleton (2011), in her research that explored how IPV is portrayed in men's and women's magazines, found that one of the central themes of IPV representation in such media is that there is only one way to prevent domestic violence and that is to separate victims from their abusers and the responsibility for doing so lies with the victim. She argues that in creating such a

strong social discourse that women in violent relationships must leave, there is a lack of representation of other viable options and "no narratives offer[ing] resistance to the popular canon that women must leave" (p. 154) are represented in the media.

Loseke and Cahill (1984) have argued that this homogenization of viable responses to IPV has led to the stigmatization of women who stay in relationships where there has been violence. They argue that the act of staying in a violent relationship has come to be portrayed as "unreasonable, normatively unexpected and therefore deviant" (Loseke & Cahill, 1984, p. 298). Once IPV has occurred in a relationship, in order to escape being labelled as deviant, women staying in such a relationship require a suitable explanation to justify not leaving. This onus on "requiring" a suitable explanation as to why women stay in violent relationships has been criticized as leading to possible victim blaming and secondary victimization (Eisikovits, Buchbinder, & Mor, 1989). The implication is that women in relationships in which there has been violence have only two options: to stay and accept further violence and disempowerment or to leave and become empowered.

Furthermore, Peled et al. (2000) have noted that the explanations given as to why women stay tend to be based primarily on the defense that these women become entrapped in their relationships and are powerless to leave. These explanations have led to these women being "characterized as incompetent, weak, and lacking in coping skills, which further engulf them in the victim role and contribute to their powerlessness" (Peled et al., 2000, p. 9). In a society that labels women experiencing violence as either victims or survivors and as either empowered agents or passive objects (Reich, 2002), women who stay in their relationships become designated as perpetual victims which contributes to their stigmatization. This is despite research that has found that women who remain in violent relationships are not atypical of women in

general in terms of psychopathogy, with researchers often finding that the majority of these women are not antisocial or masochistic (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Therefore, it appears that the stigmatization of these women is based on what is seen as their lack of appropriate social response to IPV, which according to Nettleton's review of women's magazines is to "abandon her life and flee" (2011, p. 148) before the violence escalates and it is "too late" (2011, p. 148).

In addition, if the threat of dire consequences to staying in a relationship where violence has occurred and the stigma of not heeding its warning is not enough to convince women to leave, there has also been a trend by both media and researchers to dichotomize love and abuse in such a way as to argue that the two cannot coexist (Fraser, 2003). This idea can be found in several IPV awareness campaigns that extol the idea that "if he really loved you he wouldn't hurt you." For example, one popular website posts the following advice to people in a violent relationship:

> In that situation, it's only a matter of time you will be hurt severely and the next and the final step will be death. Don't believe when he tells you how sorry he is after he hurts you. Don't believe when he tells you how much he loves you and doesn't want to hurt you anymore" (Wikihow.com, 2015).

Fraser (2003) has argued that this love/abuse polarization has led to the creation of popular discourses about love and abuse that oversimplify relationships and lead to labelling of relationships as "normal/abnormal" (p. 276). This oversimplification can lead to the de-legitimization of relationships that transgress from the conventions inherent in these discourses as well as leading to the underestimation of the possibility of abuse in relationships as women are led to believe that relationships based on love are supposed to produce "lasting happiness" (Fraser, 2003, p. 276) free of violence. Therefore, through the rhetoric of these discourses on

love and abuse, women who stay in violent relationships are judged as being involved in a loveless relationship, and in doing so these women face further stigmatization.

Women's Experiences of Relationships in which Violence has Desisted

Given the controversy surrounding the existence of this population and the stigmatization attached to women who stay in relationships where violence has occurred, it is not surprising that little is currently known about the relationship experiences of this population. The majority of studies on the topic of desistance of violence within intact relationships tend to focus on male perspectives (for a review of qualitative work with men see Sheehan, Thakor, & Stewart, 2012). However, there is a small body of research that has looked at desistance of violence within a relationship from a woman's perspective. The four studies that were found that explored the process by which violence desists within an intact relationship from a woman's perspective are reviewed.

Study 1. In the Milwaukee Study (Bowker, 1983), 146 women who had been assaulted at least once by a marital partner and reported a desistance of relationship violence for at least one year after they were last assaulted were interviewed. This study found that the women engaged in a number of processes that were intended to resist relationship violence. The participants rated the success of these processes. Processes included talking with their partner (rated as fairly successful in 32% of the cases), gaining promises from their partners to end violence (rated as fairly successful in 5% of the cases), making threats (rated as very successful in 3% and fairly successful in 67% of the cases), hiding (rated as very successful in 2% and fairly successful in 56% of the cases), passively defending themselves (rated as fairly successful in 1% of the cases), engaging in aggressive defence techniques (rated as very successful in 2% and fairly successful in 40% of the cases), and avoidance of their partner and /or arguments with their husband (rated

as fairly successful in 61% of the cases). Other actions undertaken by the women included seeking help from both informal and formal help sources. Bowker (1983) found the success of these help-seeking tactics was more likely in relationships where the violence was less severe, shorter in duration, and where minimal power imbalances existed between the two partners.

However, Bowker (1983), in summarizing the results of "what works best overall" to resist violence, argued that it is not what is done so much as how it is done, stating:

> Perhaps the best way to summarize these results is to say that almost any strategy or help-source can ultimately work. The crucial factor is not always the nature of the strategy or help-source; what really matters is the woman's showing her determination that the violence must stop now. Once the batterers in the Milwaukee study became convinced of their wives' determination to end the violence, they usually reassessed their position in the marriage and decided to reform. Of course, this is only true for those husbands who value their marriages and wish to continue them. (p. 131)

In this statement, Bowker (1983) alluded to the need to explore the issue of not just what the women did, but also the attitude taken by the women, noting that some important transformative process appeared to have occurred in the women. However, no details on this transformative process are given, nor does the study appear to acknowledge the limitations of having the women report retrospectively on their actions that may or may not have impacted their partners' decisions to end the violence (no corroborating evidence from the male partners was collected). Most problematic is the fact that Bowker seems to imply that women, by engaging in these processes with enough determination, can control whether their partners will be violent or not as long as their partner cares for them. The author does not appear to acknowledge the number of women who may have engaged in the same process with no effect on their partner's violent

behaviour regardless of whether their partner cared for them, as the women's actions, while self-protective, do not equate to having the power to end their partner's use of violence in their relationships. Finally, the study does not provide any information on how the women viewed the quality of their relationships post-violence.

Study 2. Another study, a qualitative longitudinal study, followed 32 women over a period of two and a half years as the women engaged in decision-making processes in attempts to cope and resist the presence of male partner IPV in their relationships (Campbell et al., 1998). At the time of recruitment, all the women reported being in a monogamous relationship in which there had been more than one instance of minor violence or at least one incident of major violence or forced sex perpetrated by her partner within a context of coercive control. At the time of the initial interview, 25 women described themselves as still being in the relationship, two women reported being out of the relationship, and five women reported neither being in or out of their relationship, but rather that their relationship status was more fluid. This "fluidity of the relationship status" (Campbell et al., 1998, p. 748) described women who were actively engaged in the process of leaving by either emotionally distancing themselves from the relationship or by physically leaving but maintaining an emotional and/or sexual attachment to their partner. The women were interviewed on three separate occasions during the course of the study in regards to their relationship status and the presence of abuse.

The authors (Campbell et al., 1998) identified that most of the women in the study initiated a process of trying to resist the violence rather than terminating the relationship immediately. This process of resisting the violence was non-linear in which the women described going back and forth in the relationship by not only physically leaving and returning, but also in how they felt and thought about their relationships. Elements of this process included responding

to turning points (including both significant actual events and cognitive events such as experiencing a shift in thinking), negotiating, and using a number of different active problem solving strategies to improve the relationship and decrease violence. A turning point was defined as a specific incident or process that was seen as pivotal to how the relationship was viewed by the woman, or affected how the woman viewed herself or influenced her decision to remain in the relationship. Examples included becoming violent, gaining financial independence, partner infidelity, escalation of abuse, self-defining as being abused, and child related concerns. Negotiating included both tactics of negotiating internally with one's self and externally with the abuser. Problem solving strategies included calling the police, seeking advice or help from others, fighting back or hitting first, leaving, taking financial actions, self-talk, acts of finality such as filing for divorce, avoiding or hiding, and subordinating self.

The researchers (Campbell et al., 1998) noted that the strategies employed by the women to try to resist the violence were used with varying degrees of success. At the end of the study three quarters of the women were no longer experiencing violence, with 43.8% experiencing no violence or emotional abuse and 32% reporting no violence, but still experiencing emotional abuse. Unfortunately, this study does not identify the relative success of the various strategies employed by the women. Most significant to this study was the researchers' report that of the six women who remained in their relationship during the entire period of the study, three of the women remained free of all forms of abuse for almost four years. However, the researchers provide no insight as to how these three women perceived the quality of their relationships.

Study 3. A third study by Horton and Johnson (1993), on post-abuse survivors of physical abuse, explored the personal and abuse profiles of survivors and the strategies they employed to resist their partner's violence. The researchers asked 185 self-identified post-abuse

survivors, recruited by public service announcements, to complete a questionnaire that contained both forced-choice and open-ended questions. All participants reported experiencing violence more than once in their spousal relationship and that there had been no violence for at least one year. Of the 185 survivors, 182 were women. Results of the study found that 85.4% of the survivors left their abusive partners, 5.9% stayed with their partner but were "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with the relationship, and 8.6% remained in the relationship and reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied."

In comparing the two groups of survivors who remained with their partners, the study found that dissatisfied survivors tended to be older, had more children, had fewer job opportunities, and had experienced less physical abuse than the satisfied survivors. Dissatisfied survivors as a group also reported higher rates of having been abused as a child and being forced to have sex in their relationships. Satisfied survivors reported greater use of resources such as personal and community resources, legal resources, and professional resources. Satisfied survivors also reported their partners as engaging in greater use of drug and alcohol treatment services.

Although this study suffers from several methodological limitations, including not assessing for the presence of on-going forced sex or psychological aggression as indicators of on-going abuse, it does support the idea that, in a minority of violent relationships, violence can stop. More importantly, the study also addressed issues of how the women who remained in their relationships perceived their relationships, suggesting that the quality of relationships post-violence varies as does women's satisfaction with their relationships.

Study 4. Finally, one study was found that specifically undertook to generate a theoretical understanding of how IPV desists in a relationship based on women's perspectives

(Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2008). This qualitative, and notably, Canadian study, employing a feminist grounded theory approach, interviewed a community convenience sample of 27 women living in post-violent relationships in which the time since the last incident of violence ranged from 0.25 to 28 years. Although not explicitly stated, all the women's relationships appear to have been heterosexual. Based on the interviews, the authors generated a theory of "shifting the pattern of abusive control" (p. 281) to explain the process of how a relationship becomes non-violent from a woman's perspective. Within the process, the authors describe three sub-processes: counteracting abuse, taking control, and living differently. The authors note that the first two sub-processes are very similar to the processes that women who leave abusive relationships go through, with the differences relating not to the women's processes, but to how their partners responded to the processes set in motion by the women. The last sub-process of living differently is unique to post-violent relationships and reflects a continuum of quality in regards to the level of intimacy in the relationship. Each sub-process will be further described.

Counteracting abuse. According to Wuest and Merrit-Gray (2008), shifting the pattern of abusive control begins with the sub-process of counteracting abuse. It involves three micro-processes that allow women to "survive day-to-day in the context of abuse while exploring ways to change, avoid, and/escape his oppressive behaviour" (p. 284). The first micro-process of counteracting abuse is minimizing. Minimizing refers to any methods used to reduce the intensity and frequency of abuse and includes behaviours such as doing what the abuser wants, being careful, and fighting back. The authors note that minimizing abuse by "doing what the abuser wants" is similar to the problem solving strategy of "subordinating self" that was described in the Campbell et al. (1998) study. However, Wuest and Merrit-Gray note that if this tactic does not result in relationship improvement, then relationship dissatisfaction increases. In

terms of the minimizing tactic of being careful, the authors further note that even if being careful not to upset her partner results in the woman experiencing fewer attacks, being careful is limited in that it does not function to improve the relationship. The last tactic of minimizing is fighting back and it includes a number of different behaviours ranging from verbally resisting, to physically resisting, to calling on outside sources such as the justice system or the family to stop the abuser.

Fortifying was identified as the second micro-process of counteracting abuse. Fortifying reflects ways that women work to improve their lives while living with abuse. It involves behaviours such as opening up about the abuse they are experiencing to family, friends, and/or professionals, seeking comfort in individual or community activities, and becoming more engaged in work, school, or community. The consequences of engaging in such behaviours can lead to women developing new capacities that can lead to a re-evaluation of their situation.

This leads to the third micro-process of countering abuse, that of breaking free. Here women are actively considering their options and beginning to disengage from their relationship. Disengagement may be emotional, physical, or both. By disengaging, women become familiar with the consequences of terminating their relationship and this knowledge can help them move to the second sub-process of shifting the pattern of abusive control.

Taking control. The second sub-process of shifting the pattern of abusive control is taking control, where the relationship itself is targeted for change, as opposed to the sub-process of counteracting abuse where only abusive behaviour in the relationship is targeted. Taking control involves three micro-processes: limiting, building personal power, and renegotiating the relationship. Interestingly, the sub-process of taking control was recognized by the women as being potentially dangerous by increasing their risk of abuse.

The first micro-process, limiting, involves the women setting and enforcing boundaries with their partners. Methods employed include tactics such as threatening (using threats to exert pressure on the partner to change), asserting (letting the partner know that his behaviours are not effective in achieving the effect he desires), and physically separating.

The second micro-process, building personal power, involves extending the gains that are acquired in the fortifying process. This includes gaining new personal capacities and resources via methods such as getting help, boosting competence, and developing new perspectives, which in turn help women feel more competent and autonomous.

The final micro-process, renegotiating the relationship, occurs only after male partners have demonstrated the ability to respect the limits and boundaries that the women have set. Renegotiation of the relationship can be orientated to coexisting, where the emphasis is on how to co-exist peacefully (either living separately or together), or to reinvesting, where the emphasis is on not just ending the violence, but also on improving the overall quality of the relationship. In order for this micro-process to lead to the next sub-process of living differently, the authors noted that the woman must feel secure in terms of physical safety and autonomy.

***Living differently*.** The last sub-process of shifting the pattern of abusive control, living differently, involves the micro-processes of interrupting previous patterns, securing personal power, and reconfiguring the relationship. It represents a continuation and honing of the newly negotiated relationship. This final sub-process requires that both partners remain committed to continuing the relationship.

In the micro-process of interrupting previous patterns the couple establish new ways of interacting based on new expectations of the relationship. In order to do this, vigilant reinforcement is often required by the woman to prevent a return to old patterns of interaction.

Defusing triggers is another method of interrupting patterns that allows couples to develop new ways of dealing with the pressures related with common couples issues such as money management, employment, parenting, daily chores, or extended family.

At the same time that interrupting previous patterns is occurring, the micro-process of securing personal power must also occur for the women. This includes activities such as consolidating their efforts to achieve economic independence, attending to personal growth, and expanding personal networks. Such activities help provide women with options, and therefore choice, in regards to remaining in the relationship.

Finally, the micro-process of reconfiguring the relationship represents not only basing current relationship interactions on the new negotiated standards, but also future ones. This requires some degree of trust, although for women coexisting with their partners, trust may be limited. At this point, regardless if the relationships involve coexisting or reengaging, women report satisfaction with their living situation and do not fear their partner.

Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2008) close their study with a discussion that highlights two points. First, their research suggests that ultimately the success of shifting the pattern of abusive control is dependent on how the abusive partner responds to the women's efforts to establish personal autonomy and altering the balance of control in the relationship. Second, and most significant to this study, the authors highlight that it is not enough to establish the desistance of violence. Altering coercive control is also needed for women to feel that their relationships have improved.

Summary. In summary, few studies have been conducted that look at the process of ending violence in an intact relationship from a women's point of view, with only heterosexual relationships being examined. Only the Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2008) study probed the process

with sufficient depth to reveal the complexities of the process and why different possible relationship outcomes of living in post-violent relationships exist. No studies were found that explored in-depth how women perceive the quality of their relationships after the desistance of violence. Beyond the question of whether or not ending violence in an intact relationship is possible, it is important to examine more nuanced questions regarding the impact of the desistance of violence on women, including their relationship satisfaction.

Relationship Satisfaction and Desistance of Violence

This section deals with the concept of relationship satisfaction and argues that it is important to have an understanding of how women's relationship satisfaction is impacted by the desistance of violence in their relationships. A definition of relationship satisfaction is provided and a review of the literature on relationship satisfaction is presented. This review includes 1) a review of research that supports that relationship satisfaction is important to women in general, 2) a discussion of the major theories on close relationships and how these theories view relationship satisfaction, 3) a review of the research on various factors that are thought to contribute to relationship satisfaction, 4) a review of the research on the relationship between relationship satisfaction and IPV, and finally, 5) a review of the research on how attributions about one's partner, self, relationship (including causal attributions made about IPV), and perceptions of safety impact relationship satisfaction.

Defining relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction, often referred to as marital satisfaction in the research, has received increased research interest over the past few decades (Bertoni & Bodenmann, 2010). Zainah and colleagues (2012) have defined marital satisfaction (relationship satisfaction) as a global evaluation of the state of one's marriage and a reflection of both relationship happiness and functioning. Although this term originally applied to only

married couples, it is now used more generally to indicate relationship quality regardless of marital status or sexual orientation (Graham, Lui, & Jeriorski, 2006) and therefore the term relationship satisfaction will be used for the remainder of this paper.

Why is relationship satisfaction important? Understanding more about relationship satisfaction has become increasingly important as it is thought to contribute to both psychological well-being (Cohen & Willis, 1985; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Rook & Pietromonaco, 1987) and physical well-being (Schuster, Kesskerm & Aseltine, 1990; Taylor, 1995, Umberson & Williams, 2005). It has also been suggested that the study of relationship satisfaction may be particularly salient to women as, in general, women tend to report lower relationship satisfaction than men when surveyed (Rogers & Amato, 2000; Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen & Campbell, 2005). This has led to speculation that women, by experiencing a lower level of relationship satisfaction relative to men over the life course, may be at sustained disadvantage in terms of health over the life course (Umberson et al., 2005). Therefore, increasing relationship satisfaction for women is important.

Theories of close relationships and relationship satisfaction. In order to understand how to increase women's relationship satisfaction, it is necessary to have an understanding of how the different theoretical perspectives of close relationships conceptualize heterosexual relationships and what each perspective proposes as the source of relationship satisfaction. Harvey and Wenzel (2006) have identified four major theoretical perspectives in the field of close relationship study: the evolutionary psychology perspective, the social exchange perspective, the personality/ attachment perspective, and the cognitive-behavioural perspective.

Evolutionary theories. The evolutionary perspective on close relationships is based on the premise that men and women have developed different evolutionary strategies with regards

to mating, with men preferring relationships with women who are youthful and reproductively fertile in order to ensure their best chance of bearing offspring and women preferring men who have the resources to support offspring (Buss, 1988, 1989). From this perspective, relationship satisfaction is considered to be adaptive to the process of mate selection and retention, as evolutionary mechanisms are thought to enable people to gauge the cost and benefits of their relationships and if the cost is greater than the benefit, then the relationship is determined to be not satisfactory (Buss, 1988). In this way, the determination of relationship satisfaction is thought to function to motivate people to either act to improve non-satisfactory relationships or to seek alternative relationships that will be more beneficial (Buss, 1989; Shackelford & Buss, 2000).

Social exchange and equity theories. The social exchange perspective on close relationships is composed of a number of different social exchange and equity approaches (Harvey & Wenzel, 2006). These approaches hold that people operate in ways to maximize their rewards and minimize costs in their relationships (Canary & Stafford, 2001). Research suggests that people who perceive their relationships as equitable report the most relationship satisfaction while people who report the cost of their relationships outweighing the rewards report the lowest relationship satisfaction (Hatfied, Utne, & Traupman, 1997). In addition, Kelley and Thibult's (1978) interdependence theory states that how one evaluates one's relationship outcome is dependent on one's personal standard or expectation of what constitutes an acceptable relationship outcome. This process is known as the comparison level. According to Thibult and Kelly (1978), relationship satisfaction is produced when one's perceived relationship outcome surpasses one's comparison level.

Personality based theories. Personality based perspectives posit that it is individual

differences in various personality traits that account for differences in relationship quality, with one of the most studied constructs being adult attachment style (Harvey & Wenzel, 2006). Adult attachment style proposes that one's way of approaching close relationships is shaped by early attachment experiences with caregivers and can be classified as secure (easily gets close to others and is comfortable depending on others and having others depend on them), anxious-ambivalent (finds that others do not get as close as wanted and worries about their partner not loving them or leaving them), and avoidant (uncomfortable with closeness and/or depending on others) (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Research supports that adult attachment style is predictive of relationship satisfaction for both the individual and his/her partner (Collins & Read, 1990), with secure individuals reporting greater relationship satisfaction than avoidant and/or anxious/ambivalent individuals (Fraley & Shaver, 1999).

***Cognitive behavioural theories*.** The cognitive-behavioural perspective of close relationships posits that the way individuals perceive and interpret events in their relationships impacts both their emotional and behavioural responses (Beck, 1988). Epstein and Baucom (1993) have suggested that beliefs and expectations held by individuals can impact how they view the quality of their relationship. Specifically, Bradbury and Fincham (1990) have suggested that individuals in healthy relationships versus individuals in distressed relationships make different causal attributions about relationship events. Individuals in healthy relationships attribute positive relationship events to internal, global, and stable aspects of their partner's character in contrast to individuals in distressed relationships who tend to attribute positive relationship events to external, specific, and unstable factors. The opposite pattern of causal attributions is true for negative relationship events. Bradbury and Fincham (1990) have also noted that in addition to causal attributions, individuals also make responsibility attributions that

focus on an individual's accountability for relationship events. Both causal and responsibility attributions have been found to predict relationship satisfaction with negative attributions predicting lower relationship satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1993).

According to Luo, Zhang, Watson, and Snider's (2010) review of research on relationship attributions, there is currently considerable research supporting the presence of a strong positive association between holding a positive perception of one's partner and increased relationship satisfaction. For example, Neff and Karney (2005) have found that individuals who perceive their partner positively in global terms report greater satisfaction with their relationship. This finding appears to be true regardless of whether or not one's perceptions are accurate. Research has also found that partners routinely produce positively biased perceptions of their partners and such biased perceptions are linked to increased relationship satisfaction (Luo & Snider, 2009; Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 1996). It has been speculated that these positively biased perceptions may be adaptive in helping partners strengthen their belief that they are with the 'right' partner, as well as "seeing their partners' faults in the best possible light, which may provide intimates with the security and optimism necessary to confront difficulties in their relationship" (Murray et al., 1996, p. 96).

Factors that contribute to relationship satisfaction. According to Harvey and Wenzel (2006), while no one perspective on relationship closeness offers a comprehensive rationale for why some heterosexual relationships are satisfying and others are not, taken together these perspectives have generated numerous theories that provide insights into how biological, dyadic, familial, and societal factors contribute to relationship satisfaction. This has led to researchers trying to identify factors important in determining relationship satisfaction. For example, one study that investigated 57 couples listed the following essential ingredients as being present in

satisfying marriages: commitment, mutual trust, respect, support, intrapersonal fidelity and integrity, loyalty, reciprocity, accountability, love, sense of belonging, personal development, good communication skills, good problem solving skills, flexibility, cooperation, equitable power distribution, shared leadership, joint decision making, compromise, creativity in handing differences, shared values, and fun and friendship (Kaslow & Robison, 1996). Another study that surveyed 50,376 married couples identified the following five categories to be of the greatest importance in happy marriages: communication, couple closeness, couple flexibility, personality compatibility, and conflict resolution (Olson, Olson-Sigg, & Larson, 2008).

As opposed to identifying factors present in satisfying relationships, other researchers using systematic observations have noted that three interactional patterns (defensiveness, stubbornness, and withdrawal) lead to deterioration of relationship satisfaction over time (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Gottman (2002) currently lists four negative interactional patterns (criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling) and refers to these patterns as the "four horsemen of the Apocalypse" in terms of their presence being predictive of relationship dissatisfaction and dissolution. Criticism is defined as voicing negative opinions about your spouse's character or personality. Defensiveness refers to making excuses or blaming your partner for your actions or lack of actions. Contempt is characterized by sarcasm, cynicism, name calling, eye-rolling, sneering, mockery, and hostile humour. Stonewalling is when someone disengages from their partner by not responding to what they say, avoiding eye contact, etc. The power of these interactional patterns to predict divorce has led to the idea that relationship satisfaction is not just determined by positive dimensions (e.g., love, affection, positive attitudes) but also by negative dimensions (e.g., conflicts and negative attitudes) and that happy couples display a ratio of positive to negative interactions of 5:1 (Gottman, 1994). Bertoni

and Bodenmann (2010) also have found that satisfied couples in comparison to dissatisfied couples report more positive and less negative dimensions in their relationships as well as a much higher ratio between positive and negative dimensions. In addition, this study found that satisfied couples had more appropriate conflict styles in that they engaged more in compromise and less in violence, avoidance, and attempts to offend their partners during conflict.

Relationship satisfaction and IPV. In general, research supports that a significant and negative relationship exists between relationship satisfaction and the perpetration of physical violence (Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward, & Tritt, 2004; Stith, Green, Smith, & Ward, 2008), and that relationship dysfunction increases with increases in aggressiveness (Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001). However, what has been less clear is whether IPV precedes reductions in relationship satisfaction or if reductions in martial satisfaction precede perpetration of IPV. Recently, Lawrence and Bradbury (2007) conducted a longitudinal study on IPV and concluded that the perpetration of IPV is generally the antecedent of reduced relationship satisfaction. Other researchers maintain that the relationship between reduced relationship satisfaction (relationship distress) and IPV is bidirectional with both factors influencing each other (Rehman, Holtzworth-Munroe, Herron, & Clements, 2009).

In addition, it has been suggested that various dimensions of IPV such as gender of the victim and perpetrator may affect relationship satisfaction in heterosexual couples (Stith et al., 2008). For example, one meta-analysis of 32 studies looked at the relationship between relationship satisfaction and IPV and found that there was a significant negative relationship between IPV perpetration and relationship satisfaction for both men and women who perpetrated IPV, with the relationship being stronger for men than for women (Stith et al., 2008). There was also a significant negative relationship between victimization and relationship satisfaction for

both male and female victims with the relationship being stronger for women. Also, in comparing the individual's role (perpetrator versus victim), the study found that the negative relationship between relationship satisfaction and IPV was significantly stronger for victims than for perpetrators regardless of gender (Stith et al., 2008).

While the Stith et al. (2008) study provides important findings about IPV and relationship satisfaction, it should be noted that these findings are not unequivocal. For example, one study (Williams & Frieze, 2005) found that some participants reported being satisfied with their relationships despite the presence of violence in their relationship regardless of gender, mutuality, and severity. This finding suggests that for a small minority of individuals, violence may have little impact on relationship satisfaction. These authors speculated that this finding might be due to various reasons including individual personality variables such as a high need for thrill-seeking, relationship variables such as the presence of high levels of passion in which violence is only one aspect of how passion is expressed, with other aspects being expressed more positively, or other dimensions of IPV that are were not explored in their study (Williams & Frieze, 2005).

Relationship satisfaction in relationships where violence has desisted. Although Stith et al.'s (2008) study did not look at the relationship between relationship satisfaction and IPV in relationships where IPV has desisted, it is possible that the variables identified in their study (gender and role in IPV), as well as other variables such as severity and frequency of violence, may impact relationship satisfaction after violence desists. In order to explore the link between women's relationship satisfaction and IPV desistance, a review of IPV interventions that measured violence desistance and relationship satisfaction as post-treatment outcome measures was conducted. This area of research is where most of what is known about relationship

satisfaction after the desistance of violence is found. However, given that the majority of these interventions are couples therapy studies, it is possible that these couples by nature of seeking therapeutic intervention in their relationships are lower in relationship satisfaction than other couples experiencing IPV. Therefore it is unclear if these findings are generalizable to non-clinical samples. Furthermore, given that the studies included in this review of relationship satisfaction in relationships where violence has desisted only included heterosexual couples, it is unclear if these findings are generalizable to other types of couples such as same sex couples.

Increased relationship satisfaction has been reported in association with the desistance of violence in the majority of the studies reviewed (Fals-Stewart, Kashdan, O'Farrell, & Birchler, 2002; O'Farrell, Murphy, Stephen, Fals-Stewart, & Murphy, 2004; O'Leary, Heymen, & Neidig, 1999; Stith, Rosen, McCollum, & Thomsen, 2004). For example, Stith, Rosen, McCollum, and Thomsen (2004) conducted a study comparing couples in conjoint therapy, multi-couple group therapy, and a wait list group. At post-treatment, only couples in the multi-couple group showed positive changes in reducing relationship aggression (psychological as well as minor or severe physical aggression). Results of a 6-month follow-up found that only participants in the multi-couple group reported a significant decline in the recidivism rate of male violence and an increase in relationship satisfaction for both partners in comparison to the waitlist group. This study suggests that when significant changes in the reduction of psychological and physical violence occur, relationship satisfaction also increases. However, the study does not delineate if the changes in relationship satisfaction were due to decreases in psychological aggression or decreases in physical aggression or both.

Another study by O'Leary, Heyman, and Niedig (1999) compared the efficacy of couple treatment in increasing relationship satisfaction and reducing IPV with a gender specific

treatment. Results of this study found that at the end of treatment husbands from both treatment groups had significantly reduced their use of psychological aggression, mild physical aggression, and severe physical aggression. This study also found that after treatment, women reported significantly greater relationship satisfaction than pre-treatment, regardless of whether they had been in the couple or the gender specific group. The researchers (O'Leary et al., 1999) further analyzed the relationship between these changes in relationship satisfaction and treatment modality by exploring changes in mild and severe aggression, psychological abuse, dominance/isolation behaviours, and communication problems as covariates. For the couple treatment group, only reduction in communication problems was associated with improvements in the wives' relationship satisfaction. For the gender specific group, only reduction in dominance/isolation behaviours approached a statistically significant association with improvements in the women's relationship satisfaction. It is important to note that in neither treatment group did the changes in mild or severe levels of violence appear to significantly impact the relationship between treatment modality and women's relationship satisfaction. However, it should be noted that with only 22 couples in the couple treatment group and only 15 couples in the GST treatment group completing treatment, it is questionable if the study had sufficient power to detect statistically significant differences.

At one year follow up, the researchers (O'Leary et al., 1999) noted that while sample sizes were too small to replicate their previous analysis of the effects of the afore-mentioned covariates, martial satisfaction was still significantly increased over pre-treatment levels for women in both the couple and gender specific treatment groups. However, it should be noted that the methodology employed in the study used two different relationship satisfaction measures for their pre- and post-measures and then used a conversion formula to convert the one measure's

scores to an equivalency score on the other measure, even though this technique is not recommended for clinical samples (Crane, Allgood, Larson, & Griffin, 1990). Therefore, the study (O'Leary et al., 1999) may not accurately reflect the true rate of change in relationship satisfaction. Nevertheless, this study (O'Leary et al., 1999) suggests that while it may not have been changes in psychological and physical aggression per se that caused relationship satisfaction to increase, the variables did appear related in that decreases in these forms of aggression were found to occur with increases in relationship satisfaction.

An additional factor that has been investigated in the study of the relationship between the desistance of IPV and relationship satisfaction is the presence of substance abuse. A number of studies have been conducted on the effect of Behavioural Couples Therapy (BCT) for treating substance abuse on reducing IPV (Klostermann, Fals-Stewart, Gorman, Kennedy, & Stappenbeck, 2005). IPV is a highly prevalent problem amongst substance abusing clients and their partners. The primary goal of the treatment is to provide couples with skills and alter dysfunctional interaction patterns to create an environment that is supportive of reducing alcohol and drug use. In regards to IPV, non-substance abusing partners are taught methods to increase safety when in dangerous situations such as leaving a situation and avoiding conflictual and emotionally-laden discussion topics when a partner is intoxicated (Klostermann, Kelley, Mignone, Pusateri, & Fals-Stewart, 2010). Research has found support for the effectiveness of BCT on reducing IPV among couples in which the abusive partner abuses substances (O'Farrell et al., 2003; O'Farrell et al., 2004). Other studies have found that BCT is effective in increasing relationship satisfaction in couples where substance abuse is a problem (Fals-Stewart, Birchler, & O'Farrell, 1996; O'Farrell, Choquette, Cutter, Brown &McCourt, 1993; Winters, Fals-Stewart, O'Farrell, Birchler, & Kelley, 2002).

Only two BCT studies were found that explored the impact of treatment on the occurrence of IPV, changes in relationship satisfaction, and substance abuse. In the first study, Fals-Stewart, Kashdan, O' Farrell, and Birchler (2002) compared couples treatment for drug abuse with individual drug abuse treatment. Although initially both conditions reported similar levels of post-treatment IPV, results of a 1-year follow-up found that rates of recidivism were significantly lower in the couple condition (17%) than in the individual treatment condition (42%). This study also found that only the couple condition reported increased relationship satisfaction at post treatment. In addition, it was found that relationship satisfaction, frequency of heavy drinking, and frequency of drug use during the year post-treatment mediated the relationship between type of treatment (individual or couple) and the reduction of IPV. Results of a logistic regression in which the occurrence of IPV was the dependent variable revealed that there was a significant relationship between increases in relationship satisfaction and decreases in substance abuse in decreasing IPV while controlling for treatment method and that the addition of these mediator variables had a significant impact on reducing the strength of the relationship between treatment condition and the occurrence of IPV. However, it is also possible that it was the occurrence of IPV that resulted in reduced relationship satisfaction or increased substance abuse rather than increases in relationship satisfaction and decreases in substance abuse decreasing the rate of IPV. A second treatment study (O' Farrell et al., 2004) compared couples in which the male partner was an alcoholic to a demographically matched non-alcoholic couples comparison sample. This study found that clinically significant reductions in violence occurred in men whose alcoholism was remitted and once again that the relationship between treatment efficacy and reductions in violence was mediated by both reduced problem drinking and increased relationship satisfaction. These studies are important in that they suggest that in

couples experiencing male perpetrated violence where male substance use is also present, relationship satisfaction, IPV, and problem substance use are interrelated.

Finally, one treatment study was found that compared two different types of couples counselling for the treatment of IPV that suggests that relationship satisfaction can increase without a reported decrease in physical aggression (LaTaillade, Epstein, & Werlinich, 2006). At the end of the study both approaches were found to be effective in reducing psychological aggression, but neither resulted in any significant reduction in physical aggression (LaTaillade et al., 2006). One of the treatment approaches produced a significant increase in relationship satisfaction for men and a non-significant increase for women, while the other treatment resulted in a significant increase in relationship satisfaction for both partners. Although this study suffers from limitations in that its selection criteria excluded couples with a history of severe physical aggression, which in turn may have affected the study's ability to detect changes in physical violence due to the low baseline levels of pre-existing violence in the couples, it does suggest that relationship satisfaction might change independent of significant reductions in physical violence. Also, it may be that it was the decrease in psychological aggression that caused relationship satisfaction to increase as psychological aggression has been linked to martial satisfaction by previous researchers (Panuzio & DiLilo, 2010). Unfortunately, since the study did not analyse the relationship between relationship satisfaction and physical aggression and/or psychological aggression directly, it is not possible to make a definitive statement about the relationship between the variables.

In conclusion, in reviewing the previous studies, it appears that while increased relationship satisfaction has been reported in association with the desistance of violence in the majority of the studies reviewed (Fals-Stewart et al, 2002; O'Farrell et al., 2004; O'Leary et al,

1999; Stith et al., 2004), this has not always been the case (LaTaillade et al., 2006). Also, even in cases where relationship satisfaction did increase after the desistance of violence, the exact cause of the increase in relationship satisfaction was often not investigated. Therefore, it is possible that factors other than the desistance of physical violence such as reduced substance abuse, improved communication, or decreased psychological abuse may be playing a role in determining relationship satisfaction. For example, Panuzio and DiLilo (2010) found in their longitudinal study that while psychological, physical, and sexual aggression were all linked to lower levels of relationship satisfaction, it was psychological aggression between partners, as opposed to physical and sexual partner aggression that was the most consistent contributor to determining victim relationship satisfaction. However, in the one study reviewed that investigated possible mechanisms of change in relationship satisfaction after the desistance of violence, O'Leary et al. (1999) did not find that psychological abuse was associated with increased relationship satisfaction. However, results of this study should be interpreted with caution due to the study's limitations such as small sample size of treatment completers and other methodological issues previously discussed. In conclusion, there is not enough research evidence at this time to make any definitive statements regarding the exact nature of the relationship between relationship satisfaction and the desistance of IPV.

Another possible explanation for the lack of clarity surrounding the issue of how relationship satisfaction and desistance of violence are related may lie in the distinction between the presence of abusive behaviours and the role of interpretation of such behaviours. For example, some researchers have argued that it is not whether male partners engage in psychologically abusive behaviour so much as if their female partner labels the behaviours as such (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2008). These researchers noted that, in their study of women living

in relationships where violence had ceased, women who had developed skills in interrupting previous patterns of controlling behaviours and increased their sense of personal power were less likely to label psychologically abusive behaviours as such due to their increased confidence and sense of control. These changes appeared to buffer the effects of their partners' actions. Based on this finding, the researchers concluded that in order to assess psychological abuse, the assessment needs not just to query the presence of specific behaviours, but also must include women's interpretation of the behaviours.

Relationship satisfaction and the role of attributions. Wuest and Merritt-Gray's (2008) argument, that it important to have an understanding of how women perceive and interpret events in their relationships, is consistent with the cognitive behavioural theoretical perspective of close relationships. As previously discussed, from a cognitive behavioural perspective, one's cognitions about one's relationship are thought to impact one's relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Luo et al., 2010; Neff & Karney, 2005). This premise has led some researchers to investigate how the causal attributions that women make to understand why IPV occurs impact their relationship satisfaction.

Research on women's causal attributions of IPV. To date, most of the research on women's causal attributions of IPV has focused on asking women to endorse attributions of male partner violence from a list of possible attributions prepared by the researchers (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992; Gordon, Burton & Porter, 2004; Meyer, Wagner, & Dutton, 2010; Nabi & Horner, 2001). For example, several studies that have looked at women's attributions for the violence they have experienced have used the Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992), a measure that consists of six-items. Other studies that do not use the RAM have constructed their own list of causal attributions and asked women to endorse items from the

list as a means of understanding women's attributions of the violence in their relationships (Gordon, Burton & Porter, 2004; Meyer, Wagner, & Dutton, 2010; Nabi & Horner, 2001). Results of studies employing this quantitative methodology suggest that studying women's causal attributions for violence is important as causal attributions have been linked to how women perceive the quality of their relationship (Byrne & Arias, 1997; Fincham et al., 1997), their coping efforts to deal with the violence (Meyer et al., 2010), and their decision to leave or remain in their relationship (Gorden et al., 2004; Pape & Arias, 2000). A review of studies in this area is presented to explore each of the study's contributions as well as their limitations.

As previously noted, several studies that have looked at women's attributions for the violence they have experienced have used the Relationship Attribution Measure (RAM; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). This measure consists of six-items that use a 6-point Likert scale which asks women to endorse how much they agree or disagree with the different types of attributions in reference to their partner's most recent violent behaviour towards them. Causal attributions include one item on locus (e.g., My partner's violence was due to something about him), one item on globality (e.g., The reason my partner was violent affects other areas of the relationship), and one item on stability (e.g., The reason my partner was violent is not likely to change). Responsibility attributions include one item on motivation (e.g., My partner's use of violence shows he thought mainly of his own needs), one item on intent (e.g., My partner deliberately engaged in the violence I just described [he meant to do it]), and one item on attributing blame for their partner's violence (e.g., I blame my partner for his violent behaviours towards me). One study using the RAM included sixty-six married couples that had experienced IPV in their relationships (Byrne & Arias, 1997). This study found that not only was lower relationship satisfaction associated with a higher frequency of IPV, but that for both husbands and wives

increasing relationship distress was significantly associated with attributing negative partner behaviour with more negative causal attributions (global, stable, and locus in partner) and more negative responsibility attributions (intentionality such as bad intent, motivations such as selfishness, and personal responsibility). A follow up study found that relationship satisfaction was associated with both causal and responsibility attributions independent of whether couples reported having experienced violence, suggesting that cognitive factors such as attributions play an important role in relationship satisfaction (Fincham, Bradbury, Arias, Byrne, & Karney, 1997). Another study (Pape & Arias, 2000) using the RAM found that attributing their partners' violent behaviour to stable and global causes, as well as endorsing more attributions regarding blameworthiness, malicious intent, and selfish motivation, influenced women's decisions to remain with their abusive partners, making it more likely that the women would choose to leave.

Although studies using the RAM have contributed greatly to our understanding of how women's attributions impact their relationship satisfaction and decision making processes, these studies are limited in that the attributions listed in the RAM draw heavily from intrapersonal causal theories of IPV. Intrapersonal theories of IPV focus on individual differences to explain partner aggression. They include various theoretical conceptualizations from both psychological and biological perspectives and focus on factors such as the presence of personality disorders (Dutton, Starzomski, & Ryan, 1996; Hamberger & Hastings, 1991; Holtsworth-Monroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2000; Holtsworth-Monroe & Stuart, 1994), alcohol and drug use (O'Farrell et al., 2003), difficulties with self-regulation (Finkel, 2007; Finkel, DeWall, Slotter, Oaten, & Foshee, 2009), cognitive factors (Eckhardt & Dye, 2000), and biological processes (Pinto et al., 2010). As such the RAM does not explore attributions relating to interpersonal, sociological, or multisystemic etiological theories of IPV. Interpersonal etiological

theories of IPV include theories that tend to focus on developmental processes such as social learning theory (O'Leary, 1988) or focus on aspects of adult intimate relationships such as relationship discord (Woodin & O' Leary, 2009). Sociological etiological theories of IPV focus on macro-social factors that include factors such as norms and cultural expectations as well as power structures (Woodin & O' Leary, 2009). Examples of sociological etiological theories include both feminist perspectives and family violence perspectives. Currently, there is growing support for multisystemic approaches to the etiology of IPV that propose that sociocultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal causes of IPV act in conjunction with one another (Woodin & O'Leary, 2009). Examples of such theories include Dutton's nested ecological theory (1985), the social ecology model (Heise, 1998), the impelling/inhibiting model (Finkel, 2007), the dynamic developmental systems model (Capaldi & Kim, 2007; Capaldi, Shortt, & Kim, 2005), and the vulnerability-stress-adaptation framework (Langer, Lawrence, & Barry, 2008). Therefore, attribution studies that use the RAM are limited in that they explore attributions from a limited etiological lens.

