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ABSTRACT

Current estimates indicate that upwards of 3,000,000 women a year are physically abused by an intimate partner, however, it is important to note that serious limitations associated with these estimates exist. Despite media campaigns, educational efforts, community outreach, and legislation, the majority of intimate partner violence that occurs in the United States continues to go unreported. While there is a vast literature on domestic violence, the focus has been on the experiences and outcomes of younger women. Very few studies have investigated the experiences of older women as survivors of domestic violence who came of age in an era of traditional gender values when men had authority and dominion over women, and there was no public acknowledgement of domestic violence. Little is known about the meaning older women make of their experiences with and beyond domestic violence, or the lifetime effect domestic violence has on women as they age.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the ways in which older women make meaning of their experiences with domestic violence. The intent was to center on and illuminate the lives of older women survivors of domestic violence- the ways that they have come to understand and work through the complicated emotions and relationships in the wake of the abuse, and how they have constructed their identities around the experience. Additionally, I wanted to expose the institutional structures, forces, and “wordless authorities” that worked to subordinate these women and keep them silent.

Life history interviews of 15 older women survivors, aged 60 to 89, were collected and analyzed. Four of the women were Native American and eleven of the women were white. Findings highlight the link between family of origin and individual development, and the influence that the family of origin has on later life values and actions. Several major themes

emerged from the interviews related to the development of self-esteem, the loss of innocence, timing & decision making, divorce stigma, support, intimacy, remorse, and resilience. Race and age-related differences indicated that the younger women were less effected by traditional family values and divorce stigma; women who left their abusers very early in the relationship generally had better physical, psychological, and social outcomes, as did their children; and Native women were quicker to act on the decision to leave, were more focused and successful at restoring balance to their lives, were more forgiving of their partner's, and dwelled less on feelings of remorse or regret. All of the women spoke of the gender restrictions they faced, usually reflecting on 'a different time' to account for their subordination, but they didn't question their scripted roles or responsibilities as women, wives, and mothers. Some of the older women, despite their personal histories of violence and abuse at the hand of their husbands, continue to feel that men should have authority over women in marriage.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN: OLDER WOMEN'S VOICES AND THE ANALYSIS OF MEANING
AMONG SURVIVOR'S OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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DISSERTATION

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Science
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Introduction

In 2003, at age 70, my mother broke her silence. Over coffee, on what would have been her 50th wedding anniversary she turned to me and said, “You know, he was a monster... what he did to me was wrong.” I was surprised by her sudden admission but I nodded, acknowledging that I knew our life with my father was miserable. But when she started to cry, I began to realize that I didn’t know the extent of my mother’s suffering. My mother was a stoic woman. She rarely cried. But now she seemed to be unwinding and breaking down. She was releasing the tight reign she had kept on her emotions over the years. She cried for the physical violence she suffered during her marriage of 28 years, and the emotional and psychological abuse that continued, for an additional 14 years after her divorce, until my father’s death in 1994. Finally, after so many years, she had put words to her suffering and she had named my father as her abuser. When I asked my mother why she never talked about her abuse she seemed exasperated with me. She said things like, “because it was a private matter” and “in those days you just took it” or “you did what you were told and you didn’t talk about it” or “it was a family matter... nobody wanted to hear about it and after a while, I was too ashamed to talk about it”. At age twenty-three, with two young children, my mother once asked her own mother for help to escape my father. My grandmother’s response was “You made your bed, you sleep in it!” Although my mother felt a sense of bitter disappointment and overwhelming abandonment, she also felt my grandmother’s advice was rational and justified. She remained in an abusive relationship for another twenty-four years. My mother once told me that she thought she could bury all of her emotions- her fear and regret, her love and loathing, her anger and disappointment, when she buried my father. She couldn’t.

Impetus

My mother represents a unique segment of women in contemporary American society who transcended two specific social and spatial eras. They were born in the first half of the 20th century when the institutions of God, Freedom, and Family shaped the lives of many Americans, and they have emerged as elders in the beginning of the 21st century when such institutions are regularly scrutinized (Coontz 2000). They have witnessed tremendous shifts from conventional warfare to nuclear warfare, from telephones and electricity to cell phones, computers, and satellites, from economic depressions to global economic booms. They have also been witness to the gradual but favorable progress made in the struggle for gender equality since the height of the women's rights movement in the 1970s (Coontz 2000). Today, most women in the United States (US) have opportunities (i.e. equal access to education, career choices, and choices regarding marriage and procreation) and liberties (i.e. freedom of sexual expression and- for the time being- freedom to control their bodies) that were unimaginable to previous generations of women (Bartky 1990).