In addition to studies that use the RAM to explore women's attributions for violence, other studies have created their own list of possible attributions. For example, Meyer and colleagues (2010) gave women who had experienced male perpetrated violence a list of eight different attributions and asked each woman to place a check beside any attribution that she believed applied to her experience of violence. The researchers then categorized the attributions using factor analysis as either excuse or blame attributions. Excuse attributions consisted of three items in which women excused their partner's violence as due to situational variables (e.g., He was under a lot of stress; I made him mad). Blame attributions consisted of five items consistent with attributing the violence to their partner (e.g., His anger was out of control; He wanted to

punish me for, or stop me from, leaving). Results of the study found that women who endorsed more blame attributions were more likely to use a wider variety of coping strategies, including active strategies that were more likely to increase a woman's access to resources. In comparison, women who endorsed more excuse attributions were more likely to use passive coping strategies such as placating their abuser (Meyer et al., 2010). Although the study does explore both excuse and blame attributions, it is limited in that it does not tell the reader anything about how much the women weighted their endorsements of the attributions as the women were asked to simply endorse what items from the list of attributions they thought contributed to the occurrence of IPV in their lives. In addition, the study is limited in that it only explores attributions at intrapersonal and interpersonal levels of causation and as such does not address any attributions at a sociocultural level.

Another study was found that expanded the study of IPV causal attributions to exploring women's self-attributions. Gordon, Burton, and Porter (2004) created a measure of domestic violence attributions that consists of 26 items rated on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The measure contains three subscales; Self-attributions (I talked back), Partner Malicious Attributions (He wants to control me), and Partner Benign Attributions (He was abused himself). This study found that the less a woman endorsed partner malicious attributions, the more likely she was to forgive the violence and consider remaining in the relationship. While this study does look at women's self-attributions separately from other types of explanations that women make for their partner's violence, it still is once again limited in that it includes attributions focusing primarily on intrapersonal and interpersonal levels.

One study was found that did incorporate attributions from a sociocultural perspective. Nabi and Horner (2001) asked respondents (including women who reported having experienced

IPV) to rate on a 5-point scale the extent that they thought the following factors contribute to the perpetration of IPV: 1) the man was abused as a child, 2) the man saw his mother abused as a child, 3) the man wants to control woman, 4) the man has an inability to control his anger, 5) the man's friends accept his violent behaviour, 6) people accept violence toward women as normal, and 7) women's friends don't offer to help. This study found that abused women were more likely than women who had no personal exposure to IPV to endorse a man's desire to control woman, people's acceptance of violence toward women as normal, and women's friends not offering to help as contributors to IPV. These results suggest that abused women are more likely to believe that society gives tacit consent to abusive behaviour. While this study gives the reader some insight as to a range of causal attributions endorsed by abused women, including causal attributions at a sociological level, the study did not ask the women to endorse the factors within the context of their own personal experience of IPV, nor does the study explore how different types of causal attributions (intrapersonal, interpersonal, or sociocultural) may impact women's relationship satisfaction, coping mechanisms, or decision making processes.

This review of the research highlights many of the limitations of asking women to endorse attributions from a list of possible attributions prepared by the researcher(s). First, it appears that the lists compiled tend to focus on a small number of attributions that focus mostly on intrapersonal factors. This is in spite of the growing support for multisystemic approaches to the etiology of IPV that propose that sociocultural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal causes of IPV act in conjunction with one another (Woodin & O'Leary, 2009). Second, by not including open-ended questions, this methodology does not allow women to give voice to their own understanding of their experiences of violence in the context of their lives. When taken together, these limitations suggest that this methodological approach does not allow for an integrated

analysis of the various levels of etiological factors to which women may attribute the IPV they experience. Comprehensive understanding of women's attributions regarding the violence in their relationships is important given that research suggests that women's causal attributions for violence impact their coping efforts to deal with the violence (Meyer et al., 2010), their decision to leave or remain in their relationship (Gorden et al., 2004; Pape & Arias, 2000), and most important to this study, how they perceive the quality of their relationship (Byrne & Arias, 1997; Fincham et al., 1997).

Perceptions of safety. Before concluding the discussion of the literature on how women's perceptions of their relationships impact their relationship satisfaction, given that all the women in the study have experienced violence in their relationship, a review of the research on how women's perceptions of safety in their relationships may impact relationship satisfaction is necessary. It was found that most IPV intervention studies have tended to narrowly define safety as the absence of or ability to avoid violence (Stith et al., 2004), rather than defining safety in broader terms. Broader definitions of safety go beyond focusing on the presence of discrete acts of aggression. For example, safety can be defined as "the need to feel secure from harm" (Servino, Smith, Porter, & Brown, 2011, p. 432).

As an example of a model based on a broader view of safety, Whiting, Smith, Oka, and Karakurt (2012) have developed a model of relational safety based on women's appraisals of having security, support, and closeness in the relationship, as well as a lack of appraisals of various types of threats in the relationship. Whiting et al. (2012) defined appraisals of security as relating to a felt sense of ease within the relationship based on trust that it is okay to be oneself without concern of impacting the stability of the relationship. These types of appraisals tended to lead to behavioural actions meant to increase connection. Support appraisals were defined as

appraisals related to perceiving active encouragement from one's partner or a sense that one's partner would be there for you if needed. These types of appraisals tended to lead to behavioural actions meant to encourage and support one's partner. Closeness appraisals were defined as a felt sense of emotional attachment that was often conveyed through verbal or physical means. These types of appraisals tended to lead to willingness to allow one's self to be more vulnerable in the relationship. The model also stresses the absence of threat appraisals, noting that these appraisals are often linked to fear, uncertainty, and/or unpredictability. The presence of these types of appraisals tended to lead to responses related to increased escalation/reactivity, attempts to control one's partner, shutting down emotionally or separating physically, placating, and/or attempting to de-escalate the situation. Based on this model, Whiting et al. (2012) contend that lack of safety can lead to relationship dissatisfaction and violence.

Although there is little research on how appraisals of safety impact relationship satisfaction, there is some research to suggest that perceived relationship safety is linked both to relationship stability and satisfaction (Gottman, 1999). Perceptions of relationship safety (emotional, physical, sexual, and psychological) have also been linked to dyadic adjustment, which is thought to consist of dyadic satisfaction, cohesion, and consensus (Brown, Banford, Mansfield, Smith, Whiting, & Ivey, 2012). Furthermore, it has been speculated that lack of safety can result in emotions and behaviours that can lead to relationship deterioration and violence (Whiting et al., 2012). Therefore, exploring the women's appraisals of safety after the desistance of violence was important to understanding the women's relationship satisfaction in this study.

Present Study

Despite the vast amounts of research that has been conducted on IPV, little research has studied intact relationships where violence has desisted. This may be due, at least partially, to the

controversy around whether violence in relationships in which IPV has occurred can truly desist (Johnson, 1995). With the likelihood of safety within relationships following IPV being questioned both in IPV services practice and the social discourse surrounding IPV, the "best" outcome for women is often defined as the termination of the relationship (Nettleton, 2011; Peled et al., 2000). In particular, very little is known about how women view their relationships after violence has desisted in terms of relationship satisfaction. Understanding how the desistance of violence impacts relationship satisfaction is important as quality intimate partner relationships are thought to contribute to both psychological well-being (Cohen & Willis, 1985; Diener et al., 1999; Rook & Pietromonaco, 1987) and physical well-being (Schuster et al., 1990; Taylor, 1995; Umberson & Williams, 2005).

The few studies that have looked at the issues surrounding the desistance of violence within intact relationships have focused either on how women coped (Bowker, 1983) and attempted to resist violence (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2008) or on the treatment efficacy of couples IPV interventions where relationship satisfaction has been measured as a treatment outcome (Fals-Stewart et al, 2002; LaTaillade et al., 2006; O'Farrell et al., 2004; O'Leary et al, 1999; Stith et al., 2004). These studies, while providing valuable insights into the relationship between the desistance of violence and relationship satisfaction, have not been able to delineate the role that the desistance of physical violence plays in how women determine their relationship satisfaction.

In addition, no research was found that looked at women's attributions about why violence started or ended, despite the fact research suggests that attributions play an important role in determining women's perceptions of the quality of their relationships (Byrne & Arias, 1997; Fincham et al., 1997). Nor has a great deal of research been conducted on how this

population of women perceive their current relationships in terms of other factors related to relationship satisfaction beyond the presence/absence of abusive dynamics. This includes a lack of research on how women in this population view their safety. These gaps in the literature highlight the need to employ methodologies that allow for more in-depth study of women's experiences and perceptions of these issues.

This study sought to address the shortcomings of the current literature in such a way as to meet a number of goals. First, it was thought important that the research be conducted in a way that allowed for women to give voice to their relationship experiences in a way that honoured the complexities of their lived experiences and allowed them to share their subjective meaning of the role of violence in their relationships. Second, while respecting the diversity of individual experiences amongst women, it was considered important to conduct the study in a manner that acknowledged possible shared patterns amongst women's experiences. The third goal of the study was to highlight the role of social inequalities and structural factors that may have shaped the women's experiences.

With these goals in mind, the aim of this study was to collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data from women who are currently living in heterosexual relationships where violence has occurred in the past but has desisted, in order to understand their unique perspective. While it is considered of equal importance to explore these issues in all types of relationships, it was decided to limit the present study to women in heterosexual relationships. This was due to concerns that 1) the exploratory nature of this study and the complexity of the issues involved that the scope of study should be kept as narrow as possible and 2) that not enough women in abusive lesbian relationships where violence has desisted could be recruited to ensure sufficient representation in the study to adequately explore the unique issues faced by

many women in abusive lesbian relationships. For example, research has identified the denial of the existence of IPV in lesbian relationships (Girshick, 2002; Ristock, 2002), fear of losing disrupting/ relationships within or connection to the lesbian community (Bergen, 1998; Burstow, 1992), threats to "out" victims by abusive partners (Morrow & Hauxhurst, 1989), internalized homophobia (Renzetti, 1997) and homophobic responses by service providers (Morrow & Hauxhurst, 1989; Ristock, 2002) as some of the unique concerns faced by women in abusive lesbian relationships.

The study examined two key areas of inquiry: 1) how satisfied are these women with their relationships and what factors are important to them in determining their relationship satisfaction and 2) how do the women understand the changes in the violence that have occurred in their relationships, and how do these changes impact how they perceive the quality of their current relationships. Addressing these questions included exploring the attributions that they made about the violence in their relationship and the centrality of the desistance of violence in improving relationship quality as perceived by the women. It was hoped that the insights generated from the perspective of this understudied population of women would help generate a more nuanced understanding of the factors that impact relationship satisfaction after the desistance of violence and identify issues that might need to be addressed in terms of intervention with this population of women.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Conceptual Framework

Given the afore-mentioned goals and aim of this study, the study was situated within an epistemological framework that drew from elements of feminist theory, intersectionality, narrative theory, postmodernism and critical theory.

Feminist theory was considered pivotal to the epistemological framework of this study. While acknowledging that there are multiple feminist perspectives, in general, feminist perspectives involve a study of how gender relations act to create oppressive conditions that foster "domination, inequities, and marginalization" (Pitre & Kushner, Raine, & Hegadoren, 2013, p. 122). Feminist approaches view IPV as a consequence of socially and culturally approved gender inequality (Bograd, 1993) and tend to emphasize the common experiences of women who have experienced IPV in order to help create a unified approach to opposing IPV (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). However, the traditional feminist approach has been criticized from a postmodernism perspective that posits that all knowledge is relative in that there are multiple social realities, and as such does not support the idea that there is one universal theory that can explain IPV fully (Allen, 2011).

This criticism has led many feminist researchers to challenge the idea that gender inequality is the sole causal explanation of IPV, arguing instead that other forms of inequity and oppression intersect with gender oppression in the lives of individual women experiencing IPV (Allen, 2011; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Proponents of this view identify the need to give voice to all IPV victims, including women from diverse and often marginalized social locations through the adoption of an intersectionality approach (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). The intersectionality approach proposes that people's identities lie at the intersection of race, class,

gender, ability, and sexuality; it is the combination of these constructs that shape people's experiences, including their experiences with social structures (Crenshaw, 1991; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Trahan, 2011). Bograd (1999) has argued for applying an intersectionality approach to the study of IPV as each unique combination of intersectionalities "color the meaning and nature of domestic violence, how it is experienced by self and responded to by others, how personal and social consequences are represented, and how and whether escape and safety can be obtained" (p. 276) and therefore create a multitude of ways that woman experience IPV.

However, in placing emphasis on the differences and uniqueness of how diverse and often marginalized groups of women experience IPV, some feminist researchers have warned that there is a threat of downplaying the overarching role that structural power is thought to play in the lives of all women experiencing IPV, thus creating a tension between intersectional and structural approaches (Collins, 1998). In addressing this issue, Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) have argued that neither traditional feminist nor intersectionality approaches alone are capable of providing "battered women from diverse backgrounds with the kinds of personal and social change required for safety and growth at the individual and communal levels" (p. 39), and as such suggest that researchers draw on elements of both approaches. Through applying multiple approaches to the study of IPV, both the diversity within women's experiences with IPV and the role of structural inequalities such as socio-economic barriers and inequalities that are thought to influence women's experiences of IPV can be explored (Allen, 2011; Olesen, 2000; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Given that the overall goal of feminist research to analyze the role and meaning of gender in the lives of women (Personal Narrative Group, 1989) and that the application of

intersectionality analysis tends to lend itself most easily to qualitative methods (Trahan, 2011; for a review of the value of applying intersectionality analytic approaches to quantitative data and how it can be accomplished see Cole, 2009), elements of narrative theory were also incorporated into the study. Narrative theory focuses on the study of personal narratives as 1) being deliberately and purposely constructed by storytellers, 2) rooted within historical, structural, and ideological contexts that include social discourses and power relations and thus shape storytellers' choices and actions, and 3) providing storytellers with a means to make sense of their past and act as social agents (Pitre et al., 2013; Riessman, 2008). Thus, through how they construct their narratives, storytellers choose to reproduce or challenge the "rules and routines that are socially embedded in any community or society" (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 118).

By incorporating narrative theory, the study gave women the opportunity to speak of their experiences in a way that allowed them to discuss the violence that occurred in their relationships without stripping it of its context or personal meaning. It also allowed for dialogic space for the women to reflect on not only their attributions of the violence that occurred in their relationship but also their attributions of why the violence desisted, and how both processes impacted their current relationship satisfaction. Boonzaier and Schalkwyk (2011) have argued that when women are able to ascribe meaning to and make sense of their experiences of violence, they construct certain identities of themselves, allowing them to author their own stories of violence. This process is thought to increase personal agency amongst women who may not have had this opportunity in the past and as such was relevant to this study. In addition, Fraser (2004) has noted that narrative research has the potential to "validate the knowledge of 'ordinary' people, especially 'ordinary' women who are liable to be omitted from many research projects" (p. 184).

Given the study's emphasis on narrative theory, the theoretical framework of this study was heavily influenced by postmodern assumptions about the constructive nature of knowledge and the emphasis it places on the ways that people create subjective meaning of the world (Smith, Sparkes, Phoenix, & Kirby, 2012). For this reason, the central research questions of this study focused on how women view the impact of the desistance of violence in their relationships on their current relationship satisfaction. These views are subjective in nature and reflect how the women in this study have come to interpret and construct their reality. In writing about the advantages of using a narrative approach to IPV research, Boonzaier and van Schalkwyk (2011) have noted that it is the subjectivity-constructing aspect of narrative research that makes it different from other qualitative methods in that women are allowed to represent their experience of violence according to their own frames of meaning that include the influence of sociocultural factors such as gender, poverty, and ethnicity. Also, given the stigma that is thought to be associated with the role of a woman who experiences IPV and does not leave her partner (Nettleson, 2011), it was considered important to acknowledge the role of the researcher in the co-narration of the interview process (Kirkman, 2002) and how the social location of the researcher as a White middle class educated woman might have influenced the content of the interviews.

Finally, the epistemological framework included elements from critical theory in that the study wished to acknowledge the dialectical relationship between individual agency and the constraints of social structures (Pitre el al., 2013). As such, a critical perspective applied to the stories that people tell "highlights the power of social, structural, and ideological contexts within the stories that were told. Stories uncover the commanding voice of the social collective in determining privilege, boundaries of agency, and sources of domination, marginalization, and

oppression" (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 126). For this reason, a critical feminist approach to narrative inquiry places more of an emphasis on what is told in a story rather than how the story is told than most other forms of narrative approaches do. Although the performative (why a story is being told) and structural (how a story is being told) aspects of a story are still analyzed in this approach, in emphasizing the analysis of the content of a story, greater understanding of the external forces and conditions that shape experiences and "delineate the boundaries of individual or collective agency, voice, identity, and reflexivity" (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 119) is thought to be gained.

In employing a theoretical framework informed by elements of feminist theory, intersectionality, narrative theory, postmodernism, and critical theory, a number of tensions arising from integration of the different theoretical approaches needs to be acknowledged. This includes acknowledging the tensions between 1) the analysis of content versus process within the narratives, 2) focusing on what is voiced by the women in their narratives versus interpreting what the women say within popular social discourse and/or what is embedded in the narrative but not named in the narrative, and 3) focusing on the narrative itself (such as structural elements of the narrative) and the broader social context that the narrative takes place in (such as social structural elements present in the narratives).

Design

This study employed a mixed methods design that included both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore women's perceptions of their experiences with violence and their relationship satisfaction. Specifically, this study employed a "qualitative dominant mixed methods research design," (Johnson, Onwegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 124) which has been described as a type of mixed methods research design in which the methodology is dominated by

a qualitative constuctivistic view of the research process, while simultaneously acknowledging that the addition of quantitative methods has the potential to improve the quality of research.

The employment of mixed methods designs is not without its critics and is highly contested by many (Smith, Sparkes, Phoenix, & Kirby, 2012). According to Smith and colleagues (2012), critics of mixed methods designs argue that the blending of the two methodologies is not commensurable, given that each method is based in different research paradigms that include opposing ontological (beliefs about the nature of reality) and epistemological (what is the relationship between the inquirer and knowledge of reality) stances. Purists of the quantitative research paradigm argue that knowledge of social observations are like physical phenomena and can be determined in an objective manner free of observer, while purists of the qualitative research paradigm argue that the knower and the known can not be separated and as such there are multiple constructed realities (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, Johnson and colleagues (2007) argue that the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is justifiable based on the adoption of a pragmatist position in which:

> …. the basic differences between paradigms are deemed commensurable. As a consequence, the epistemological and ontological differences between paradigms do not really matter. What matters for proponents of a pragmatist position instead is the purpose of the research and the methods use to meet it. (Smith et al.,2012, p. 378)

Accordingly, a pragmatist position argues that what is of primary importance is the research question(s) of the study and research methods should be chosen through a process of consideration of what methods and procedures offer the best chance of answering the research question(s) in a way that results in a "combination of complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 19). As such, Johnson and

Onwuegbuzie (2004) take the position that including a close-ended instrument to measure certain factors considered important to a qualitative study has the potential to increase the generalizability of the study and from a pragmatist position can therefore be included.

In applying Johnson and Onwegbuzie's (2004) version of pragmatism to the study's research questions, a mixed methods research design with emphasis on qualitative methods was chosen based on a number of reasons. For example, the use of qualitative methods was employed in order to increase the breadth and depth of understanding the women's experiences of violence through the use of qualitative analysis of participants' interviews while the addition of quantitative methods allowed for a quantified description of the constructs of interest (i.e., level of relationship satisfaction, severity and frequency of violence in the relationship). Use of both methods allowed for methodological triangulation (Johnson et al., 2007). For example, the addition of a quantitative measure of relationship satisfaction to the qualitative interviews which explored women's relationship satisfaction allowed for the collection of thicker and richer data in that not only was data from the interview available for analysis, but also data as to how the participant's relationship satisfaction compared to a standardized sample of women. Through convergence and collaboration of findings stemming from two methods, methodological triangulation is thought to help increase confidence that the findings are valid (Patton, 2002). It also allowed for deeper exploration of the issues as the findings of the quantitative method were used to help inform the qualitative method (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Specifically, women who self-reported on the quantitative methods the presence of physically aggressive acts in their present relationship were asked to explain how the presence of these behaviours did or didn't fit with their present view of their relationship as being non-violent.

Ethical Considerations

The research protocol, as approved by the University of Manitoba as being in accordance with widely accepted ethical principles for the conduct of research, was adhered to throughout this study. This included taking special precautions to ensure the safety of the participants and interviewer by only conducting interviews in public buildings that had security on site and having guidelines in place in the event that one of the women's partners showed up to the interview without the woman's permission. Other safety precautions included monitoring the women for possible distress brought on by the interview, and a licensed clinical psychologist was on call to help de-escalate the participant if this situation arose. Although no difficulties with regards to previous unidentified mental health issues or personal safety were noted with the participants in this study, women were informed of community resources for crisis, individual, and couple counselling they could access via the informed consent process in case iatrogenic effects occurred after the interview. While it was noted that some of the participants in the study did experience emotional distress at points during the interview, by the completion of the interview, all participants presented as no longer experiencing undue distress due to participation. In addition, many of the participants expressed gratitude for being given the opportunity to participate in the study suggesting that women may have found the experience beneficial in some way. This possibility is in keeping with research literature that suggests, while acknowledging that conducting IPV research can have iatrogenic effects on participants, that research can also prove beneficial to participants in terms of helping participants connect to helpful resources (Btoush & Campbell, 2009), heal, have the opportunity to help others, and envision new life directions (Taylor, 2002).

Recruitment and Participants

Participants were recruited from posters displayed in various community agencies that

offer mental health or support services to women and families as well as a variety of other locations frequented by women such as community centres, libraries, and universities (often in women's washrooms). The posters invited women to participate in a study on relationship satisfaction if they self-identified as having experienced violence in their current relationship in the past, but had not experienced any physical violence in their relationship for at least one year. A copy of the recruitment poster can be found in Appendix A. Later in the recruitment process the criteria were altered to encourage participation by women who self-identified as not experiencing violence in their relationships for at least three years to ensure that the study included the perspectives of women whose relationships had been violence-free for a longer period of time. The last stage of recruitment focused on recruiting participants who did not report a history of substance addiction as pivotal to their experiences with IPV in order to ensure diversity of experience. Recruitment continued until redundancy was reached and lasted approximately one year. Sampling to redundancy is said to occur when no new information is forthcoming from additional interviews (Patton, 2002).

Given the emphasis of this study on exploring women's experiences of being in a relationship in which violence has desisted, only women were recruited for this study. In addition, it has been suggested that researching this process from both partners' perspectives simultaneously may jeopardize the participants' relationship and the women's safety (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2008). In order to qualify for the study, participants needed to self-identify as currently being in a heterosexual relationship where violence (physical and/or sexual) occurred in the past, but had not occurred in the past year (this criterion was waived for one participant who self-identified as not experiencing violence in the past ten months and wished to participate before she moved out of the research area). All participants self-identified as having had

experienced male perpetrated violence in their relationship, regardless if the violence was bi-directional or not. Also, all participants were required to be 18 years or older. To ensure that participants met these criteria, the women underwent a brief screening interview over the telephone before being invited to participate. A script of this telephone screening is included in Appendix B.

Seventeen women were interviewed for this study. Two of the interviews were excluded from the study. One interview was excluded due to the woman reporting after the interview that she had not answered the questions during the phone screening stage accurately and did not meet the criteria for the study as she had not been in contact with her partner for several months and did not know where he was or how to reach him. Another woman's interview was excluded from the study as she reported that she had broken up with her partner between the time of the phone screen and the interview and she did not know if she wanted to get back together with him or not. After excluding these two interviews, the final number of participants in the study was 15.

The 15 women who participated in this study ranged in age from 23 to 47 years old and identified as being of European, Asian, African, and Aboriginal descent. In addition, one participant was not a Canadian citizen. The participants' level of education ranged from grade 5 to the completion of a university undergraduate degree. In terms of household income, the self-reported household income ranged from below 15,000 to over 90,000 dollars annually. The length of time women reported being in their relationship ranged from 3 to 20 years. The length of time reported by the women since the last violent incident in the study ranged from 10 months to six years.

Data Collection Procedures

At the beginning of the study, all participants were asked to give informed consent to

participate in the study. Included on the informed consent form (which each participant read, signed, and was given a copy of) was information on how to contact local crisis service providers in case the women experienced any negative impacts of participating in the study. Participants were asked to grant their permission to be contacted for a follow up interview if at a later date additional information was required. Participants were also asked to provide a mailing or email address if they wished to (a) have a copy of the interview transcript sent to them so that they could confirm that the transcript accurately reflected their views, and (b) would like a summary of the results sent to them. Due to lack of interest in wanting to review their transcripts and difficulties re-contacting women who did wish to review their transcripts, only one transcript was sent out and no feedback was received back from the participant. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix C.

After giving consent, each participant participated in a semi-structured interview followed by the completion of three quantitative measures. The qualitative interview followed a semi-structured format that focused on women's perceptions of changes that occurred in their relationships. Participants were asked to describe what they thought contributed to violence in their relationship and what they thought ended the violence. In addition, they were asked about their satisfaction with their current relationship and if the desistance of violence had impacted their relationship satisfaction in any way. All interviews were audio recorded. A copy of the interview guide is provided in Appendix D.

After completing the interview, participants were asked to complete three quantitative measures. The first of these measures gathered demographic information and information about the status of the participants' current relationship. The second questionnaire assessed the participants' current level of adjustment and satisfaction in their relationship. The third

questionnaire was completed twice, once to access the severity, frequency, and bi-directionality of past violence in the relationship and once to access for the presence of current psychological or psychological abuse in the relationship. These measures are described more fully in the measures section of this paper. This quantitative data situated the sample in terms of demographics, the nature of the violent behaviour that occurred in the past, current presence of possible psychological and physical abusive behaviour, and the level of relationship satisfaction reported by the women in comparison to a normative sample of women. If participants endorsed the presence of current physical violence in their relationship on the quantitative measures, the interviewer asked them to explain how the presence of the physically aggressive behaviours they identified as having occurred fit with their definition of being in a violence free relationship (see the follow-up interview question listed in the interview guide in Appendix D).

In addition, the writer took field notes during and immediately after the interview to record impressions and reflections of the interview process. This included noting the emotional climate of the interviews, initial impressions of how the women presented themselves and their narratives, as well as feelings evoked in the interviewer by the narratives. Field notes were considered as a source of data.

The average length of time required for participation in the study was approximately two hours. Participants received a $50 honorarium for their participation. Although the participants were asked to give permission to be re-contacted for a second interview if additional information was required to clarify or further explore the participant's narrative in greater depth, no follow-up interviews were conducted, as it was not deemed necessary.

Measures

Demographic and Relationship Status Measure. Demographic data was collected from

the participants including age, cultural identification, income, highest level of education obtained, current work situation, disability issues, and sexual orientation. Data was also collected on the number of years participants had been involved in their relationship, current living arrangement, whether the couple had ever separated, length of time since the last incident of physical violence, whether either partner had ever been charged in regards to the past violence in the relationship, and services used by the couple in regards to the past violence (see Appendix E).

Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) is a self-report measure used to assess the quality of marriage and other similar dyadic relationships. It is considered to be one of the most widely used measures of relationship quality in the social and behavioural sciences (Graham et al., 2006). It has been used to measure relationship satisfaction and to classify whether or not a relationship is in distress (South, Kruger, & Iacono, 2009). The DAS is a 32-item measure in which the items are summed to produce a total score that can range from 0 to 151, with higher scores indicating more positive dyadic adjustment. It uses a variety of response formats including Likert scales as well as yes/no answers.

Spanier (1976) defined dyadic adjustment as "... a process, the outcome of which is determined by the degree of: (1) troublesome dyadic differences; (2) interpersonal tensions and personal anxieties; (3) dyadic satisfaction; (4) dyadic cohesion; and (5) consensus on matters of importance to dyadic functioning" (p. 17). As well as a total score that measures dyadic adjustment, the measure also produces scores for four subscales. These subscales include Dyadic Consensus (how much the couple agrees on matters of importance to the relationship), Dyadic Satisfaction (how satisfied the person is with his/her relationship), Dyadic Cohesion (the degree of closeness and how often the couple engages in shared activities), and Affectional Expression

(the degree that the couple engages in demonstrations of affection and sexual activity).

The original psychometrics of the measure are generally strong, with Spanier (1976) reporting evidence for content, criterion-related, and construct validity. High internal reliability was also reported with a Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha score of .96 for the total scale. Internal reliability scores for the subscales were reported to be .90 for the Dyadic Consensus subscale, .94 for the Dyadic Satisfaction, .86 for the Dyadic Cohesion subscale, and .73 for the Affectional Expression subscale. Results of a recent meta-analysis study (Graham et al., 2006) found lower internal consistency scores than Spanier's (1976) scores, with acceptable internal consistency scores of .92 for the total scale, .87 for Dyadic Adjustment, .85 for Dyadic Satisfaction, and .79 for Dyadic Cohesion. Although the authors report an internal consistency score of .71 for the Affectional Expression subscale, they suggest that this subscale may not meet a sufficient standard of acceptability when the confidence interval of 95% is applied, as the lower limit drops to .68. In addition, the authors looked at how variables such as sexual orientation, gender, marital status, and ethnicity may affect the reliability of the measure and noted that no differences were found (Graham et al., 2006).

Low scores on the DAS are indicative of having relationship problems while high scores indicate the absence of problems (Spanier, 1989). Interpretation of the DAS is based on converting raw scores to *T*-scores derived from standardized samples, with norms available for both divorced and married individuals. Interpretative guidelines for *T*-scores are available with scores of 45 to 55 considered to be in the average range and scores below 30 considered to be clinically significant. The norms used are based on a sample consisting of 218 married individuals drawn from Centre County, Pennsylvania as reported by Spanier (1976). Despite the limitations of the original normative sample which has not been updated, as previously noted,

Graham et al.'s (2006) review of 91 studies representing 128 different samples and 25,035 participants found that the DAS consistently produces scores with acceptable internal consistency across a wide range of romantic relationships.

The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2). A modified version of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus et al., 1996) was used to access the nature of past physical violence (including both victimization and perpetration) by tabulating reports of minor and severe acts of physical assault, injury, and/or sexual coercion. The classification of minor acts of physical assault include: throwing an object that could hurt, twisting hair or arm, pushing or shoving, grabbing, and slapping. The classification of severe acts of physical assault include: using a gun or knife, punching or hitting with something that could hurt, choking, slamming against a wall, beating up, burning or scolding, and kicking. The CTS2 is a widely used measure in research (Korman et al., 2008) and has been used in studies to assess the frequency and severity of violence based on self-reported behaviours (Aldarondo & Straus, 1994; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010).

The CTS2 is a 78-item questionnaire consisting of five scales (Straus et al., 1996). The Negotiation Scale consists of six behaviours taken to settle a disagreement, three of which refer to cognitive aspects of negotiation and three to emotional aspects. The internal consistency of this scale is .86. The Psychological Aggression Scale asks about the occurrence of eight verbal and nonverbal behaviours that are aggressive but not acts of physical assault. The internal consistency of this scale is .79. The Physical Assault Scale asks about the occurrence of 12 behaviours, five of which are classified as minor violence and seven of which are classified as severe. The internal consistency of this scale is .86. The Injury Scale asks about the occurrence of six behaviours, two of which are classified as minor and four of which are classified as severe

acts of physical aggression. The internal consistency of this scale is .92. The Sexual Coercion Scale asks about the occurrence of seven behaviours, three of which are classified as minor and four that are classified as severe. The internal consistency of this scale is .87. In addition, the CTS2 also asks how often these behaviours have occurred in the past year (Straus et al., 1996). Behaviours that occur one or two times in the twelve month period are considered to occur infrequently, while behaviours that occur three or more time are considered to occur frequently (Feld & Straus, 1989).

Participants were asked to answer the measure using a reference period of the 12 months when they considered the violence in their relationship to be at its worst. Participants were asked each question first in regards to their own behaviours and then in regards to their partner's behaviours. In order to assess whether psychological or physical abuse was currently occurring within the relationship, participants were also asked to fill out the CTS2 a second time using the past 12 months as a time frame. Any endorsement of physically violent behaviours was followed up in the qualitative interview to access the incongruence between the woman's self-definition of being in a non-violent relationship and her positive endorsement of the occurrence of physically aggressive behaviours in her current relationship.

Data Analysis

Narrative analysis was chosen based on several characteristics of the method that match with the purposes of this study. Narrative analysis in general "refers to a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form" (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). Narrative approaches focus on exploring the life of the individual through the participant's meaning making processes and theorizing about them in insightful ways (Josselson, 2011). Riessman (2008) has noted that narrative analysis allows for the honouring of individual agency and

intention, an important consideration in working with women who have experienced IPV. It also allows for women's stories to be seen as context-bound, shaped by social, political, historical, and cultural forces (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, 2011). These aspects of narrative analysis allow for the researcher to both acknowledge the power and role of structural factors in shaping women's lives and stories while simultaneously acknowledging the power and role of individual agency (Fraser, 2004).

Narrative analysis also emphasizes keeping a story intact by theorizing within cases (Riessman, 2008). This allows the researcher to explore the whole story rather than fragmenting it into thematic categories. This emphasis on the entire story is considered important as it is thought that it is how the parts of a story are integrated as a whole that gives the experience meaning (Josselson, 2011). This emphasis on maintaining an intact story was also important to this study given that the process of achieving non-violence has been described as non-linear (Campbell et al., 1998).

The narrative analysis method was based on Fraser's (2004) "critical social work approach" (p. 180) that draws ideas from feminist, critical theory, and constructivist approaches. Fraser's approach emphasizes that researchers need to balance their approach to narrative research so as to not ignore the impact of social structures and cultural influences while simultaneously not denying the presence of individual agency.

The initial stage of Fraser's (2004) analysis involves "hearing the stories narrated and experiencing the emotions of participants and interviewer" (Fraser, 2004, p. 185). In order to accomplish this task the writer listened carefully to the interviews during the transcription phase. Interviews were transcribed verbatim to help prevent omitting or mishearing any of the material as well as ensuring that the desired level of detail in the transcription was maintained

consistently in all interviews. Field notes of each interview (including the time, place, emotional climate of the interviews, and the feelings evoked by the narratives) were also reviewed at this time. Fraser (2004) lists issues for the analyst to consider as he/she listens to the narratives such as how each of the interviews starts, unfolds, and ends; how curious the analyst feels; how open the analyst is to developing further insights about him/herself; and if the analyst feels she/he has adequate support to engage in the work. Such questions help the researcher identify possible researcher biases and engage in reflexive practice. Use of reflexive practice helps identify areas of potential bias and allows the researcher to "bracket" these areas of bias. Bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of the researcher's prior knowledge and assumptions by recognizing and suspending (but not abandoning) them during various phases of the research (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

After the transcription of the interviews was completed, analysis of the interviews was conducted primarily using the analytic steps described by Fraser (2004). First, the individual interviews were divided into sets of ideas in which some type of plot unfolded. Then individual transcripts were interpreted for common themes and meanings, noting any contradictions that were emerging. Development of the themes was influenced by a variety of factors that have been previously identified by Riessman (2008), including prior and emergent theory (i.e., theory on IPV and marital satisfaction), the purpose of the investigation, the data itself, and political commitments (i.e., commitment to feminist, intersectionality, and critical theory). Analysis also focused on the "main points" of the stories and "how" the stories were being told. This included interpreting the verbal content for the significance of vocal inflections, what words participants chose, and how they chose to emphasize some words, as well as notable silences, pauses, or gaps. Finally, in addition to Fraser's (2004) methodological recommendations for this stage, a

performative analysis was also conducted. Riessman (2008) has described this type of analysis as being concerned with "who" the story is being directed to, as well as the "when" and "why" of the story. Narratives are seen as performances and as such give us insights into what identity the narrator is trying to convey to the audience in mind. The audience is seen as an active presence and as such the influence of cultural pressures and societal norms on the participant is considered (Riessman, 2008). In particular, the influence of the social location of the interviewer as a female Caucasian graduate student was considered as to what effect it might have had on the co-construction of the narratives that unfolded in the interviews.

The next stage of the analysis involved scanning individual narratives for different domains of experience such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, and structural as well as considering how they may be linked (Fraser, 2004). This was done to help prevent fixating on only one dimension of the participants' experiences. This stage included scanning stories for intrapersonal aspects of stories such as narrator self-talk. Narrator self-talk includes such as things as sharing private thoughts and feelings. Interpersonal aspects of stories were also examined, the sharing of conversations between the women and their partners and other people who played an important role in shaping their ideas and actions in regards to the violence that the women experienced. Another important element of analysis at this stage was examining cultural aspects of the women's stories, including how these cultural aspects relate to dominant discourses on love, IPV, and gender roles. Finally, stories were scanned for additional social structural aspects of the women's stories such as the influence of public policies and social systems such as residential schools, child welfare authorities, and the legal system.

Overlapping with the previous stage, analysis then focused on what Fraser (2004) has described as "linking the personal with the political" (p. 193) by purposely considering how

dominant discourses and social conventions shape women's interpretation and understanding of their experiences. Consideration was given to how narratives support, negate, or unsettle dominant discourses on relationships, love, and IPV. This included noting how the women told their stories, as meaning is often constructed through speech patterns that have been previously established in the popular vernacular and how one tells a story shapes our interpretation of its legitimacy (Riessman, 2008). How the women used humour, metaphors, language, and narrative style in narrating their stories was reviewed in order to help inform the understanding of the women's stories, as Fraser (2004) has noted that such linguistic devices are "mediated by time, place, gender, culture and class" (p. 194) and can act as sources of miscommunication if not carefully considered.

The next stage of analysis involved moving to analyzing the data across cases, looking for commonalities and differences between and amongst the women's narratives while simultaneously exploring inconsistent or challenging findings (Fraser, 2004). This included noting emergent themes or patterns/plots that occurred across the transcripts with emphasis on how different themes, plots, characters, settings, and temporal orderings converged or diverged. Specifically, the writer searched for emerging themes as to how the changes in the violence that the women experienced shaped their current relationship satisfaction. Next, in addition to Fraser's methodological suggestions, an analysis based on Bamberg's (2004) concept of a positioning analysis was conducted. Bamberg's (2004) positioning analysis states that often within narratives, dominant and counter narratives "emerge in co-presence" (p. 353) and as such act together in a discursive process in which individuals both comply and contest dominant narratives. Bamberg (2004) notes that dominant narratives (sometimes also referred to as plotlines, master plots, dominant discourses, storylines or cultural texts) provide the social

location for where and how the individuals in the story will be positioned within a storyline already known to and accepted by the audience. He also argues that while certain aspects of the dominant narrative are always left intact within a story, other aspects might be reshaped and reconfigured within the dominant framework. Aspects of the storyline that are reshaped or reconfigured are referred to as counter narratives. As such, counter narratives are said to "always operate on the edge of disputability and require a good amount of interactional subtlety and rhetorical finessing on the part of the speaker" (Bamberg, 2004, p. 363). The transcripts were explored for dominant and counter narratives that emerged across cases to help understand how the women in the study were negotiating meaning in their experiences of IPV and their current relationships.

The last stage of analysis, in keeping with Fraser's (2004) analytic recommendations, involved checking that the results of the analysis were in keeping with the narratives that were told by the women while addressing the objectives of the main research questions of this study. This included looking for blind spots in the researcher's interpretation of the data in the study. The results of the analysis were then subject to review by the researcher's supervisor to help ensure consensual validity. The inclusion of having a methodological expert act as a check on the writer by engaging in actions such as reviewing the writer's interpretation of direct quotes and checking for disconfirming or negative cases contrary to the writer's working hypotheses is thought to increase the credibility (accuracy of the researcher's representation of the participants' experience), dependability (consistency of the findings), and confirmability (the degree to which the results can be confirmed or corroborated by others) of the study (Krefting, 1991). This last stage of analysis also provided an excellent opportunity for the researcher to engage in reflective practice. As someone with a history of working as a couple's therapist with couples who had a

history of abusive dynamics, including physical aggression, it was important to acknowledge the researcher's biases and how these biases impacted interpretation of the women's narratives. This included attempting to bracket her personal beliefs regarding what constitutes healthy relationships and her belief that while some couples are capable of overcoming violence in relationships, it does not always result in couples experiencing increased relationship satisfaction.

A descriptive analysis of the quantitative data was also conducted to provide additional information about participants' past and current experiences. Analysis of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale allowed for a comparison of how participants' current level of adjustment and satisfaction in their relationship compared to norms established from a standardized sample of married women (Spanier, 1976). This comparison allowed not only for reporting the women's individual level of relationship satisfaction, but also allowed for reporting the range of relationship satisfaction of the entire sample. These quantitative results were compared with the women's qualitative statements about their relationship satisfaction to see if there was congruence. For example, a woman might have reported in her interview that since the desistance of violence she is satisfied with her relationship, but the results of quantitative measures may have revealed that in comparison to the standardized sample, she is still relatively low in relationship satisfaction.

Analysis of the CTS2 provided descriptive information about the frequency, bi-directionality, and severity of the violence that the participants experienced in the pastas well as assessed for the presence of possible physical or psychological abuse in the current relationship. The data pertaining to the twelve month period when the violence was at its worse helped provide behavioural context to the women's stories of the violence they experienced. This data was also compared with the women's qualitative statements about their past relationship

experiences to see if there was congruence. The data collected from the past twelve months reflecting the participants' current relationship was examined for the presence of abusive behaviours (both psychological and physical). This data was also compared with the women's qualitative statements about their current relationship to see if there was congruence, particularly in regards as to the women's self definition of their relationships being "violence free."

Trustworthiness of the Research

In order to establish the trustworthiness of the study, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of establishing transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability of the study were applied. Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to contexts beyond this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By quantifying the context of the violence experienced by the study's participants in terms of the frequency, severity, and directionality of the violence experienced by the sample allowed for future researchers to have a greater understanding of the possibility of transferring the study's results to other situations. Extensive information on the demographic and social locations of the participants was also provided for this reason.

Credibility, the accuracy of the researcher's representation of the participants' experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was established through the use of reflective listening during the interviews, the richness of the data gathered, and finally by cross checking information from multiples sources (triangulation) such as field notes, memos, and both qualitative and quantitative data. Triangulation is a common method of increasing the credibility of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Several steps were taken to help ensure the confirmability of the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which results can be confirmed or corroborated by others and is a measure of the objectivity used in evaluating the findings of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This

included the researcher's use of a reflexive practice to be aware of and note potential biases, keeping an audit trail to detail how certain patterns were found in the data, and having the findings confirmed by the researcher's advisor who is an expert in the field.

Dependability, the consistency of the findings in terms of the ability of the results to be replicated and have similar findings found (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was ensured by having only one researcher collect the data and providing a detailed description of the methodology used by the researcher.

Feedback to Participants

Upon completion of this study, a summary of the findings will be distributed to the participants who indicated on their informed consent that they would like to be sent a summary.

Chapter 4: Findings

This section includes information gathered on the demographic and social location of the participants. It also includes information on the interview process and how factors related to the interviewer, the participants, and recent events in their relationships may have impacted the narratives the women constructed. Next, the findings regarding relationship satisfaction from both quantitative and qualitative sources are presented and integrated. The final portion of findings section focuses on the impact of desistance of violence on relationship satisfaction and includes the findings of the CTS-2 (Straus, 1996), the causal attributions the women made as to why violence occurred in their relationships, the dominant narrative and counternarratives told by the women when describing the changes that have occurred in their relationships, and possible reasons why women may have constructed their narratives the way that they did.

Demographic and Social Location of Participants

Sample demographics. In order to situate the women in this study in terms of their sample demographics, a summary of socio-demographic, relationship, and service use characteristics is provided (Table 1). Of the 15 women who participated in this study, seven of the women were in their twenties, five in their thirties, and three in their forties. The women identified being of European, Asian, African, and Aboriginal descent, with over half of the women identifying as Aboriginal (the term Aboriginal was used in the demographic questionnaire rather than the term Indigenous as it was considered to be a more commonly used term by the general population at the time of data collection). In addition, one participant was not a Canadian citizen. The high representation of Indigenous women is consistent with research indicating that Indigenous women in Canada are over represented statistically in terms of experiencing IPV, with Indigenous women being approximately three times more likely to

Table 1

Participant Socio-demographic, Relationship, and Service Use Characteristics (*N* = 15)

Characteristics	Number of women
Socio-demographic Information:	
Age	
20-29 years of age	7
30-39 years of age	5
40-49 years of age	3
Cultural Background	
Aboriginal Canadian	8
African Canadian	1
Asian Canadian	2
European Canadian	4
Hispanic Canadian	0
Non-Canadian	1
Highest Educational Level Achieved	
Less than Grade 10	1
Less than Grade 12 or GED	2
Some university or college	9
Completed university or college	3
Employment Status	
Working full time	0
Working part time	5
Full time home-maker	2
Student	8
Not working	3
Disabilities	
Physical disabilities	9
Mental health disabilities	9
Disability limits activity	5
No disabilities	2
Household Income	
< $15,000/year	5
$15,001 – 30,000/year	3
$30,001 – 60,000/year	3
$60,000 – 90,000/year	2

over $90,000/year	2
Number of Children	
0	7
1-2	2
3-4	4
5 or more	2
Relationship Information:	
Length of Relationship (years)	
1-5 years	2
>5 years	6
>10 years	4
>15 years	3
Cohabitation Status	
Living together full time	10
Living together part time	3
Living apart	2
Number of times couple has separated	
Never	3
Separated (number of times not reported)	2
Once	8
Twice	1
More than three times	1
Length of time since last violent incident	
< 1 year	1
1 – 2 years	5
3 - 5 years	5
>5 years	4
History of Substance Abuse Issues	
Self	7
Partner	10
Neither self or partner	5
Legal charges due to IPV	
Self	2
Partner	6
Service usage:	

Counselling for IPV	
Self	9
Partner	10
Shelter use	
Never	8
Once	3
Twice	4

experience IPV than Non-Indigenous women (Statistics Canada, 2016b).

The participants' level of education ranged from grade 5 to the completion of a Bachelor's Degree at university, with 12 of the women reporting attending some university or college or completing university or college at the time of this study. Therefore, while there was a wide range in the educational experiences of women in the study in general, women with higher levels of education were over represented in the study.

In regards to paid employment, none of the women in the study reported working full time, five reported working part time, and two reported not working. The majority of the women (8/15) reported being students. In addition, the majority of women self-defined as having some type of disability or long-term illness (13/15), with five of the women reporting that the severity of their disabilities/illnesses limits their activity. Physical disabilities/illnesses identified by the women included gastrointestinal problems, thyroid problems, diabetes, human immunodeficiency virus, epilepsy, and back problems. Mental health disabilities identified by the women included depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse issues. A high prevalence of substance abuse issues were reported by the women, with almost half the women (7/15) reporting they have a history of substance abuse and two thirds of the women (10/15) reporting that their partners have a history of substance abuse. One third of the women did not report a history of substance abuse for either person in the relationship.

The self-reported household income ranged from below 15,000 to over 90,000 dollars, with 5 women endorsing the modal response of having a household income of less than $15,000 a year. Of the six women who reported including their partner's income in their household income, three women shared that without their partner's income, their income would drop to less than $15,000 a year. This suggests that the majority of women in the study (8/15) have limited

financial resources that are readily available to them if their relationships were to fail.

Over half of the women in the study reported having children and of the 8 women who reported being mothers, seven of the women reported caring for dependent children.

The length of time the women reported being in their relationship ranged from 3 to 20 years, with the modal response being longer than five years but less than 10 years. The length of time the women reported as being in a violence free relationship ranged from 10 months to six years, with the modal response falling between 3 and 5 years. No women who self-identified as being violence free longer than ten years participated in the study and therefore women with long-term perspectives on how the desistance of violence impacts relationship satisfaction were not represented in the study.

Two women reported that they had been charged due to their involvement in IPV and six women reported their partner had been charged due to involvement in IPV. The majority of the women also reported using counselling services for IPV, with nine women reporting having received services for themselves and ten women reporting that their partners had received counselling services. Almost half of the women reported using shelter services for IPV at least once.

Interview Process

This section includes information and reflections on the process of the interviews, in part to engage in a reflexive practice of how both the interviewer's and the participant's social location shaped the co-construction of the women's narratives. In general, the women presented as comfortable engaging in the interview process. That being said, there was a range in how the women responded to the process. For example, some women presented as eager to speak about their relationships, as captured in the statement of one woman who expressed being

"flabbergasted" that there could be a research study that she could participate in that acknowledged that abusive relationships can change:

> **Kiki:** That's why I was so amazed when I saw the study on the board. And I read, and I read and I kept on reading. And I thought, that's so me. And what would be the chances, cause I was looking for apartments, cause we're looking to move again. And, you know, and then I came across that. And I was absolutely flabbergasted cause that's so me and that's why I phoned you.
> **Interviewer:** Do you think, you're talking about this idea that you were so surprised.
> **Kiki:** I was.
> **Interviewer:** That you could see something on a poster that described you, what kinda ideas…
> **Kiki:** Cause you don't see that, people changing.

However, when asked to reflect on what her relationship was like before it changed, this same woman struggled with having to talk about her past painful experiences:

> **Kiki:** Like we've been through a lot. I don't want to go into detail. Please don't ask me to go into detail about certain stories cause really I'd rather put them behind me. But I'm going to do my best to help the best I can.

For Kiki, as well as some of the other women in the study, participation in the study seemed important for her, but still difficult at times.

It was also not uncommon for women in the study to report or show signs of distress at points in the interview and different women dealt with their distress in different ways. For example, one woman showed adeptness in using humour to deal with her distress during a part of the interview in which she had begun to cry by jokingly asking "I'm sorry, how's my makeup?" and starting to laugh. This allowed her to shift the emotional tone of the interview. Other examples of how the women dealt with distressing parts of the interview included one woman asking the interviewer to look away if she began to cry, while another woman took a short water break to regain her composure. It was thought important by the interviewer to respect the women's agency in shaping the interview and to recognize when the women needed to lower the intensity of the interview and reframe or come back to difficult subjects later in the interview.

In addition, the women who were asked to explain how the presence of physically aggressive acts that had occurred in the past year fit with their definition of being in a violence free relationship also displayed some discomfort. Part of this appeared to be related to being questioned about their actions by someone who, by virtue of the interviewer's social location as an academic, had the social power to possibly judge them. This was noted in how the women's speech patterns became more disjointed and the emphasis that two of the women placed on stating that they understood that their actions did constitute violent acts, as one woman put it "on a piece of paper," although they continued to report their relationships as being violence free.

The idea that some of the women were concerned about being judged by the interviewer was evident in other ways, such as one woman who had a grade five education expressing concern that she may not be expressing herself well enough, stating "I have a grade five education, so if I could use better words I would." Another woman who was studying to be in a professional helping role shared that she felt conflicted while answering some of the questions because she wanted to answer in a manner consistent with her profession, but her personal views did not always align with what she viewed as the professional stance. A different woman, who had a history of extensive counselling for IPV, also chose to incorporate a great deal of the terminology related to the cycle of abuse and feminist perspectives on IPV into her responses. This left the interviewer wondering if she wanted to give the impression that she was knowledgeable about IPV. Finally, one woman had a habit of using words not commonly used in everyday conversation, leaving the interviewer wondering if this was typical of her speech patterns or if she too may have been wishing to convey an impression of herself as knowledgeable.

In addition, the interviewer's ethnicity appeared to play a factor to some extent in shaping

the interview. For example, one of the women who identified as Aboriginal made a point of asking whether the interviewer was familiar with the history of residential schools and its negative impact on people. However, once assured that the interviewer was aware of the issues facing some residential school survivors and their families, the participant seemed reassured and appeared to engage fully in the interview process.

Some of the women reported recent significant events in their relationships that may have impacted the interview. For example, one woman reported that she was contemplating getting an abortion against the wishes of her partner. Another woman reported that she had recently had an argument with her partner and shared that she had been crying prior to the interview. Finally, one woman brought her child to the interview as she had no childcare and this may have impacted her ability to be completely forthright.

Despite these factors that impacted the interviews, it appeared that participants were engaged in the process and willingly shared their views about their experiences.

Lastly, it should be noted that as the interviewer interviewed more participants, the interview process changed in that the order of asking the questions became more fluid so as to minimize the influence of interviewer on shaping how the women constructed their narratives.

Findings on Relationship Satisfaction

As previously noted, the focus of this study was on examining two key areas of inquiry: 1) how satisfied were the women with their current relationships and what aspects of their relationship were important in determining their relationship satisfaction, and 2) how the women understand the violence in their relationships and what impact did this understanding have on their current relationship satisfaction. In order to explore the first of these areas of inquiry, the relationship satisfaction of the women was explored through the integration of the quantitative

and qualitative data. Quantitative data consisted of the women's scores on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the patterns found across the women's results. Qualitative data consisted of the women's responses to interview questions regarding what they thought women in general needed to be satisfied in their relationships, what the women liked and disliked about their current relationships and what changes in their relationship might increase their satisfaction. Patterns across the women's responses were identified. Sources of congruence and incongruence resulting from the integration of findings from both forms of data are discussed.

Quantitative analysis of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) scores. In order to explore the women's current relationship satisfaction quantitatively, the women were asked to complete the DAS, a measure of dyadic adjustment (Spanier, 1976). The DAS scores ranged from *T*-scores of 20 to 66. Scores between 45 and 55 are considered to represent average relationship satisfaction and scores of 30 or below are considered to be of clinical significance by the developer of this scale (Spanier, 1976). Of the fifteen participants, two women (Kylie and Mary) scored in the clinical range (below 30; see Table 2). An additional three participants (Ellen, Cindy, and Rita) scored in the much below average range (30 to 34). Two participants had scores in the below average (35 to 39) and five women had scores in the slightly below average ranges (40 to 44). One woman (Samantha) scored in the average range (45 to 55), one woman (Signe) scored in the slightly above average range (56 to 60), and one woman (Kiki) scored in the much above average range (66 to 70). The mean DAS *T*- score was in the slightly below average range (39.6) with a standard deviation (*SD*) of 11.5.

In regards to the DAS subscales, *T*-score means for the subscales ranged from 36.7 (*SD* = 9.8) on the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale to 52.8 (*SD* = 11.5) on the Dyadic Cohesion subscale. There was a tendency amongst the women to report lower Dyadic Satisfaction, which is an

Table 2

Dyadic Adjustment Scale and Subscale T-scores

Participant	Dyadic Adjustment Scale	Dyadic Consensus Subscale	Dyadic Satisfaction Subscale	Affectional Expression Subscale	Dyadic Cohesion Subscale
Kiki	66	61	60	63	73
Signe	58	58	48	54	68
Samantha	47	40	48	46	63
Honey	43	47	37	41	56
Lana	41	42	40	41	49
Julie	41	45	41	37	47
Tabitha	40	40	33	50	59
Colleen	40	41	33	46	59
Abby	38	36	35	37	59
Emily	37	42	30	41	51
Rita	33	30	38	41	42
Cindy	32	31	**27**	50	49
Ellen	32	32	30	46	47
Mary	**26**	36	**28**	**24**	30
Kylie	**20**	20	**22**	33	40

Note: Values in the clinical range are in boldface.

indicator of the presence of high tension in the relationship and/or low commitment to continuing the relationship, with only 3 of the 15 women reporting average or above Dyadic Satisfaction. subscale scores. Furthermore, 10 of the 15 women scored lowest on this scale, suggesting this was a trend amongst women regardless of their overall DAS score. Of the five women who did not score lowest on this subscale, three women (Samantha, Rita, and Kylie) scored lowest on the Dyadic Consensus Subscale and two women scored lowest on the Affectional Expression subscale (Julie and Mary). In contrast, the majority of women in the study reported much higher scores on the Dyadic Cohesion subscale, a measure of common interests and activities shared by the couple, with 11 of the 15 women reporting average or above average scores. Furthermore, 13 of the women scored highest on this scale, suggesting this was a trend amongst women regardless of their overall DAS score. Of the two women who did not score highest on this subscale, Mary scored highest on the Dyadic Consensus subscale and Cindy scored highest on the Affection Expression subscale.

Overall, these results suggest that, on average, the women in the study reported slightly lower relationship satisfaction than the average woman in the normative sample of the DAS (Spanier, 1976). However, relationship satisfaction varied greatly from woman to woman. The data from the subscales also suggested the presence of a general pattern of relationship satisfaction across the sample that was characterized by weakness in the area of relationship stability and strength in the area of couple cohesion.

Bio-sketches. In order to help the reader have a greater understanding of the context of each woman's narrative of her relationship satisfaction, brief bio-sketches based on information gathered from field notes, interviews, and questionnaires are provided. Identifying information such as names have been changed and specific demographic information has been generalized in

order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Given this study's focus on relationship satisfaction, the bio-sketches are arranged in order of women reporting the highest relationship satisfaction to lowest satisfaction as determined by their relationship satisfaction scores on the DAS (Spanier, 1976).

Kiki. Kiki (a pseudonym was used for each participant) is a Caucasian woman in her forties. She reported not working at the time of the interview, having limited financial resources, and having disability issues that limited the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. Kiki described both herself and her partner as struggling with addiction issues in the past. She reported being with her partner over 10 years and self-defined as violence free in her relationship for over five years. Kiki lives with her partner. She has adult children but currently no children live with the couple. Kiki's DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the much above average range.

Signy. Signy is an Indigenous woman in her twenties. She is a post-secondary student. She identified as having limited financial resources but not as having disability issues that interfered with the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. Signy described both herself and her partner as struggling with addiction issues in the past. She reported being in her current relationship for over five years and self-defined her current relationship as being violence free for over two years. Signy currently lives with her partner and the couple have no children. Her DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the slightly above average range.

Samantha. Samantha is an Indigenous woman in her thirties. She is a post-secondary student. Samantha did not describe herself as having limited financial resources, but did describe herself as being financially dependent on her partner. She did not report having any disability issues that interfered with the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. Samantha described both herself and her partner as struggling with addiction issues in the past. She

reported being in her current relationship for over 15 years and self-defined her current relationship as being violence free for almost 5 years. Samantha currently lives with her partner and their children. She also has an adult son form a previous relationship. Samantha's DAS (Spanier,1976) score fell in the average range.

Honey. Honey is an Asian woman in her twenties. She is a foreign student studying in Canada. Honey shared that she does not have limited financial resources. She reported not having any disability issues that would interfere with the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. She reported being in her current relationship for five years and self-defined her relationship as being violence free for over three years. Honey currently lives with her partner. The couple have no children. Her DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the slightly below average range.

Lana. Lana is a woman of mixed race (European Canadian, African Canadian, and Asian Canadian), in her thirties, and a post-secondary student/part-time worker. Lana did not identify as having limited financial resources or as having disability issues that would interfere with the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. She reported being in her relationship over five years. Lana self-defined her relationship as being violence free for over a year. The couple have no children. Her DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the slightly below average range.

Julie. Julie is a second generation Asian Canadian in her twenties. She is a post-secondary student. Julie did not identify as having limited financial resources but did report having disability issues that would interfere with the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. She reported being in her current relationship for over five years and self-defined her relationship as being violence free for over three years. She does not live with her partner and the couple have no children. Her DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the slightly below average

range.

Tabitha. Tabitha is an Indigenous woman in her forties. She reported not currently working. Tabitha identified as having limited financial resources and disability issues that interfere with the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. She described both herself and her partner as struggling with addiction issues in the past. She reported being in current relationship for approximately ten years and self-defined her relationship as being violence free for over five years. She lives with her partner; the couple have no children, although her partner has at least one adult child from a previous relationship. Her DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the slightly below average range.

Colleen. Colleen is an Indigenous woman in her twenties. She works part time and attends post-secondary school. Colleen did not identify as having limited financial resources or disability issues that interfere with the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. She described her partner as struggling with addiction issues in the past. Colleen reported being in her current relationship for approximately fifteen years and self-defined her current relationship as being violence free for over five years. Colleen lives with her partner and their children. Her DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the slightly below average range.

Abby. Abby is a Caucasian woman in her twenties. She reported not working. Abby identified as having limited financial resources but not as having disability issues that interfere with the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. She reported being in her current relationship approximately three year and self-defined her relationship as being violence free for just under a year. Abby lives with her partner and the couple have no children. Her DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the below average range.

Emily. Emily is an Indigenous woman in her thirties. She attends post-secondary school

and works part-time. Emily reported having limited financial resources and having disability issues that interfere with the kind or amount of activity that she can participate in. She described both herself and her partner as struggling with addiction issues in the past. Emily reported being in her relationship for over five years and self-defined her relationship as being violence free for over a year. She lives with her partner and the couple have no children. Her DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the below average range.

Rita. Rita is a Caucasian woman in her thirties. She attends post-secondary school. Rita reported having limited financial resources and disability issues that interfere with the kind or amount of activity that she can participle in. Rita reported being in her relationship for over 15 years and self-defined her relationship as being violence free for over five years. She lives with her partner and their children. Rita's DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the much below average range.

Cindy. Cindy is an Indigenous woman in her twenties. She is a post-secondary student. Cindy reported as being financially dependent on her partner. She did not report having any disability issues that interfere with the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. She described her partner as struggling with addiction issues. Cindy reported being with her partner over 10 years and self-defined her relationship as violence free for over two years. She does not live with her partner. The couple have children. Colleen's DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the much below average range.

Ellen. Ellen is a Caucasian woman in her forties. She works part time. Ellen identified as being financially dependent on her partner. She does not have any disability issues that interfere with the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. Ellen described her partner as struggling with addiction issues. She reported being in her relationship for over fifteen years and

she self-defined her relationship as being violence free for over six years. She lives with her partner and their children. Ellen's DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the much below average range.

Mary. Mary is an Indigenous woman in her thirties. She was not working at the time of the interview. She identified as being financially dependent on her partner but not as having disability issues that interfere with the kind or amount of activity she can do. She reported both herself and her partner as having addiction issues in the past. She reported being in her current relationship twenty years and she self-defined her relationship as being violence free for over six years. She lives with her partner and their children. Mary's DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the very much below average range (clinical range).

Kylie. Kylie is an Indigenous woman in her twenties. She was attends post-secondary school at the time of the interview. Kylie identified as having limited financial resources and as having disability issues that limit the kind or amount of activity she can participate in. She reported her partner as struggling with addiction issues. Kylie reported being in her relationship over three years and she self-defined her relationship as being violence free for over a year. She lives with her children. Her partner is not currently living with her as he is incarcerated. Kylie's DAS (Spanier, 1976) score fell in the very much below average range (clinical range).

Qualitative analysis of relationship satisfaction. In analyzing the women's responses to interview questions about relationship satisfaction, both in general to women and specifically to their relationships the women identified six sub-themes as important components of a satisfying relationship. These subthemes included: 1) love, intimacy, and connection (including physical affection); 2) trust and honesty (including fidelity); 3) open communication; 4) security and stability; 5) support; and 6) respect.

Love, intimacy, and connection (including physical connection). In discussing what they thought was important for women to be satisfied in their relationships; the majority of the women in the study noted the importance of love, intimacy, and connection between partners. For example, many women noted the importance of love to having a satisfying relationship, with some women highlighting the need for an unconditional aspect to love:

> **Signe:** I think that the key, you really have to love the person, the good and the bad, no matter what, to really be happy with it.

In her statement, Signe emphasized the need for a type of love in relationships in which partners accept each other, "the good and the bad," and that for her unconditional love is the "key" to a satisfying relationship. Another woman, Mary, emphasised the same point as Signe, but from a different perspective, sharing what it is like for her to not have mutual unconditional love in her current relationship:

> **Mary:** Another thing is unconditional love, which, uhh, I feel, I unconditionally love my partner. But, umm, my partner, calls me names, tells me I'm fat and that I should go work out. And that to me isn't unconditional love. There's certain conditions there.

Mary noted she believes that her partner does not love her unconditionally as she feels that she has to meet "certain conditions." She also links this lack of unconditional love to her partner calling her "names" and being verbally abusive towards her. Her partner's criticism of her body highlights the intersection of gendered and cultural beliefs around the value of women's bodies, leaving Mary vulnerable to her partner's verbal attacks. She later shared how her partner's lack of unconditional love impacts her:

> **Mary:** I noticed with him he's always asking me to change. And I'm really dissatisfied with that cause I don't ask him to change. But I don't appreciate being asked to change because if you can't accept me for who I am, what are you doing with me? You know, just because we have children, if you're not? That's how I feel. You know, you should just, people say unconditional love, where he should just, you know. I unconditionally love him, faults and all, the grouch he is (laughs). And then being asked to change, it's just, it's almost like a slap in the face.

In equating her partner's requests for her to change with "a slap in the face," Mary constructed a vivid image of her dissatisfaction with this aspect of her relationship.

Other women in the study emphasized the need for the presence of intimacy and connection in satisfying relationships. For example, in speaking about her ideas of what things are important in order to have a satisfying relationship, Lana noted that there had been a point in her relationship when both partners had been very busy pursuing different career interests, making it "pretty tricky schedule wise" for the couple to spend much time together in which they could focus on working on their relationship. According to Lana, this lowered her relationship satisfaction. She shared her desire for something more than a "supportive roommate" in the following excerpt:

> **Lana:** … a sense of enjoyment of the other person's company, you know. People can start to take other people for granted, get into a routine. Umm, go through the motions you know. And I know where we've gone through periods where I feel like I have a really supportive roommate, but that wasn't exactly what I bargained for. So I, umm, I made my feelings known and I worked on it and its gotten better.

Lana's use of the phrase "I worked on it and its gotten better" lets the interviewer know that she viewed the situation as important/problematic enough to require her to put effort into ameliorating the issue so that her relationship could be "better."

In addition, one woman who had children extrapolated on this point by sharing her opinion that relationship satisfaction includes an aspect of connection between partners that goes beyond their role as co-parents.

> **Samantha:** You need, umm, have some commonalities, like similarities that you and your partner have, kinda like they're just for you. Like we have three kids and there are family parts, but there are certain things that we, like before we go to bed we talk, like about things that are just between me and him. Umm, I find that that's important because we, like everybody else, live busy lives that are going in multiple directions. So to kinda ground.

By noting the need to set aside time to talk about "things that are just between me and him," Samantha conveyed her belief that satisfying relationships require time where couples focus on maintaining their connection and "ground" their relationship.

Other women in the study emphasized the importance of having a physical connection between partners in a satisfying relationship. For example, Rita, spoke of the importance of physical affection to her relationship satisfaction:

> **Rita:** … he still likes to hold hands and cuddle. And all that sort of thing. I know that's something that a lot of women complain that they lose over time so I'm glad to have that.

In emphasizing that physical affection can be lost in a relationship and that when this happens it leads to women having relationships complaints, Rita shared her belief that physical connection is important to having a satisfying relationship and this makes her "glad to have that" in her relationship.

Another woman, Mary, who reported not having sexual relations with her husband for over two years, also emphasized the need for "a healthy sexual relationship" between partners:

> **Mary:** … maybe if we were more intimate. I think that would make a big difference for, you know, we'd be more close. And umm, I know with intimacy there's the pillow talk. So that's always nice, that was nice.

Mary shared that she believes that sex is important to relationship satisfaction as it leads to "pillow talk" and "intimacy." She also noted that in the past when she had this in her relationship, it was "nice," and shared she thinks it "would make a big difference" to her relationship satisfaction if the couple could regain this aspect of connection in their relationship.

Abby also shared that for her a satisfying relationship includes physical contact and noted that for her "hugs and kisses" are linked to feeling loved:

> **Abby:** … just like hugs and kisses, and just feeling like somebody loves you.

Abby also shared that she has felt less satisfied in her relationship since her partner has become

less physically affectionate with her:

> **Abby:** Umm I think like, right now what I'd say I don't like is umm … I guess is like the lack of, ahh, showing love. Like, uhh like I, I feel like I'm, uhh, like we, like I feel like I'm happy in my relationship with many areas. But I feel like when it comes to being emotionally kind and lots of hugs and kisses, like we're on different levels. So I think that would be something that…. [name of partner] was a lot more like that when we first met. And, but like I wasn't really, uhh, to the point that I am now when it comes to wanting to receive that…. And then, I think like just through lots of stuff that we've been, that we went through, he started to put his guard up. and it's just, uhh, it's just gone like way down, like the scale of that has gone way down.

Abby shared that part of the "stuff" the couple went through in the past was her unwillingness to agree to a monogamous relationship at the start of their relationship. As a woman, Abby's decision to not follow the gendered roles of heteronormative romance led to her partner dealing with her decision by becoming angry and putting his "guard up." In return, Abby learned to deal with this problem by withholding affection from her partner:

> **Abby:** …like I'm very affectionate and very like I just want to be able to be nice and loving and stuff and he will be like that if I'm not showing him that. So, I don't understand why, but that's just how it is.

By withholding physical affection, Abby shared that she can manipulate her partner into being "nice and loving." This suggests that for this couple, connection and intimacy have become contentious, with each partner withholding physical and emotional closeness at times. This in turn impacts Abby's relationship satisfaction negatively.

Trust and honesty (including fidelity). Another sub-theme that over half of the women discussed in terms of what they thought was important in order to have a satisfying relationship was the need for women to have trust and honesty in their relationships. For example, one woman, Tabitha, spoke of how her partner, in demonstrating that he can now keep his promises to her, helped her feel that she could now trust him. She contrasted this change in her partner to the past when he was drinking and "selfish."

> **Tabitha:** Yeah but every once and a while he scores a few points, you know. Cause I think, I was working before, and I was doing home care, so I supported his first truck. And I bought his first truck. But he paid me back for it. So that's how it started, I bought him a truck and he says "when I get, when I get some more money happening, I'm gonna buy you something for Christmas." And I didn't think he'd buy me a car, but he did.
> **Interviewer:** So he kept his word.
> **Tabitha:** Yeah so that's, like little things like that have changed in him. Cause normally, in his drinking mode he would never do that, yeah he would never do that, so that's changed a lot in him.
> **Interviewer:** So lots of changes.
> **Tabitha:** Yeah, cause he was really selfish and inconsiderate and stuff like that when he was drinking. And he thought he was just a single man. And stuff like that, you know how men are. Especially when they drink, they walk down the street, they're beside you but they act like they're single. He doesn't do that, he used to.

When asked what she meant by acting like he was "single," Tabitha shared that her partner used to "look at girls" and not include her in conversations when he met someone he knew on the street. For Tabitha, her partner's lack of public acknowledgement of her as his partner made him untrustworthy. Tabitha also disclosed that her partner at one point in their past relationship had been "screwing my neighbor," suggesting that her partner's entitlement to act "single," while she was expected to faithful and loyal, led to his infidelity. This double standard of behaviour based on gender and cultural norms impacted Tabitha's relationship satisfaction negatively. By keeping his word to pay her back the money she spent on his truck, Tabitha shared that her partner scored "a few points" in terms of her seeing him as more trustworthy and presumably her relationship in a more positive manner. She contrasted this to her past view of him as "selfish and inconsiderate" when he was drinking.

Another woman, Kylie, also shared that she felt that honesty was important to having a satisfying relationship, noting that her partner's jealousy has contributed to her feeling she cannot be "fully honest" with her partner:

> **Kylie:** Umm, there's a lot of like jealousy. He gets jealous really easy. Umm, so from that idea, I'm not fully honest with him most of the time, umm, because then I wouldn't be allowed to have certain friends or go certain places. Umm, I guess that's like the big

thing that I really don't like.

Kylie went on to describe how she lies about certain aspects of her life to her partner:

> **Kylie:** … there's certain people who are like my friends. Like guys, I'm not allowed to hang out with guys obviously. And, umm, I'm not allowed to have a Facebook. Umm, which I do any ways. Like, you know, like those types of things, I have to lie about. Or if I go hang out with certain friends, like even some girls, he doesn't like me to be around because of the way they look …

Kylie shared that she lies to avoid her partner's anger and she would prefer it if "he didn't get mad over everything." For Kylie, her partner's anger, jealousy, and control issues contribute to her inability to be honest in the relationships and "that's the big thing I really don't like."

Another woman, Cindy, shared that for her trust is linked to infidelity and lack of trust is important to her relationship satisfaction as she sees the presence of trust issues in her relationship as a "a big problem":

> **Cindy:** There's a lot of trust issues between us. Because it happened a lot in our past, like infidelity and stuff, like both ways. So that's a big problem.

As the interview continued, Cindy noted that her and her partner's trust issues go beyond issues of infidelity, noting that he monitors her spending and activities:

> **Cindy:** Umm, he likes to control my money. Like he will send me money, like put money into my bank account, like every time payday comes around. He can't make it home. And he'll say "what did you do with the money? What did you spend the money on?" Like, you know. And then he'll check my bank account.
> **Interviewer:** So what would you prefer?
> **Cindy:** Like that he would not be so controlling over that. Like I told him he could trust me with money. Like seriously, what am I going to do, like I'm buying stuff for the house and, I don't know…. Like he thinks I have a drinking problem, like I tell him that I have drinks sometimes on the weekends, but my mom stays home with the kids. And I don't drink at home I said. So he thinks I have a drinking problem, so.
> **Interviewer:** So there's some discussion about that idea.
> **Cindy:** That I go out with my friends or my cousins and, and have a few drinks like at [name of a restaurant] or something downtown. Yeah.
> **Interviewer:** So there's that idea that he says it's about.
> **Cindy:** And when I go out somewhere, like he'll call my cell phone non-stop to see where I am and what I'm doing. I have to shut my cell phone off and say "okay."
> **Interviewer:** So it's hard to kinda go out.

> **Cindy:** Especially when he knows I'm going out. Cause he's always calling my eldest son, well like my old son is like "well Mom's gone out" and then he's automatically calling me. Yeah.

In telling this story, Cindy linked lack of trust between her and her partner to his unfounded accusations of her misspending money and drinking excessively, as well as to his controlling behaviours such as monitoring her activities "non-stop," all of which negatively impact her satisfaction with the relationship.

Communication. Women also emphasized the role of communication between partners in satisfying relationships. For example, Kiki shared that, in her opinion, learning to communicate "properly" was important to improving her relationship:

> **Kiki**: … learn how to talk to each other without yelling or name-calling and, and even if there is an argument, there's always arguments, but do it properly, say how you think, communication is number one with me….

Kiki also shared that she thinks that women want both partners to communicate in their relationships, but for women in abusive relationship, fear can prevent women from communicating with their partners:

> **Kiki:** I think women want communication…. Communication, ahh. I think it just has to work both ways. Yeah, I think women should be able to express how they feel and not have to be scared to say how they're feeling and it's recip-, goes both ways, right?
> **Interviewer:** You've actually kinda alluded that communication is linked to some kinda safety issue.
> **Kiki:** Yes, cause a lot of women won't say how they're feeling cause they're scared, so communication is a big thing
> **Interviewer:** What do you think they're scared of?
> **Kiki:** Well, scared of the violence. Cause after, if they say something wrong or do something wrong.

In discussing her beliefs about communication, Kiki made it clear that she believes that the presence of violence in relationships can place women at risk if they try to communicate, suggesting that in her experiences, free speech is often denied to women by men.

In taking about communication in her relationship, Kylie expanded on the concept of how

abusive dynamics shape and limit communication:

> **Kylie:** … like umm he takes off if he gets too mad, or something like that. So it's, it's, we can only discuss things to a certain point cause then I know he will leave. Or you know, if we're on the phone then he'll just hang up or, or I'll hang up.
> **Interviewer:** So it sounds like you think that's a problem, you know, the hanging up and the running away and stuff. What do you think, what do you think the effect of that is?
> **Kylie:** What do you mean?
> **Interviewer:** Well, you know, when there's a problem, the fact of the matter is that these things happen. How do you think that affects your relationship?
> **Kylie:** I guess there's less communication, cause there's certain things we can't talk about. It puts a strain on the relationship. Like there's a lot of things I have to ignore.
> **Interviewer:** Can you give me an example of one of the things so I get a better idea?
> **Kylie:** Umm, like when he would go out and drink. And he would come back, right? I would have to you know let it go, ignore it, forget about it, in order to continue with the relationship.
> **Interviewer:** So that's like an unwritten rule.
> **Kylie:** Yeah or there's certain things he would say that I thought were kinda mean and I would ignore that…

In this excerpt, Kylie explained that, in her relationship, trying to communicate about problems often led to both partners shutting down communication. This prevented the couple from working through their problems as they could "only discuss things to a certain point." She also shared her perception that communicating about certain "things" was not allowed by her partner, as doing so would risk "the continuation of the relationship." This forced Kylie to "ignore" and self-silence how she really felt about her partner's actions, including his verbal abuse.

Finally, when asked about what things she thought were important to women in order be satisfied in their relationships, Julie shared that not only did she feel that communication was important but also shared her belief that by limiting communication, men are able to manipulate women to "try harder":

> **Julie:** I think it's good to talk about if something is bothering you. You shouldn't be afraid to express how you feel. Especially if it can, you guys can work on the relationship.
> **Interviewer:** Uh-hum, why would somebody be afraid to say what they feel?
> **Julie:** Umm, just cause they might be scared that they may anger or upset the other person. Or they might be, they might get mad, or for fears that they, the other person

might not even care, I think that could be a prob-, a reason why they wouldn't want to talk
Interviewer: Uh-hum, so in terms of the last thing you said, things that could hold you back from communicating is that you're worried that the person might not even care. When you have that fear that the person doesn't really care, how does that impact relationship satisfaction for women?
Julie: Umm, from what I've seen in myself and like just the close people, the girls around me, my friends, when their partners don't really seem to care, it kinda pushes them to try harder. Even though it might not, might work in a way that they wouldn't want it to.
Interviewer: That sounds interesting.
Julie: It's kinda like the chase, I would explain it. Because they don't care I think it would push people to try harder.
Interviewer: Uh-humm, so one person gives less, then the other partner has to give more?
Julie: Yeah.
Interviewer: And that creates like a chasing.
Julie: Yeah, That's what I think.
Interviewer: So if you're someone doing the chasing in the relationship, how do you think that impacts how you feel about the relationship?
Julie: Well they wouldn't really be happy, I think they'd, it's like they are looking for something that isn't really there, they are trying to find the happiness through chasing a person, when it should really just be equal I think. Like there shouldn't be a chase, like guys should be on the same level.
Interviewer: That's interesting the idea of being on different levels, umm who's on what level?
Julie: In that situation the girl is on a higher level, more effort on her part, yeah.
Interviewer: So in terms of effort, she's working harder, who do you think has the power in that relationship?
Julie: The guy, cause he doesn't have to do anything. And I've seen that a lot (laughs), I've seen that in a lot of relationships too.

In this excerpt, Julie shared how she sees communication as a gendered issue in her group of young Asian Canadian friends, with the women wanting to communicate but being too "scared" to do so, as they are unsure how their partners will react. Julie attributed this fear to the women not knowing if their partner cares about them. This lack of assurance creates a dynamic where men maintain greater power in the relationship, where women "try even harder" to work on the relationship and the man "doesn't have to do anything." In this way, the men in Julie's social group use communication processes to exert control in their relationships, which results in the

women not being "happy."

Security and stability. Many of the women in the study also spoke of how they think feeling secure and having stability in their relationships is important to relationship satisfaction. This was reflected in women's perceptions of having enough security and stability in their relationships to feel at ease in the relationship. For example, Julie speaks in her interview of feeling "free" with her partner:

> **Julie:** I like how, I guess, I can really be myself, cause there's a different sort of, like the way I act around my friends is not, it's not a different person, but I know that, well I like to think of it as being on. Like I can't just lounge around or be like, I guess, be a potato. Like with my friends I have to talk and we always have to discuss things. But like in my relationship I like to be free, like how I am at home, and not really care too much about the way that I'm acting I guess.

By choosing to narrate her story with the metaphor of being a "potato" and stating that when she is with her boyfriend she doesn't "really care too much about the way I'm acting," Julie constructed a portrait of a woman at ease in her relationship.

Another woman, Emily, emphasized her belief that stability is important to relationship satisfaction by sharing her experiences when her relationship was "rocky":

> **Emily:** There has to be stability. Umm, fear sets in when you don't have stability, especially with a partner or living somewhere or not having stability or solid ground between the two of you.
> **Interviewer:** So stability is having solid ground between the two of you. So I can get a better grasp of that can you give me an example of what that would look like?
> **Emily:** In my relationship, we were in between moving and we stayed with a relative of mine more than once and that's when things between me and him were rocky…. Umm and I guess in satisfaction, there was no stability, we didn't have our own place.
> **Interviewer:** Okay.
> **Emily:** Uhh, hostility from him towards me and it made me have doubts and stuff about myself.
> **Interviewer:** So when you're talking about stability you're talking about housing?
> **Emily:** Housing, stability to have solid ground, to have a solid foundation to be happy, our own place.

In discussing stability, Emily linked the couple's problems with housing with problems of not

having a "solid foundation" for their relationship. Emily further shared how she viewed instability as linked to substance abuse, financial insecurity, trust, abuse, and living in fear:

> **Emily:** I think it is, if you have that stability, I'll give you an example, umm if there is only one of you being truthful about what's going on financially, he used to take off after he'd get his pay cheque and one of us would be left struggling to pay the rent cause he would drink…. He lied, uhh, and when I knew that he was going to be gone I'd take off. And when I wasn't there when he came home he'd flip out. I would go to my Mom's cause I wouldn't want to deal with his stuff.
> **Interviewer:** Yeah, what kind of stuff do you mean?
> **Emily:** Verbal, mental, and sometimes physical abuse.
> **Interviewer:** Okay, so when he came back.
> **Emily:** So there was no stability between the two of us because of lack of trust and financial issues. They're all tied into one…. It usually made me feel like the hair on my back was going to stand up.
> **Interviewer:** So living with that constant, like, fear.
> **Emily:** Yeah, so that's why I say that instability would bring the onset of fear.

For Emily, lack of physical and emotional stability in the couple's past relationship led to "fear" and relationship dissatisfaction.

Another woman, Abby, described why she thought "emotional stability" was important to women being satisfied in their relationships:

> **Abby:** Umm, I think like, ahh, I think like mental, mental, emotional, and verbal abuse is a lot more easily distributed than people realize. And I, ahh, it, I've definitely experienced that a lot. And I think throughout all those experiences I realized how important emotional stability is with the person that you're with.

Abby's experiences have led her to the conclusion that unlike the societal beliefs she has been taught about romantic relationships, psychological abuse is actually more "distributed" than "people realize." Stemming from the context of her past romantic relationships, Abby's definition of emotional stability appeared to reflect her belief that the absence of psychological abuse is necessary in order to have relationship satisfaction.

Support. Another element that women identified as important to relationship satisfaction is support. For example, one woman noted how important her partner's support is to her:

> **Colleen:** That he does support the decisions that I do make, you know the majority of our relationship now, today. Like, umm, you know, if I need to be somewhere for school or work or anything with the kids. Like he's supportive, like he will watch the kids. Like I have no concern at all with, with like the kids. He's a good father, he's always been. And, umm, so I would say he does support me in that. And that financially, like even that he says "my money is your money, it's not just my money." And I think with our history from where it was to where it is right now, it's all has been like a growing uphill, like it's been more successful more happier, more peaceful, calm.

In this excerpt Colleen gives a number of examples of ways she feels her partner is supportive or encouraging of her. Her definition of support includes not just emotional support, but also tangible support such as helping with childcare and providing financial resources. She makes it clear how perceiving she has this support impacts her satisfaction in the relationship positively, as noted in her metaphor of the couple "growing uphill."

In contrast, while Cindy shared that she too believes that support is important to "being a relationship," she emphasized that for her it is lack of support from her partner that impacts her relationship satisfaction:

> **Cindy:** Umm, I would say umm a partner who's going to help you and support you in everything that you do…. Like umm say if you wanted to look for a job or try and get your kid into daycare. Or to take care of something for instance. Like experiences with me, I was always left to do it on my own. And the other person was out doing whatever they wanted to do. And there wasn't help with the kids, never had that mutual support from your spouse that you're supposed to, that you get maybe even if you're not married, even living common-law for so long. Like you're supposed to be in a relationship and you have a family and stuff to look after.

Cindy's experiences, particularly with parenting, appear to reflect a double standard where men do "whatever they wanted," while women are "left to do it on my own." In stating that she "never had that mutual support from your spouse that you're supposed to get," Cindy revealed that she believes that support is something women should be entitled to when they are part of a relationship and that for her, not getting this relationship benefit has impacted her relationship satisfaction negatively.

Rita's narrative included an example of how non-supportive behaviour from her partner lowers her mood. Rita shared how she feels reluctant to share her ideas with her partner due to her concerns that he will pop her "balloon":

> **Rita:** …And often it seems like when I do have something to say he wants, he comes up with a point to try and sort of counter it in a way, like he, as if he wants to, like to him that's a discussion. It's like I say something that I'm really thrilled about for example or I think this is really good and then he's like, then he points out the negative aspect to it. And it's kinda like, well that's not really what I wanted to hear…. And then he pops my balloon or whatever, tries to.

When asked to provide an example, Rita shared the following story:

> **Rita:** Umm well one that sticks really out in my mind is half way through the winter term I was feeling very overwhelmed and exhausted and just on the bus one day to clinical I just decided to, that this summer I would make a project to make my oldest daughter a quilt …. And I kinda felt like that excitement was gonna help me get through the rest of the term. So when I told him about that, that I decided to make my daughter a quilt, he was, his response was that "Oh I thought you said that you decided you were not going to make her a quilt because you did something else for her instead." And it was just very deflating for me because it was, it felt very important to me because this was something that was going to help me get through the rest of the six weeks so.

Rita use of the word "deflating" in describing her reaction to her husband challenging her plan to make a quilt for her daughter to lift her spirits links back to her previous use of the metaphor of feeling that he "pops my balloon" when he focuses on the "negative" elements of her ideas. Within the context of Rita's longstanding problems with depression, this dynamic appears to present a risk to her mental health as she struggles to "get through" difficult times. Rita further shared that she feels this dynamic plays out "fairly often" between the partners:

> **Interviewer:** … do you think that happens a lot?
> **Rita:** I think it happens fairly often. Another example would be I've been having problems with my iron levels and so last Friday the doctor had me tested, or sent me for a blood test for Celiac's disease and I haven't had the results back yet. But I've been wanting to just go gluten free because just in case that's something that is making me sick. I don't want to have to keep putting that into my body. And he really didn't like that decision at first. But I just, I asked him to be, just be supportive of me and not to oppose me because I guess a lot of what I want to do, his attitude is oppositional. And I, so I just really asked him to just support me and he has been supportive. So I'm glad he changed

his attitude about that (laughs).

In this story, Rita used the word "oppositional" to convey her perception that her partner is more likely to oppose her choices than support them and in this way she feels he often undermines her choices.