While in some instances women continue to occupy a position secondary to that of men (e.g. men continue to hold most positions of power and continue to have a higher wage earning potential), for my mother and most young women in the post war 1940s and 1950s, life was bound by rigid, gender-scripted social codes that revolved around the institution of marriage and family (Oke 2008). At that time, the institution of family was a private and protected entity, crafted by religion, enforced by the state, and controlled by the male head of household (Heinemann 1996; Coontz 2000). Women, like my mother, who were being abused in their intimate relationships were isolated and silenced, literally by their partners and figuratively by society at large.

It is my mother's story, and the stories of women like her, that provides the framework for this study. The purpose of the study is twofold; first, to strengthen the voices of older women survivors of domestic violence by documenting their stories and, second, to expose the various discourses, or "wordless authorities" that worked to silence these women's voices (Smith 1987:19). Specifically, I sought to privilege the voices of women elders and to understand the meaning they found in their lives around, but also beyond, domestic violence. My intent was to explore with these women their experiences across the life course after leaving a violent or abusive relationship. Did their encounter with domestic violence significantly alter the trajectory of their lives? If so, how had they come to understand and make meaning of these changes?

Additionally, I wanted to explore their stories of life during and beyond domestic violence with a critical eye toward the subtle but oppressive powers that further complicated their abuse. Stories of domestic violence often relay the obvious- the visible, personal effects of an abusive, powerful individual- but embedded in these stories are subtle, anonymous, and often invisible abuses of power that are manifest in the form of social practices (Westlund 2006). How did a simple phrase like "you made your bed, you sleep in it" compel women to stay silent? A threat in and of itself, how did it reinforce perceptions of guilt and shame? I was interested in uncovering the other "wordless authorities" embodied in the collective and institutional influences that women of their generation were 'obeying' in addition to their husbands or partners (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule 1986: 27; Smith 1987:19). I was interested in exposing the multiple silences that were/are imposed upon these women in relation to their gendered role in the family and in society. My aim was to examine the ways in which gendered messages were/are created, named, and infused into the culture by the dominant discourses that

cloak male privilege; and the ways in which subjective experience shapes and is shaped by these messages (Smith 1987; Smith 1990; Jones 2004).

My experience with older women is that they are remarkably insightful but they are barely recognized in scholarship, or by the culture at large. By exploring the lives of older women survivors of domestic violence and the ways in which they have constructed their identities and made meaning of their experiences throughout the life course, I hope to provide a greater understanding of the complexity of older women's lives and shed light on the long-term impact of domestic violence, as well as to perhaps provide insight into alternative aging and domestic violence policy and interventions.

In 1950, my mother and other women like her were silent statistics of a private practice that no one spoke about because there was no official language for it. Sixty years later the ideology of patriarchy persists, although subtly cloaked by civil progress, male power positions are maintained, prescribed sex roles endure, and domestic violence is just as prevalent (Oke 2008). Today in the United States (US), we are well versed in domestic violence discourse, but while domestic violence may have gained mainstream exposure it still remains a silent issue. As an intractable social ill, domestic violence, once a 'dirty little secret', is now routinely and graphically portrayed by the media to the point of desensitization (Meyer 2001).

The available statistics on US women who are abused or murdered by their intimate partners are unprecedented. I have worked closely with older women in my professional role as a health care provider and I have worked closely with abused women as an advocate volunteer for a local domestic violence program. I have also witnessed the multiple abuses my mother endured during, and after, her marriage. As a result of these experiences I have become personally committed to non-violence and justice. This study represents my attempt at engaging

in a survivor discourse with wise women in order to shatter the silences surrounding domestic violence.

Significance

Domestic violence within intimate relationships is a serious social problem that impacts the lives of women on a global level. In the US, exact prevalence rates of domestic violence are difficult to estimate for a number of reasons: despite over forty years of advocacy, domestic violence is still under reported; there is no national reporting agency to collect or evaluate statistics supplied by police agencies, hospitals, and shelters; and quantitative research on domestic violence has been plagued with inconsistencies with sampling, operational definitions, and analysis leading to vastly different outcomes in reporting (Kemp 1998; Archer 2000; Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller 1999.)