Respect. Finally, many of the women in the study emphasised the role of mutual respect in satisfying relationships. For example, Tabitha noted she believes that it is important for women to feel "respected" in their relationships:

> **Tabitha:** Respected…. Cause if you don't respect him how are you supposed to give it out if you don't get it?
> **Interviewer:** Uh-humm, so that's really interesting, you're talking about how you need to feel sorta towards your partner.
> **Tabitha:** Yeah, well if he doesn't give me any respect or give me anything, how am I supposed to show it to him, if he's not doing it the same? So if I'm always giving and giving and giving and I'm not get back, so I'm not going to be satisfied by him being nice to me or doing anything for me. Do you know what I mean?
> **Interviewer:** So, so you're sort of saying that respect is, you know, a two way street in a relationship.
> **Tabitha:** Yeah, cause like I give him a lot of respect and do things for him now, but back then I didn't, because I really didn't care. Cause he was too verbally abusive [for me] to really care and stuff like that. So I used to just take off or do my own thing. Now, it's changed a lot since alcohol is out of our life.

In sharing her beliefs about respect, Tabitha noted that her partner's lack of respect for her in the past prevented her from feeling "satisfied" with the relationship, even during times when he was "being nice to me or doing anything for me." She also linked how verbal abuse and lack of mutual respect in the couple's past relationship led her to "take off or do my own thing" as she "didn't really care" about how her actions impacted her partner. Tabitha shared that this in turn led to her partner going "psycho" and stalking her through the use of non-stop phone calls and questioning people about her whereabouts. She contrasted this to "now" in that things have "changed" in terms of her partner's decreased engagement in verbal abuse and "stuff." She shared that since she now feels "respected"; she in turn treats her partner with "respect." This

increase in respect between the partners appeared to increase Tabitha's satisfaction with the relationship, as she noted her relationship has "changed a lot."

In contrast, some of the women spoke of respect as lacking at times in their current relationship. For example, Ellen noted that she thinks that her partner is not "consistently" respectful:

> **Ellen:** Umm, I could use a more respectful tone more consistently, cause he gets it, does it right a lot of times (laughs) you know a lot of times. Like it's okay a lot of times, but then the other half of the time it is not okay. So there's some impatience and disrespect that I could do without. Umm … sorry, what was I …. Yeah, less confrontational. His version of assertive is, comes off as a lot more confrontational to me then he realizes, sometimes mean to, …so that, that needs to get itself sorted out…

Ellen's linkage of lack of respect on the part of her partner to his "confrontational" behaviour leads to her emphasis that this issue "needs to get itself sorted out" as it negatively impacts her relationship satisfaction.

Summary. Overall, in discussing the concept of relationship satisfaction, patterns across the women's interview were identified, with women describing six subthemes related to relationship satisfaction: 1) love, intimacy, and connection; 2) trust and honesty; 3) open communication; 4) security and stability; 5) support; and 6) respect. The women discussed the importance of these elements in terms of their presence in their relationships, as well as in terms of aspects that were absent or lacking in their relationship. It was noted that the women varied greatly in terms of the extent to which their present relationship achieve these key elements of relationship satisfaction. For example, one woman, Kiki, when asked what she would like to change in her current relationship, replied "absolutely nothing." Other women primarily spoke of the key elements of relationship satisfaction as something they aspire to, emphasizing the need for change in their current relationships and their lack of relationship satisfaction. However, the majority of the women in speaking of their relationship satisfaction emphasized, to quote

Colleen, being in a process of "growing uphill" in terms of building relationship satisfaction. The role of structural factors such as gender, race, and ability was also noted in creating conditions that impacted the women's satisfaction. Women spoke of how the structural context of their lives was conducive to creating and maintaining cultural norms of entitlement/power. These cultural norms contributed to behaviours on the part of the male partners such as body shaming (Mary), infidelity (Tabitha), and exerting control over aspects of the women's lives such as social contact (Kylie), communication (Kiki, Julie), sexuality (Abby), movements, (Cindy, Tabitha), and day to day activities (Rita, Cindy). The presence of these behaviors led to decreased relationship satisfaction.

Integration of the data on relationship satisfaction. In discussing relationship satisfaction, the women identified six key elements that needed to be present in order for them to feel satisfied in their relationships. These elements were emphasized by both women who reported being satisfied in their relationship on the DAS (Spanier, 1989), as well as women who did not, suggesting that these elements taken together represent an ideal standard of relationship satisfaction for the women in the study. In sharing why they chose the elements that they did, the women often made connections to how the lack of these elements is linked to current and past dynamics in their relationships, including abusive behaviour. It also appeared that it was their perceptions of the presence or absence of these key elements that determined the women's level of relationship satisfaction, as women with higher scores on the DAS tended report the presence of these elements more often than women with lower scores.

Impact of Desistance of Violence on Relationship Satisfaction

Overview. The second purpose of the study was to explore how the women perceived the changes in the violence that occurred and how these changes might impact their current

relationship satisfaction. Based on the premise that level of current relationship satisfaction was determined by the women's perceptions of the presence or absence of the six key components of a satisfying relationship previously described, findings indicated that women who reported increased satisfaction with their relationship since the desistance of violence predominantly narrated the story of their relationship within the framework of a dominant narrative of positive relationship change. Women who reported lower relationship satisfaction incorporated more counter narratives in the telling of their relationship stories. How the women chose to narrate their stories appeared to reflect a process that began with the women's perceptions of the violence they experienced in the past, which in turn shaped their perceptions of the changes (or lack of changes) that occurred after the desistance of violence in their relationships. These perceptions of change were then filtered through social discourses on love and IPV that further shaped how the women chose to narrate their stories. This process is depicted visually in Figure 1 and details of the key components of the process are described in detail next.

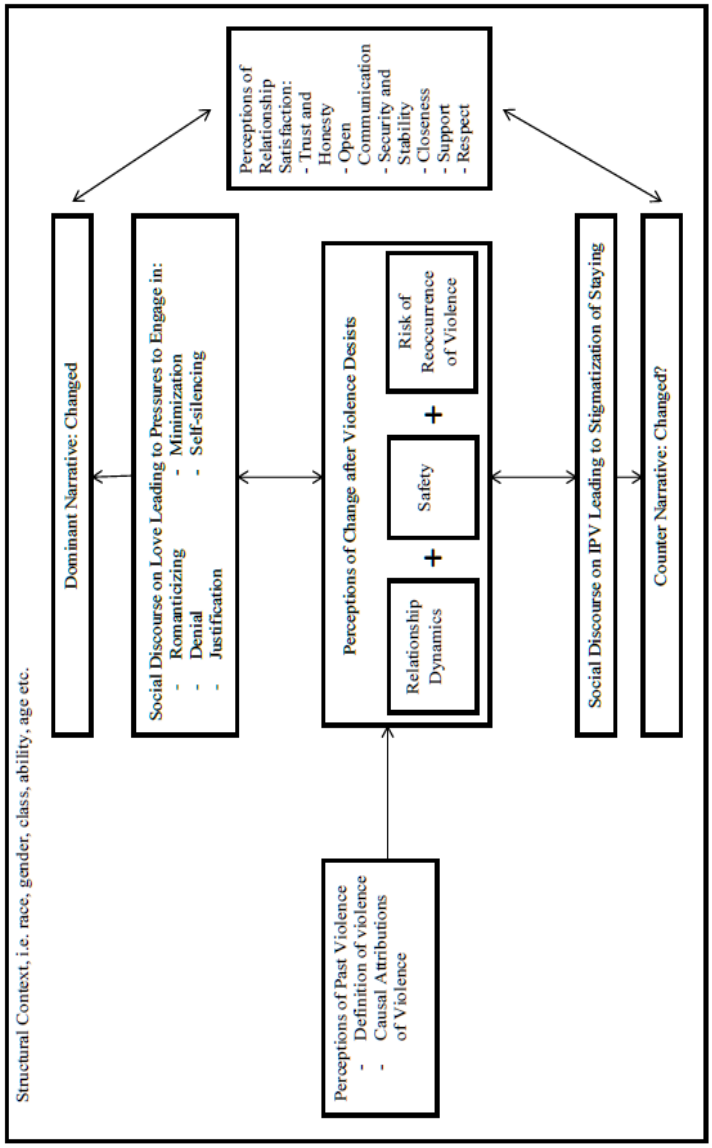

Figure 1. Visual depiction of the proposed relationship between the desistance of violence and relationship satisfaction.

Perceptions of violence. In order to understand how the changes in violence the women experienced impacted their relationship satisfaction, it was important to determine not only the frequency, severity, and mutuality of the violence that occurred but also the context of violence. This was done by analyzing both the data from the CTS-2 (Straus, 1996) and the data from the interviews and then integrating both sets of data to identify areas of convergence and divergence within the data. In addition, in order to form a more complete understanding of the context of the violence that the women experienced, various causal attributions that the women made to explain why violence occurred in their relationships were explored.

CTS-2 Findings. This section discusses the results of the CTS-2 as they pertain to physical aggression, injury, psychological aggression, sexual coercion, and negotiation between the partners. Data was collected based on the one-year period that the women identified as the most physically violent in their relationship and on the past year of their relationship.

Severity and frequency of physical abuse and injury. Although all the women in this study self-defined their relationships as "free of violence" for a period of at least one year before the interview (with the exception of Abby who self-defined her relationship as being violence free for ten months), results of the CTS-2 revealed that three participants (Signe, Samantha, and Colleen) endorsed that minor acts of physical aggression had occurred in their relationship in the past year. All three women reported that they had engaged in minor aggression (occurring once or twice in the past year) and one of the women, Signe, also reported that her partner had engaged in an act of physical aggression (once in the past year). These acts of aggression included throwing something at their partner that could hurt and one woman, Samantha, also endorsed that she had shoved or pushed her partner. For more detail on the raw scale scores for each woman and her partner please see Table 3 (raw scale scores for the Physical Assault

Table 3

Results of the Physical Aggression Subscale of the CTS-2

	Worst Year			Current Year		
Participant	RS	Freq.	Sev.	RS	Freq.	Sev.
Kiki						
Self	225	20+	S	0	0	N/A
Partner	225	20+	S	0	0	N/A
Signe						
Self	16	2	S	1	1	M
Partner	20	2	S	1	1	M
Samantha						
Self	93	11+	S	2	2	M
Partner	51	6+	S	0	0	N/A
Honey						
Self	0	0	N/A	0	0	N/A
Partner	18	2	S	0	0	N/A
Lana						
Self	55	11+	S	0	0	N/A
Partner	53	11+	S	0	0	N/A
Julie						
Self	4	3+	M	0	0	N/A
Partner	2	2	M	0	0	N/A
Tabitha						
Self	9	1	S	0	0	N/A
Partner	19	1	S	0	0	N/A
Colleen						
Self	29	20+	M	2	2	M
Partner	181	20+	S	0	0	N/A
Abby						
Self	-	-	-	0	0	N/A
Partner	-	-	-	0	0	N/A
Emily						
Self	0	0	N/A	0	0	N/A
Partner	56	6+	S	0	0	N/A

Rita						
Self	0	0	N/A	0	0	N/A
Partner	3	1	M	0	0	-
Cindy						
Self	70	20+	S	0	0	N/A
Partner	92	20+	S	0	0	N/A
Ellen						
Self	3	1	S	0	0	N/A
Partner	6	1	S	0	0	N/A
Mary						
Self	30	6+	S	0	0	N/A
Partner	81	11+	S	0	0	N/A
Kylie						
Self	40	6+	S	0	0	N/A
Partner	71	11+	S	0	0	N/A

Note. RS = raw score derived from frequency of total acts of aggression endorsed; Freq. = highest frequency of an endorsed act of aggression in the category of highest level of severity endorsed with 1 = once, 2 = twice, 3+ = 3 to 5 times, 6+ = 6 to 10 times, 11+ = 11 to 19 times, and 20+ =20 or more times; Sev. = severity; S = severe violence; M = minor violence only; N/A = not applicable.

subscale have a lower limit of 0 and an upper limit of 300).

In terms of past violence, all 15 of the women reported experiencing violence, with 13 of the women reporting having experienced severe acts of physical aggression and two women (Julie and Rita) reporting having experienced minor acts of physical aggression during the 12 month period of time when the violence was at its worst in the relationship. Data from the 12 month period of when the violence was at its worse was not available for Abby due to a completion error on her part, assessment of severity of past violence was based on her reports of the lifetime violence from her CTS-2 form that she completed for the past 10 months. Twelve of the women also reported that in the past they had engaged in physically aggressive behaviours, with ten of the women reporting having engaged in severe acts of physical aggression and two women (Julie and Colleen) reporting having engaged in minor acts of physical aggression. Three women reported not engaging in physically aggressive behaviours (Honey, Emily, and Rita).

Overall, the data from the Physical Assault subscale suggests that in the past the majority of the women had been involved in mutual violence in their relationships. However, closer inspection of the data suggested that there were four patterns to the violence: 1) women who experienced frequent severe violence at rates approximately equal to the violence they engaged in (Kiki, Samantha, Lana, and Cindy); 2) women who experienced less frequent severe or minor violence at rates approximately equal to the violence they engaged in (Signe, Julie, Tabitha, and Ellen); 3) women who experienced violence where there was a distinct imbalance between their use of violence and their partner's greater use of violence as noted by differences in raw scores, frequency, and/or severity (Colleen, Mary, and Kylie); and 4) women who reported experiencing violence but did not engage in any violence (Honey, Emily and Rita).

In terms of injury, none of the women reported having sustained or injured their partners

in the past year (10 months in the case of Abby). In terms of past injury, 13 women reported having sustained injury during the year the violence in their relationship was it its worst. Two women did not endorse sustaining any type of injuries due to IPV (Ellen and Julie), while four women endorsed sustaining minor injuries (Signe, Lana, Colleen, and Rita), and nine women endorsed sustaining severe injuries due to IPV (Kiki, Samantha, Honey, Tabitha, Abby, Emily, Cindy, Mary, and Kylie). In contrast, only nine women endorsed that their male partners had sustained injuries in the past and only one of these women reported that her partner had sustained severe injuries. Overall, the result of the Injury subscale indicated that the women reported more often sustaining injury than their partners in the past and the women's injuries were more likely to be severe than minor. In contrast, partner injury was more often reported to be minor. This suggests that while many of the women reported both partners engaging in severe acts of physical violence, these acts did not have the same impact, as women were more likely to be severely injured.

Severity and frequency of psychological abuse. The range of raw scores reported by the women of their current engagement in psychologically abusive acts varied greatly, ranging from 0 to 113 (the upper limit of raw scores for this scale is 200). Of the 13 women who reported currently engaging in psychologically abusive acts, six women reported engaging in severe acts and seven reported engaging in minor acts. The range of raw scores reported by the women of their past engagement in psychologically abusive acts also varied greatly, ranging from 2 to 200. Of the 15 women who reported engaging in psychologically abusive acts in the past, 12 women reported engaging in severe acts and three reported engaging in minor acts. Although all the women in this study reported a reduction in their engagement of psychologically abusive acts in terms of the raw score for this subscale, the amount of change varied greatly between women

with the range between worst year scores and current year scores ranging from 3 to 200. In addition, one woman, Rita, reported that while her overall raw score was lower than in the past, her engagement in these acts now included severe act(s), as opposed to only minor acts in the past. Overall, the data suggests that the majority of the women reduced their engagement in psychologically abusive acts significantly, with only Signe and Mary reporting little reduction and continued frequent use of psychological aggression.

The range reported by the women of their partner's current engagement of psychologically abusive acts varied greatly, ranging from 0 to 75. Of the 14 women who reported that their partners were still engaging in psychologically abusive acts, six women reported that their partners engaged in severe acts and eight reported their partners engaged in minor acts. The range reported by the women of their partner's past engagement in psychologically abusive acts also varied greatly, ranging from 24 to 200. Of the 15 women who reported their partners engaging in psychologically abusive acts in the past, 13 women reported their partners engaging in severe acts and two reported that their partners had engaged in minor acts. Reported change in the engagement of psychologically abusive acts from the worst year to the current year ranged from a decrease in scores of 200 points to an increase in scores of 23 points. Only one woman, Mary, reported a substantial increase in her partner's psychologically abusive tactics after the period of time when the violence was at its worst and currently. Despite, the positive changes reported by the women in terms of reductions in the rate of psychological aggression being experienced by the women, high rates of psychological aggression within their current relationships were still reported by Signe, Colleen, Abby, Rita, Ellen, Mary, and Kylie. For more detail on the scale raw scores for each woman and her partner please see Table 4.

Sexual coercion. In terms of the past year, three women endorsed engaging in minor acts

Table 4

Results of the Psychological Aggression Subscale of the CTS-2.

	Worst Year			Current Year		
Participant	RS	Freq.	Sev.	RS	Freq.	Sev.
Kiki						
Self	200	20+	S	0	0	N/A
Partner	200	20+	S	0	0	N/A
Signe						
Self	86	3+	S	81	2	S
Partner	74	3+	S	56	20+	M
Samantha						
Self	144	20+	S	10	3+	M
Partner	63	6+	S	2	1	M
Honey						
Self	2	2	M	0	0	N/A
Partner	60	20+	M	27	20+	M
Lana						
Self	103	20+	S	27	3+	S
Partner	97	20+	S	25	3+	S
Julie						
Self	55	1	S	31	20+	M
Partner	24	20+	M	13	6+	M
Tabitha						
Self	31	2	S	12	3+	S
Partner	79	11+	S	33	3+	S
Colleen						
Self	90	20+	S	4	20+	M
Partner	155	20+	S	54	20+	M
Abby						
Self	-	-	-	51	2	S
Partner	-	-	-	98	6+	S

Emily						
Self	75	2	S	8	3+	M
Partner	125	20+	S	17	2	S
Rita						
Self	69	20+	M	53	6+	S
Partner	73	3+	S	45	20+	M
Cindy						
Self	151	20+	S	25	20+	M
Partner	175	20+	S	25	20+	M
Ellen						
Self	58	20+	M	35	20+	M
Partner	80	3+	S	65	20+	M
Mary						
Self	55	2	S	52	20+	M
Partner	52	6+	S	75	20+	S
Kylie						
Self	162	20+	S	113	20+	S
Partner	190	20+	S	75	20+	S

Note. RS = raw score derived from frequency of total acts of aggression endorsed; Freq. = highest frequency of an endorsed act of aggression in the category of highest level of severity endorsed with 1 = once, 2 = twice, 3+ = 3 to 5 times, 6+ = 6 to 10 times, 11+ = 11 to 19 times, and 20+ =20 or more times; Sev. = severity; S = severe psychological aggression; M = minor psychological aggression; N/A = not applicable.

of sexually coercive behaviours and two women endorsed that their partner had engaged in minor sexually coercive behaviours. In all cases the minor acts reported by the women consisted of making their partner have sex without a condom. In terms of the use of sexually coercive behaviours during the year when the violence was worst, three women endorsed using minor acts of sexually coercive behaviours towards their partner, with one of the women reporting that she engaged in both minor and severe acts (including the use of threats and force to make her partner engage in sexual acts). In contrast, eight women reported that their partners had engaged in sexually coercive acts towards them, with five of these women endorsing that their partner had engaged in severe acts of sexual coercion including the use of threats and force to make the women engage in sexual acts. Overall, the data supports that, with the exception of making their partners have sex without a condom, the use of sexually coercive practises by both partners had desisted.

Negotiation. Results of the negotiation scale revealed that 10 women endorsed an increase in their current engagement in negotiation tactics and 9 women endorsed an increase in their partner's current engagement of negotiation tactics in comparison to their prior engagement in negotiation tactics during the worst year of violence (see Table 5). As previously noted, data was not available for Abby. Three patterns were identified: 1) women who reported substantial positive changes (Kiki, Signe, Samantha, Honey, Lana, Tabitha, Colleen, Rita, and Ellen), 2) women who reported substantial negative changes (Emily, Cindy, and Kylie), and 3) women who reported minimal change (Julie and Mary). In terms of the level of engagement in negotiation behaviours, only one woman, Mary, reported low engagement in acts of negotiation and two women reported their partner's engagement in acts of negotiation as low (Mary and Tabitha).

Table 5

Results of the Negotiation Subscale of the CTS-2.

	Worst Year		Current Year		Change
Participant	RS	Freq.	RS	Freq.	
Kiki					
Self	80	20+	100	20+	+
Partner	80	20+	100	20+	+
Signe					
Self	70	20+	109	20+	+
Partner	86	20+	123	20+	+
Samantha					
Self	12	2	56	11+	+
Partner	12	2	76	11+	+
Honey					
Self	32	6+	91	20+	+
Partner	6	20+	81	20+	+
Lana					
Self	22	3+	58	11+	+
Partner	22	3+	65	11+	+
Julie					
Self	79	20+	64	20+	-
Partner	57	20+	48	11+	-
Tabitha					
Self	5	2	35	11+	+
Partner	1	1	25	6+	+
Colleen					
Self	17	6+	83	20+	+
Partner	34	20+	73	20+	+
Abby					
Self	-	-	130	20+	N/A
Partner	-	-	110	20+	N/A

Emily					
Self	130	20+	52	20+	-
Partner	70	20+	29	6+	-
Rita					
Self	105	20+	123	6+	+
Partner	77	20+	87	20+	+
Cindy					
Self	130	20+	75	20+	-
Partner	112	20+	75	20+	-
Ellen					
Self	84	20+	130	20+	+
Partner	53	20+	106	20+	+
Mary					
Self	6	2	10	3+	+
Partner	29	20+	6	2	-
Kylie					
Self	106	20+	71	20+	-
Partner	81	20+	77	20+	-

Note. RS = raw score derived from frequency of total acts of negotiation endorsed, upper limit = 150; Freq. = highest frequency of an endorsed act of negotiation with 1 = once, 2 = twice, 3+ = 3 to 5 times, 6+ = 6 to 10 times, 11+ = 11 to 19 times, and 20+ =20 or more times; Change = increase (+) or reduction (-) in negotiation behaviours over time

Integration of the data on physical violence. The results of the CTS-2 indicated that the majority of the women had engaged in mutual violence with their partners in the past, with only three women reporting not engaging in any type of physical aggression towards their partners. However, in comparing the CTS-2 results to the women's interviews, there appeared to be a lack of congruence in that the women's stories of different episodes of violence in their relationships did not always reflect the CTS-2 data. For example, even Lana, who described herself as a "worthy opponent" in regards to her mutual involvement in IPV and whose CTS-2 results show that both partners engaged in severe violence at the same frequency (over 11 times in the year the violence was at its worse) with similar raw scores (Lana's RS = 55, her partner's RS = 53), shared in her interview that the violence did not start out as mutually violent:

> **Lana:** But it was kind of strange, because it kinda became normalized. The reason it was somewhat okay with me was because I can take him, I know that sounds really kinda childish and school yardish, but I gave as good as I got. Like the first time it happened I was kinda shocked and I was off kilter …. Umm, I don't why it happened but it continued because at the time it was easier than other options like moving out or telling his parents. Or I never felt threatened…. I just felt like it was an out-lashing and it would end and that would be it until, you know, the next time…. I think at the time, umm, cause it did start when we were living at the [name of location] and I think maybe just the isolation. I don't know whether either of us thought we could get away with it or you know. Umm, and I know that I found it really strange, cause he's actually a very caring and sensitive person, but he's also has a kind of bravado. I don't know if he was trying that on for size with me. I don't know. Umm, I know that when I got physically involved with him it was because I was going to hit back. Like that was my way of retaliation, I wasn't going to call the cops, I wasn't going to tell anybody else and I think maybe it actually started as a testing out, seeing what either of us could get away with, especially him...

Within Lana's story, she shared that initially she was left "shocked and off kilter" by the violence and only depicted herself as engaging in the violence after she decided at some later point to "retaliate" against her partner as this seemed "easier" than options available to her such as having to quit her job and move away. She also alluded in her story that, while she was not sure, she believes that her partner's motivation in assaulting her may have been based on his

"bravado" and a desire for "testing out" what he could get away with. In this way, Lana constructed a story of her partner trying to control the relationship, with her violently resisting, suggesting that the IPV pattern, in Johnson's (2006) terminology, shifted from intimate terrorism to violent resistance.

This idea the results of the CTS-2 and the interviews may not be congruent based on the possibility that patterns of IPV may shift over time is also supported in Cindy's data. Her CTS-2 results indicated that both partners engaged in severe acts of violence, at a high frequency (over 20 times each during the year that the violence was at its worst), with little difference in their raw scores (Cindy's RS = 70; partner's RS = 92). In contrast, Cindy shared this story of the first time there was violence in her relationship:

> **Cindy:** The first time he ever hit me, I think, I think my baby was about three months. And, umm, I was taking my bags to leave, cause he was being mean to me. And I had my baby in the, umm, the car seat and I was going down the stairs. And I threw the keys and I said "you can take the keys, you can live at the house, I'm moving out. I'll go live with my mom." And then he punched me several times in the face and, umm, my ba-, my car seat fell out of my hands and went down the stairs with my baby in there…

In Cindy's story, she depicted her partner as controlling and violent, endangering both her and her baby after she tried to leave him. Previous to this incident of violence, Cindy described her partner as having a history of attempting to control her in other ways. In terms of Johnson's (2006) types of IPV, this story seems to fit best in his definition of intimate terrorism, suggesting this episode of violence is not congruent with the results of the CTS-2 that were more indicative of situational couple violence.

An extreme example of incongruence in the data was found within Julie's data as her CTS-2 results and the information in her interview regarding the violence in the relationship were contradictory. In her interview, Julie reported that only two incidents of violence occurred

in her relationship, stating that the second incident was similar to the first. Julie constructed in her interview a story of violence that depicts her partner as the sole aggressor in the violence:

> **Julie:** Ahh well I was, I was kinda close to a wall, this was in his room. And, yeah, I was yelling and he, I guess, uhh, shoved. He pushed me really hard (little laugh) and I kinda hit the wall and then he, he punched the wall, like right by my head. And it was just really intense and scary and I was shocked. Cause we, back then, that was back in high school we talked about it and he said he'd never hit a girl, but then, yeah. So I was pretty scared the first time and I didn't know what was gonna happen. I guess …. And then he went on to, umm, throw objects around and just abuse furniture and I didn't know.

Julie did not mention any violent behaviour on her part in her interview. What she did emphasize was how his actions, many of which would not be captured in the CTS-2 (punching the wall by her head but not hitting her, throwing objects around but not at her, and flipping over the furniture), left her feeling shocked and intimidated. However, the CTS-2 results indicated that she had engaged in minor violence (grabbing her partner) on at least three different occasions. Furthermore, as Julie was leaving the interview she shared that she had remembered that she had once slapped her partner in an incident that occurred after the two incidents of violence she spoke of in her interview and she had not reported this on her CTS-2 forms. Taken together, the data indicates that when asked about her experiences with "violence" in the interview, Julie chose to focus on telling stories of violence in which she was a victim of violence. This suggests that the CTS-2, with its lack of contextual information, may have captured physical acts of aggression that Julie did not view as central to her narrative of relationship violence and even on the CTS-2 women may underreport their use of violence.

Lack of congruency was also found between the women's self-reported presence of physically aggressive acts in their current relationship on the CTS-2 and their self-definition of being in a violence free relationship. Three women endorsed the use of minor acts of physical aggression on the CTS. In addition, one woman reported that her partner had also engaged in a

minor act of physical aggression in their current relationship, but she did not define this act as violence.

In order to explore this incongruence, each of the three women was asked how she saw the presence of these behaviours as fitting with her view of their relationships as free of violence. In her explanation of her endorsement of throwing something at her partner and shoving him, Samantha located her physical aggression towards her partner as a specific incidence in which she "broke down and lost it":

> **Samantha:** I'm talking about a specific time, er, one time when I lost it. Like I broke down and lost it and threw a fit and, and acted up. So then I had to go and call my sponsor (laugh). Yeah…. It was like terrible, I was like a wreck after, I was like crying, but I recognized that I needed to go see my doctor and talk to my sponsor and. And touch base with my supports and figure out, uhh, what had gone wrong to make me fly off the handle like that. And, umm, I got scared. Yeah that was a horrible feeling.
> **Interviewer:** Yeah. So just in terms of that idea, you self-define and you say this "we haven't had any violence in the last year" but there was this episode.
> **Samantha:** Yeah, I forgot about this cause I was thinking about him being violent to me, I wasn't thinking about myself. I filled that out and I was like "oh my god, (laughing) I was totally violent as well" maybe that's why I feel so guilty cause.

Samantha's choice of language drew heavily on the discourse of illness, as she spoke about needing to access medical and other expert help from her sponsor to help "figure out, uhh, what had gone wrong to make me fly off the handle like that" suggesting she saw her actions as resulting from some sort of mental health crisis, rather than a story of engaging in violence. Samantha also noted that her acts of physical aggression may have been harder for her to recognize as violence than if the same acts had been perpetrated by her partner, suggesting the presence of a gender effect in how she determined which acts of physical aggression would be labelled as acts of violence. These two issues appeared to play a role in how Samantha self-defined violence in her relationship, as she discussed the difference of how an act of physical aggression might appear "on a piece of paper" and how she processed it within the context of the

situation.

> **Samantha:** Yeah, like if you look at it on a piece of paper and you saw that, like you are. But I would say no (laughs).

In taking the context of the physical aggression into account, Samantha defined her relationship as being non-violent.

In contrast, when asked about her endorsement of both partners throwing something that could have hurt the other, Signe took a stance that since there was no true intent to injure each other that these acts do not qualify as violence as she defines the term:

> **Signe:** Umm, it was, I mean, it's not like I threw something really heavy at him. But to catch him off guard or, or he threw, I'm trying to think of what he threw, I remember we threw something at each other and like it was, was heavier or something just to try catch him off guard cause we were mad at each other. So it's not like he was doing it specifically to hurt me and I wasn't doing it specifically to hurt him, cause we were mad.

For Signe, she saw the couple's use of physical aggression as a way to express emotion, stating her intent had been to "show you that I'm mad," rather than "hurt" her partner. Through this perspective, these acts of physical aggression do not meet Signe's definition of violence.

Colleen, in discussing an incident where she threw a shoe at her partner, seemed to struggle with reconciling her act of physical aggression with being an act of violence based on the fact that she did not actually hit her partner with the shoe she threw at him:

> **Colleen:** Well I think that, I think that the intention was to hit him, but I didn't hit him so I just justified it in, it was like that's not violence, but that is violence. But not on his part but on my part and the role reversed, uhh, like that, like I don't know, that I, yeah when I think of that I didn't, like I never….
> **Interviewer:** Yeah. Well I think that originally you said "I don't think of it that way." And you talked about this idea about well, you know, in terms of "I didn't hit him" and also it was me doing it to him. If he was doing it to you would you think of it as, as affecting your definition of the relationship as being non-violent currently?
> **Colleen:** I would think that it would still be the same. Like the intention was "yeah I wanted to hit her, like throw the shoe and hit her." But I didn't hit him, which is the good thing. But I think it would be a different story I think even if I hit, like if I hit or if he hit me with the shoe, then that would be. Like the intention was there but it didn't happen. But I know that there are better ways of expressing anger and ways and then I think that

> even if he did that, like what would my reaction be? …. Like, I probably, yeah. Like I think too with the whole like, uhh, violence is, uhh, yeah there is, so I think of that, how I view that like is like okay well that's still violence but even though, there is no, even though. It is, what it is, it's me reacting in a way that I probably should have not acted…. it was kinda like it seemed like my guards went up, cause I was mad of like, I was just mad, and like I was just like if I'm not gonna get what I get what I want, if you're not gonna listen what I say then I'm just gonna chuck this and…. but that's not, that not, cause that is violence. Like that still is on my part.
> **Interviewer:** Would it be more recognizable if you had actually had hit him?
> **Colleen:** I think so. If I actually had hit him with a shoe I think I would actually consider that violence. But because I didn't, I justify it with "well, that's okay" (laughs).
> **Interviewer:** So there's the difference between hitting and missing. So there's a subtle difference that you recognize in your mind. But I think, umm, you still see your relationship as being non-violent essentially today, right?
> **Colleen:** Yeah, for the most part it is...

Although Colleen stated that her actions are "still violence," it seemed that her actions did not alter her definition of her relationship as being free of violence as she stated "for the most part it is" in her mind, still violence free.

In summation, in integrating the data from both the CTS-2 (Straus et al., 1996) and the interviews, the stories told by the women suggest that the CTS-2, with its lack of contextual information, 1) failed to capture how patterns of physical aggression shifted over time in some of the relationships and 2) captured the presence of physical acts of aggression that the women did not self-define as violence.

***Causal attributions of violence*.** In order to gain a more complete understanding of the women's perception of past violence, causal attributions made by the women were explored. Analysis of the women's responses as to why they thought violence had occurred in their relationships focused on the subthemes of 1) addictions; 2) exposure to other forms of violence; 3) lack of healthy ways to cope with conflict and stressors; 4) power, control struggles, and gender issues. In addition, the causal attributions the women made also reflected how the role of structural factors and inequities in society intersect in creating conditions that place women at

risk for violence.

Addictions. The majority of the women spoke of how addictions played a causal role in the violence they experienced. For example, Kiki was adamant in her beliefs that addiction problems are central to the causation of violence.

> **Kiki:** That is the number one problem, that's where it all begins, because I don't think there's any violence if there is no substance abuse.

However, she also acknowledged that for her and her partner, addiction was part of a bigger "scene":

> **Kiki:** Yes, that's how we met, in that scene, what I mean is what goes along with that scene, comes along everything else, violence, abuse, not only to yourself, but every way.

In her excerpt, Kiwi makes a link to addiction as a form of self-abuse that connects to being violent and abusing others. This suggests that she viewed the violence that occurred between her and her partner when they were both struggling with addiction as a multifaceted phenomenon composed of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural components that together formed a "scene" that was conducive to abusive behaviours.

One way that women discussed addiction as being linked to the occurrence of violence included linking drug and alcohol use to personality changes. For example, in the following excerpt, Signe described her perceptions of what happens when her partner transforms into what she refers to as the "obnoxious" drunk.

> **Signe:** ... like with him it was, with him drinking, it was what he would drink, and he would be drunk. He would get to a point where he would be loud fun drunk but then he would get to a point after that. And you can always tell it. He's obnoxious and obnoxiously drunk, and then he doesn't make sense. And then he's picking fights. And it's not like that's how he always was…

In emphasizing that "it's not like that's how he always was," Signe constructed a narrative of her partner being aggressive only when he drank too much, changing from being "loud fun drunk" to

not making "sense" and "picking fights."

In a similar vein, Samantha described her perceptions of how her personality would change when drunk.

> **Samantha:** So even our drinking ideas were different, you know, like how we drank. He would drink and then he be done but I wouldn't be. So that difference, especially when I was intoxicated, you know, I would be a lot more ornery, and loud, and verbal, and …. Yeah, I've had a lot of people wanting to punch me out when I've been intoxicated. So like (laughs), it's a terrible thing, but I mean like, to think I can instigate somebody to a point of, well, just piss them off.

In sharing her story of her past drinking, Samantha also constructed a narrative of transformation, portraying her "intoxicated" self as someone who is "ornery" and would instigate confrontation with others. This is contrasted to her description of her partner who would reach a point of being "done" in terms of consuming alcohol, suggesting that Samantha viewed herself as lacking the ability put limits on both her drinking and aggression.

In addition, women stressed not only the idea of drinking or drug use as leading to violence in their relationships while under the influence, but also how the aftermath of substance use can lead to violence. For example, Samantha noted that the risk of violence stemming from substance abuse would extend long past the period of intoxication.

> **Samantha:** All the times there was violence would have been either while we were drinking, or the morning after, or in-between the hangover and the few days before we were normal (laughs) in that cycle. Cause we would drink on the weekends and we didn't drink every day, just on the weekends. So we'd be hungover a couple of days. And then be normal on Wednesdays and say "Oh I feel great, let's go drinking this weekend." And then that's how it was in our life, so.

In this story, Samantha noted that after "drinking," the risk of violence remained high for the next "few days" before the couple were "normal" again, suggesting an extended period beyond intoxication in which the threat of violence remained high in the relationship.

In terms of how the aftermath of consuming drugs and/or alcohol could increase risk of

violence occurring, Colleen shared a specific story of how her partner attacked her the next day after a night of his alcohol and drug use.

> **Colleen:** … like I remember one time I think about five years back and I just finished taking the kids to school. And, ahh, the kids were off to school and then I got back and it was during the week. And then, this was still when he was in addiction and maybe it would have been six years ago, I don't know, but it's been about five or six years ago. Anyways, then I asked him, like he was doing drugs the night, all night, the night before and he didn't end up going to work. He ended up calling in and saying he wasn't going to work. So I started asking, all I asked him was "are you going to work?" you know. And then all of a sudden he got up and he just started like pinning me up against the wall. And, you know, there was no, not even, no visible "like hey, know what, like this is what's gonna happen [her name]." It was just like; it was just a simple question. And that was the trigger. Umm, and then there was like, so yeah alcohol and drugs did trigger like him, like it increased the violence too, like because every time, like a lot of times when he drank. Then he would just, umm, I guess he just had this, like he, like when he drank he used to run around on me all the time. He used to be with a whole lot of different women or and what not. So he would come back and start accusing me that I was with men, that, you know. And then, so that would cause violence because he would be thinking that because what he's doing. So that would cause a lot of like violent episodes.

In her story, Colleen connected her partner's previous use of drugs and alcohol the night before to being unpredictable and violent the next day. She also shared her belief that because he would cheat on her when he was using, he would become not only violent, but also jealous. Substance use and violence was often connected by the women in the study to issues of jealousy and infidelity.

Other women stressed how the occurrence of violence was linked to partner conflict over one partner's choice to use or abstain from substance use against the other partner's wishes. For example, Signe, shared how a disagreement over her partner's use of "crack" led to a violent altercation between the couple.

> **Signe:** … and then we got into an argument on the bus. He got off the bus and then I, at a stop, and I continued, oh he brought up, that's what it was, he wanted to stop and get drugs, so I got pissed off and I just completely ignored him, cause I told him before like I don't want to do any drugs…. So I got annoyed, I didn't say yes or no, but I just kinda got mad and I just ignored him and then he got off the bus and I stayed on the bus and I ended up going home. So he got home twenty minutes later and apparently he decided to

> go pick up crack (laughs). And so he walked in and showed me that he had bought crack and then I got pissed off, we started getting into a fight. I grabbed it from him, and I took it and was gonna go flush it up stairs. And then he chased me out the room and he started, he grabbed me, and was trying to get it from me. And especially when he's drinking he doesn't realize how…. So anyways, I was going up the stairs to try and flush it and then he was trying to grab at it and then he pulled me down on the stairs. And I was holding it out like that and he was leaning on my back with his arm to try and get it. And at that point I just had to try and get him off of me and I ran up the stairs and flushed it…. And he tried to deny it afterwards. And he said "I never did that, you know. I was trying to get it away from you and you wouldn't give it back to me." And you know, just denied it, and I was like "you had your arm on my throat"…

In her narrative, Signe makes it clear that not only did her partner's decision to bring drugs home instigate violence, but also his intoxication enabled him to "deny" his use of violence and avoid taking responsibility for his actions. In this way, addiction led not only to violence, but also to its maintenance through denial.

In contrast to Signe who emphasized how fighting over her partner's use of substances led to violence, other women emphasized how their use of substances led to violence on their partner's part. For example, Mary shared how her use of substances would sometime lead to violence, as captured in this excerpt where she shared how her partner punished her for staying out drinking one night.

> **Mary:** Well yeah, I believe so. Like there was one time I didn't come home. I didn't come home and I phoned and I asked can I come home. And, uhh, he said "yeah." And then I said I was bringing an eighteen pack of beer. And as soon as I got to the top of the stairs, umm, there was a door at the top of the stairs, and he took the beer. And he grabbed me by the throat and he threw me down the stairs. And, uhh, and then, uhh, I was, I was in a, I don't know. I was just dazed and he picked me up and he threw me outside after that. And it was winter. And that that's still a very painful memory for me…. I didn't come home for the night, I was just at a girlfriend's drinking. And, umm, yeah, so he was angry about that. And I don't know, I thought it would, I phoned, I thought it would be okay to come home. And apparently it wasn't (laughs).

In her story, even though Mary "asked" if she could come home and he agreed, her partner took the beer and threw her down the stairs and out into the cold, suggesting that his actions were a deliberate act of punishing Mary for her staying out drinking. The fact that he felt entitled to use

physical force to punish Mary for her actions suggests the presence of a structural context that supports gender roles and cultural norms (women should not stay out all night drinking and men have the right to use force against women for breaking rules) that together created a rationale for her partner's behaviour.

Quitting the use of substances was also identified as a causal attribution of violence. For example, Emily spoke of how her decision to stop drinking and not wanting to have alcohol in the house led to violent reactions from her partner:

> **Emily:** Sometimes, but, when I didn't want to drink or to put up with it, he would make remarks and stuff and I would tell him no. He came home one time and I told I didn't want drinking in my house and he said it was his house cause he paid some of the rent and he was, it was after work and he thought it was the man's right to have a drink cause you work all week and come home and drink in his home if he wanted to. And he didn't care if we had neighbours, be disruptive, didn't have keys one time, he kicked the door in and he had steel toed boots on and he kicked me in the head …

In her narrative, Emily shared how her partner's belief that "it was the man's right to have a drink" led to him justifying his use of violence, despite him previously having agreed that he would not drink in the couple's home. Emily had asked her partner not to drink in their home after she decided to quit drinking in order to have better control over her diabetes. During times like these, Emily also shared that her partner would pressure her to drink with him as captured in this excerpt in which Emily described an incident when her partner came home drunk wanting to "celebrate" with her:

> **Emily:** … it was around Valentine's Day, that day. And he came back and he brought a bottle of wine, but he was already more than inebriated. And he wanted to celebrate with me.
> **Interviewer:** …and that was for you, ahh, a violation of the agreement that you had made and you didn't want to drink. So when you said you didn't want to drink, what happened?
> **Emily:** He came at me. And he got angry, he said "I came home for this?" And we were in the middle of a doorframe, like a post in our apartment. And he held me up against the thing (sniffling). If I fought him any of the times I probably would have had a trip to the

> emergency. He's bigger than me. And I'm thinking too that a lot of the abuse took place when he was drunk and I keep telling myself if only he stays sober.

In her story, Emily emphasized how her partner used intimidation and violence to punish her for not drinking. Like Mary's story, this story suggests the presence of a structural context that supports gender roles and cultural norms (men have the right to demand that their partners do what they want them to do even if it endangers women and men have the right to use physical force to punish non-compliance) that created a rationale for her partner to engage in violent behaviour.

Finally, one woman shared how, even when in agreement about using substances, pressure to obtain alcohol and/or drugs could lead to conflict and violence.

> **Kiki:** Like you know, when you abuse alcohol, alcohol makes you violent, or if you run out of alcohol then you need more and you're arguing about who bought the last beer or whatever the case may be …

In this excerpt, Kiki shared her belief that the pressure that addiction(s) places on couples to maintain their usage, can lead to violence if you "run out" and neither partner has the financial resources to get "more." In this story, it is the intersection of addiction (ability) and lack of financial resources (class) that created the risk for violence.

In summary, although many women were in agreement that addictions led to violence in their relationships, the diversity in the stories they shared suggests that there are many different ways that addiction can lead to violence. Taken together, these stories suggest that as a causal attribution to explain the occurrence of violence, addiction attributions must be considered within the context of violence that occurs in order to fully capture how structural factors and inequities such as gender roles and patriarchy may be interacting with addiction to fuel violence.

Previous exposure to other forms of violence. Many of the women also attributed violence to previous exposure on their or their partner's part to family violence, childhood abuse,

and/or living in a culture of violence. For example, one woman, Samantha, spoke of how her partner's previous exposure to violence placed her at risk.

> **Samantha:** …and [partner's name], he saw his Dad beat his mom, and then his mom used to beat him as well so.… You know I never really thought about violence, never really seen a lot of violence before, like bar fights or anything like that. I never really seen anything like that before I met [name of partner] and he kinda introduced me to whole new world of violent actions, it seems normal for him and the people that he knew, but not for the people that I knew. So it was very shocking for me to see some of things he would do to his friends and stuff. And, but it's just normal for them, it's just how they did things…. like it's nothing. I even brought [it] up to him, "like why are you so violent" or "why are you doing that". It would be more like, we'd laugh about my reaction to it because I was "wahh" screaming and "what are you doing?" Like trying to break them up and stuff, like him and his friend would be fighting. And then he'd [the friend] leave and he'd come back the next day and they'd just be friends again. Like, and to me, it was just strange, I didn't understand. But like all his people, hanging around, that's just how they were…. Well you know, cause like I went to a private school and stuff. And like I said, my parents were strict…. So I never really saw fights though. And then I started to see fights. And even his dad too, umm, we'd go over to his house to drink and there'd be a big fight, you know (laughs). So it was a totally different atmosphere, it was totally foreign to me and new. And yeah, I didn't know what to make of it to be honest. I didn't actually think I'd be like the victim of it either. It just didn't occur to me at that time. I was just kinda naïve about it I guess.

For Samantha, her partner's family history and culture of acceptance of violence was in sharp contrast to her previous experiences of being in a "strict" family and attending "private school." These differences in terms of class and cultural norms left Samantha in a position where she was "naïve" as to how her partner's experiences with violence would play a role in her eventually experiencing IPV.

Other women discussed their own exposure to previous forms of violence as being linked to their experiences of violence in their relationships. For example, Mary, when asked to what she attributed the violence in her relationship, made a self-blaming attribution, linking it to alcohol abuse and her own low self-esteem as an adult.

> **Mary:** I would say the alcohol, yeah, and my, my poor self-esteem. Like if I had better, if I had a good self-esteem and I loved myself there's no way I would have let that happen. I, I strongly believe that.

Mary later shared that she was sexually abused as a child and she believes that this is the source of her low self-esteem.

> **Mary:** … With my mother we didn't talk about things, so we didn't talk about things. And, uhh, there wasn't a lot of "I love yous." And, umm, so growing up my self-worth was, uhh, barely there. Cause, ahh, you know, I didn't… I'm a sexual abuse survivor too. And so, and my mother didn't believe me. And I became a, uhh, teenage mother and I didn't know what I was doing. So I had poor self-esteem as a child and as a teenager and into my adult years, I had poor self-esteem.

Stemming from her experiences of being sexually abused, Mary traced a path of starting to abuse drugs and alcohol as a child, to being a teenaged mother who lost custody of her children, to becoming involved in her current relationship in which violence occurred. Through this pathway Mary viewed herself as contributing to the violence as she stated she believed that "if I had a good self-esteem and I loved myself there's no way I would have let that happen." This suggests that Mary believed that women with greater self-esteem have the power to stop violence somehow.

Another woman, Emily, also described a self-blaming causal attribution in that she noted that she believes her experiences of being sexually abused as a child left her at risk for being abused within her current relationship. Emily shared that her experiences with being abused as a child left her with a lack of trust in people in general that made her overly trusting in her relationship, placing her partner on a "pedestal."

> **Emily:** I wasn't, there was violence, I wasn't hit, I was sexually abused, I needed healing, I opened up a door for him to come into my life when I had a lack of trust with people. And I started trusting him. And he was everything and I just put him on a pedestal, and opened my everything, my thoughts and feelings to him. He was able to use that. And I, I stopped drinking for a long time because of a health thing, cause of things in the past, and I thought maybe I needed somebody to go through stuff with me. And then he unloaded his bag of issues.

After her partner "unloaded his bag of issues" and became violent, Emily was not equipped to

deal with his violence, as she had already "opened" to him and "he was able to use that" to keep her in the relationship as she believed that she "needed somebody to go through stuff with." In this way Emily blamed herself for the violence as she saw her history of childhood abuse as leading to her being too trusting of her partner, placing him "on a pedestal," and becoming dependent on him.

*Lack of healthy ways to cope with conflict and stressors***.** Women also identified an inability to deal with conflict and stressors in a healthy way as contributing to the violence in their relationship. For example, in terms of dealing with conflict, some women noted that they didn't know how to deal with conflict when it arose in their relationship. An example of this was described by Rita, who gave the following explanation as to how the media shaped her use of violence to deal with conflict in the early part of her marriage:

> **Rita:** …the first time in our early marriage it was kinda instigated by me. Because you know how you always see on TV and movies that, where the girl slaps the guy and that's considered socially acceptable. So I kinda had that mindset that that sort of thing was okay. So, except that he would hit me back and that wasn't like [what she had seen on TV and in movies] and then I kinda learned that violence either way is wrong…. but it just shocked me when he hit me back, you know, because guys aren't supposed to hit girls you know. That was my mind set at the time. Umm, so it was definitely my attitude at first that, that it's okay once in a while to slap him or hit him or kick him if he's being a bonehead or an idiot or something.

For Rita, not knowing that "violence either way is wrong" led her to believe that slapping or kicking her partner was an acceptable way to deal with conflict in her relationship. It also led to her belief that her partner would not retaliate as the media had given her the message that "guys aren't supposed to hit girls." These gendered rules of violence delivered by the media promoted violence in Rita's relationship by providing her with a dangerous model of how conflict should be handled by partners.

Signe also shared how sometimes she and her partner would deal with conflict in an

unhealthy manner and described how the couple would go "nose to nose":

> **Signe:** I mean there has been a couple of instances where we've gotten pretty up in each other's face. Like we'll do the old standing nose to nose screaming at each other, pushing each other. Like not touching, like not with pushing with our hands, but like leaning on each other. But it's not, I mean that's still aggressive, but it's only been half of the times, maybe two or three times.

Signe shared that she attributes "stubbornness" on both her and her partner's part as leading to an aggressive style of dealing with conflict in which neither partner was willing to take a "step back."

> **Signe:** I guess, yeah just, with our fights, not taking that step back. And I don't think we'll ever change the way we are with our stubbornness. But I know that with the way we've been dealing with it, it's gotten a lot better. And that is what I'm hoping will get better as years go by. I've seen with my parents, they were together right until my mom passed away. And ah seeing them fight, I never, I did see it sometimes. And you know the way my Dad is, I'm very much like my Dad, very stubborn and when I was younger he was the one that, like he was pretty easy going but when he was mad he was really mad, and it was like scary mad. And I've kinda realized that I got my Dad's anger. That people wouldn't see it, but that people who know me don't see it, but when we do fight or it's a really bad fight. People are kinda surprised.

Signe also linked her aggressive behaviour to being "very much like my Dad," who she described as someone who would become "scary mad" when fighting with her mother, suggesting that as a child she did not have access to proper role models to teach her how to control her temper or deal with conflict. Signe also noted that she and her partner were both working on handling their fights "better" now, suggesting that she viewed the couple's previous method of dealing with conflict as needing improvement.

Another woman, Lana, also shared that at the beginning of her relationship both she and her partner has "very bad tempers" and that they did not "fight fair" in terms of dealing with conflict:

> **Lana:** Umm, well I don't think either of us really fought fair for a long time and… But I get very, we both have very bad tempers, which we've learned over time to control more of less. And I would get very upset and then he would mock me and then it's a moot

> point. So we put down some rules about how we would handle that "I will try not to get so escalated but you also can't mock me" and "if it's not a good time…," all the relationship basics really.

This lack of healthy ways to cope with conflict made it difficult for the couple to deal with their relationship stressors. For example, Lana gave the example of how difficult it had been for her and her partner to have a workplace romance where the staff all lived in close contact at an isolated location.

> **Lana:** and before you know it we were considered to be an item, before we even knew we were an item. And then it was a year of living together, working together, sleeping together. … There wasn't even a way to get to town, just take a day off and just, so I think that that put a lot, I think that kinda accelerated the relationship whatever it was at the time to fit the surroundings.
> **Interviewer:** Like I'm a little unclear what it means "to fit" to those surroundings.
> **Lana:** Well just, umm, the high exposure to one another. Like I barely knew him and all of a sudden I have a few hours I can sit and just be in my room… And the same with him. And also the social structure of the [name of workplace] crowd right…. We were kinda cheered on actually cause we were the oldest staff there, everybody else was teenagers working for the summer and they thought it was so cool and it was, so I think there was a level of expectation and definitely a level of contact that was kinda overwhelming…. And then with the physical confrontation. You know we can't yell, cause the walls are paper thin, we have to be professional downstairs in the [name of workplace]. Umm, like the rational thing would be to kinda sit and talk quietly, but it's not a very rational situation…

In this excerpt, Lana described the pressures of trying to develop a relationship under the stress of continuous "high exposure to one other" while simultaneously trying to preserve a public image of being a happy couple. According to Lana, this led to periods of time where the couple tried to hide their problems followed by episodes of "physical confrontation," as by Lana's account, the couple were unable to "sit and talk quietly."

Other women also echoed Lana's sentiment of how dealing with stressors led to violence their relationship. For example, when asked about what caused the violence to occur in her relationship, Ellen shared that while the "easy answer" was her partner's addiction, that there was also a more complex answer which lay her partner's inability to deal with the multiple

stressors in his life.

> **Ellen:** … well the easy answer on that one is that he was that much further along in his addiction. Umm, and because he was, ahh, away again and this it was during his apprenticeship period, umm, and his babies were small and he was finding that stressful. So he drank more and I think his disease that way progressed, quite a bit. So I think there's some of that in play. Umm, sometimes I think he turned into his dad once he had children, but you know I'm not psych, psychologist or a psychiatrist (laughs). So I don't know, but, ahh, I wonder if somehow patterning didn't turn on and like "okay, I'm a dad now and this is what dads do" (big breath in). But I just think that, and externally, like having to be away and financial things were really stressful…. This was, all six of us were in the house, umm, it was pretty high stress situation. My oldest son was causing problems, for himself mostly, but, umm, of course there was turmoil in the house because of it.

Within Ellen's complex analysis of the violence that occurred, familial, financial, and work related stressors were discussed. She also shared that this led her partner, in her opinion, to start acting like his father, whom Ellen described as an overbearing sexist man who would talk openly about "the good old days when you could hit your wife." For Ellen, she saw violence in her relationship as stemming from her partner dealing with the stressors in his life by drinking heavily and taking a more patriarchal stance.

Rita also shared that she felt that the second period of violence in her relationship resulted from her husband's inability to deal with stressors in his life in a healthy manner. Rita spoke of how when the demands of his job became too much for him to handle alone that her partner became "increasingly violent" towards her and the children as a means to force them into helping him manage his job.

> **Rita:** …he was a district manager for the [name of company] and it was a very stressful job. He was spiralling really down and he was becoming increasingly violent towards the kids. And there was a couple of times where he like threw, one time he threw a box at me. And another time he, he, umm, rolled over in bed and like bumped me really hard with his body on purpose. And he was also just very intimidating in general and bullying because he wanted me or expected me to help with the, with his job. And I was resisting him because I didn't feel like I had the energy. And, and then all a long I felt like this is your job, you need to do it. And not expect the family to do it because he was also

> making our kids help him deliver and getting them up in the middle of the night. And it was a very bad time.

In telling her story, Rita made it clear that her partner's lack of ability to cope with the demands of his job led to the use of intimidation and violence to extract free labour from the children, which he felt entitled to do despite Rita's protestations.

Another woman, Emily, spoke of her partner becoming violent due to the stress of him having to deal with the process of making a residential school claim for compensation.

> **Emily:** …there was no fighting, no arguing, no nothing. The money, money made people angry. And I think that having to go through the, to relive what he went through. I started smoking writing his story that he told me, like I said I did his paperwork. And it brought stuff out of him that he didn't want to feel. I blame myself a lot for the stuff that happened just like I was bringing out a monster in him, his abuse issues. You know what I mean?

In contrasting how her relationship was positive before the claim, Emily constructed a narrative in which her partner became transformed into a "monster." She also spoke of how around this same time period, her partner decided to seek out a relationship with his biological mother and how this also resulted in adding to her partner's stress.

> **Emily:** Yeah, we were there and I found his mother, I don't know. And it was through school, I was, ahh, doing an oral history presentation or project. I used him as my example in relation to what the residential school system did, it played a big part in my life here, this was chaos. It was chaos. And I it's something you don't want to go through. His mother was the second, ahh, she was the first generation, they took her kids away cause she was sexually abused in the residential school. And they didn't see her as a fit mother and they took him. And then he goes, and then he goes and has to go somewhere years later [to find her]. And I think that's why their relationship didn't work out. But at, at the beginning of that time period, and he… It plateaued here with me and how he was towards me, he cut our furniture everything and moved quite a few times and then came to a point where I said no more, I'm going to go woman's shelter.

In locating the beginning of the violence in her relationship to the same period as her partner was dealing with the abuse of his time in residential school and trying to establish a relationship with his mother, Emily emphasizes how stressors related to colonization impacted her relationship.

Power struggles, control, and gender issues. As noted previously, power struggles, control, and gender issues were identified as contributing to many of the causal attributions of violence made by the women in the study. Some women were direct in discussing how they viewed these factors leading to violence. For example, in speaking about the violence she experienced in her relationship, Kiki noted the link between power struggles, controlling behaviour, and violence:

> **Kiki:** It was a control thing very much. So like I remember times, sitting in the corner and having to stay in that corner, too scared to move out of that corner.

By making her sit in the corner and intimidating her to not move "out of that corner," Kiki's partner used violence to exert his control over her.

Cindy also shared a similar view that control was "a big factor" when asked about her attributions for the violence:

> **Cindy:** … I guess it's mostly, I would say the controlling issues. I would say they played a big factor in everything. And he always wanted to control me, like even when I was a young teenager. And I allowed it for a very long time.

As previously discussed, Cindy shared that the first time there was ever violence between her and her partner was when she leaving her partner. After he could not persuade her to stay, her partner retaliated by punching Cindy in the face. In this way Cindy's partner's failure to control her by other means led to his use of violence. Within this excerpt, Cindy also referenced how structural factors such as her gender and age played a role in her partner's attempts to control her.

Lana, who spoke about the stress of trying to maintain a public image of being a happy couple as a reason why violence occurred, also noted how the presence of power struggles and control issues within the couple led to her becoming violent in the relationship.

> **Lana:** … but he's also has a kind of bravado, I don't know if he was trying that on for

> size with me. I don't know, umm, I know that when I got physically involved with him it was because I was going to hit back. Like that was my way of retaliation, I wasn't going to call the cops, I wasn't going to tell anybody else. And I think maybe it actually started as a testing out, seeing what either of us could get away with, especially him…

In her story, Lana's description of violence as a means of "testing out" each other, "especially him," was suggestive of a couple embroiled in dispute over who would have control in the relationship.

Another woman, Samantha shared that the first time her partner ever threatened her with violence was after he learned that she had chosen to give their child her last name rather than his.

> **Samantha:** Well, actually I was thinking about this and I do remember when my first son was born, umm when we signed the like form in the hospital, like the one you filled out for, for vital statistics whatever, I had filled out my name as last and then we had gone like a week later to go and change it and I remember him saying, I don't know if he was kidding or not cause he doesn't remember it now. We were walking across the street and I was like "I'm not gonna change it" and he said "you better change it or I'm going to kill you" so I remember feeling, at that point, I felt threatened by it, from what he said and I couldn't really tell if he was joking or not.

Eventually these threats turned into violence as Samantha's "partying" lifestyle continued:

> **Samantha:** Well I think that he felt that he couldn't trust me umm partly from the repeated incidences of me leaving. Like it didn't happen every time, like every second time but it would. To him I know he didn't like it because he felt like I was abandoning him. I was off with like other people, like whatever. I guess to him we were still in this partnership, raising these kids and umm…
> **Interviewer:** And you felt differently at times, early in the relationship?
> **Sammantha:** Yeah, that didn't really have anything to do with the leaving…. it was just a matter of, to me it was partying, cause before I met him I used to like party a lot too, like place to place to place it, to me it was just the way I did it, there wasn't like anything going on or anything. It [was] just kinda the method I had become accustomed to. So even in the beginning it was weaning off of that because I would party until the next morning like type of thing. So just ending it at 2:00 when the bar ended, and being an alcoholic too, like just turning it off didn't seem like what I wanted to do at the time as well.

In not changing her "partying" ways, Samantha shared that her partner felt "like I was abandoning him." This would lead to violence sometimes as her partner would react violently to what he saw as her not upholding her roles of partner and mother.

Women in the study also spoke of violence as stemming from a desire for one partner to control and limit the other's sexual behaviour. For example, Abby attributed the violence in her relationship to her partner's inability to accept that she had not wanted to be monogamous at the beginning of their relationship, which in Abby's words "broke his heart":

> **Abby:** I think that, I think that like in the beginning I think I broke his heart and then I think like he came back at me and was like I'm gonna break her heart now. And now we're both kinda like well we don't want to do that to each other but he's still got like a way more, I'm a lot quicker to forgive than he is.

Abby believed that violence occurred due to his desire to retaliate against her and "break her heart now," as her partner viewed her lack of monogamy as cheating.

Another woman, Julie, spoke of how she believed violence stemmed from her confronting her partner over his secret communication with a past girlfriend.

> **Julie:** I think it was because, it was during those fights about the other girl actually. And I think it was because I was trying so hard to explain that it would have been better if he was just open in the beginning and then I would have been more trusting. And he wouldn't I guess believe me or he wouldn't understand or he couldn't understand that if he were to say something I wouldn't be as mad. And I kept trying to get that point across and I guess I was, I was mad so I was yelling and I was in his face I guess.

In response to her getting "in his face," Julie's partner's violent reaction silenced Julie's confrontation and thereby controlled her.

Honey also spoke of her partner responding violently when she did not clean up her "hair pieces" in the bathroom after he asked her to.

> **Honey:** …and he's like "I, didn't you hear that I asked you to clean the hair pieces?" And I was like "Okay, after doing, like after I'm done with this homework, I'll do it." And once I was done with my homework, I had dinner with him, and then I'm like "oh I'm so tired." And, and we both walked into the washroom to brush our teeth and he saw that hair pieces (laughs). And then it just went like (snaps her fingers), that's how it goes (snaps her fingers again), and he just lost it.

In responding violently, Honey's partner let her know that complying with his requests was mandatory. Honey shared that this initial incidence of violence with her boyfriend had not been

the first time in her life she had been violently punished for displeasing men, as captured in this "shocking" story:

> **Honey:** Yeah, because, that's a shocking story, I was three and I put some manicure, cause I thought it was really pretty, yeah nail polish. And my grandpa founded out and he was so mad because I put on the nail polish and he was like "are you a sex trader? Like are you a hooker? You shouldn't have done that, that's a really really bad thing." And he was scolding me for it, so many things. And he actually, he, then he walked back to his room so I thought oh maybe it wasn't a huge issue and then he came back with this this, umm, pipe thingee to punish me. And my grandmother, if she wasn't there I probably would haven't lived (laughs)…. Oh yes, and he always said things like "oh, ahh, it would have been so great if you were a boy" and "it's too bad you're a girl, you're not a boy." And his brother actually would never give me any treats, like when I was young. Like when I was four, I remember being in his house but he never, he has never given me any like candies or like nothing because I'm a girl. And my grandpa actually said "well she's a really good girl and she deserves it. So why don't you give it to her." And he was like "no, and why would I give it to a girl." So those types of things, but yeah that's okay that didn't bother me that much (laughs).

Honey's story revealed not only a history of being violently punished for displeasing men, but also a family history of being taught that "it's too bad you're a girl," shaping her to comply with what men want. As an Asian immigrant, Honey's story also revealed how cultural messages she received as a child in Asia contributed to the violence she experienced with her partner (who has a similar cultural background) in Canada.

Another woman, Colleen spoke of how "self-esteem" played a role in maintaining the violence in her relationship as she was taught at a young age to accept violence from men. She shared how her mother taught her that women should "stay with your husband" and "accept" whatever happens in the relationship, including violence:

> **Colleen:** …it really got ingrained to me…. that whole thought of you stay with your husband, your partner, through thick through thin. You accept what, what it is and I think that has a whole lot to do with societal norms of like women, but, and so. So I know where I think I've gotten a lot of why I, even early in the relationship why I stayed, why I pursued and kept trying to work at it.

Colleen further shared that her mother's teachings were in keeping with the "societal norms" she

experienced in her community where no one ever questioned the appropriateness of male violence.

> **Colleen:** Self-esteem, I would say, that really played a huge role, the self-esteem, self-worth, you know…. And I would say just like the surrounding of people, because there's so many people that you know… I remember times when the violence was happening where it was like they just accepted it. Like they didn't, like it wasn't like, "you know what you're doing is wrong, you know you're not supposed to be doing that, right." It was just like "Oh well, that's how he is". Like it was not like "Hey, you know what, like I know of this good woman's program like that's being offered." And it had really like a lot to do with the value I had of myself as a young woman, well a young girl growing into a woman. And that because I didn't, there was no value, there cause I never had the guidance.

Colleen made a clear association between societal acceptance of violence against women and the impact this had on her self-esteem, as captured in her statement that she viewed herself as having "no value" as a young woman, thus limiting her power to leave her violent husband.

*Summary***.** In reviewing the causal attributions the women made as to why violence occurred in their relationships, causal attributions relating to 1) addictions; 2) exposure to other forms of violence; 3) lack of healthy ways to cope with conflict and stressors; and 4) power, control struggles, and gender issues were identified. In addition, the causal attributions for violence identified included attributions from intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal levels. Intrapersonal causal attributions identified by the women included not only attributions specific to their partners such as personality traits and substance abuse issues , but also to themselves, including self-blaming attributions. Of particular note, some of the women shared that they viewed their own lack of self-esteem as contributing to the violence. Interpersonal causal attributions focused on family of origin issues such as childhood exposure to violence and relationship dynamics in which people did not "fight fair," while societal causal attributions addressed issues impacting the women such as the impact of colonialism, patriarchy, and lack of societal response to IPV.

In terms of an intersectionality analysis, it was evident that many of the women linked the causes of the violence that occurred in their relationships to the presence of intersecting structural factors, not only in terms of their social location, but also their partners'. For example, Kiki noted how poverty and addiction lead to a "scene" where violence between couples was common place. In Emily's story, she noted how not only sexism and diabetes placed her at risk of being abused, but also how her partner's experiences as a residential school survivor further impacted her risk of violence in the relationship. Samantha noted how her middle class upbringing and gender shaped her ideas about violence, leaving her "naïve" to her risk of violence, as she did not understand her how partner's cultural acceptance of violence as a means of dealing with conflict would extend to her. Cindy noted that her age, as well as her gender, placed her at risk of experiencing violence by a controlling partner. Honey's story also revealed how her gender and race intersected to place her at risk to experience relationship violence, even before she met her partner, as she learned at an early age that men in her culture had the right to physically punish women and children. Issues related to race were of particular importance to many of the Indigenous women, as the impact of colonialism, the residential school system, and the removal of Indigenous children from their birth families featured prominently in the stories women told of why violence occurred in their relationships. Taken together, the causal attributions identified highlight the need to understand the contextual factors that place women at risk for violence.

The dominant narrative of improved relationships satisfaction: Changed. Not only did the women share their perceptions of why violence occurred in their relationships, they also incorporated these perceptions into the narratives they constructed of their present relationships. Their perceptions of the violence they experienced (including both causal attributions of violence

and self-definition of violence) appeared to influence their perceptions of changes in their relationship following the desistance of violence in regards to relationship dynamics, safety, and risk of reoccurrence of violence. The following section focuses on the stories told by the women that relate to a dominant narrative of being in a positively changed relationship. In this narrative, women told stories that emphasised three key themes as important to viewing their relationships as changed. These themes included: 1) a turning point in the relationship that triggered a significant positive shift in relationship dynamics, 2) being able to establish safety, and 3) perceiving that the factors that caused the violence were now resolved. However, it is important to note that not all the women's individual narratives contained all of three of these elements or contained varying degrees of these elements (this will be further explored in the counter narratives section of the study).

Taken together the three thematic elements appear to compose the plot line of the dominant narrative of being in a changed relationship. This plotline appears to reflect a social discourse commonly held in North America on love; the "true love conquers all" storyline that emphasizes the transformative power of love. While noting that this story has several variations, Searles and Mickish (1984) described the main plot of the story as being that heterosexual couples need to overcome differences or difficulties in the relationship in order to develop satisfying relationships. In order to overcome these barriers, often some type of unusual circumstances is needed to bring the couple to a realization that the assumptions that the partners have been making about each other are unfounded or that one or both of them have been behaving in "unnatural ways" (Searles & Mickish, 1984, p. 270). Dramatic examples of unusual circumstances include illness, injury, or great loss. Traditionally in this discourse, the woman's role is seen to be one of self-sacrifice and patience. Hayes (2014) uses the example of Belle in

Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* to highlight how this dominant discourse on love can be employed to downplay abusive dynamics in relationships and highlight the transformative power accorded to love:

> Belle, the "Beauty" in the Disney film, is captured by a cranky beast who lives in a huge castle. Belle is the quintessential beautiful young ingénue who wins the beast over with her kind words and sweet manner. The facts that she has traded herself for the safety of her father and that the beast is abusive are downplayed, overtaken by the romantic storyline, where Belle eventually, through her sweetness and love, turns the beast into the perfect prince and they get married and live happily ever after. (p. 15)

The dominant narrative of a "changed" relationship will now be discussed in further detail, fusing together the findings from the analysis to explore how the women tell their stories in order to convince their audience that their relationship has indeed changed.

***Turning points*.** As noted above, in the dominant narrative of improved relationship satisfaction, women described a turning point in their relationship that resulted in a positive and stable shift in the relationship dynamics between the couple. In defining turning points as to how they pertain to women experiencing IPV, Chang et al. (2010) have noted that "turning points are specific incidents, factors, or circumstances that permanently change how the women view the violence, their relationship, and how they wish to respond" (p. 252). The epitome of such a turning point in this study was when a woman threatened to leave or actually left her relationship and used this change in the status of the relationship to leverage greater power in the relationship to affect changes in her partner and/or in the relationship in the direction that she desired. If her partner agreed and followed through with his promise to comply with her request(s), this was considered a successful turning point. In the next section, examples of different variations of

successful turning points are described in greater detail.

Woman initiated turning points. In describing successful turning points that were self-initiated, women told stories that reflected the importance of gaining personal empowerment, feeling the need to protect others, prioritizing their health and safety, as well as wishing to live in a way consistent with their values.

A process of gaining personal empowerment was described by many women in the study as pivotal to reaching a turning point in their relationship. For example, Colleen spoke of a turning point in which she told her partner that he needed to get his addiction issues and violent tendencies under control as she was no longer able to support him in his struggles with addiction and unresolved anger, as she had come to prioritize her own happiness over his needs for her help.

> **Colleen:** I remember the clarity of that day was just like "You know what? I'm done." Like I just, like you know, there is so much more to life. There's like, you know, I remember looking at other women and seeing women happy and being happy and I'm like "Why can't I be that woman? Why can't I be that woman who smiles and feels good." That, that woman is sitting at the park with her children …. I said "like you know what, what else, I'm like you you've been here, you've done this, you've like… If none of these [name of addiction programs] are helping you I can't stick around anymore, like I just can't."

Colleen linked her realization that she had the right to be happy to the development of her own sense of growing self-esteem and agency, as captured in her quote "I can't stick around here anymore." Furthermore, Colleen linked her growing self-esteem and agency to her experiences with domestic violence counselling and building relationships with other women who supported her. This process also seems to have meant rejecting some of the teachings she had learned as a child from her family of origin. Colleen shared with the interviewer how her mother told her when she was young that a woman should "stay with your husband through thick, through thin" (one of the causal attributions she made as to why violence was maintained in her relationship).

The difficulty in rejecting these teachings seems to have been compounded by Colleen's experiences with societal reactions to her victimization, as noted in the following excerpt where she tells about an incident when her husband assaulted her in public:

> **Colleen:** … that men can do what they want and if that means become violent to their spouses, umm. Because I know that, umm, like I've had situations. Like one time, ahh, my husband attacked me outside a corner store and the corner store was like, he came into the corner store and he pushed me against the racks or whatever. And basically all what the people, like it was like the people were walking by us like as if nothing was happening, like "oh well, whatever."

In this story Colleen offered insight into how a lack of appropriate societal response to IPV made it difficult for her to have self-esteem (another one of the causal attributions she made as to why violence was maintained in her relationship). She interpreted the lack of response of others to her victimization to mean that "men can do what they want" and violence towards women is not important enough to merit a response from people.

Nevertheless, at the turning point of the relationship, Colleen's growing empowerment led her to confront her partner about the unacceptability of his abusive behaviour. Interestingly, Colleen also shared that it was not only her own growing empowerment but also her partner's recognition of it that made a difference:

> **Colleen:** He knew that. He said to me that he heard a seriousness in my voice that he never ever heard and that scared him to want to get help. Like to deal with his ang-, he went to anger management, he went to men's program. And he just said that he got scared that, he knew "if that I didn't change that you weren't gonna stay." Cause we were together at that time for eleven years, yeah eleven years, that was four years back. And, umm, he said" I knew, something in your voice was different" than any other time of when we had, you know, physical abuse.

In Colleen's story, it was her partner's recognition that she had the strength and the conviction to follow through with her threat to leave him that persuaded him to change. Her empowerment led to a shift in the power dynamics of the couple as her partner recognized that Colleen now had the strength to leave him.

Other women spoke of initiating a turning point in their relationship through a process of realizing that they needed to protect their children, pets, or even their own health. As these needs became more important than other needs that had previously kept them less able to negotiate healthy relationships, the women reported a new sense of empowerment. The women used this newfound empowerment to construct a turning point in the story of how their relationship changed. For example, one woman spoke eloquently about how her growing love and attachment for her children helped her change her priorities:

> **Cindy:** It wasn't like, like if you asked me this maybe five years ago, my kids were babies still, I wouldn't say that they were my first priority then. I would say he was. And then over the years as my kids grew up and I seen how much they were changing and how they have their own personalities now and their own things that they like to do. Now I know that, uh, that, uh, I want to keep them for the rest of my life. I don't ever want to lose them. Because at one point, I did think, that wasn't the right way.

In prioritizing keeping her children over maintaining her relationship, Cindy found the strength to distance herself from her partner, realizing that his unhealthy behaviours were a threat to her relationship with her children due to the involvement of child welfare services:

> **Cindy:** I guess, kinda, cause I did kinda, distance myself from him. Because I always thought that if I didn't have him, I would lose the kids and everything else. Cause he was always the provider and all that kinda stuff. But then, umm, it took a long time for me to actually, ahh, realize that I could do stuff for myself, like for me and the kids. Like now that they are a little bit older you know like they kinda encourage me too.

Before this point, Cindy felt that she was not capable of supporting and caring for her children without her partner's assistance, particularly his financial assistance. She had worried that if the couple split up, he would be granted custody of the children. She noted the importance of the support that she received during the physically abusive period of her relationship from Child and Family Services as well as support from the legal system in helping her make the transition to feeling able to parent her children and take a stand against her partner's abusive behaviours for the sake of her children. Through her empowerment, Cindy was able to take on the role of

protective mother and in doing so constructs herself as agentic in the narrative she is telling, someone who "could do stuff for myself."

Another woman, Honey, noted how getting pets changed her perspective on her willingness to remain in the relationship. At the beginning of Honey's relationship, she felt that she had little choice but to accept her partner's abusive behaviour as she felt she had few viable housing alternatives if she were to leave him. However, once the couple adopted cats, a new bottom line of what constitutes acceptable behaviour from her partner became established for Honey, as she took on the role of protector of the cats.

> **Honey:** But if he was that violent then the chances, our cats, I mean my cats are gonna get hurt right? And I cannot afford that so I probably will just move away, I mean walk away.

This role of protector seemed to help empower Honey to assert herself in the relationship as she began to see herself as someone who would "walk away" from her relationship if circumstances became such that she could no longer "afford" to stay. The idea that leaving was now an option for Honey reappears later in her story, as one day after her partner called her an unacceptable name, she confronted her partner as to what she would no longer "tolerate":

> **Honey:** …when he was driving and he was saying all the words like bitch, like, like a joke and umm I stopped laughing. And I, and I stopped saying anything. And once we got out the car I looked straight into his face, I mean straight into his eyes and I said "I don't, I'm not gonna hear you calling me like that never again. And I don't want you to say it like that, call me like that, or I don't want you to, to label me in some way". And so on and so on, and if you call me like that once more than I probably will have to finish the relationship**.** And it's just, it's just not something that I can tolerate. And he understood what I meant.

As to how Honey's ability to shift the dynamics in her relationship came about, she noted in her interview that adopting cats led to the couple feeling more like a family, giving the couple a mutual interest. She thinks this resulted in increasing her value in her partner's eyes as he came to realize that if she were to leave him, he would lose contact not only with her, but also with the

cats. Previous to adopting the cats, Honey's partner had told her that if she was not happy in the relationship, she was free to leave the relationship, as he did not care enough for her to be willing to alter his behaviours. After Honey's confrontation of his verbal abuse and threat to leave the relationship, it seemed to Honey that her partner was forced to reconsider his previous stance that her leaving the relationship was insignificant. Honey believed that her partner had come to view him, her, and the cats as constituting a "family."

> **Honey:** After adopting the cats, it like he really started to feel our relationship as a family, instead of a girlfriend. So we're, our connection has gotten really stronger. And if we just break up then it seems like if he doesn't see me its fine with him, but if he doesn't get to see the cats then he made an issue for him.

Unlike losing a "girlfriend," Honey argued that her partner came to see their "family" life together with the cats as important, creating a "stronger connection" between the partners. For Honey, her threat to leave her partner represents a successful turning point in the relationship, as it led to her partner agreeing to change his behaviour.

In addition, some woman spoke of coming to realize that the unhealthy behaviours that characterized their relationships (violence, substance abuse, or stressful interactions with their partner) were risking their health and that they needed to prioritize their health over the relationship with their partner. This point is illustrated in the following exert where Emily speaks of an interaction with her partner where she is able to convince her partner that his insistence on having her drink with him constitutes a genuine risk to her life because of her chronic health problems:

> **Emily:** … I asked him at one point "what would you do if I was dead?" And he really thought about it and he cried, he cried like a, he bawled. I asked him "if I had died and it was at your hands, if you were the one who did this, if I died while I was drunk because you wanted to drink", you know. I think that somebody has to want to stop, want to grow; I want to grow as a person. I don't see a lifestyle with me being self-medicated or living in fear. It's not what I want.

In the past, Emily's objections to drinking alcohol and/or having her partner drink in their home led to severe violence. The power of her argument during this turning point seemed to propel her partner to consider not only a future without her, but also the ramifications of knowing that he would be to blame for her death. He agreed to respect her decision not to drink and altered his own drinking behaviour. This excerpt represents a successful turning point in that Emily's partner allowed Emily to influence him and he decided to respect Emily's boundaries regarding his alcohol use.

One atypical presentation of a woman becoming empowered enough to place boundaries on the unhealthy behaviours in the relationship rather than maintain the status quo of the relationship was one woman's story of how attempting suicide broke the silence surrounding the violence in her relationship. Abby told of reaching a point in her relationship where she could no longer tolerate the violence and abuse in her relationships and attempted suicide:

> **Abby:** I got really, really, really upset and I was not, like I was just not, uhh. handling what had just happened well. And I almost, uhh, like, and I almost committed suicide. Like I took like a lot of, umm, like a lot of medication and then made myself get rid of it. But, and then I was in the hospital because they had to obviously check everything. So it was out in the open right away as soon as it happened. Like my parents were there with me and like it was just a, just a really bad situation. So there wasn't anywhere that he could really hide that had happened. And I think that fact like helped.

Abby described the impact of her suicide attempt as having "opened up the curtain" on the violence in the relationship as it became "out in the open" for others to see. The awareness it generated in her social support network appeared to have left her partner in a situation where "there wasn't anywhere that he could really hide that had happened" and he had to admit to his role in her "bad situation." This seemed to impact her partner sufficiently for him to re-evaluate the acceptability of his violent behaviour. Therefore, Abby's attempted suicide represents a successful turning point in Abby's story as it helped her gain power through the support of her

social network.

In addition, other women spoke of experiencing a turning point in their relationship that was driven by a need within themselves to live a life more in keeping with their own values. This meant changing their abusive behaviour. For example, Lana spoke of feeling "ridiculous" at work one day after a physical altercation that both partners had engaged in that left her with scratches on her neck:

> **Lana:** I know this is going to sound kinda cliché, but I was working reception in an office and I had a scratch down my throat, and of course he had a few scratches too, and I didn't have a turtleneck, so I wore a dressier jacket. And I just wore the jacket (zips up the jacket she is wearing all the way up her throat) all day like that, and I just thought "this is ridiculous" but it's exactly, like listening to my friend, it's exactly what she went through and nobody had any clue until she came to the school and told our student advisor she can't go home.

Lana's worry that people might guess what had happened the night before left her feeling compelled to keep her jacket zipped up to hide her scratches and in doing so she equated herself with her friend, a woman who had been hiding that she was a victim of IPV from others. Lana later recalled thinking about how her father taught her that violence towards others was not acceptable and that "if you're gonna hit something make sure it doesn't have a pulse." The hiding of her scratches seemed to create feelings of guilt and shame regarding her involvement in a violent relationship where both she and her partner had engaged in violence. This incident led Lana to leave her partner and live on her own until the violence in their relationship ended.

> **Lana:** Umm, well like I said, I told him "nothing changes if nothing changes." We had made resolutions over and over again. And, but being creatures of habit, the first sign of stress or whatever, you just revert to what you do. "So I'm going to go for a year and you can do your thing, and I'm not going to cut you off or anything, I'm just going to physically remove myself and we'll see how it goes". And I think, umm, I think the fact that I did actually follow through, cause I had threatened to do it a few times. I almost did it one time before and then I changed my mind. But when I showed that I had the lease and that I had put... Umm I don't know. I think I showed him that I will do what I say and I think I usually do. But that was a pretty, that was a pretty big promise slash threat…

Lana's "big promise slash threat" to move, which she did, represents a successful turning point in ending the violence as she felt it led to her partner understanding that there would be consequences if violence occurred that she would enforce. This meant the couple could no longer "revert to what you do" during stressful times and her partner decided to change.

Before ending this section on successful turning points initiated by the women, it is important to note two things. First, it must be made clear that a woman initiating a change in the relationship by itself was not enough to stop violence, rather it was the partner's acceptance of the change in the relationship dynamic that led to a decrease, if not the desistance, of violence. Kiki, who described her uncertainty during the process of her partner agreeing to stop drinking, captures this concept in the following statement:

> **Kiki:** I don't know, he kept on going for a while, he kept on doing his thing, but I kept on doing my thing. And eventually he broke and he went in and got help. Either it can make your relationship or break it, and if it makes it, makes it. And if it makes it that means you both really want the relationship. If it breaks it, it means that one wants it more than the other and you just go on. And I think that was the hardest thing for me at the beginning, cause "I want to make it but does he?" And when he did decide to go for help, I was so happy cause I knew that he wanted it just as much as me. And it worked out for me, thank god.

Kiki noted that her partner was initially resistant to changing and her choice of language denotes a period of tension where he "kept on doing his thing" but she "kept on doing my thing" and eventually she sees herself as prevailing in this struggle, as he "broke" and went for help to overcome his addictions.

Second, after a woman has initiated a turning point in the relationship and her partner has agreed to change, these changes may be challenged at a later point by the woman's partner. For example, Rita described how her experiences dealing with police, the shelter system, and child welfare authorities led to a turning point in her abusive relationship in which her partner agreed to leave the family home. However, when the couple reunited, her partner's abusive behaviour

started again as he tried to physically force their young daughter to get up in the middle of the night to help him with his night job:

> **Rita:** … I guess during that time I just found myself feeling more empowered. Like if he does something, like I'm going to call the police, like I'm not going to let this, let him get away with this. Like there was actually one incidence where after he came back and had been living with us for a while, he was trying to like physically force my daughter to help him. And I actually made him turn himself in to the police station. Like I actually went down with him. And I actually felt like there was a turnaround where I'm not scared of you anymore. I'm just gonna like you know, do something about it."

Rita's story suggests that for some women establishing non-abusive relationship dynamics may be an ongoing process rather than permanent, and that power struggles between partners over additional abusive behaviour (s) after a turning point has been reached may still continue.

Partner initiated turning points. Although only reported in one woman's story, there was an example in which the woman made it was clear that it was changes in her partner that led to a pivotal turning point in the abusive dynamics of the relationship. In Samantha's story, the process of reaching a turning point in the relationship appeared to be initiated by her partner's decision to quit drinking. As noted in the following excerpt, Samantha seemed to attribute her partner's decision to quit drinking in part to his guilt over an incident in which she was hurt badly, leaving her with a significant scar on the face:

> **Samantha:** The last time he assaulted me would have been in May. I have a scar here from it (indicates with her finger a centimeter long scar on her face). Yeah, I'm pretty sure he felt bad about it (laughs), what he did to my face. Then he, that was May and then he quit drinking in August. And in between that point I think he was already, I think he was just, he was already. I think he decided he didn't want to drink anymore, but he was only drinking cause I was drinking, umm, but it was definitely different, it wasn't like he was gung-ho to go to the bar or he was just like kinda pouring it down like just to keep me at home or something, I don't know instead of having me go off alone somewhere else.

In her story, Samantha noted that her partner was "only drinking cause I was drinking," suggesting that in her opinion he was drinking because he didn't want her drinking "alone."

After her partner gave up drinking, Samantha shared she also gave up drinking, but her partner later left her and Samantha was unable to maintain her sobriety. While her partner's decision to quit drinking was a turning point in ending his violence towards Samantha, the true turning point in the relationship seemed to be her partner's request get back together with her and to re-negotiate the couple's relationship based on honesty and forgiveness of past infidelities.

> **Samantha:** He wanted to know; he asked for this whole period, he said he wanted to know how many times had I cheated on him. He said "I can't and this is why I left", cause he was "that's all I can think about". He was making an effort to, ahh, I guess it was just at this point that he needed to know this particular question so I told him and then he told me and that's it.

It is clear from Samantha's use of language that she viewed her partner as the one who was driving positive change in the relationship. Samantha credited her partner with giving up drinking and no longer being violent. However, this change was not enough to keep him in the relationship. According to Samantha, for him, it seemed to be about dealing with the couple's past history of infidelities so he could move on in the relationship. Samantha, in turn, accepted his terms by being truthful with him about her past infidelities. She later attributed this moment to ridding herself of her guilt, which in turn eventually helped her stop drinking. Although it was her partner who changed first and initiated the re-negotiation of the couple's relationship, it seems that, for Samantha, it was the honest discussion about their past transgressions that allowed her to move on. The result was greater relationship satisfaction for her.