The majority of qualitative research on women and domestic violence is focused on women in acute crisis (Johnson 2004; Few 2005; Davies, Block, & Campbell 2007; Campbell & Manganello 2006) ; the resiliency of women survivors and/or their children (Humphries 2001; Wagnild & Young 1990; Trinch 2003); or women's experiences with services or providers, e.g. shelters, advocates, judicial or legal system, physicians and health care services, etc. (Trinch 2003; Williams 1998; Johnson 2004; Gerbert, Caspers, Milliken, Berlin, Bronstone, & Moe 2000; Fulmer, Firpo, Guadagno, & Easter 2003; McMahon & Pence 2003; Trautman, McCarthy, Miller, Campbell, & Kelen 2007). While the bulk of domestic violence literature focuses on physical abuse, associated abuses of power and control such as intimidation, forced isolation, and financial exploitation are under-explored (Graham-Kevan & Archer 2003; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Johnston & Campbell, 1993; Leone, Johnson, Cohan, Lloyd 2004). Very few studies investigate the impact of domestic violence on the lives of older women and there is no reliable

data on the lifetime effect of domestic violence on women as they age (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998; Higgins & Follette 2002; Kurtz 2004).

Despite an exhaustive search of social science and aging databases, to date I have been able to find only a few qualitative studies that center on the lives of older women impacted by domestic violence. Judy Wright (2003) interviewed five white women, aged 42 – 69, in a Hospice setting who were either receiving end of life palliative care or who were caring for their terminally ill husbands. These women were in an actively abusive relationship and their narratives focused on the release from the abuse and control of a violent marriage. Winterstein and Eisikovits (2004) interviewed 21 older Israeli women, many of whom were still married, who had experienced battery for a significant portion of their married lives. This study centered solely on these women's experiences with loneliness. Julie McGarry (2010) interviewed 16 women from a clinic population who were between the ages of 59 and 84 on the effect of domestic violence on long term health and emotional wellbeing. Finally, Wolkenstein and Sterman (1998) discussed the epidemiology, nature of disclosure, and subsequent sequelae of prior domestic violence via in-depth case studies of two women in a mental health clinic.

The Study

This study is unique in that it centers on and illuminates the lives of older women survivors of domestic violence. Older women's experiences are not well represented in scholarly literature, and while the field of family violence scholarship is growing, little attention has been paid to the lifetime effects of domestic violence on aging women. I was interested in understanding the complex, untold stories of older women who had left their abusers and survived their experiences with domestic violence. How did this experience shape their identities? How did they understand their lives- retrospectively, as the young women they were,

and currently, as the women they are today? How did they come to make meaning of their lives after an abusive intimate relationship? What forces influenced this understanding and their subsequent life experiences? I was particularly interested in how these women, impacted by the intense stress of an abusive relationship, navigated through the cultural shifts in women's roles within the family and in society at large. How did they understand the advancing status of women's roles and women's rights and how, if at all, were they changed by them? How did they see themselves over time?

This study creates a space in which these women's voices can be heard and their stories documented. The significance of this research is that it examines both the meaning and effect of domestic violence on the lives of older women. This study will add to the existing feminist literature on domestic violence and aging. Additionally, this study may precipitate changes in policy related to domestic violence survivor services and may be helpful to clinicians and advocates working with women in crisis and older women in general.

Other Chapters

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I discuss the experiences of aging women in contemporary, western society and present a summary of family violence, current data on domestic violence, and a review of theories of domestic violence. In Chapter 3, I discuss my research methods. This was a qualitative study involving narrative analysis of the life history interviews of 15 older women ranging in age from 60 to 89 years old. Here, I explain my methodological framework and discuss details related to my research process. Chapter 4 begins the analysis of my research starting with the Early Life narratives which includes recollections of the family of origin, exposures to violence and abuse, and the impact of self-esteem. Chapter 5 focuses on the Marital Transition and the women's experiences with abuse and violence, as well

as the actions they took to manage or escape their abuse. Chapter 6, the Life After narratives, explores the complex emotions the women experienced once they were free of their abusive partner and began to establish themselves as independent women. It also explores the meaning these women make of the experiences with and beyond domestic violence. Chapter 7 concludes with a discussion of findings, strengths and limitations of the study, and avenues for action and further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The Experiences of Older Women

The federal criminalization of domestic violence in the US, when reported, has only been in existence since the Violence Against Women Act of 1994. Prior to that time, there was no cohesive protection for battered and abused women, in part because of the cohort values of mid-century America. These attitudes included the subservience of women in marriage and society, tolerance for violence to keep women and children in line, and the sanctity of family privacy that vehemently discouraged the ‘airing of dirty laundry’ (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998). Since the 1970s, most studies on domestic violence have focused on young women, and there is virtually no literature on the rates or frequency of abuse reported by older women before the late 1980s (McDowell & Raymond 1988; McGarry 2010). Wolkenstein and Sterman (1998) suggest that “estimates for older women, whose marriages began approximately 40-60 years ago, might be expected to be higher than rates in younger women.” (341).