Couple driven turning points. Finally, Tabitha's story seemed unusual in that, although the violence stopped after her partner went to jail for assaulting her, for her the pivotal turning point in her relationship seemed to be a mutual decision in which both partners agreed to quit drinking. At the time, Tabitha's partner was in the hospital for an operation and it was the gravity of this health situation that seemed to lead him to consider Tabitha's previous requests that as a

couple they should both stop drinking,

> **Tabitha:** He said "I'm gonna stop drinking". I said "I've been bugging you to quit drinking for months." And I said "if you don't stop drinking I'm gonna leave ya, I can't handle, I can't live like this anymore." So we slowly did it.

Even though the violence had stopped prior to the couple having this conversation, Tabitha remained unhappy in the relationship, as highlighted in her threat to leave him. However, until this moment there appears to have been some ambivalence on her part to committing to both leaving the relationship and working on her own sobriety. Although Tabitha could have stopped drinking before this point, her ambivalence about quitting drinking seemed to disappear only after her partner conceded to her previous requests to stop his drinking. At that point, both partners committed voluntarily to quit drinking. For this woman, positive change in the relationship appears to have occurred more from this mutual decision to quit drinking and support each other in their sobriety than from the desistance of violence that had previously occurred.

Safety. The second element that appeared in the dominant narrative was that of establishing physical and emotional safety. In the dominant narrative that women told of increased relationship satisfaction, many of the women focused on the establishment of safety in broader terms than the desistance of violence. This is idea is captured in the following excerpt from Ellen's story:

> **Ellen:** Yeah, lots of my thinking has changed in the last year and safety, when I first started talking to people at [name of agency] for example, this is where it first really, people kept asking me are you safe? And I thought he's away most of the time and when he's at home umm I don't necessarily feel physically threatened or I wouldn't have said so or thought so um but I really thought it meant, in my head, it was strictly like "I'm I gonna die or am gonna get beat up and sent to the hospital, like sent down the stairs?" No, I don't believe that any of those things are gonna happen. Most of the time I don't believe those things are gonna happen, you know, but today my definition of safety includes my emotional wellbeing and umm being able to say something without having to edit or worry about what's gonna happen or pay for it in some way or fashion. Uhh,

yeah, that also fits into safety.

In this excerpt, Ellen makes it clear that her conceptualization of safety has evolved beyond physical safety and encompasses an element of emotional safety that allows her to speak openly "without having to edit or worry about what's gonna happen or pay for it in some way." This suggests that while the perception of having physical safety in a relationship may be important to the process of establishing safety for women who have experienced IPV in their relationships, it may not be the sole criteria, as the threat of violence or other negative repercussions may linger.

Also, in terms of physical safety, some of the women in this study spoke of desistance of violence as not being as important as the eradication of other threats that the women perceive to be relevant to their safety. This idea of the desistance of violence being secondary to the eradication of other threats, such as substance abuse, is supported in the following excerpt from Tabitha's interview:

> **Tabitha:** Well at least the violence stopped. It stopped when he came out of jail that stopped.
> **Interviewer:** So that was like, is it fair to say that was a small piece to getting your trust back?
> **Tabitha:** A little a little piece to our ten year puzzle (she laughs).
> **Interviewer:** Do you think that's an important piece though?
> **Tabitha:** No. I think the most important piece was to quit drinking.
> **Interviewer:** Fair enough, that's what I wanted to know.
> **Tabitha:** Yeah that was the most important part.

Even though I, as the interviewer, had indicated to Tabitha that I heard her point that drinking was the primary problem in her relationship, she made a point of reiterating her previous statement on the importance of resolving the couple's problematic drinking, this time using less tentative language to highlight her perception of what was most significant to her in terms of improving her relationship satisfaction. For Tabitha, the couple's drinking remained a threat to her relationship satisfaction, even after the violence ended. This excerpt taken from Tabitha's

story, like Ellen's, suggests that while the desistance of violence plays an important part in women's relationship satisfaction, for women who viewed the physical violence as being linked to other factors such as substance abuse, eradicating the root causes of physical violence may be "the most important part" of establishing relationship satisfaction.

In discussing the idea of threat of future physical violence, the majority of the participants reported they did not feel concern for their physical safety. Some women were emphatic regarding this subject and some women were more pragmatic. Examples of women's emphatic statements include:

> **Colleen:** I haven't felt, like I haven't felt scared like how I used to feel like there's just, there's just a different like presence of himself. He, he's changed, I don't feel like he's gonna umm revert back because it was such a, like I think because he, he's allowed goodness in his life. That he thinks of having, he has more appreciation towards me and he, he has told me like sincerely where he knows that he has hurt me and he's sorry, that's like not like that story of you know "Oh I'm sorry, I won't do it again". Like it's a real genuine story of like "wife, I love you, I sorry, I'm sorry for hurting you, I'm sorry for doing the things that". So I don't feel fear…

In her statement, Colleen attributed her lack of fear to her belief that her partner has "appreciation" for her now, that he is "sincerely" sorry for hurting her in the past, and that "he's changed." Another woman, Emily, emphasized that for her, her safety was linked to her partner's sobriety:

> **Emily:** He's been sober…. Things have changed significantly. I'm happy, I feel safe.

For Emily, her partner's sobriety appeared to provide evidence that "things have changed significantly."

Other women were more pragmatic about the possibility of violence reoccurring, but still presented as not particularly concerned about their physical safety.

> **Samantha:** It's always possible, I can't rule it out, you know I can't see what the circumstance might be at this point, but it's always possible.

> **Interviewer:** Does the idea that the violence might happen again, is that something that you worry about?
> **Samantha:** No.
> **Interviewer:** No, so you're saying anything can happen, you're an intelligent woman, you know that, but it's like this idea that it's hard to imagine it happening again.
> **Samantha:** It's hard to imagine it happening again but, I'm, if there's alcohol involved of course it could happen again.
>
> ~~~
>
> **Lana**: While it's been a while so I'm not so edgy about it and I'm not really wondering if it's going to happen again.

From Colleen's and Emily's previous statements of strong conviction to Samantha's and Lana's bracketing of violence as a possibility that is "hard to imagine", the women presented as not perceiving any imminent threat of violence. While these excerpts all support a dominant narrative of safety from physical violence in the women's relationships, closer analysis revealed that the women also spoke of feeling unsafe in more subtle ways. These subtle references to lack of safety will be addressed in the counter narratives of safety.

Resolving the risk of reoccurrence of violence by making meaning of the violence that occurred: "It just made us stronger." The third theme identified relating to the dominant narrative was the concept that in discussing their experiences of resolving violence in their relationships, some of the women spoke of finding significant meaning in the resolution process. These women constructed narratives that included attributions about why the violence started and why the violence ended and focused on processes of healing and/or growth. Stories of healing included narratives of overcoming the damaging effects of past experiences such as childhood abuse and residential school, as well as narratives of overcoming addiction issues. Stories of growth emphasized either how couples were able to learn to deal with relationship issues by developing better ways to deal conflict within the relationship or by improving communication, or how the women felt they had grown in terms of their own development.

Some of the stories contained both elements of relationship growth and personal growth. Regardless, in general, being able to find significant meaning in their experiences of violence appeared linked to increased relationship satisfaction for the women in this study.

Stories of healing. In telling their stories of violence, many women situated the reason(s) for the violence they had experienced in either their own or their partner's or in both partners' negative past experiences. For example, one woman, Emily, in speaking of her partner noted:

> **Emily:** He was adopted from, from his family from a young age to another family in [name of province]. And he was abused and sent to residential school while in this new home where he was placed**,** both at home and at the residential school. And he came to [name of city]. And me and him crossed paths and basically didn't leave each other's side …. I think he was lacking, he didn't know how to have relationships with anybody… and I was the only one and I was treated like property…. He was self-medicating and I knew it was because of his abuse and from his having to create himself on his own, his lack of knowing who he was, the way he was in the world and who he had…. But then after he was able to have a mother, to start that relationship and that growth …. That's why I think right now it's good, they're, to know and to grow, to know, with each other right now. He stays over there and then he comes back home…. And I think he had seen what I was worth, cause I helped him find and gain his family, his own biological family. And that was probably something he lived his life on finding. So think after … that when that conversation started coming out. We dealt a little with the abuse after that.

For Emily, her meaning making of the violence is linked in part to her partner's healing from his negative childhood experiences and his resulting lack of knowledge about how to have positive relationships, as well as his addiction problems. Her story of healing emphasizes, amongst other things, the establishment of a healthy relationship between her partner and his birth mother as helping overcome the violence in the relationship. In addition, Emily also shared that in her opinion, the initial violence in her relationship was triggered by her partner going through the residential school settlement claim process as captured in her statement "the switch flipped after we started dealing with the residential school." Emily constructed a positive narrative of their relationship prior to the settlement claim process:

> **Emily:** He took care of me for a long time, years there was no fighting, no arguing, no

> nothing. The money, money made people angry and I think that having to go through the, to relive what he went through. I started smoking writing his story, that he told me, like I said I did his paperwork and it brought stuff out of him that he didn't want to feel. I blame myself a lot for the stuff that happened just like I was bringing out a monster in him, his abuse issues…

In telling her story of violence, Emily emphasized her belief that it was the stress of dealing with the emotions that the settlement claim evoked in her partner that led him to increased alcohol use and anger. This is summed up in her statement "the money made people angry." She noted that her partner's securing out of province employment helped to create a more stable relationship as his new job gave him the opportunity to bond with his birth family and heal from his past.

Another woman, Colleen, noted, that for her, "not knowing what, what health was" was instrumental in shaping her relationship. Like Emily, she too saw her partner's struggle to overcome his past history of childhood abuse, exposure to physical violence between his parents, and resulting addiction issues as central to the violence that occurred. But she also shared that she felt that her own upbringing and the beliefs she was taught about men, relationships, and the world may have primed her for looking for a partner who was violent:

> **Colleen:** I would say that violence, it was taught to me very young too. Like as a woman now, when I look back on my experiences and my life and my journey, that my mom ingrained a value of accepting, like high tolerance of men's like behaviours. Like accepting negative things from men, not like, I was not, I was not exposed to healthy male relationships growing up. So that, to what I seen a man to be, was what I went out exactly looking for. Like and that was the characteristics of my husband, it was I was looking for somebody that was, you know, addicted to, you know, had addiction problems, you know, that gave that persona of like I'm strong, I'm like, you know, like the man, macho, that I can protect you.

According to Colleen, having "acceptance of negative things from men" was ingrained in her as a child and not being "exposed to healthy male relationships" led her to look for a "macho" man who was "strong" and could "protect you." This is reflected in the next excerpt where Colleen shared that she rejected opportunities for healthier relationships in favour of the relationship with

her present husband who, while creating a very unhealthy relationship dynamic, also seems to have met her early relationship expectations:

> **Colleen:** … to be honest I don't even know if we would have last. I don't, I don't because I, I had a couple of boyfriends before my husband. They weren't anything like my husband and then I guess they were healthier and I was like "Nah" and then I chose unhealthy. And I don't, I don't think it would have lasted if it was, like yeah. I don't think it would have lasted as long it did if I didn't go through all the things that I went through. I think if things were always good and great, I would think that something would be wrong with that too.

Colleen emphasized that it was her choice to choose an "unhealthy" relationship over "healthier" ones, based on her beliefs that relationships shouldn't be "always good and great." This reasoning helped Colleen legitimate her decision to seek out the partner she did. In positioning herself as someone shaped from childhood to seek out a violent man, Colleen constructed a narrative in which her choice of an aggressive partner is normative.

As Colleen continued with her narrative of the violence in her relationship, she also emphasized the role of healing. After describing a process of both partners receiving extensive counselling for their issues, she presented her current relationship as being on a healing path, with both partners appreciating the difference in what is and is not healthy in a relationship.

> **Colleen:** I know that we've been to hell and back in our relationship. And (big sigh) we've been through so much that I, that I just have faith that, that, umm, things will work, and only for the better. Like I can't ever see it getting worse again, like I think because we've lived it, we've been there, we know how it feels. We don't want that. So we just keep moving forward…. it's important to continue to grow, important to continue to work on myself and his self, like the work just doesn't stop, like I think because we've had such, like umm so much experiences that were not good that it is gonna take a long time to heal and to go through.

Colleen emphasized that she has "faith" that the relationship will not get "worse" and return to violence, as the couple is motivated to "keep moving forward" by past relationship experiences "that were not good." Through the telling of her story, Colleen constructed a story where the couple is now on a journey of healing that will "take a long time to heal and to go through."

Kiki, another woman whose story emphasized overcoming addiction for both her and her partner as instrumental in ending the violence, also noted the role of living in an unhealthy community in her story of becoming a healthier couple. Kiki shared her perceptions of how prevalent violence and addiction problems are in her community and how rare it is in her community for couples to overcome their problems and have abuse free relationships:

> **Kiki:** Yeah, I see a lot of people. Like I'll go to my meetings and where I go to my meetings are right in the midst of things sometimes. And I see a lot of violence, I see, I hear it and it really bothers me you know. You don't see that, people changing ….Well, I don't know any other couples that really have, you know …. It just made us stronger, made us more respectful for each other, you know, and thankful for what we have because not too many people have what we have.

When asked about the impact of not knowing any other couples in their community that have healthier relationships, Kiki noted that she now sees herself and her partner as being "loners," with few connections in their community, preferring to engage in activities with each other in contrast to the partying lifestyle the couple used to engage in:

> **Interviewer:** What's the effect of not knowing any other couples?
> **Kiki:** It's hard. It's kinda hard. Mind you we're kinda a bunch of loners. We kinda, sticking, cause really all the people we did associate with were under the influence or still in the game. And the thing is, is that we are both free from that. So we are basically loners (laughter). But we're good loners, (laughter) together. So yeah.
> **Interviewer:** So that's interesting.
> **Kiki:** I wouldn't say isolate, cause we don't isolate. We go out and do things together but we do more things together like tobogganing. And you know it's just stuff and it's amazing, my life is amazing.
> **Interviewer:** But it sounds like there was a time where you had a wider social circle.
> **Kiki:** Yes, with the wider social circle, that's where all the rigmarole was. And to break free from that, that was the thing to do.

Kiki's reflection on her story of the violence seems to suggest that the couple had to overcome an unhealthy culture of relationship norms that included excessive alcohol and drug use as well as violence. Kiki's view of her relationship as being healthier than the other relationships she sees in her community seemed to have shaped a general attitude of being "thankful for what we

have because not too many people have what we have." This seems to be linked to her increased relationship satisfaction and her view of her relationship as having changed for the better.

Finally, one woman who clearly identified herself as struggling with alcohol addiction when her relationship was violent noted that because she was not ready to deal with her addiction issues during that period, it also meant that she was not in a position to address the violence. In the following excerpt Samantha shared how her unwillingness to stop drinking led to her viewing the relationship violence as a way to help "balance" things out:

> **Samantha:** Well it had to do with, umm, like my own guilty feelings maybe. Guilt about what I did or what I said or, umm knowing that, just having an overall guilt I guess. Almost like balanced it out in a way so ….that's hard to say because I know my violence was tied to alcoholism and I didn't want to talk about that at that time. So to expose the violence was also to expose all of that. And I didn't want to stop drinking. Umm, so that's why I didn't want to say anything either.

For Samantha, her ability to overcome her addiction appeared linked to positive relationship changes that occurred, such as the desistance of her partner's drinking and his willingness to engage her in an open and frank conversation about the couple's past infidelities.

> **Samantha:** I think there was a lot less pressure on our relationship at that point. Especially having that conversation, like that was a pivotal conversation that we had, cause it kinda answered questions that he wanted to know, it let me tell him as well. So it kinda cleared the air between us, I would say on the parts, that were really bugging us. So there was that, umm. And then I would have to say, when I quit drinking in that period…. I think for me that was like a weight lifted off my shoulders.

The presence of honesty and open communication in her relationship appears to have been instrumental in creating a healthy relationship climate that allowed Samantha to reduce her guilt over past behaviours and heal from her addictions.

Overall, the theme of one partner or both having to overcome addictions was prevalent in the stories of healing. For example, Kiki, in answering the question about what advice she would give to women experiencing relationship violence, made it quite clear that for her, women need

to deal with substance abuse issues in order to "break free" and save their relationships:

> **Kiki:** I think the first think I would say is if they are drinking or using to go get help first.
> **Interviewer:** So get straight.
> **Kiki:** Break free.
> **Interviewer:** Break free.
> **Kiki:** Break free of your substance abuse first because that is what's going to save your relationship.
> **Interviewer:** Wow, so for you that's where your problems first started so that's the first step you'd say.
> **Kiki:** That is the number one problem, that's where it all begins, because I don't think there's any violence if there is no substance abuse.
> **Interviewer:** Okay, what if somebody was experiencing violence but there was no substance abuse.
> **Kiki:** I don't know, I've never heard of such a thing and if there were then I'd be amazed…. Sorry to say that, but it's true, that's just the way I see things.

Kiki also shared that in overcoming their issues with substance abuse and violence, she and her partner have become "stronger" as a couple:

> **Kiki:** It just made us stronger, made us more respectful for each other, you know, and thankful for what we have because not too many people have what we have.

Thus, for the women who identified substance abuse as a cause of the violence that occurred in their relationships, an important aspect of being able to make meaning out of and resolve their experiences with IPV is having a belief that not only the violence, but also the substance abuse issues are resolved. The belief that these issues have been resolved allows women to construct narratives that their relationships are now healthier and therefore changed.

Stories of growth. Other women seemed to find meaning in their experiences with relationship violence by situating the presence of violence within a story of growth in which the couple needed to develop healthier coping methods to deal with relationship issues. For example, one woman came to see the violence that happened early in their relationship as a way of relieving tension between the partners when they did not know how to deal with their relationship stresses:

> **Lana:** And it also takes down a method of defense cause if you can physically battle over something you never really have to talk about it…. It was a nice way to kinda detour…. Then I come or he'd come home and the dishwasher would be full and that would kinda be the impetus, kinda like the distraction, like there can be something at work bothering him or something going on with his mom or whatever. But let's not talk about that, let's…"

In stating that she thinks that violence acted as a "detour" that allowed the couple to avoid dealing with other issues, Lana seemed to imply that the violence had an important function in the relationship. She went on to note that without the presence of violence, she is not sure if the couple would have "lasted" as it provided the couple with a "release":

> **Lana:** … maybe we wouldn't have lasted … we obviously needed that release. So kinda like sparring partners. And I don't know if I'm minimizing it or something.

When asked how she thought the relationship might be different if violence had not occurred, Lana stated:

> **Lana:** It would have determined the course of the relationship a lot faster, I think.

However, Lana shared that she now sees the absence of violence as allowing the couple to move ahead in the relationship as noted in the following excerpt:

> **Lana:** And kinda getting out of a loop right, like there's always the whole fight, and then the silence, and then the sweetness and then the build up and the fight. Kinda not replaying that dialogue is, now we can have fights about new and exciting things.

Lana's emphasis on the couple now having "new and exciting things" to fight about seemed to emphasis a new maturity to the relationship where conflict is viewed and dealt with in a more direct non-violent manner, rather than being stuck in a "loop." By making meaning of her experiences of the violence in her relationship in this way, Lana was able to position her relationship in the dominant narrative of being in a changed relationship.

Another woman in the study, Signe, seemed to view the presence of violence as having a different function, emphasizing that it propelled the couple to realize that they needed to deal

with problems in the relationship a different way, acting as what she referred to as a "wake up call." These problems included drinking and drug use, as well as a pattern of dealing with even "the littlest things" in their relationship in an overly aggressive way. In the following excerpt Signe noted that she thinks the occurrence of violence may have actually saved the relationship:

> **Signe:** I think it would be, I think we would still be in that same pattern. Knowing us and who we are, I think we would still be in that situation, you know, in that. It wouldn't have changed us for the better. It wouldn't have been the wakeup call that we needed**.** So we would still be in that, you know, mentally, not mentally abusive but mentally aggressive or you know constantly fighting, finding the littlest things. We would still be in that situation, which I think we would just, we would be unhappy until we just broke up.

Signe viewed the presence of "mental aggression" as potentially leading to the couple breaking up and even though she stresses twice that she did not see the mental aggression as "abusive," it still seemed to have affected the quality of the relationship. The unacceptable presence of violence in her relationship (which she did presumably see as abusive) appeared to act as a call for action that highlighted the need for the couple to start dealing with their problems in a different way that included developing new ways to deal with conflict. Signe shared how after a night of her partner being violent, she refused to engage with her partner in their habitual pattern of heated arguing over what and what not had happened during an abusive episode. Instead, she chose to disengage from her partner, later presenting him with a written record of the events of the previous evening and an ultimatum that he needed to change or she would leave him.

> **Signe:** I told him exactly what had happened, I wrote it all down just after it had happened, I told him exactly what happened. He said he doesn't remember anything from falling asleep until waking up the next day…. And I think at that point, yeah. I think at that point too, I didn't even. Cause normally I would wake up and yell or cause a fight or we'd start to get into an argument. But that day I woke up, I had to go to work. I had to be at work for nine in the morning. I got up and didn't say a word to him, was calm, wasn't, didn't grate at him, didn't yell, didn't say a word. I was just calm and walked out the door. He tried calling me, I didn't answer. When I got home and just walked in and was cold.

In refusing to engage in their pattern of heated arguing and, rather, being "calm," Signe was able to convey to her partner that she would be coping with their problems differently from now on. Signe later shared that she and her partner attended counselling and as a result were dealing with conflict differently:

> **Signe:** …so we've kinda talked about our issues and we both realize what sets each other off and we know what we're doing wrong and we know why we're doing it so we've kinda both tried to, you know, he's good at taking breathes and just go away for five minutes and we'll calm down and I, I'm good at bothering him (little laugh) but I've been getting better, my biggest thing has been I would blow up and even if he said walk away I would still want to pick a fight, so I'm, my thing is that I'm getting better at not doing that.

Thus, learning to deal with conflict in a "calm" manner becomes part of the Signe's growth plotline and supports the dominant narrative of a "changed" relationship.

In addition, Abby shared a narrative of violence that incorporated elements of violence acting as both a way to avoid the couple's problems and ultimately bringing the couple to a point of having to dealing with their issues. This is captured in the following excerpt where Abby reflects on how violence has shaped her relationship:

> **Abby:** I wouldn't be surprised if we weren't together. [Name of partner] probably wouldn't have been able to find any sort of way to let it out. Because he does not, not communicate those kinds of things and so I think that eventually like he probably would have said okay I'm checking out so I think we probably would have just broken up…. I don't think it would happen again because we, uhh, because we have first of all talked about it so much and umm like we've been in counselling, counselling for couples who have been through abuse. So like if you know that you're going to counselling every week because you're in an abusive relationship I think you start to realize like this can't happen because like I'm in, I'm in counselling for this, like for this specific reason, like this shouldn't be happening. I, I think it registered with him that he knows it shouldn't be happening. And I also think that umm that the tools that we use when it comes, umm, to the way that we argue now have been incredibly helpful, the tools that we learned from counselling. So like we do things like time outs.

In her story, Abby noted that the couple developed new conflict resolution skills as a result of seeking counselling for the violence that occurred in the relationship. For Abby, these new

"tools" seems to be important to situating her experiences within a "growth" scenario where the couple now handles conflict more skillfully and is able to avoid abusive escalations.

In a similar vein, Kiki, in discussing the changes in violence that occurred in her relationship, spoke of the importance of changing her and her partner's communication pattern. She tells how the couple did this by employing a communication technique from Native culture to develop a more respectful communication style.

> **Kiki:** … I think it all began, like I'm into the Native culture, okay even though I'm not Native, we have a rock, it's called Nemo, cause it looks like little Nemo, okay so we take the rock, and whoever has the rock speaks, so whoever doesn't have the rock doesn't speak until the rock gets passed and if we get to a point where we are talking about something serious, that's what we do, that's our thing, that's how it all began. Today, we don't use him as much, cause we don't need to. But that rock is sitting in my smudge bowl and it sits on our dresser and that's our rock.
> **Interviewer:** Where'd you get that idea?
> **Kiki:** That's from the Native culture and what they do is usually pass an eagle feather and what we do is pass a rock.
> **Interviewer:** So did you learn that through religious ceremonies or through a program?
> **Kiki:** Religious ceremonies, yeah, And it just helps people communicate and lets them talk till they're done talking, cause I was really bad for cutting people off, and it seems we both were, and that where everybody gets frustrated because you're trying to get in there and when you've got the rock, you're the one with the rock, so.

The idea of growth emerges in Kiki's discourse as she discusses how she both she and her partner can now communicate without interrupting each other or getting "frustrated." Like Abby's story, Kiki emphasized the development of new communication skills that led the couple on a path to a 'changed' relationship.

Summary. In summation, whether the women made sense of the violence by locating the violence in their relationships in either a healing or growth based scenario, the presence of the violence is seen as an act of "unnatural ways" (Searles & Mickish, 1984, p. 270) that is resolved in terms of creating a narrative of being in a changed relationship. By positioning themselves in the dominant narrative of a changed relationship, the women are able to draw upon an accepted

social discourse on love that states that true love conquers all and in having resolved the violence in a manner where the reoccurrence of violence is viewed as remote, the women can now live happily ever after.

The counter narrative: Changed? Although most of the women in this study emphasized the dominant narrative of a being in a changed relationship that led to an increase in their relationship satisfaction, it was clear that the dominant narrative did not encompass the women's experiences in their entirety. As such, the dominant narrative failed to capture many of the experiences and nuances that appeared in women's stories. Closer inspection of the interviews of even some of the most satisfied of the women revealed the presence of remaining problematic aspects of the relationships suggesting the presence of counter narratives. As noted before, counter narratives operate when multiple storylines are presented at the same time as the narrator tries to negotiate meaning in their experience (Bamberg, 2004). As the women expressed concerns with their relationships, a counter narrative of the relationship not having changed emerged with women expressing doubts about the stability and quality of their present relationships, as well as lingering abusive dynamics.

Successful turning points? In contrast to the dominant narrative where many of the women spoke of pivotal turning points in their relationships that emphasized their role in the process, women also told stories of turning points that were more reflective of being driven by external forces, such as the legal system or involvement with child welfare authorities. For example, Kylie spoke of how her partner's incarceration changed the dynamics in their relationship in that there was no longer any physical abuse in the relationship and her partner was no longer drinking or doing drugs. However, as can be seen in the following excerpt, Kylie did not seem to have much hope that these changes would last beyond his incarnation:

> **Kylie:** Umm, he did a lot of pills, so when he would do the pills he would black out, cause he would mix them with alcohol. And he got very addicted; he had to go to treatment. Umm first there was the detox and then we got him into [name of treatment centre] treatment center. And like afterwards he was good for a bit. But then he always goes back to doing the same thing, like the same routine. And the same things happen over and over again. He does the pills, he drinks the booze, he goes to jail. Then he's good for a bit, then he does the booze, does the pills and then he goes to jail.

For Kylie, it appeared that she viewed the desistance of violence as part of a pattern that had temporarily abated; when her partner's incarceration ends, and he is no longer being externally controlled, he will eventually go back to his old ways. In expressing these concerns, Kylie revealed that she is not sure that the dynamics in her relationships have changed. Nevertheless, Kylie shared that she vacillates, sometimes believing that her relationship will change:

> Kylie: … cause sometimes I think we've been through all this crap together, we'll be stronger and better for it and what not and then there's other days where it's like … you know, you're so dumb, why have you been with this person so long?

Despite the doubts she expressed in her counter narrative, Kylie still clings to the dominant narrative that one day her relationship will "be stronger and better."

Another woman, Ellen, in discussing the turning point in her relationship, spoke of the importance of her partner being forced to stop drinking by his workplace. His workplace not only insisted that her partner quit drinking in order to maintain his employment, but also subjected him to random testing to enforce his sobriety. Ellen shared her concerns that once her husband's company stops their enforcement of his sobriety that he will begin drinking again and this will lead to a return of his abusive behaviour:

> **Ellen:** And, and it needs to stay that way. Umm, because this two years thing, it feels like it's kinda out there looking at me because he hasn't committed to it. Like "yeah I'm not gonna be drinking for the two years" but umm still talks about wanting to have a beer on a cold day. I'm like "ahh, I don't think so." You know, this is a concern of mine, that this will start off with a cold beer on a hot day and will devolve to a hot mess…. it's always been on my mind, because he's never, and we've talked about it, like, sometimes he feels quite grateful for being put in this situation and sometimes not so much…. But as I said, there's still this thing inside his head, is "well I would still like to do that, I could master

> that." And, and which explains his reticence to continue on with the steps of AA. And I'm not all that familiar with them but I think the first one is to accept that things were out of your control. And I don't know that he's really gotten past that part (laughs).

Ellen's statement highlighted the ambiguity she believes her partner feels regarding his sobriety, as well her concerns about what will happen in the future after the external controls on his drinking are lifted. Ellen used the metaphor of her husband turning into a "hot mess" if he should start drinking again, something that worries her enough to be "always … on my mind." In sharing that she does not feel confident that her partner is committed to maintaining his sobriety, Ellen's story is not always congruent with the dominant narrative of a changed story line.

Together these two women's stories seem to suggest that externally-driven turning points in the relationship, in which the person engaging in unacceptable behaviour is forced to comply by forces outside of the relationship, are less effective in creating confidence in the women that the positive changes in their partners/relationships are permanent. This is in sharp contrast to the relationship changes that women described in the dominant narrative in which changes were attributed to turning points initiated from within the couple and viewed as stable.

Finally, there was one woman's interview that did not seem to yield an identifiable turning point in which she felt that the relationship dynamic changed. Although Mary reported that the violence in her relationship had stopped, she expressed a lack of clarity around why the violence ended as the couple has never discussed this issue:

> **Mary:** Umm, cause he had me charged, he had me charged, umm I, I don't know, I think he's afraid if he hits me I will charge him. So I don't know how he would get around, like he's manipulated the system before so, I don't know, I have no answers for that.
> **Interviewer:** But yeah I, it seems like you don't really have an understanding, but it sounds like you place the violence not happening in his hands. Like it wasn't something you did, it's something he did.
> **Mary:** Uh-huhh.
> **Interviewer:** But you don't really understand what was motivating him to stop?
> **Mary:** Yeah, I don't, I don't know.
> **Interviewer:** So that's something you never talked about?

Mary: No, no.

In this excerpt, Mary does not identify herself as an active participant in the relationship shift that occurred. She shared that her partner's motivation in stopping his violence may be linked to the threat of incarceration, an external control factor, but she is not sure. Mary and her partner have not communicated about why the violence is no longer happening, leaving her unable to make sense of changes in violence that have occurred in her relationship. Unlike the turning points described in the dominant narrative of a 'changed' relationship, Mary's story lacked a defining moment that leads to a redefining of the couple's relationship.

Safety? Although many of the women in this study spoke of feeling safe in the dominant narrative, closer inspection of the women's transcripts revealed many ways that this safety was missing or actively threatened. This included elements of lack of emotional safety, the presence of forms of psychological abuse, and ongoing physical aggression in the women's relationships.

Emotional safety. In terms of emotional safety, some of the women spoke of having concerns in their relationship that prevented them from feeling secure in their relationships. For example, in speaking about her relationship, Julie spoke about how she feels that she can "really be myself" in the relationship and how this is important to her relationship satisfaction. However, later in the interview she shared that she still experiences a lot of pain and insecurity surrounding her partner's past behaviours with other women, and this leads to behaviour on her part that she referred to as "faking" by smoothing things over:

> **Julie:** And just smooth things over I guess. But not completely (laughs).
> **Interviewer:** Yeah, so how do women smooth things over?
> **Julie:** Umm, I feel that they're more compromising. Like they, they want to try to fix things so sometimes they sorta go against what they feel just so that everything is good again I think. Not everybody but.
> **Interviewer:** Give me an example of about you said, go against how they feel, what is, what is an example of that, a specific example.
> **Julie:** Umm, I guess using my example of my fights. I knew that it was wrong for my

> boyfriend to keep the relationship with his, I guess, old friend, from me a secret, from me. But when we're trying to smooth things over, it's like I try to forget or I try to forgive everything, even though I knew it was wrong or I said it was okay, just don't …
> **Interviewer:** You said it's okay, but it's really not okay is it?
> **Julie:** No (her voice breaks).
> **Interviewer:** Not at all, so smoothing things over.
> **Julie:** I guess it's kinda like forgiving when you don't really forgive, just try to…
> **Interviewer:** Yeah, but what is forgiving when you don't really forgive?
> **Julie:** It's faking (little snort) I think.
> **Interviewer:** Yeah, cause now that you've talked more about it, the idea that it's a faking.
> **Julie:** Acting okay when you are not.

In this excerpt, Julie shared a different side of her relationship, where unresolved problems and conflicts are, to paraphrase her, smoothed over by women through "faking." Julie also shared that she sees her mother doing this in her relationship with Julie's father, a relationship where violence has also occurred. She now finds herself doing it in her relationship, suggesting that Julie has learned to self-silence in her relationship in order to avoid conflict as conflict can lead to negative consequences including violence.

This idea of women "faking" is echoed by Abby when she is asked about the impact of the violence that she has experienced on how she feels about her relationship now. Abby spoke about being more "submissive" in her relationship:

> **Abby:** Yeah definitely, I think that, I think that it's made me a lot more submissive to him. And I think that I back down a lot quicker and agree with him a lot more when I don't even really agree, so yeah.
> **Interviewer:** So you know when you find yourself doing that, what's motivating you?
> **Abby:** You're just like emotionally and physically afraid.
> **Interviewer:** Uh-humm, so there's still some fear?
> **Abby:** Uh-humm.
> **Interviewer:** Yeah, for safety?
> **Abby:** Yeah.
> **Interviewer:** So you kinda catch yourself saying things you don't actually agree with just to keep the, the peace?
> **Abby:** Yeah
> **Interviewer:** So that's a big impact.
> **Abby:** Yeah
> **Interviewer:** How do kinda see that turning out for you in the long run?

> **Abby**: Umm well I, I guess like I'm really working on being more assertive. So, umm, I think as long as, uhh, I think as long as I learn to hold my ground a bit more and be more true to myself ahh I think that I can rise up against the way that I see things with him and I. But I also think that, umm, if I continue to be like so submissive and not allow myself to, uhh, not allow myself, ahh, not allow myself to speak my mind and say what I'm thinking, then I will probably just fall into, uhh, I don't know, some sort of a, some sort of a hole of depression probably. And self-loathing.

Although Abby admitted that she sees the long-term consequences of her self-silencing as detrimental to her health, her current priority is to avoid conflict, as she too sees conflict as possibly leading to negative consequences, including violence. Taken together, Abby's and Julie's stories suggest a counter narrative where relationships are depicted as precarious, suggesting the possibility that without the women self-silencing, the relationships may not turn out happily ever after. As such, the women do not feel safe to openly communicate with their partners.

Other women in the study incorporated counter narratives into the telling of their stories of lack of trust in their partners. For example, Ellen shared how some of the recent events in her relationship have left her questioning the authenticity of her partner's 'change,' stating that she has concerns that she may have been taken in by "the old-switch-er-oo":

> **Ellen:** Yes, well to be honest with you, the, yes I'm still today married and living in my married relationship. Umm, and have been working for months to make that a better place to be and for myself to be a better person just generally and inside of that umm (big breathe out). I feel like in the last couple of weeks I've experienced sort of an, umm what do you call it when they move the, the cups around on you, don't know where the…
> **Interviewer:** It's a shell game.
> **Ellen:** Yeah (laughs). I feel like I've had the old switch-er-oo done on me somewhere along the way. Umm, because he'd been committed to, to doing his things that were gonna improve his well-being. So he can come to our relationship and be a better person. And those things are not happening now. And there's, you know, he unilaterally stopped taking his medication and, umm, is, ahh, struggling with AA, his sponsor is giving him grief too. And all of these things are, you know, he's kinda backsliding a little. Taking a lot of progress so far, two steps forward five steps back kinda thing. Umm, so, umm, my, my, umm, assessment of the satisfaction that I'm experiencing is an ongoing measurement. And umm some days I am more satisfied than others. And the option of not continuing in this relationship is becoming bigger. The bigger it gets, because, yeah

things that I thought were happening are not happening. So…

Ellen's assessment of the current state of her relationship suggested that she is beginning to see her partner's changes as, at best, temporary and, at worst, an active attempt on his part to fool her into believing he has changed. This counter narrative once again suggests a lack of emotional safety in some of the relationships that is in contrast to the dominant narrative of being in a changed relationship.

In a similar vein, Rita voiced concerns regarding her partner's possible manipulation of her. This includes her questioning his explanation of his lack of involvement in household chores as being due to depression, as she questions whether he is even actually depressed:

> **Rita:** For me, the jury has been out whether he's actually struggling with depression or not. But he doesn't take medication for it and umm, he's never really pursued treatment for it. So it just makes me really wonder if it's an actual thing or it's more of an excuse for him.
> **Interviewer:** How long do you think that's been going on where he's been saying "I think I'm depressed, I think I'm depressed."
> **Rita:** Several years.

Later in Rita's narrative, she noted that she has even questioned whether remaining with her partner will result in her having to perpetually support him financially as she perceives her partner as lacking a "direction" in his schooling:

> **Rita:** ... He's been going to school for the last two years but not really doing well. And kinda just picking courses based on interest. And he doesn't, he didn't really have a direction in mind. And I kinda felt like once I graduate [name of program] school, like I don't want to be supporting him as a, I don't know, as a perpetual student and paying off, and working hard to pay off both of our student loans.

Rita's comments about her partner's attitude towards his schooling were in sharp contrast to the goal she expressed to finish school as soon as she can so that she can join the workforce. In expressing her doubt that her partner may be using going to school as a way to avoid working, leaving her to pay off the couple's student debts, Rita's concerns challenge the notion of feeling

safe in her relationship. Rita also spoke of how she feels that in the past her partner has gotten her to do things she would not "ordinarily" do through persuasion, and likened herself to "a frog in hot water" in which the temperature of the water is so gradually increased that the frog does not even attempt to escape and "dies." In summary, Rita constructed a narrative of being manipulated by her partner in the past and having fears that this might happen again.

Physical safety. As previously discussed, although all the women in this study self-defined their relationships as "violence free," three of the participants (Samantha, Signe, and Colleen) endorsed the presence of physically aggressive behaviours in the relationship during the last year. Although none of the women viewed the behaviours as violence, all three women reported engaging in minor acts of aggression and Signe reported that her partner had also engaged in a minor act of physical aggression, suggesting that physical safety had not been firmly established in these women's relationships.

In addition, other women, while not endorsing acts of physical aggression being present in their relationships in the interview or on the CTS-2, did express concerns that violence may occur again. For example, when asked about how she thinks her relationship might be different if no violence had ever occurred, Honey revealed that she still has lingering doubts in regards to her partner's ability to not harm her or the people she loves:

> **Honey:** And I would feel like, I would feel more stable about our relationship. And I would feel like even if I marry this guy, if something goes wrong, he is not going to harm me or anything. And he's not gonna harm my kids or my family, I mean my mom or dad or like whatever. And, yeah those securements, that would be the biggest difference that I would feel.

When asked directly about some of the concerns that she expressed, Honey denied that she has these doubts as she has seen how "good" her partner is with the cats:

> **Interviewer:** When you think about having kids together do you worry that he might harm them?

> **Honey:** Uhh. Now I don't. Because I see how he do to, how he does to our cats, and he's quite okay.
> **Interviewer:** You, you've given him a practice trial with the cats.
> **Honey:** Oh yeah, poor cats (both women laugh). But he's really good, yeah.

However, previously in the interview, Honey shared that she feels that she has to monitor his interactions with the cats and subtly try to control his actions so that things do not get "out of control":

> **Honey**: Like still when he gets really upset and he tries to punish the cats I really protect them, where by all means. But sometimes he gets even more upset by me doing it because he thinks that I am confronting his authority towards the cats. And he feels like he is being confronted…. Yeah, so sometimes I have to let it go. Like if I, like if I really try to cool him down, like really say, I have to make it really sound like I don't care about that issue. And like I really respect his opinions and his decisions on this cat's behaviour, but still, like I think, it doesn't really worth him putting that effort into punishing the cat. So " just let it alone, like, ahh, just punish it with this little piece of paper or whatever. Put a, what is it, water sprays or whatever, he really hates it." That works. But if I confront him "no you're not gonna touch him", that's a big "no." Then it's out of control.

Overall, Honey's narrative revealed a tension between her desire to see her partner as safe and her on-going efforts to try and ensure that her partner acts acceptably towards the cats when he is angry. This suggests that she sees her partner's ability to be "good" as contingent on her presence to monitor his behaviour and step in to try to subtly manipulate his behaviour. However, she minimizes this aspect of the relationship so that she can see herself involved with a "good" man.

In contrast to Honey, Ellen was more forthright in expressing the concerns she has at times about her partner's ability to be safe. When asked directly if she thinks violence may ever occur again her relationship, Ellen stated:

> **Ellen:** (big breath in and then out) It depends, at different times I would have said no. But like I said, yesterday no, no, not yesterday, Sunday afternoon, umm, four days ago or whatever, ahh, I stood and watched him make a fist and do his little angry dance. And, umm, that alarms me that that it's happening (lets out big breath)…. I think under the normal course of action, the daily things, that probably I don't believe that I'm in danger. Umm, but I worry sometimes if I were to leave that he might lose all impetus to not lose

his temper. So that has crossed my mind.

While Ellen sees her safety as secure "under the normal course" of day-to-day life, her partner's performance of the "angry dance" leaves her with fears that under certain circumstances, he may "lose his temper." This suggests that Ellen, like Honey, to some degree sees her partner's use of violence as contingent on her actions, especially not leaving the relationship. While both women express that they feel some safety in their relationships, it appears that the threat of violence still lingers, and as such this threat acts to control the women.

Psychological and other forms of abuse. Consistent with the results of the CTS-2, many of the women told stories of experiencing psychological and other forms of abuse in their current relationships. For example, both Tabitha and Honey told stories of their partners blaming them. For example, Tabitha told the story of how her partner blamed her for his accidental breaking of a baby bassinet:

> **Tabitha:** Okay just like the other day, we get into an argument over. Okay, I bought a bassinet because his son is, ahh, pregnant…. But I put it in the basement because I wanted it to be a surprise, right? So he brings it up the stairs and he breaks the mobile arm off it. He breaks it coming up the stairs. Oh shit, I didn't get mad. Well then he says, well he didn't admit that he broke it, he blames me. So I said "how is it my fault"? "You know, well you should have given it to them earlier, I wouldn't of broke it." Like come on man, try to put the blame on me. So of course I gave him, I didn't give him shit, but I said "how can you blame this on me? You can't take the blame and admit that you broke it without freaking out?" I said "Just go for a ride or something." So he jumps in his car and takes off and then as I'm fixing it, I had to crazy glue it…. And then he, he texts me, I ignored his texts, he texts like fifteen times for no reason, I said "what's wrong with you?" He never said he was sorry or admitted that he did it wrong, he just tried to blame me, put the blame on me. And finally I said to him "why can't you take the blame for something, something silly like that, I would have fixed it. You could have said oh I'm sorry I broke it coming up the stairs." So I said "what's wrong with you" and then he didn't text back at all for about an hour. And he texts back and he was all nice. I guess he thought about, what I said, so that put a stop to the argument right there.

In this passage, Tabitha shared that she sees her partner as struggling with taking responsibility for his actions, even including things that in her opinion are "silly." In telling this story, Tabitha

positions herself in the role of the competent adult, correcting her partner's behaviour, sending him away to "go for a ride" and cool off, and fixing his mistakes. Overall, there is a sense of frustration within the narrative, as captured in Tabitha's questioning of her partner "what's wrong with you?" When asked about her relationship satisfaction later in the interview, Tabitha shared that while there are times when the couple is "having a good day," the presence of "odd little scraps" lowers her satisfaction as "some days are bad":

> **Tabitha:** When we're having a good day, when we're both laughing together and we have a good dinner on the go, usually on weekend, the dog's in the yard playing, I'm cooking in the house, the doors are open, a nice sunny day, like a couple of days ago. He was working in the yard and I was cooking a big ham roast and then the doors are open, things were happening in the house, it was a good day.
> **Interviewer:** So is it fair to say that you're at your most happiest right now? Like this?
> **Tabitha:** Happier
> **Interviewer:** Happier?
> **Tabitha:** Some days are bad, still, like the odd little scrap and he leaves. Or the odd little scrap and I leave. Or the main thing now is that when we fight, we depart. Back then we didn't, we'd sit there and fight to the death. Yeah, we don't do that no more. One of us leaves, I leave or he leaves, and then everything calms down when we come back home.

In contrast to picture of domestic bliss that Tabitha shared of the "sunny day," she also made it clear that stability in her relationship remains tenuous, like the day her partner broke the bassinet and blamed her for his actions.

In a similar vein, Honey shared an experience where she felt unfairly blamed by her partner after he realized that he should have bought milk when the couple was grocery shopping.

> **Honey:** ….he said "Do you want some milk" so I said, uhh, "no not that much, I, I don't really want milk." So we do grocery shopping. And we didn't buy milk and we went back home. And he was cooking and then, then he figured out uh we didn't pick up the milk, and he sort of needs for it in order to make the stuff that he was going to make. And then he started to blame me for, uhh, not picking up the milk. If you understand what I mean, is it clear to you?

In addition to this incident, there are times when Honey tells stories about how her partner does not treat her very respectfully. Here is one example:

> **Honey:** So he never swears at me, like although sometimes he does like say things and he yells at me, but when I do something wrong .Then I kinda accept that and I say "okay, sorry I made the wrong decision." But when I didn't do anything bad and if he says something like "bitch", he didn't say that word but I don't know a lot of slangs in English, so umm when he says those types of things then that's when I really get upset and he knows that I don't tolerate really any of that.

On one hand, Honey is adamant that her partner "never" swears at her and that she does not "tolerate" this type of behaviour. However, she also talks about when he was angry and swore at her. She shared that two days ago there was an incident when her partner got angry at her over some burnt food:

> **Honey:** So he was like swearing but he didn't hit me, push me, or punch the door or anything. So it was okay.

Honey's reaction to his swearing during this incident suggests that she minimizes his actions and in doing so, comes to see his actions as "okay." This minimization allows Honey to maintain her belief in the dominant narrative as seeing her partner as having changed.

Another woman, Cindy, like Honey, also denied the presence of verbal abuse in her relationship, as noted in the following excerpt:

> **Cindy:** He usually talks pretty nice. Cause he knows, like he knows the way I want to be talked to. So he knows that if he talks to me in that snotty kinda attitude then I'm gonna get angry with him. And he knows that. So he knows that when we do talk he talks very nice to me. With respect and stuff, yeah.

However, Cindy also disclosed the existence of an unhealthy communication pattern in which she may have control over how her partner talks to her, but he controls when and if he talks to her:

> **Interviewer:** You said "when we do talk"?
> **Cindy:** Yeah, like we talk maybe every three or four days but he, he emails me and stuff or leaves messages on answering machines or he phones my kids. He phones my eldest son almost every day. Cause, cause my son has his own cell phone for his dad to call him. They're really close.
> **Interviewer:** So when you think about how often you communicate, is there anything that you would like to change about that?

> **Cindy:** Umm... I'd like him to call more but he says every time I call, he tells me that every time he calls that I want to argue. So he doesn't phone to argue with me. I always tell him "well just call me I won't argue with you. I just want to talk to you." You know, whatever, and he won't call, sometimes for a week. And I like, okay, I know he's still calling my son, so it's like he just doesn't want to talk to me. Yep.

This disclosure leads Cindy to sharing that she sees this pattern as a game, in which both partners withdraw from communication to punish the other:

> **Cindy:** Yeah, cause he, like if I turn around to that, it gets turned around on me, and he does it right back. And it's like one big game. And I'm like sometimes I don't talk to him for a long time after that, like I won't talk to him.

Nevertheless, Cindy holds on to the dominant social discourse of true love being able to conquer all obstacles and therefore it is important for her to not "give up" trying to work on the relationship:

> **Cindy:** And I just don't want things to end up bad. And I always told him this, like I seriously told him this. Sat there with tears in my eyes telling him how much I care and that I'm not gonna give up, I want to try. So he knows this. So.

For Cindy, despite the presence of this abusive communication pattern, she does not want "things to end up bad" because she cares for her partner. She made it clear is that she is committed to "try" to fix the couple's communication problems.

Another area of contention some of the women spoke of was financial control, with some of the women telling stories of how their partners monitor and question their spending. For example, Ellen described how her partner questions her use of money. In the following excerpt she shares how her partner tried, unsuccessfully, to make her account to him for all the money she spends by providing "receipts":

> **Ellen:** … I don't like the accusations; umm right now we're having some trouble over money. Umm because, I don't know why, because umm when he came home this last time, this last December, he said "okay that's it, I'm umm I'm gonna buy the groceries, I'm gonna spend all the money, that's it. I don't like what you've been doing with the money." And I'm like well what have I been doing with the money? I've been buying the groceries and paying the kids lunch fees, I've been doing all the things I told you I've

> been doing with the money so what's the big surprise here? Umm but his perception is that I've been spending it on something that he doesn't want me to spend it on. So, umm, that's what the winter has been all about….But he was like, "okay, so I'm gonna give you this much money, based on, you know. I counted up all the grocery money I spent in March and February and then I divided it all up and this is what I spent a week. And this is what I'm gonna leave you (laughs). And I like "what?" "And you're gonna leave me receipts." And I'm like "No. No I won't. No, I won't do that …. no I won't." So that's what I said. And it got to be, well the money went up and some of the receipts. "Well use your debit card." "No, no, I won't." And so then he backed down, right to "alright, well this is how much I'm gonna leave you." Which was more then he started off with. And "no you don't have to give me receipts, it's okay, you're right." Because I was like "you're accusing me of something but you're not actually saying it… I haven't done anything wrong. And quite clearly because you need all these receipts you don't trust me, so you must think I doing something. I haven't done anything. So you know where do you get off like this?" And anyways, it eventually ended up as "okay I'm gonna transfer this money and there you go." So, but, no doubt along the way there will be some reference to it.

Although Ellen felt that she won this round of not having to formally account financially to her husband, she also noted that she does not expect this issue to be over as evidenced by her comment "no doubt along the way there will be some reference to it." This statement leads the listener to believe that the couple will continue to engage in similar tense battles over money, with her partner wanting to control the finances at the expense of Ellen's financial autonomy. This vision of a future filled with conflict over finances belies the dominant narrative of being in a changed relationship where the couple lives happily ever after.

Other women spoke of their perceptions that they need to help their partners manage their emotions and that this is necessary to keep their partners from behaving abusively. For example, the following excerpt from Honey tells of how she learned to help her partner remain calm:

> **Honey:** As we started to live together we started to have issues, like after a month. And, and when he gets upset I have no place to go, right? I cannot just walk away. Umm so I have to stay with him and usually I would cry or I will try to talk to him and I try to calm him down and it seemed like that kind of worked. And I really showed a lot of effort that I want our relationship to move on and improve and I really do respect him and I, umm, I understand why he feels that way and this is what I did wrong. But you don't have to, like you are over, I think it's not a huge thing, like he means to be mad at. Like some things are some huge things that he needs to be mad at, like that. And then I explain things like

> that and he kinda calms down and starts to understand. And maybe you're right about some things, but I'm still mad about this because what, what, what, and those conversations kind of helps. Either way it makes me old.
> **Interviewer:** (laughs) Well, I think when you say old you mean that it takes a lot of your energy.
> **Honey:** Oh believe me (laughs). Oh yeah and I'm so glad that I don't have to do that very, like as often as I used to. So that's a huge improvement.

What also is clear in the excerpt is the emotional toll it takes on Honey to help her partner manage his emotions as this young woman in the twenties describes herself as "old." It makes one question the future implications of Honey remaining in this role in the relationship, particularly given Honey's previous history of suffering from depression during the earlier period of her relationship when the violence was present.

Emily identified herself in a similar role as Honey; she also spoke about having to help her partner emotionally regulate. In the following excerpt, Emily discusses what it is like for her when her partner, who works out of province, comes home:

> **Emily:** I haven't had anything, I think because of the distance and not having enough time even when we are home together. I like to have structure and plan things out, or what we're gonna do in a day. I don't leave room for arguments and I don't like confrontation and I just steer out of… I think my relationship with him would be more satisfying if I didn't have to.
> **Interviewer:** Yeah cause it sounds like…
> **Emily**: It's still a little bit of an abuse issue, coming to think of the things that, clearly it is, but physically I'm not being …

It is clear that for Emily, she still feels the need to "steer" her partner from getting out of control by structuring the time they spend together so as not to leave any room for "arguments." Emily follows up this excerpt in her transcript by talking about how she likes to go to the spa after her partner's visits in what seems to be an attempt to rejuvenate. Taken together, both Honey's and Emily's stories suggest that that the women feel the need for vigilance in their current relationships as they still see their partners as emotionally volatile. This vigilance comes at a cost to the women, as both women mentioned how fatiguing they find these situations.

Summary. In contrast to the dominant narrative in which women expressed confidence in their ongoing safety, in their telling of counter narratives of safety, women expressed doubts and concerns. They identified lack of emotional safety, the presence of ongoing physical aggression and threat of future physical aggression, as well as psychological and other forms of abuse in their relationships.

Unresolved stories. Finally, in contrast to the stories women told of finding meaning in their past experiences with violence, some women's stories appeared to be unresolved. These women seemed to view the desistance of violence in their relationship as unstable, describing their relationships as precariously balanced and subject to change or as unpredictable in general. For example, both Kylie and Ellen spoke of their belief that their partner's ability to refrain from violence was linked to sobriety, with neither woman believing that her partner was truly committed to sobriety. Both of these women noted the presence of external factors as not only being pivotal in their partner ending his alcohol and/or drug use but also in maintaining it. As previously described, Kylie's partner was in jail and Ellen's partner was being monitored by his work through random drug testing to ensure his compliance to sobriety. Neither woman appeared to have much hope that when the restrictions placed on their partners were removed their partner would remain sober. For these women, the instability in their present situation seems to have led to decreased relationship satisfaction, with one of the woman, Ellen, noting that for her, relationship satisfaction fluctuates a great deal:

> **Ellen**: Yeah, yeah. Cause there's been times where if you had asked me, I would have said it's just really incredible, I can't believe we've come this far. And, ahh, and ask me a week later and oh this is, ahh, I'm gonna, you know, drive away from here fast (laughs). So it really is something that changes. And I guess there's kinda the difference between sorta background satisfaction level and then what you're experiencing every day and my everyday satisfaction oscillates. But even that background, overall I, even if you look at absolutely everything and give everything some perspective, and you know, how important is this going to be ten years kinda thing, that changes, that's what we do.

In sharing that her " everyday satisfaction oscillates" and can change from "incredible" to wanting to get "away from here fast" within the span of a week, Ellen constructed a narrative in which relationship dynamics shift so quickly and extremely, that it is impossible for her to gain enough "perspective" to accurately assess her true level of satisfaction.

Another woman, Julie, in making sense of the violence that she experienced and the subsequent changes in her relationship, described a balance in her relationship where she believed that as long as she did not become angry and engage in practices such as yelling, her boyfriend would not become violent. However, her bottom line was not tolerating any secret relationships between her boyfriend and other woman. She made it clear that, in her mind, this behaviour was the trigger to the violence she experienced, and also that, if it was to occur again, this would trigger her anger and her anger may trigger the return of his violence:

> **Julie:** Umm I think it's possible if, if there is something that well I think it could be possible if umm something like that were to happen again, if I feel betrayed like that again. It's possible, even though I do tell myself that I'm too tired to try to, I guess fight, but I think it's possible, I think it would be too hard to just leave it and walk away. Even though I know it's what I should do if that were to happen again.
> **Interviewer:** You said that it would be possible if you were betrayed again. What's powerful about being betrayed that it would alter this situation?
> **Julie:** Well I think it's just because it's happened. And if the same thing keeps happening, I think I would feel even more angry and upset because it's like I wasted time over the same thing again (little laugh). I think that's what would make it worse.

In sharing that she would "fight" rather than "walk away," Julie revealed that her anger over another betrayal would lead to her confronting her partner, even though last time this resulted in violence.

Another aspect of unresolved issues in the women's stories includes the lingering presence of unresolved pain due to the abuse that the women have experienced. In the following excerpt, Colleen shares that she still experiences pain stemming from the abuse she suffered:

> **Colleen:** … and even still to this day I think of, there's years of healing that I need to do that, that [word missing]. That I think it's going to be an ongoing process, like because there were times where I felt hurt. Like I never dealt with it and I masked what I felt to try just to, like just to, because I didn't want to feel the pain. And there's still times where I don't want to feel the pain because it hurts and its like I don't want to go there. I've, you know, I've been there, and it's a difficult thing sometimes.

Colleen seemed to be dealing with her pain by not dealing with it, suggesting that a certain level of denial on her part still remains at times. This suggests that Colleen, like some of the other women in the study, is still struggling to resolve issues related to violence in her relationship.

Rejecting the discourse of domestic violence. The counter narratives in the woman's stories indicate that the dominant narrative was not sufficient to explain all of their experiences or feelings towards their relationships. Stories of continued violence, abusive dynamics, lack of safety, and possible relapse of their partners into violence/addiction were often versed in ways that minimized or denied the problematic aspects of the women's relationships. Further, counter narratives emerged within the stories that suggested that unresolved pain and concerns regarding the quality and viability of their "violence free" relationships still existed for the women. This leads one to an important question: Why do women tell these stories of relationships as both changed and precarious?

In regards to why the women chose to tell the dominant narrative, it can be argued that the presence of violence in the women's relationships is problematic for the women in that there is a strong societal discourse that once a relationship has become violent that violence will continue and worsen (Nettleton, 2011). This discourse creates societal pressure on women to leave their relationships. This point is emphasized by Abby who shared the pressure she felt to leave her partner:

> **Abby**: umm I'm, I'm very, very happy that it stopped, yeah, and I think that like when I see that change in him, like when it comes to physical violence, because people have always told me in the past that he's never gonna change when it comes to men who have

> like, men who have issues with this. And so that would always come and go through my head when this happened with [name of partner] and umm and then he did, so I think that it gives me kinda hope for other endeavours that we come across.

Like Abby, the women in this study have chosen to stay, despite experiencing societal pressure to leave from both family members and social agencies such as child and family services. By telling the dominate narrative of being in a changed relationship, it can be argued that the women are employing a long standing accepted social discourse of "true love conquers all" that allows them to distance themselves from the role of being a victim of domestic abuse and situate themselves in a narrative in which they have agency and are able to initiate important changes within their relationships.

Performative analysis findings. In reviewing how the women in the study portrayed themselves, a performative analysis revealed that many of the women portrayed themselves as strong capable women. This point is illustrated in Lana's telling of her story in which she portrays herself as a "worthy opponent" who could "take" her partner in a physical altercation, locating herself outside of the victim role. She contrasted her attitude towards herself being in a violent relationship with her attitude towards her friend who disclosed to Lana that she was also in a violent relationship:

> **Lana**: Yeah like even the idea that I could handle it, and that made sense to me, but when she [her friend] said that, I was like "why would you put yourself?" Like, it was kinda weird, cause it was like othering, like I could handle it, but you shouldn't have to put up with all of that.

In this excerpt, Lana revealed that her first response was to question why her friend stayed in a violent relationship, stating her belief that her friend "shouldn't have to put up with all of that." However, in listening to her friend talking about being abused, Lana later realized that she had been "othering" abused women, positioning herself as different, as someone who could "handle" violence. In this way, Lana had been able to avoid acknowledging herself as being a woman who

is experiencing IPV.

Another woman, Rita, also portrayed herself as a strong capable woman in talking about how she responded to her partner's inappropriate behaviour:

> **Rita:** I actually made him turn himself in to the police station. Like I actually went down with him. And I actually felt like there was a turnaround where "I'm not scared of you anymore, I'm just gonna like, you know, do something about it."

Rita use of phrases that emphasize strong "I" language help convey an image of a woman asserting her agency in doing "something about" the abuse.

Finally, women in the study also portrayed themselves as strong capable women who stayed in their relationships by choice, rather than need. For example, Samantha emphasized that her staying with her partner was based on choice:

> **Samantha:** All throughout I never thought "oh I'm gonna turf him when I once I get better," it wasn't like I was hanging on to him, like I needed him, like I was afraid to leave, or anything like that. It wasn't anything like that. Like I felt that we were, we still had that connection, umm, and like a type of bond.

Samantha is clear in stating that even while dealing with her alcoholism, she was not "hanging on" to her relationship due to dependence or fear, but rather because there is a bond between her and her partner.

Intersectionality analysis findings .Another possible explanation as to why so many of the women in this study chose to portray their relationships as being in alignment with the dominant narrative may have been to protect them from having to acknowledge the presence of powerful structural factors in their lives over which they have little or no control. The results of the intersectionality analysis revealed multiple ways that the intersection of various structural factors shaped the women's relationships. Examples of ways that structural factors intersected in shaping the women's relationships and acted to constrain their relationship choices are discussed next.

Although none of the women were asked why they stayed with their partners, some of the women offered explanations that justified their staying that revealed reasons other than love. For example, Lana shared that she was "stubborn" and explained how this acted to keep her in her relationship.

> **Lana:** I had just about had it up to here, but then on the other hand I'm very stubborn and determined and I was explaining to her in hindsight you know, I don't think I left because I invested so much time, it's going to have to deteriorate of its own merit, I'm not gonna up and leave because I put in four years and I'm in my thirties now so I wasted the last half of my twenties.

In this excerpt, Lana shared that if her relationship were to fail that this to her would mean that she "wasted" the past four years of her life, suggesting she would see this as a personal failure. She also emphasizes not only her effort, but also her age and the passing of time in justifying why she stays in her relationship. Given that Lana also shared in the interview her desire to own a house and start a family, it is possible that she felt pressure to maintain this relationship in that it is her best chance to attain her goals as she sees herself as already highly invested in this relationship. As a woman in her "thirties" who is currently working part time and attending university, Lana is socially located in a difficult position. She cannot afford to buy a house on her own as noted in her story of trying to convince her partner to agree to work towards saving for a house with her or at least agreeing to be her "roommate" if she buys a house on her own. She also appeared to view herself as someone losing social power as she ages, suggesting that she sees her chances of finding a partner willing to father a child as decreasing with her age. Without a partner, Lana will face increased difficulty attaining her goals in a society that is based economically on the nuclear family unit (Hunter College Women's Studies Collective, 2005). This places her in a position in which she justifies her choice to stay through a metaphor in which the resources she has already "invested" in the relationship preclude her from believing

she can be successful without maintaining the relationship. Taken together, Lana's age, gender, class, and the economic structure she exists in appear to intersect to create circumstances that pressure her to stay in her relationship or risk not attaining her goals of becoming a mother and homeowner.

Kylie also shared aspects of her relationship that suggest that she stays in her relationship, at least partially, not for love, but because it provides her children with a father.

> **Kylie:** Umm he helps me out with stuff, like money, he helps me with the kids, umm I'm thinking…. And the thing is, they're not even like his kids so the fact that he put into that commitment to children that aren't even his really was like something that really made me stick with him through all like really bad stuff.

Although Kylie's partner has a history of being in and out of jail and he is sporadic in his financial support of the family, his contributions are still seen as valuable to Kylie, particularly since he is not the biological father of her children. Kylie's social position of being a young, low income, Indigenous single mother of two small children places her in a vulnerable social position where any type of support, even if sporadic, is valued. Kylie also shared her belief, that in her socio-cultural environment, men do not want to take on the responsibility of a child that is not biologically theirs. Thus, lack of viable alternate partners and her belief that she needs a partner to be financially secure due to a lack of viable options to gain financial independence on her own place Kylie in a position where she will "stick with him." This story highlights the role of the intersecting structural factors of age, class, and gender in shaping Kylie's choices.

Another woman, Rita, who had small children, also discussed how difficult it was for her when her partner left the house and she took on the role of being a single parent:

> **Rita:** …and I also found, at first anyways, that our life was a lot more peaceful without him because he likes to do a lot of, like start a lot of things, like provoke chaos and arguments with the kids and things like that. So at first it felt very peaceful to have him out of the house but then after a time I felt it to be draining to be a single parent …

As a young low-income single mother with a history of depression, Rita shared that she found caring for her children on her own to be "draining." Although Rita made it clear in her story that she found the support of child welfare services helpful in separating her partner from the family (he was not allowed contact with her or the children for six weeks and then only for supervised visits), there was no mention in her story of any type of support to help her make the transition to being a single parent. Later in her story Rita shared:

> **Rita**: I know that right now that I need him in my life like because I'm going to school and what he does contribute is valuable.

Through the process of having her partner removed from the family home by child welfare authorities, Rita's time spent as a single parent appeared to reinforce in her the value of having a co-parent. To get the help she needs with child care while she is attending school, Rita allowed her partner to return home but continued to access the power of the child welfare authorities to limit her partner's behaviour:

> **Rita:** There would still occasionally be moments where he would treat the kids inappropriately and those were addressed, again I made him turn himself in for one example. And, or I would like notify [name of child welfare agency] because we still had an open case with them...
> **Interviewer:** Was it helpful to have [name of child welfare agency] involved?
> **Rita:** Yeah.

In this story, Rita painted a picture of woman balancing her need for help raising a family with her partner's "inappropriate" behaviour. Rita's choice to remain with her partner seemed to be shaped more by her social location in which gender, ability, and class limit her choices than by a belief that her relationship represents true love.

Another example of how the women in the study are constrained by structural factors to remain in their relationships as they pertain to their roles as mothers is the case of Mary. Within Mary's narrative is embedded information that suggests that her choices may be limited given

that her partner has sole custody of their children. In particular, Mary spoke of wanting to be there for her daughter, for whom Mary will "put up with anything" to be with:

> **Mary:** Yeah, but it's that old cliché that I stay for the kids so umm I have a fourteen, I have one daughter and I just refuse to umm to, I don't know, it's just these years with her, she's just becoming a woman, she's a teenager, so I'll put up with anything just to be with her.
> **Interviewer:** So it sounds like you don't think you could have a relationship with your daughter if, if you weren't in the relationship with your partner.
> **Mary:** Yeah, he has custody of her, he has custody of all the kids. So umm, umm, if I left she would visit, she's old enough, but. Umm it's not so bad as it was, you know, in the past so. It's not, I can tolerate it, I can put up with it. It's not so bad as it once was.

Nevertheless, Mary was emphatic in her claims that she loves her partner and that their relationship is based on choice and a foundation of true love.

> **Mary:** I don't know how many people break up for and are in different relationships and get back together and umm decide, you know, they want to raise their children together and you know, and I think it has something to say about, uhh, how much we truly do love each other umm cause we didn't have to get back together you know. So that was a conscious decision with a lot of thought put into it and yeah…. We had our ups and downs and I'm sure we still have a few to go. Umm, I love him no matter what I'll always love him.

Mary's story revealed aspects of romanticizing her relationship with her partner as a journey where true love will conquer all, but her counter narrative suggests a reality where Mary feels trapped in a relationship where she stays "for the kids," a narrative more reflective of the dominant social discourses of why women remain in abusive relationships. Mary also chose to describe this part of her narrative as "that old cliché," suggesting that she is not comfortable situating herself in a narrative where the threat of losing her children keeps the in her relationship. Finally, she justifies her choice to stay with her statement "it's not so bad as it once was," even though the results of the CTS-2 indicate that the level of psychological abuse in her relationship has increased since the violence stopped.

Addiction issues also appear to play a role in shaping Mary's decision to remain with her

partner. Mary lost custody of their children when the couple was separated, and Mary was addicted to opiates and alcohol. Mary shared that her history with addiction started when she was 12 years old and linked her addiction problems to being sexually abused. She became a mother early and had two children when she was still in her teens. She further shared she left her children on reserve after she decided to move off reserve and her ex-partner told her that she could not take the children with her. It was at this point she met her partner, who also had a history of alcohol addiction, having just attended a residential treatment facility. Although both partners drank heavily and abused drugs during the first years of their relationship, it was Mary who lost custody of the children when they broke up and her partner was granted custody. This was despite his addictions problems, which Mary shared she helped hide from child welfare authorities, and his history of being previously charged with assaulting Mary. Mary described how her partner was able to control her through the custody of the children:

> **Mary:** He's used the police to, umm, I don't know, how you say that, but umm. Like he had, umm I had a, a probation for two years for that assault [an assault that Mary described as initiated by him]. And umm I wasn't supposed to be around him, I was, I wasn't supposed to have no contact. And then umm he would come to my apartment and he would bring the kids. And he would say, oh come over, oh the kids want you to come over. And the kids would be "yeah, come over mom, come over." And I would go over and he would, umm, manipulate the system is what he would do. He'd be like if you don't do this I'm gonna call the cops that you're here. And it was just a total manipulation of the system and, uhh, it was very abusive. And, umm, finally when my probation was over, umm my last appointment with my probation officer she had told me that I have a warrant out for my arrest. And I thought "what are you talking about"? And, umm, I, we were allowed to have contact, just no alcohol or drugs could be involved. Whatever. So he had umm, that day he, I wanted to go back home, I didn't want to stay there and I left and he phoned the police and told the police that I had assaulted him. And, umm, I had six charges of assault, ahh two assaults and three breaches and some other charges that didn't make any sense to me because I didn't, I didn't touch him, I just went home.

Mary's social location of being an Indigenous woman addicted to alcohol and opiates set up a power dynamic where her partner could easily manipulate her through his custody of the children

and his greater credibility based on his social location as being a non-Indigenous, non-addicted man. As such, structural factors of gender, race, class, and ability intersect in shaping Mary's decision to stay in her relationship.

In a similar vein, gender and racism appeared to play a part in Colleen's decision to stay with her partner, as she shared that during the period of time when she contemplated leaving her husband she saw her relationship as her only chance of having a happy relationship as she was not willing to look for a new one.

> **Colleen:** … like I remember looking at my marriage and my relationship of eleven years and I was thinking like, I was just like well I have no other man in life, like I don't want to pursue any other relationship with anybody, like even if my marriage ended right now that's the last thing I would want to do, is go out and try to find another relationship….

Given that Colleen is only in her late twenties, one has to wonder why she feels this way and what impact this perspective had on her choice to remain in her relationship. Colleen shared that growing up she had been instilled with a belief that men are violent, and in particular White men are dangerous.

> **Collen:** like growing up in my community there wasn't very much Aboriginal families and I know that for myself I experienced a lot of racism and prejudice and discrimination and it was just like they had the upper hand of any woman, it didn't matter, you know it was the target of Aboriginal, right. So I, so I would, within the last couple of years I would say I've been able to develop relationships with white males that are not what were viewed in my past. Because I just stayed away, like cause nothing has ever happened, it was just the way they look at me or just uncomfortable and not like a good vibe. So it was and that I know comes from early childhood. Because, yeah.

As someone whose experiences as a young Indigenous girl reinforced the idea that she was a "target," Colleen's choices are constrained by sexism and racism.

Even in the stories of women who emphasized that their decision to stay with their partner was a choice based on love, closer analysis revealed that women's choices might also be shaped by structural factors. For example, Samantha, who had stated that her choice to remain in

her relationship was based on having a "connection" with her partner, also noted the existence of a number of structural factors at play in her life. She shared that long before meeting her partner she had problems with alcohol addiction. She attributed her addictions problems to "wanting to fit in" when she was fifteen. Samantha, who identified as Aboriginal, never directly stated why she felt like she did not fit in, but she did share she was adopted. She did make it clear how difficult her addiction issues made it for her to parent:

> **Samantha:** The CFS thing. Umm, so actually there was time where I did leave them and my oldest son wasn't there, so it was, they [her two younger children] were [age] and [age] I think at that time. Then I ended up in the hospital, but he found out right away, I don't know. He must have been checking up on me at the same time, I just didn't realize it. Like, because it didn't really make any sense, how he came an hour later, after I left, to come get them.
> **Interviewer:** So it sounds like, you know, he was really involved.
> **Samantha:** Yeah, oh yeah (laughs).
> **Interviewer:** He was not living with you but he was still really
> **Samantha:** He was, he would come there every morning. He'd come every morning and take them to school and come back for supper. He was in the house at least once a day, umm, doing stuff. Like Christmas he was there at six a.m., like that so. [Name of child welfare authority] kinda got involved during that time period.

Samantha's story of leaving her young children unattended while drinking and her subsequent hospitalization for alcohol related health issues, suggests a different reality than her previous claim that even when she was drinking, she was not reliant on her partner. Rather, this story revealed that her partner monitored her ability to parent and came to her house every day to help take care of the children. She also spoke of losing her housing at one point, and her partner signing a lease on a new place for her and the children to live, suggesting again Samantha's dependence on her partner to provide for the children. Taken together, Samantha's social location as young mother addicted to alcohol struggling to provide care and housing for her children reflects how intersecting structural factors such as gender, class, and ability have shaped her relationship choices.

Other women also discussed how having difficulties with housing influenced their decision to stay in their relationships. For example, Tabitha shared how her problems with her roommates led her, at least in part, to let her partner move back in with her.

> **Tabitha:** I still didn't bring him by my house cause I knew if I brought him to my house he'll just take it over. Like he'll say "this is my house and I'm back with her name and all you guys move out" and that's exactly what happened when I brought him back to my house. He took over the household and "you guys have to move out now, I'm gonna pay the rent." And that's exactly what happened.
> **Interviewer:** Were you okay with that?
> **Tabitha:** Mmmm, kinda, sorta, because the guys, when I wasn't there they were making that place into a, uhh, I don't know, I can't say for sure. But when I went to my dad's, for usually a weekend at a time or a week at a time, I had mutual friends say that they went over there and they were all smoking drugs at my place. And when I came back there were things missing out of my house and stuff like that. So like when I was there, they're all innocent. They'd sit around and drink with me and stuff like that, but when I was gone they'd turn that place it into a crack den. That's my understanding. So I guess I kinda, if I brought [name of partner] there that would put a stop to that. Which it did.

Although she was concerned about having her partner move back in, her untenable situation with her roommates seemed to have justified the risk she took in letting her partner live with her. Within her story, elements of gender and class intersected to create a cultural context that limited Tabitha's choices, as she shared that she did not feel that she would be able to "put a stop" to her roommates' unacceptable behaviour or get them to move out without the presence of another man to "take over the household" and "pay the rent."

In a similar vein, Honey also shared how a lack of housing impacted her decision to stay with her partner. Honey reported that she felt that she had to make her relationship work because as an immigrant with few social/financial supports in this country, she did not have any viable housing options if she were to move out of her partner's home. She also reported that she did not know about women's shelters at the time the violence was happening. Honey's social location as an immigrant woman without access to resources that many Canadian women have left Honey in a vulnerable position in which she reported believing she had limited choices in terms of leaving

her relationship. Although both Tabitha's and Honey's stories are quite different, both stories reflect the importance of housing in shaping women's decisions to remain in their relationships. Both stories also point to how the intersection of class and gender can produce socio-cultural contexts that support staying with a partner, even if he is abusive.

Temporal analysis findings. Finally, another reason why women might tell the dominant narrative of being in a changed relationship is that it allows the women to speak of violence as a temporally bound experience that is part of their past. Violence becomes embedded in stories drawing on the discourse of true love being able to conquer all, a variation of what Searles and Mickish (1984) refer to as an unnatural act that the women must overcome and in doing so violence becomes romanticized as part of a greater tale of love rather than a story of IPV. This idea is captured in Emily's story of how her partner gave her a promise ring, pawned the ring during the period of violence, but she still hangs on to the belief that eventually she will get the ring back.

> **Emily:** We were engaged to be married; he gave me a promise ring. He asked, it was so perfect [uh-huh] it was somewhere here before stuff happened. And it was nice and snowing that day and he told me to go and get my nails done. And I had it done. It was like a lilac purple. And he told me supper at the [name of restaurant]. I didn't know why we were going to the[name of restaurant] He had received ten thousand dollars for his common experience at that time, before he received his big settlement right here and then I went to the [name of restaurant] and my family was there. My, my immediate family, my mom and her sister, my cousin and my sisters. And then I showed up and he was there. And I tried to get the waiter to come and bring a chair over for my younger sister, here at the end. And I looked back and he had a ring. And everybody was just kinda shell-shocked from. Cause they had no idea, neither did I. And he, that was my promise ring. He asked me, he asked my mom and my mom asked her older sister if that was okay (laughter). And, ahh, they kinda knew what he went through, everything. That he was lacking but she saw, yeah they fell in love with him, already at that point, He was genuine, he took care of me, I didn't have an income and he took care of me for a long time, years … there was no fighting, no arguing, no nothing, the money, money made people angry and I think that having to go through the, to relive what he went through. I started smoking writing his story that he told me, like I said I did his paperwork and it brought stuff out of him that he didn't want to feel. I blame myself a lot for the stuff that happened just like I was bringing out a monster in him, his abuse issues. You know what

> I mean…. And we were to get married he gave me a set of white gold and turquoise stone.
> **Interviewer:** Uh-humm. I noticed you're not wearing it now.
> **Emily:** He took all my gold to the pawnshop…. he paid the guy eight thousand dollars in cash just to have it sitting in there cause he just don't want me to have it right now. When we're ready to go again he said he'd take it out.

In this story, Emily described an ideal relationship before her partner became violent, where he supported her financially and was respectful of both her and her family. She spoke of how he organized a large family function and declared his love and commitment to the relationship. She attributed his subsequent change to the stress of reliving his past abuse through the residential school claim process. According to Emily, this altered him, changing him into to what she labelled as being a "monster." Emily's belief that one day the couple will be "ready to go again" and that she will get her ring back is indicative of her faith in the power of true love to conquer all and transform her partner back to his former self.

Summary. All in all, the dominant narrative appeared to provide an important protective function for the women in this study. By invoking the romanticism inherent in our culture's social discourse about true love being able to conquers all into the dominant narrative of being in a changed relationship, it may allow the women to distance themselves from societal judgments that devalue their relationships and portrays them as victims. It may also shield women from acknowledging the impact of structural factors that limited their choice to leave the relationships such as gender, ability, race, class, and age. In addition, it may allow the women to maintain a view of the violence that occurred in the relationship as temporally bound, even if physically aggressive or psychologically aggressive acts are still occurring in the relationship. By employing the dominant narrative, the women in this study can maintain their belief of being able to live "happily ever after" in accordance with the dominant social discourse of the transformative power of love and in doing so feel greater satisfaction in their relationships.

Integration of the quantitative and qualitative data. In general, results of DAS scores and the qualitative interviews were congruent, with the women in their interviews who reported the most consistency with the dominant narrative also reporting the most satisfaction on the DAS. For example, when asked what she would change in terms of her relationship dynamics, Kiki replied "absolutely nothing". Kiki reported the highest DAS score of all the women. She also located herself firmly within the dominant narrative of having a changed relationship, identifying a turning point in her relationship that led to her partner agreeing to change, establishing both physical and emotional safety, and believing that as a couple there has been healing from addictions as well as growth in terms of the couple developing new methods and skills to deal with their problems. As such, Kiki's narrative is consistent with the dominant narrative in that her perception of her relationship is one of her being in a changed relationship where the causal attributions that led to violence have been resolved.

In contrast, Kylie and Mary, whose DAS scores fell in the clinical range, appeared to struggle to locate their experiences with IPV into the dominant narrative of having a 'changed' relationship. Neither Kylie nor Mary reported experiencing a turning point that led to a significant shift in the relationship dynamics between the partners. In addition, while both women reported changes in their relationships that led them to having increased confidence that they are physically safe (Kylie's partner is in jail and no longer abusing substances while Mary reported that there had been no violence in her relationship for over six years), both women reported aspects of their relationships that indicated a lack of emotional safety. For example, Mary shared in her interview that her relationship is still verbally abusive and she is resentful that her partner is not willing to help her regain custody of their son. Kylie also shared that she believes that she cannot bring up certain topics with her partner as there is not enough emotional

safety in the relationship to do so. Finally, neither woman appeared to have been able to construct a narrative that allowed them to perceive their present relationships in a way that the reasons for the violence and other abusive dynamics in their relationship seem resolved. For example, while Mary shared that she does not fully understand why the violence in her relationship stopped, only that it has; her narrative has no aspects of the couple becoming "stronger" through struggles to overcome IPV. Kylie shared that she is not sure what will happen when her partner gets out of jail in terms of whether he will be able to maintain his sobriety or not. She shared concerns that the couple's previous pattern of her partner breaking his sobriety, losing his control, and ending up back in jail will be repeated. As such, neither woman's ability to locate their narratives neatly within the dominant narrative of being in a changed relationship was congruent with their low DAS scores of relationship satisfaction.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Key Findings

Relationship satisfaction. Findings from both the qualitative interviews and the quantitative analysis indicated that relationship satisfaction varied greatly amongst the women in the study. In the interviews, women described a wide range of relationship satisfaction, with some women reporting high satisfaction, such as Kiki who stated that "there's nothing I don't like about my relationship," to other women, such as Mary and Kylie, who described their relationship satisfaction as being low. The DAS (Spanier, 1989) relationship satisfaction scores ranged from *T*-scores in the clinical range to the much above average range, with the mean DAS *T*- score in the slightly below average range ($M = 39.6$) with a large standard deviation ($SD = 11.5$). While it is not known if the DAS norms are appropriate to use with this population of women and the sample size of the study is too small to justify generalizing to the population of women who are currently in intact relationships where violence has desisted, the findings suggest that a great deal of variability in relationship satisfaction exists within this population.

In terms of what constitutes relationship satisfaction, the women in this study identified many of the same elements as those identified by women in other studies of heterosexual relationships, in which presumably the majority of the participants have not experienced IPV, as being part of a satisfying relationship (Kaslow & Robinsson, 1996; Olson et al., 2009). The women identified 1) love, intimacy, and positive connection (including sex); 2) trust and honesty (including fidelity); 3) communication; 4) security and stability; 5) support; and 6) respect as important to their level of relationship satisfaction. Of the six categories endorsed by the women, most of these categories have been previously identified as factors that predict relationship satisfaction. For example, in terms of love, intimacy, and positive connection, Kaslow and

Robinson (1996) identified love and Olson et al. (2000) identified couple closeness as important in predicting relationship satisfaction. Research also supports the role of good communication in predicting relationship satisfaction (Kaslow & Robinson, 1996; Olson et al., 2000). In addition, Kaslow and Robinson (1996) identified trust, mutual support, and respect as essential ingredients to relationship satisfaction. The women in this study did appear unique in their emphasis of the element of security and stability as important to relationship satisfaction.

Security and stability, as used in this study, included a sense of feeling secure from harm or danger within a stable emotional and physical environment. In their model of relational safety, Whiting et al. (2012) described appraisals of security, along with appraisals of support and closeness as important components of safety. The researchers also stressed the absence of threat appraisals as integral to relational safety. Given that that all the women in study had experiences of past violence in their relationships, it is not surprising that they would endorse this concept as more relevant than women outside of this population.

The concept of establishing security and stability was identified not only as an important aspect of relationship satisfaction, but also as an aspect of relationship satisfaction that remained problematic for many women. This finding was evident in both the qualitative and quantitative results. For example, one woman noted in her interview that her "everyday satisfaction oscillates." Results of the DAS revealed a tendency amongst the women to report their lowest subscale score on the subscale of Dyadic Satisfaction, a subscale that indicates the presence of relationship tension and/or low commitment to the relationship. Taken together, these finding suggest that establishing security and stability in relationships where violence has desisted remains problematic for many women and may be a particularly important component of relationship satisfaction for this population.

Defining violence. This study found the findings of the CTS-2 (Straus et al., 1996) and the qualitative interviews lacked congruency regarding the detection of "violence" in the study. Although all the women self-defined their relationships as "violence free" as part of the screening procedure to qualify for the study, the CTS-2 found that physically aggressive behaviours, particularly female to male violence, remained ongoing in some of the women's relationships. Three women reported engaging in minor acts of aggression against their partners and one of these women reported her partner as engaging in an act of minor aggression against her. When queried about the presence of these behaviours in their relationships, all the women continued to view their relationships as "violence free." They did not perceive these acts as constituting violence based on the context in which the physically aggressive behaviours occurred including a consideration of intent, mental health status, and if the behaviour resulted in the victim actually being "hit" or not. Also, given that the acts of physical aggression reported by the women were all minor in nature, it may have been that in comparison to the severe acts of physical aggression that had occurred previously in the three women's relationships, these acts of aggression did not meet their definition of what constitutes violence.

The reports of these physically aggressive behaviours on the CTS-2 did not appear related to relationship satisfaction as two of the three women who reported the occurrence of current physical aggression reported average or slightly above average relationship satisfaction on the DAS. In addition, all three women reported their relationships as having elements of trust and honesty, open communication, security and stability, support, and respect to some degree. This suggests that it is the self-definition of violence as determined by the context in which behaviours occur that is important in determining how the desistance of violence impacts relationship satisfaction.

Another important issue to consider in determining how the desistance of violence impacts relationship satisfaction may lie in the gender of the person committing the physically aggressive act. Women committed the majority of the physically aggressive acts identified as presently occurring in the relationships, and none of the women viewed their acts as "violence." One reason why the women may have viewed their current use of physical aggression as not meeting their definition of violence may be based on the differential impact of IPV on male victims. Research supports that while men are impacted by women's use of violence, in general men are less likely to report experiencing high levels of fear and/or severe injury than women (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Crandall et al., 2004; Kellerman & Mercy, 1992; Puzone et al., 2000). It has been speculated that this finding may be due in part to men's relatively greater physical ability to "strike harder" (Morse, 1995, p. 251) than women based on gender difference in size and strength. This finding was supported by the results of this study in that only one woman reported that her partner had suffered severe injuries in contrast to nine women who reported that they suffered severe injuries. As such, the women may have viewed their use of physical aggression as having minimal negative consequences on their partners, leading to a certain level of acceptability of female to male violence in the three women who reported engaging in these acts.

In studying the impact of acceptability of violence on the relationship between relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment, Kaura and Lohman (2009) found that both female and male participants' acceptability of female-to-male violence emerged as a significant moderator of the relationship between satisfaction and commitment, while male-to-female violence was not. While the study is limited in that majority of the participants did not have a history of experiencing physical violence and the researchers did not examine the impact of

acceptability female to male violence on relationship satisfaction directly, it does suggest that the impact of acceptability of violence on relationship satisfaction may differ depending on the gender of the individual perpetrating the violence. This research (Kaura & Lohan, 2009), in addition to this study's finding on the importance of self-definition of violence, suggests that the relationship between desistance of violence and relationship satisfaction cannot be reliably determined by the sole use of measures such as the CTS-2 (Straus et al., 1996) that do not have the ability to access the contextual factors that impact how violence is self-defined. This is consistent with the extensive literature discussing the limitations of CTS (e.g., Dobash et al., 1992).

Based on the CTS-2 (Straus et al., 1996) data, the study found four patterns of violence within sample: 1) women who both experienced and engaged in frequent severe violence, 2) women who both experienced and engaged in less frequent severe or minor mutual violence, 3) women who experienced violence where there was a distinct imbalance between their use of violence and their partner's greater use of violence as noted by differences in frequency and/or severity, and 4) women who reported experiencing violence but did not engage in violence. However, the findings from the interviews revealed that the patterns of violence found in the CTS-2 data did not always match women's qualitative descriptions of the violence, particularly in terms of how patterns of violence shifted over time, the reasons women gave for their engagement in violence, the presence of coercive control, and the psychological impact of the violence on the women.

Findings of the CTS-2 (Straus et al., 1996) were congruent with the interviews in reporting that within the context of their present relationships the women reported no injuries and that all severe forms of sexual coercion had stopped. The results were also consistent with the

interviews in finding that there was a great deal of difference across women in terms of the presence of psychologically aggressive and negotiation behaviours occurring in the women's present relationships. Also, in general, women who reported relationship satisfaction reported a pattern of past physical aggression in which rates and severity of violence between partners was approximately equivalent, lower levels and/or substantial reduction in the use of psychological aggression, and higher levels and/or substantial increase in the use of negotiation. However, there were exceptions to this rule, with some women reporting high relationship satisfaction despite the presence of physical and psychological aggression, again suggesting that women's perceptions and definitions of violence may be determining factors as to how these behaviours impact relationship satisfaction. These findings lend support to Williams and Frieze's (2005) study that found that high relationship satisfaction is possible in relationships in which severe violence is ongoing. Williams and Frieze (2005) speculated that high satisfaction is possible for individuals with thrill-seeking personalities and/or engaged in highly passionate relationships where violence is only one aspect of the relationship. In addition to their speculations, this study also suggests that despite the presence of ongoing high levels of physical and psychological aggressive behaviours, for women who live in a cultural context where violence is considered normative or if the current the levels of these behaviours are perceived by the women as representing a significant reduction in comparison to previous levels and thereby "changed," high relationship satisfaction is possible.

Relationship between the desistance of violence and relationship satisfaction. The findings of the study also support that the desistance of violence in itself is not enough to guarantee increased relationship satisfaction. Satisfaction in relationships in which violence has desisted was best explained by a model in which the women's perceptions of the violence that

occurred in the past, in combination with the changes they perceived in their present relationship (changes in relationship dynamics, safety, and risk of reoccurrence of future violence), were filtered through societal messages that value romantic heterosexual relationships while devaluing violent relationships, resulting in the telling of both dominant and counter narratives of relationships. As such, the more a woman situated herself within the dominant narrative of being in a "changed" relationship in which there had been a 1) successful turning points in her relationship that resulted in a change the relationship power dynamic, 2) increased appraisals of safety, and 3) a meaningful story of healing and/or growth in which the causal attributions for the occurrence of violence were now resolved, the more likely she was to report the presence of trust and honesty, open communication, security and stability, closeness, support, and respect. The greater the perception of the presence of these relationship elements, the greater the relationship satisfaction reported by the woman. Key components of the model are discussed in further detail next.

In terms of past perceptions of violence, not only did women's personal definition of what constitutes "violence" appear to impact relationship satisfaction (as already discussed), but also the causal attributions the women made as to why the violence occurred appeared important in determining relationship satisfaction. This study found that women attribute the occurrence of relationship violence to numerous reasons that fell within themes of addictions; exposure to other forms of violence; lack of healthy ways to cope with conflict and stressors; and power, control struggles, and gender issues. If the women did not report that they believed that the causal factors that contributed to the violence were resolved, relationship satisfaction tended to remain low (this finding will be discussed in greater detail later in this section). In particular, the role of substance abuse in contributing to violence was noted by many women, with 10 of the women

identifying substance abuse issues as having contributed to the occurrence of violence. As such, the threat of substance abuse re-emerging in the women's relationships constituted a significant factor to relationship satisfaction. This finding is supported by research that has found that in couples in which one partner is abusing substances are typically characterized by high levels of relationship dissatisfaction and instability in terms of relationship commitment (Fals-Stewart, Birchler, & O'Farrell, 1999),

In addition to the role of perceptions of past violence, the model also proposes that perceptions of changes after violence desists play a role in shaping relationship satisfaction. Women's positive perceptions of the changes that occurred in their relationships in terms of relationship dynamics, safety, and risk of reoccurrence of violence led to the telling of a dominant narrative of being in a "changed" relationship. The dominant narrative featured three themes: 1) a successful turning point in the relationship, 2) increased safety, and 3) a meaningful story of healing and/or growth in which the causes of violence were resolved.

In terms of how the women narrated the presence of successful turning points in the dominant narrative, the findings of this study were in keeping with other IPV literature that has explored how women go through a process of leaving their relationship (Campbell et al., 1998; Chang et al., 2010; Eisikovits et al., 1998; Scheffer Lindgren & Renck, 2008). Chang et al. (2010), in their research on the factors and circumstances that lead women experiencing IPV to seek change in their relationship, noted that "turning points are specific incidents, factors, or circumstances that permanently change how the women view the violence, their relationship, and how they wish to respond" (p. 252). However, what was different specific to the women in this study was the success that many of the women had in using the strength of their turning point to negotiate healthier relationships with their partner in terms of not only ending or reducing

physical aggression, but also changing the power dynamics. The women's ability to alter the power dynamics of their relationships appeared to be linked to their gain of power in the relationship through increased self-empowerment, seeking assistance from social institutions or family, and/or convincing their partners of their personal worth. This often resulted from the women leaving or threatening to leave the relationship. However, as noted by Wuest and Merrit-Gray (2008), who studied the process of ending of violence in ongoing relationships, it was ultimately the decision of the women's partner to comply with the women's demands that resolved the violence. This may also explain why turning points that were driven by factors external to the couple such as incarceration or external monitoring of men's behaviors did not appear as effective/stable in changing relationship dynamics beyond the desistance of violence as the power dynamics between the couple may not have been actually altered or only temporarily altered. In agreement with Wuest and Merrit-Grays's (2008) study, some women noted that achieving a successful turning point in the relationship was not always sufficient to lead to permanent change in the relationship dynamics, as their partners challenged changes in the power dynamic at a later date.

In addition, the women emphasised the presence of safety in the dominant narrative, including the presence of aspects of security and stability, as well as the absence of threats to safety, including psychological abuse and the presence or threat of violence/harm. These findings are in accordance with Wuest and Merrit-Gray's (2008) description of a how a shift in the pattern of coercive control occurred within their model within the sub-process of living differently. This subprocess involved the micro-processes of interrupting previous patterns, securing personal power, and reconfiguring the relationship. As such, the subprocess of living differently represented a continuation and honing of the newly negotiated relationship and required that both

partners remain committed to continuing the relationship (Wuest & Merrit-Gray, 2008). In this study, the subprocess of living differently was reflected in many ways, such as how the women spoke of how they were or were not able to express themselves freely without fear of reprisals, continued vigilance in monitoring their partner, and/or of reduced abusive dynamics between the couple.

In terms of safety, the study revealed that it was the women's perceptions of safety as expressed in the dominant narrative more so than the actual presence of physically aggressive acts that was important in determining their relationship satisfaction. Specifically, if women did not define the presence of an act of physical aggression as "violence", it did not appear to lower their relationship satisfaction significantly. This finding may help to explain why studies that use measures such as the CTS-2 to measure ongoing physical abuse can produce inconsistent results in regards to the impact of the desistance of violence on relationship satisfaction if the women do not define the presence of the physically aggressive acts as violence.

Finally, in the dominant narrative the women told stories that located their experiences of violence within a "meaningful" story of healing and/or growth. This allowed them to perceive that the causal factors of violence that they identified were resolved. This finding supports previous research that found a link between relationship satisfaction and 1) women's attributions of why violence occurred (Byrne & Arias, 1997; Fincham et al., 1997; Gorden et al., 2004; Meyer et al., 2010; Nabi & Horner, 2001; Pape & Arias, 2000) and 2) their perceptions and appraisals of their partner in general (Luo et al., 2010).

The use of qualitative methods in this study allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives to be obtained than would have been attained through the use of the quantitative methods typically used to study causal attribution of violence. Rather than endorsing

attributions from a pre-prepared list of attributions, the women were encouraged to explore their views on why physical violence occurred. This allowed the women the freedom to include attributions from intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal levels. Through this process, women often linked causal attributions to more than one level. For example, while a woman may have identified her partner's substance abuse as a cause of the violence in her relationship, she may have also shared her belief that his substance abuse is linked to structural factors such as him being a residential school survivor. In this way, the woman was able to share that rather than seeing her partner's drinking as a problem located solely within his internal locus of control, she understood her partner's drinking as a consequence of the social context he grew up in. Qualitative research's ability to provide deeper understanding of people's experiences has been attributed to its ability to "elucidate social, emotional, and interpersonal dynamics associated with personal experiences" (Chang et al., 2010, p. 252) and as such, the use of qualitative interviews to study causal attributions of violence led to the collection of data that was complex and more nuanced that data generated by forced choice measures. . In addition, the qualitative interviews allowed the women to exert their agency in the choices they made in deciding which stories they told and how they told them. As noted by Samelius et al. (2014), qualitative research allows participants to create new meaning of self and others "thorough a variety of communicative practices such as symbols, metaphors, interactions and moves" (p. 269). By employing narratives of healing and growth, many of the women in this study were able to create new meaningful narratives of themselves, their partners, and their relationships in which the presence of violence was resolved.

In addition, as previously noted, the dominant narrative of a "changed" relationship aligned in many ways to how Searles and Mickish (1984) have described the popular social

discourse on love commonly referred to as the "true love conquers all" plot. This discourse on love promises that as long as love is true and women remain with their partner, that women will bring out the best in their partners, overcome whatever misunderstandings or barriers to the relationship are present, and "live happily ever after." However, as also previously discussed, the dominant narrative was not sufficient to allow the women in this study to account for their experiences in their entirety, leading the women to tell counter narratives in addition to the dominant narrative. Within the counter narratives, instances of self-silencing, minimization, denial, justification, and romanticizing were found, suggesting that women felt the need to present their relationships, including the negative aspects, in a positive manner.

These mechanisms (self-silencing, minimization, denial, justification, and romanticizing) have been found in other studies that explored women's narratives of why they remained in violent relationships (Wood, 2001). For example, Wood (2001) described a number of beliefs that help to bolster women's ability to positively view their relationships including: "it's not as bad as," the "good outweighs the bad," "I can control it/stop it," "it wasn't the real him," and "I deserved it" (2001, p. 248). These beliefs help preserve women's belief in a fairy tale view of their romance by focusing on times when their partners are loving and minimizing the times they are not (Wood, 2001). As noted in the findings, many of these beliefs were echoed by the women in this study and in doing so allowed the women to self-silence, minimize, deny, and justify unacceptable aspects of their relationships. Although research shows that interpreting one's partner's actions in a positive manner is typical of people in satisfied relationships (Gottman, 1994), given the presence of past abusive dynamics as well as ongoing abusive dynamics in the women's relationships, it is possible that these mechanisms may be working to keep women in detrimental circumstances and perhaps even dangerous ones. These mechanisms may also

represent a way for the women to cope with social realities shaped by structural factors such as poverty, lack of housing, lack of support for single mothers, cultures of violence, ageism, racism, and sexism while still maintaining a sense of personal agency.

Intersectionality analysis. As noted in different areas throughout the findings of this study, intersectionality analysis revealed multiple ways that intersecting structural factors shaped women's experiences within the context of their relationships. IPV is considered to be a gendered issue in that IPV is thought to impact men and women differently as research suggests that the impact of IPV on men and women is not equal, with women being more likely to be terrorized, injured, or killed (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Crandall et al., 2004; Kellermann & Mercy, 1992; Puzone et al., 2000). It has also been suggested that IPV in heterosexual couples is rooted in patriarchal structure of the family and society (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1979; 1983) and as such creates norms of inequality that promote the devaluing and subordination of women (American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family, 1996). The role of gender was noted in all of the women's stories of violence in shaping economic, political, social, and cultural conditions that limited women's personal power. This included the role of patriarchal ideology in shaping gender roles and power inequities within intimate relationships, which led not only to violence but also to other forms of relationship abuse such as stalking, financial and sexual control, and emotional abuse.

Intersections between gender and other structural factors further produced social conditions that led to the occurrence and maintenance of relationship violence. For example, the intersection of disability and gender impacted many of the women in the study, with the role of substance abuse and other mental health issues impacting the quality of many of the women's relationships. In struggling with either their own issues with addiction or their partner's

addiction, the majority of the women in this study highlighted how the presence of substance abuse created conditions that led to destructive dynamics between the couple. Research on IPV and substance abuse has found that substance abuse by one or both partners is linked to increased risk of violence for women (DeMaris, Benson, Fox, Hill, & Van Wyk, 2003; Kaufmann, O'Farrell, Murphy, Murphy, & Muchowski, 2014; Klostermann et al., 2005; O'Farrel et al., 2003). In addition, some women who had addiction problems discussed how their addictions left them vulnerable to abuse as their addictions impacted their ability to parent or to gain or maintain custody of their children, which in turn impacted their ability to leave their relationships. Other disability issues, such as depression and poor self-esteem, were also noted in the study as being associated with decreased personal empowerment. Research has found that women with disabilities are at increased risk of IPV (Brownridge, 2006). Possible reasons proposed to account for this increase in the risk of IPV include ableism, stigmatization, poverty, and dependence on caregivers, which can lead to lead to both externalized and internalized devaluation (Curry, Hassouneh-Phillips, & Johnston-Silverberg, 2002).

Intersections between gender and race were also prevalent throughout the study. Many of the Indigenous women in the study identified issues such as racism and the impact of colonialism as impacting their experiences of relationship violence and relationship quality. For example, some of the women in the study noted the negative impact of residential schools, the removal of indigenous children from their families and communities, and racial discrimination as leading to oppressive conditions that limited their personal power. As already discussed, Indigenous women in Canada are at higher risk of IPV than non-Indigenous women (Statistics Canada, 2016b). Specific to Indigenous women, colonization practices and policies such as not recognizing Indigenous women's rights to own property in the past has resulted in the

devaluation of Indigenous women through the loss of social, economic, and political power. This loss of power is thought to impact the power dynamics in Indigenous women's intimate relationships and increase their vulnerability to IPV (Somlak Pedersen, Halinka Malcoe, & Pulingham, 2013).

As noted in the demographic information and in the women's interviews, class was an important structural factor in the women's lives, with many of the women reporting limited financial resources, particularly in regards to housing and the ability to provide basic essentials for themselves and their children. The women noted that their partners often were the primary financial providers, with their partner's determining how financial resources were allotted. In addition, some of the women also noted that financial dependency on their partners limited their ability to leave their relationships, leaving them little choice other than to try to make their relationships work. Low income has been linked to lack of access to resources such as quality education, jobs, affordable housing, and legal services (Chavis & Hill, 2008) and it is also associated with higher risk of experiencing IPV (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, & Kim, 2012).

In addition, some women noted the impact of age in shaping relationship choices. For example, one woman noted that she felt she had invested too much time in her relationship to give up on trying to make it work. Another woman noted that she felt that her youth at the beginning of the relationship had worked to maintain a power differential between her and her partner as he was older than her and she was still a teenager. Young age has been found to be a factor associated with higher risk of experiencing IPV (Capaldi et al., 2012; DeMaris et al., 2003; Vest, Catlin, Chen, & Brownson, 2002).

Taken together, the results of the intersectionality analysis revealed how complex interactions between gender, disability, race, class, and age intersected to create conditions

conducive to the occurrence of IPV and barriers to ending IPV in the women's lives.

Social discourses and stigma. In speculating why the women chose to tell their stories the way they did, it was also suggested that the dominant narrative may work to protect the women from the discourse that exists in our society that defines relationships where violence has occurred as flawed and irreparable and locates women who stay in these relationships in the role of victim. In particular, one popular discourse on women who remain in relationships where violence has occurred portrays these women as suffering from learned helplessness (Walker, 1989) and as being on a trajectory of increasing and intensifying violence (Pagelow, 1981). In turn, this leads to pathologizing and stigmatizing women who chose to stay in their relationships after there has been violence. This may account for why the women in this study predominantly chose to represent themselves as strong and agentic in their relationships.

Applications/Recommendations

Intervention. It is hoped that the information generated from this study on the impact of the desistance of violence on relationship satisfaction can be applied to helping women receive greater support in working towards achieving high quality relationships. For example, understanding that relationship satisfaction varies greatly amongst women who are in relationships where violence has desisted implies that even after violence desists, relationship improvements/interventions may still be needed.

***Couples counselling*.** The findings of this study that 1) physical aggression (including female to male aggression) may continue and that 2) safety needs to be established in broader terms rather than simply establishing the desistance of violence, suggest that couples who identify themselves as "violence free" may benefit from couples counselling to help with unresolved safety concerns. Couples counselling should include assessing for physical violence

and other ongoing forms of abuse. Bograd and Mederos (1999) recommend that couples therapy should only be undertaken when both partners are seeking therapy freely, the violence is infrequent and minor, use of psychological abuse is infrequent or minor, risk factors for lethality are absent, the victim(s) does not fear the partner, and the perpetrator(s) accepts responsibility for abusive behaviour. In assessing for fear of partner, it is important that level of fear should be based on personal perception of the victim(s) and not the level of violence that occurred Partners' use of physical aggression should be explored through the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, as acts of physical aggression may not be identified by either partner as meeting their personal definition of "violence". The results of this study suggest that this may be particularly true for female to male acts of minor physical aggression. Previous findings suggest that even minor violence on the part of a female partner poses a risk to escalation of violence by their male partner (Feld & Straus, 1989) and female to male violence poses a risk to both partners. Therefore, therapists should be aware of the necessity of challenging the use and minimization of minor physical violence by either partner as it is widely agreed upon that cessation of all abuse is the primary treatment goal (Bograd & Mederos, 1999; Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2002; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998).

In order to increase safety, couples therapy for IPV should also continuously monitor and address issues of coercive control throughout therapy, which may continue despite the desistance of physical violence. O'Leary (2008) has noted the importance of focusing on issues of misuse of power and control and gender roles in couple therapy for IPV. This point appears particularly salient given that the findings of this study suggest that establishing healthy relationship dynamics is not a linear process for some of the women, with previous abusive relationship dynamics reoccurring sporadically, particularly during times of stress or couple conflict. As

such, this study is in agreement with McCollum and Stith's (2007) recommendation that separate check-ins with each partner be conducted throughout the process of therapy.

For couples in which substance abuse has been a concern for one or both partners, couples counseling interventions that simultaneously address issues of addiction and IPV is recommended. Some of the women in the study noted that they did not believe that their partner's substance abuse issues were resolved. This is extremely problematic given that many women attributed substance abuse as contributing to the occurrence of violence. Research has shown that couple interventions that address both substance abuse issues and IPV are effective in reducing the rate of recidivism of IPV and reducing substance abuse (Stover, Meadows, & Kaufman, 2009).

Couples counselling for this population should also target the key elements of relationship satisfaction identified in this study (love, intimacy, and connection; trust and honesty; communication; security and stability; support; and respect). While many of these elements are routinely addressed in couples therapy (Gottman, 1999), working with couples that have experienced violence requires specialized knowledge and interventions skills on the part of the therapist. For example, abusive communication patterns were noted by many of the women in the study, including the presence of verbal abuse and using communication as a means to control partners. Research supports that there are modifiable factors associated with relationship satisfaction such as communication that can be taught in skills-based couple relationship education programs (Halford, Lizzio, Wilson, & Occhipinti, 2007). For example, Cleary Bradley, Friend, and Gottman (2011) found that a psycho-educational intervention designed to improve relationships and reduce couple conflict in low-income situationally violent couples resulted in the treatment group showing increased relationship satisfaction, greater use of healthy

relationship skills, and reduced conflict. Increasing security and stability in the relationship through couples counselling interventions is also paramount in this population, as women in the study noted that relationship dynamics remained subject to fluctuations. This may due in part to issues of lack of healthy ways to cope with conflict and stressors that arise. Therapeutic interventions needed to address these issues may include emotional regulation skills, conflict management techniques, problem solving skills, as well as addressing issues relevant to finances, employment, and housing. Furthermore, given the emphasis women placed on issues stemming from racism, including discriminatory practices such as the residential school system, couples interventions for this population must be culturally appropriate.

Individual and gender specific group counselling. Individual and gender specific group counselling services for women in relationships in which violence has desisted focused on supporting and empowering women to maintain and improve upon the gains they have made in progressing towards healthier relationship dynamics need to be made more readily available. In addition, counselling may be needed to help women deal with the trauma and pain they have experienced due to relationship violence and other forms of abuse, as research has found that the negative impact of IPV on women's mental health remains heightened even after women report the desistance of violence in their relationships (Nur, 2012; Romito et al., 2005). According to Peled et al., in 2000 there was a lack of interventions to support women who wish to remain in relationships in which violence has occurred. The continued paucity of services designed specifically for this population needs to be rectified. The design of these programs should be sensitive to respecting women's choices to stay in their relationships, while simultaneously acknowledging the structural factors that may be limiting their choices. In order to prevent stigmatizing these women, therapists must also have an understanding of how social discourses

on love and abuse can shape women' perceptions of romantic relationships. This includes being sensitive to the possible use of mechanisms such as romanticizing, minimization, denial, self-silencing, and justification on the part of women to present their relationships in a positive manner. Use of such mechanisms can mask safety concerns and need to be carefully explored by therapists in ways that takes into consideration the social location of the woman.

In summary, greater availability of counselling programs specific to addressing the needs of women in relationships in which violence has desisted is needed in order to help to increase safety (including aspects of both physical and emotional safety), and relationship satisfaction in this population.

Social services. The findings of this study also provide support for the importance of the role of social services in supporting women in their struggle to stop violence in their relationships. In speaking about turning points and trying to establish safety in their relationships, many women noted the importance of the legal system, child and family protective agencies, and domestic violence and/or addiction agencies in the process. However, as also noted in their counter narratives, some of the women also spoke of their concerns of the future if/when these supports no longer are available. This suggests the importance of providing access to IPV interventions and services until women perceive that the dynamics of their relationships have sufficiently changed to decrease the risk from violence and establish healthy stable relationships. This includes considering a more expansive definition of safety that includes elements of both emotional and physical safety. While the dominant narrative identified in this study suggests that the desistance of violence is a positive step in increasing safety, it also identified that the desistance of violence alone is not sufficient to ensure safety. Furthermore, ongoing monitoring of safety should be emphasized in this population given that safety concerns can wax and wane

in relationships where violence has previously occurred, as opposed to being a straightforward linear progression towards safety. IPV interventions should also include relapse prevention plans and long-term follow-up. Therefore, it is recommended that women's perceptions of the need for intervention should be of primary consideration in the decision of when to terminate interventions by social services and women should be provided with information on how to re-access services if required.

Social services also need to take a more active role in addressing the systemic issues identified by the women in this study as increasing their vulnerability to IPV. This includes addressing issues of poverty, access to affordable housing, and lack of affordable quality child care to decrease the dependency that some women, particularly women with small children, have on their partners. Violence combined with poverty has been linked to homelessness in women (Dector, 2014).

Research. The findings of this study have implications for how researchers evaluate the presence of violence and the success of IPV interventions. Given the emphasis that the women in this study allotted to safety as a much larger construct that goes beyond the presence or absence of physical safety, using measures such as the CTS-2 (Straus et al., 1996) that focus on physical, sexual, and psychological aggression may not reflect women's perceptions of how "safe" women actually feel in their relationships post intervention. The addition of qualitative interviews that focus on evaluating how women view the effectiveness of IPV interventions in terms of improving safety in a more broadly defined way may help to improve the validity of IPV intervention research.

In terms of assessing relationship satisfaction, some of the women in this study shared the presence of problematic relationship dynamics that may not be addressed in conventional

relationship satisfaction measures. For example, some of the women in the study noted on-going problems with coercive control, psychological abuse such as blaming and name calling, and/or on-going doubts of their partner's ability to sustain changes in his behaviour (e.g., sobriety). The DAS (Spanier, 1979), while broadly assessing for the presence of tension in relationships, does not address such issues specifically and as such may overestimate women's relationship satisfaction. In order to address these issues, this research suggests that it may be helpful to develop a new relationship satisfaction measure that is specific to the concerns of women in post-violent relationships. This measure could be used to increase the validity of the measurement of relationship satisfaction in this population, particularly if used in conjunction with qualitative interviews.

The findings of this study regarding the importance of the women's perceptions of past violence and their perceptions of their current relationships in shaping their relationship satisfaction also have implications for theory, with support for cognitive behavioral theories of close relationships (Beck, 1988; Epstein & Baucom, 1990) being found. As previously noted, findings supported previous research that found a link between relationship satisfaction and 1) women's attributions of why violence occurred (Byrne & Arias, 1997; Fincham et al., 1997; Gorden et al., 2004; Meyer et al., 2010; Nabi & Horner, 2001; Pape & Arias, 2000) and 2) their perceptions and appraisals of their partner in general (Luo et al., 2010). As such, the findings provide a basis on which a model of relationship satisfaction for women who have experienced a desistance of violence in their current relationship could be further developed and tested in the future.

Finally, this study echoes the call to action that has previously been made by other researchers to expand existing social discourses on romantic love and IPV that allow for greater

dialogic space and options for women involved in violent relationships (Fraser, 2003; Wood, 2001; Yoshioka & Choi, 2005). As noted by Wood (2001), social discourses on love and IPV currently legitimized in western culture offer insufficient stories of individuals and relationships and as such constrain both men and women. These discourses are rooted in cultural beliefs and can either be supported or undermined by cultural practices and structures. Therefore, in order to create new social discourses that simultaneously narrate violence as unacceptable while recognizing and supporting women's agency in choosing how they respond to violence, cultural institutions such as the media need to take an active role in disseminating new discourses of violent relationships that offer more options to women than either leaving or staying and accepting on-going violence in their relationships. In doing so, it is also hoped that the stigma faced by women who choose to remain in relationships in which violence has occurred can be reduced.

Strengths and Limitations

The study has several strengths in terms of its sample and methodological design. For example, the sample was diverse in term of representing women of different ethnicities, educational levels, and socio-economic status. Within the sample, a variety of different patterns of violence, including differences in rates, severity, and mutuality of IPV experienced by the women, were also represented. The design also had strengths in terms of its inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This allowed for the exploration of both convergence and divergence within the data. This exploration led to findings that would not have been found without the inclusion of both methods including the findings that physically aggressive behaviours still exist in some relationships that women define as violence free and the explanations women gave as to why these behaviours do not impact their perceptions of being a

violence free relationship. Also, in administering the CTS-2 (Straus et al., 1996) twice to compare past behaviours to current behaviours in terms of physical aggression, injury, psychological aggression, sexual coercion, and negotiation, the study was able to provide insights as to how patterns in these behaviours changed or failed to change over time, which may prove to be an important variable in understanding relationship satisfaction.

The study also has limitations in that older women (over the age of 50) were not represented in the sample. Women who had self-defined as being in violence free relationships for longer periods of time (over 10 years) were also not represented in the study. In addition, this study only included women in heterosexual relationships. These limitations and the small sample of the study impact the transferability of the findings to the overall population of women who have experienced the desistance of violence in their relationships.

The study might have benefited from having the women fill out additional questionnaires on additional constructs such as coercive control and partner perception. For example, many of the women identified ways they were still experiencing coercive control and it may have been beneficial to quantify the presence of these behaviours. For example, the Dominance-Isolation subscale of the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory – Short Form (Tolman, 1992) could have been added to detect the presence of coercive control. Also, the addition of a questionnaire to measure how the women perceive their partners in terms of positive perceptions may have been useful as previous research has shown that perceptions of one's partner tend to be positive (Luo et al., 2010) and it would have been informative to see if the women in this study were similar to other women in this regard. Addition of these measures to collect quantitative date would have been helpful in collaborating or refuting the women's qualitative data regarding their current perceptions of their relationships and their partners.

Future Research

Recommended future research in this area includes undertaking a large scale longitudinal research study on the desistance of violence and relationship satisfaction in intact relationships where violence has currently desisted. This would include the use of qualitative and quantitative methods to monitor safety issues such as the presence of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, as well as other forms of coercive control. This would allow for a better understanding of the trajectory of these relationships, how to meet the needs of this population, and help determine the scope of this societal problem.

Future research in this area would benefit from investigating how relationship satisfaction for heterosexual men is determined in relationships in which violence has desisted. Previous research suggests that when couples who have experienced IPV are questioned about their perceptions of the violence that occurred, men and women often disagree about what occurred (Armstrong, Wernke, Medina, & Schafer, 2002) and that women and men remember IPV differently (Armstrong, Heideman, Corcoran, Fisher, Medina, & Schafer, 2001). In addition, research has concluded that gender also plays an important role in how IPV impacts relationship satisfaction in heterosexual couples (Stith et al., 2008). Taken together, the results of these previous research studies suggest that the results of this study may not be transferable to men's perceptions of how the desistance of physical violence impacts relationship satisfaction. Therefore, future research in this area would be helpful.

Finally, future research into how relationship satisfaction is determined in relationships in which violence has desisted in all forms of couple relationships, including lesbian and gay couples is needed. In particular, it would be interesting to explore the possible effect of homophobia and gender roles on strengthening or weakening the relationship found in this study

between relationship satisfaction and aligning one's relationship experiences with dominant cultural discourses on relationships.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the study found that women identified 1) love, intimacy, and positive connection (including sex); 2) trust and honesty (including fidelity); 3) good communication; 4) security and stability; 5) support; and 6) respect as important to determining relationship satisfaction. The presence of relationship security and stability appeared particularly salient in the determination of overall relationship satisfaction.

Findings support the idea that violence can desist within intact relationships and that high relationship satisfaction can be attained. However, relationship satisfaction varied greatly within the study and the majority of women reported below average relationship satisfaction. This suggests that the desistance of violence alone is not likely to result in improved relationship satisfaction, but rather one important component in the process of perceiving if one's relationship as having "changed." The results indicate that both women's perceptions of the past and the present are pivotal in understanding how relationship satisfaction is determined in this population.

Components identified as key to the process of determining relationship satisfaction included perceiving that relationships dynamics, safety, and risk of reoccurrence of violence have positively changed. Level of relationship satisfaction also appeared to be related to how closely the women perceived their relationships as aligning to a dominant narrative of being in a changed relationship, including the presence of at least one pivotal turning point in the relationship, establishing a sense of safety in the relationship, as well as being able to resolve the occurrence of violence through a meaning making process. The women drew upon dominant

social discourses on love, particularly the "true love conquers all" storyline, to help construct their personal narratives of being in a changed relationship. However, the dominant narrative was not always sufficient to account for the women's experiences in their entirety, especially the presence of abusive behaviours including acts of physical aggression between the partners. Examination of the women's counter narratives revealed instances of the women bolstering their relationship satisfaction through processes of minimization, denial, self-silencing, justification, and romanticizing. Possible explanations for this phenomenon include the need for the women to protect themselves from the stigma associated with being in an abusive relationship and/or the need to protect their sense of personal agency by not acknowledging the role of powerful structural factors in shaping their personal choices.

Implications of the study include the need for more research on this phenomenon in order to improve and provide services for couples that wish to end the violence in their relationship. It also highlights the need to decrease the stigmatization of women who choose to remain in relationships where there has been violence, as well as working towards improving services for those women who wish to stay/leave their relationships. If both of these objectives could be achieved, then perhaps women would feel less societal pressure to engage in processes to positively bias their perceptions of their relationship satisfaction and in doing so help them attain a greater sense of agency in trying to attain the type of relationships they desire. While not every woman involved in a relationship where violence has desisted will live "happily ever after," it is hoped that by exploring the unique relationship needs of this population of women that greater relationship satisfaction can be obtained by more of these women.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Poster

Women Wanted for Study on Relationship Satisfaction

Researchers at the University of Manitoba are interested in learning more about relationship satisfaction in on-going relationships where there has been at least one incidence of violence in the past, but no violence in the past year. We are hoping to learn more about how experiencing past violence shapes how women view their relationships. If this sounds like your relationship and you are interested in participating please call Judy Kienas, M.A. at (xxx) xxx-xxxx Please leave a voice message detailing how and when you can be reached and if leaving a voice message for you is okay.

Participants will be provided with an honorarium to compensate for their time and any participation costs.

Participants must be 18 years old or older.

Appendix B

Telephone Screening Script

Thanks you for interest in participating in this study. This study is a study on relationship satisfaction in on-going relationships where women have experienced physical violence in the past. In order to ensure that you meet the requirements for this study, I would like to ask you a few brief questions.

Are you 18 years of age or older?

Are you currently involved in an ongoing heterosexual relationship?

Have you experienced physical violence in your current on-going relationship at least once in the past? If yes, what kinds of behaviours were involved?

When was the last occurrence of physical violence in your relationship?

Appendix C

Letter of Informed Consent

(University of Manitoba, Department of Psychology Letterhead)

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of Study: Beating Violence: Women's Perceptions of Their Relationships Post-violence

Principle Investigator: Judy Kienas, M. A., PhD student, Department of Psychology, University of Manitoba, Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx, E-mail: kienas@cc.umanitoba.ca

Co-Investigator: Dr. Diane Hiebert-Murphy, Associate Dean (Graduate)/Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba, Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx. E-mail: hiebrt@cc.umanitoaba.ca

This consent form, a copy of which will be given for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to contact us. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Judy Kienas is conducting this study as her PhD dissertation, under the supervision of Dr. Hiebert-Murphy. The purpose of this research is to explore how women who have experienced violence in their on-going relationship but who have not experienced any violence within the past 12 months view their relationship in terms of relationship satisfaction. In order to explore this topic, you are asked to participate in an interview focusing on questions about your relationship satisfaction, attributions you may have about the changes in violence you have experienced and how these changes may or may not have impacted your relationship satisfaction. The interview will be audiotaped. You will also be asked to fill out a series of brief questionnaires that ask about your demographic characteristics (such as age, ethnicity and length of your relationship), your relationship satisfaction and the occurrence of various behaviours in your relationship including acts of physical violence. It is estimated that it will take approximately 2 hours to complete the study

Please note that sharing one's story of relationship carries with it the risk of experiencing emotional distress. If you become very distressed during the interview, please note that you may stop participating at any time and/or the researcher may decide to take you off the study for the protection of your welfare. Also, please note that I have provided the phone numbers of counseling resources in Winnipeg in this form. Resources include the Klinic Community Health Centre 24 Hour Crisis Line [(xxx) xxx-xxxx) and Osborne House Crisis Line [(xxx) xxx-xxxx) and I would encourage you to contact these resources if you become extremely distressed at any time after this interview.
There may be some direct benefits to you in terms of having the opportunity to describe to a concerned listener experiences that you may have found distressing. More long-term, you will be contributing to a more informed understanding of women's experiences of relationships post-violence.

Following the interview, I may need to contact you for further information or clarification, which would involve a brief interview of 30 minutes. This contact will be optional and I will ask separately

for your consent to do so. At the end of the project, which will be in fall of 2014, you will have the option of receiving *a* brief summary of the findings. Also, with your consent, I may wish to contact you for future research projects on the experiences of women post-violence, but you are under no obligation to agree to the contacted for this purpose.

You will be given $50.00 to compensate you for your time and any costs associated with participating in the research. You will receive this cash honorarium before the interview begins. If an additional interview is deemed necessary and you choose to participate, you will receive an additional honorarium of $25.

In terms of confidentiality, information gathered in this research study may be published or presented in public forums; however your name and other identifying information will not be used or revealed. Despite efforts to keep your personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality be guaranteed. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. For example, although no questions will be directly asked regarding issues of abuse of children or vulnerable persons (such as persons in care), please note that if you spontaneously report the occurrence of certain offenses against children and vulnerable persons, the law requires that the investigator report these offenses to legal authorities. Other examples include situations in which a participant is judged to be a danger to themselves or others.

Raw data will be identified by subject number only (names will not be used). All identifying information (e.g. places, names, etc.) for the interview will be deleted form the audiotapes and will not be transcribed. Data will be kept in a secure office to which only the research team have access. If stored on a computer, documents related to the research will be password-protected. The information will be kept for 7 years after the completion of all phases of the study and will be destroyed by fall of 2020.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board may review records related to the study for quality assurance purposes.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher from her legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If you agree to each of the following, please place a check mark in the corresponding spot. If you do not agree, leave the spot blank:

I have read or had read to me the details of this consent form. ( )
My questions have been addressed. ( )
I, _____ (print name), agree to participate in this study. ( )
I agree to have the interview audio-recorded. ( )
I agree to be contacted by phone or e-mail if further information is required after the interview ( )
I agree to have the findings (which may include quotations) from this project published or presented in a manner that does not reveal my identity. ( )

I agree to be contacted for future research on temporary migration conducted by the researcher. ( )
Do you wish to receive a summary of the findings? ( ) Yes ( ) No
How do you wish to receive the summary? ( ) E-mail ( ) Surface mail
Do you wish to receive a transcript of the interview? ( ) Yes ( ) No
How do you wish to receive the transcript? ( ) E-mail ( ) Surface mail
Mailing Address: _____
_____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____Date _____

This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethic Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at XXX-XXXX, or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Quality of the relationship

1. To begin with, tell me what things you think are important in order for a woman to be satisfied in her relationship with her partner.
2. Tell me about your relationship, what things do you like about your relationship? What things don't you like about your relationship?
3. What would need to happen in order to increase your satisfaction with your relationship? (Probes include asking about psychological abuse, dominance/isolation behaviours, communication problems, substance abuse issues, etc.)

Attributions about the violence

4. Now I would like to ask you some questions about the past. Why do you think violence occurred in your relationship? (Probes include asking about attributions at an intrapersonal, interpersonal and macro-social level)
5. Tell me what you think made the violence stop.

Impact on the relationship

6. How does the violence you experienced in the past impact how you feel about your relationship now?
7. When you think about the changes in violence you've experienced, how important are those changes to your current level of satisfaction?
8. If no violence had ever occurred, how do you think your relationship might be different now?
9. Thinking about your experiences with relationship violence and knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to other women currently experiencing violence in their relationships?

Closing question

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your relationship?

Follow up question, only if participant endorsed the occurrence of on-going violence in her current relationship after completion of the quantitative measures.

1. I noticed that you reported (list violent behaviours participant endorsed) as happening currently in your relationship. How does the presence of these behaviours fit with your view of your relationship being non-violent?

Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire

The following information is being collected solely for the purpose of describing the characteristics of the group of women participating in this study. Please provide your information and, where applicable, place an "x" next to the corresponding answer in the following categories:

1. Age :
   _____ years.

2. Ethnic Identification (Check all that apply):
   _____ Aboriginal Canadian
   _____ African Canadian
   _____ Asian Canadian
   _____ European Canadian (White)
   _____ Hispanic Canadian
   _____ Other (please specify) _____

4. Household Income per Year:
   _____ Below $15,000/year
   _____ $15,001 – $30,000/year
   _____ $30,001 – $60,000/year
   _____ $60,001 – $90,000/year
   _____ over $90,000/year

5. Check the highest level of education that you have attained.

   _____ less than grade 10
   _____ less than grade 12 or GED
   _____ grade 12 or GED
   _____ some trade school
   _____ some university or college
   _____ completed college
   _____ completed trade school
   _____ completed university, list degree attained _____
   _____ other (please specify) _____

6. Are your currently working?
   _____ no
   _____ yes (please specify how many hours a week and your job title)
   _____
   _____ Other (please specify) _____

The next few questions deal with any disabilities and/or health limitations which affect daily activities. In these questions, 'long-term' conditions refer to conditions that have lasted or are expected to last 6 months or more.

7. Do you have any disabilities and/or long-term illnesses? (e.g. chronic fatigue,

irritable bowel syndrome, depression, cardiovascular disease, hearing loss, post-traumatic stress, addictions issues, etc.)

____ Yes
____ No
____Unsure

8. If yes, what are they?_____
_____
_____

9. Because of a disability and/or a long-term illness, are you limited in the kind or amount of activity you can do?

____ Yes
____ No

I would like to ask you some questions about your sexual orientation and current relationship (please refer to your <u>current relationship only</u> when answering the following questions)…

10. How would you describe your sexual orientation? (Please check only one option)

_____Heterosexual
_____ Bisexual
_____Lesbian
_____Two-Spirit *(term commonly used in aboriginal cultures)*
_____Other_(please explain) _____

11. How long have you been involved in your relationship?

_____ years

12. Which of the following terms best describes your current relationship?

_____ dating but not living together
_____ cohabitating
_____ other (please specify) _____

13. Do you have children?

_____ no
_____ yes (if yes, how many _____, what are the ages of your children_____)

14. Have you and your partner ever separated?

_____ no
_____ yes (please specify how many times) _____

15. When was the last incidence of physical violence in your relationship?

_____ years

16. Have you ever been charged in regards to the violence in your relationship?

_____ no
_____ yes (please specify how many times) _____

17. Has your partner ever been charged in regards to the violence in your relationship?

_____ no
_____ yes (please specify how many times) _____

18. Have you ever stayed at a shelter for abused women?
    _____ no
    _____ yes (please specify how many times) _____

19. Have you ever received counselling services to deal with the violence in your relationship?
    _____ no
    _____ yes (please specify if individual, couple, or both) _____

20. Has your partner ever received counselling services to deal with the violence in your relationship?
    _____ no
    _____ yes (please specify if individual, couple, or both) _____

21. How did you hear about this study?
    _____ poster at an agency
    _____ poster in the community
    _____ word of mouth

Appendix F

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APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

September 16, 2013

TO: **Judy Kienas** (Advisor D. Hiebert-Murphy)
Principal Investigator

FROM: **Brian Barth, Interim Chair**
Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB)

Re: **Protocol #P2013:050**
"Beating Violence: Women's Perceptions of their relationships Post-violence"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2). It is the researcher's responsibility to comply with any copyright requirements. **This approval is valid for one year only**.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:

- **If you have funds pending human ethics approval, please mail/e-mail/fax (261-0325) a copy of this Approval (identifying the related UM Project Number) to the Research Grants Officer in ORS in order to initiate fund setup. (How to find your UM Project Number: http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/mrt-faq.html#pr0)**

- **if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.**

The Research Quality Management Office may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba Ethics of Research Involving Humans.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: http://umanitoba.ca/research/orec/ethics/human_ethics_REB_forms_guidelines.html) **in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.**

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA | Research Ethics and Compliance
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RENEWAL APPROVAL

September 16, 2014

TO: **Judy Kienas**
Principal Investigator

FROM: **Jacquie Vorauer, Chair**
Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (PSREB)

Re: **Protocol #P2013:050**
"Beating Violence Women's Perceptions of their relationships Post-violence"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received approval for renewal by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. **This approval is valid for one year only.**

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.