Older women are a largely ignored population, even in feminist research and literature (Macdonald 1985; Arber 2003). Older women are, at a minimum, doubly stigmatized in US society- first, because they are women and secondly, because they are old. Ageism is often seen as an extension of patriarchy (Macdonald 1985; Arber 2003). When not invisible, popular media depictions of older women range from irritable to infantilized (Jhally 1991). They are often stereotyped, patronized, and seen as targets for exploitation (Cantor & Brennan 2000; Macdonald 1985; Archer 2003). As they age, many older women will face economic oppression, witness the deaths of their contemporaries, lose their partners, and some will become socially or physically isolated (Wagnild & Young 1990; Gibson 2000). Yet despite these realities of aging, many older

women are leading vibrant, engaged, and independent lives. Older women report increased happiness, meaning, and satisfaction with their later lives, and fewer negative emotions related to aging and loss (Cantor & Brennan 2000; Wagnild & Young 1990).

Fifteen older women participated in this study; eleven women were white, four were Native American. The majority of women were in their seventh and eighth decades of life when we met. The life course for women in this age range is quite distinctive. These women were part of the Depression era cohort, who gave birth to the Baby Boomers in the 1950s and 1960s, and who were approaching midlife, with strongly established value systems intact, during the 1960s and 70s and the peak of the Women's Rights and Shelter movements (Coontz 2000; Easterlin 2005). Gender roles for Depression era women were shaped by the social structure of the period but also by the intersectionality of race, class, ability, and sexual orientation. Therefore, the institution of 'family' held different meaning for different women.

Women, Work, and Family

For women growing up under impoverished, post-Depression era conditions, the values of hard work, friendship ties, and family and community obligation were emphasized, while the standards for what constituted a good life were quite low (Easterlin, 2005). However, disparities existed in both the public and private sectors for poor women and women of color. While white, middle class women reaped the benefits of the booming economy of the 1950s, many of them did not work in the paid labor market once they had children. They retired to the private sector of the home while their husbands 'brought home the bacon'. For most working class or poor women, many of whom were women of color, the luxury of leaving the work force to start a family was not an option; for these women there was no duality between public and private work (Hill Collins 1998). Additionally, poor women and women of color also had to endure the

humiliating, paternalistic policies of the Federal government related to poverty and segregation (Wilkinson 2006).

The standard of living that young, white middle class women attained in the 1950s was far better than they could have hoped for, having grown up during the poor, post-Depression years (Collins 2009; Coontz 2000). Their relative income was quite high compared to standards developed during their formative years. Also during the early post-war 1950s, there was a national sense of pride, security and rejuvenation. Consequently, white, middle class Depression-era women married young, often while still in the teens, and went on to have many children during the 1950s and 1960s, in contrast to the *Greatest Generation* cohort of the 1910-20s and the *Baby Boomer* cohort of the 1950-60s. Depression era cohort white, women married into what feminist Stephanie Coontz (2000) refers to as “the 1950s family experiment” (47). The demographic changes occurring after World War II resulted in an unprecedented increase in early marriage, a boom in birthrates, and a decline in divorce rates. Gender roles and family life in the post war 1950s were unusually scripted, orderly, and predictable. Girls became women seemingly overnight- having moved from their parents’ home to their husbands’ home, often without ever experiencing independent living (Collins 2009). Despite the unusual historical events that shaped the decade of the 1950s, the myth that it produced of the Standard North American Family- that being a middle class, suburban, nuclear family of male, bread-winner and female, homemaker, became immortalized and reified as the gold standard of moral family life for all Americans (Smith 1993; Coontz 2000; Easterly & Gantz 2001).

Most of the women I interviewed were approaching middle age, well into their 30s and 40s, when the cultural revolution of the mid-20th century was taking place. But some of the younger women I interviewed were still in their 20s and just beginning to have children in the

mid 1960s. All of these women witnessed challenges to the political and social status quo that privileged white, male authority and dominance. Led by the Black civil rights movement that began in the 1950s, the quest for basic human rights spread quickly among previously marginalized groups paving the way for the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s i.e.: the United Farm Workers Movement, the Women's Movement, and the Stonewall Riots, and the American Indian Movement. By the 1970s the social script that favored white male patriarchy was being radically re-written. Traditional gender roles were shifting; more women were obtaining college degrees and establishing careers in the workforce. Women were beginning to postpone marriage, pregnancy, and child-rearing. Cohabitation and divorce rates were on the rise but so was women's participation in corporate and legislative activity (Miller 2002).

Despite evidence of social progress in the last fifty years, all older women aging into the 21st century continue to suffer gender oppression. Private and public policies of mid-20th century America en/forced women's dependency on men through marriage, and while some women benefitted, at least initially, others did not (Estes 2004). Poor and working class women, women of color, and single women were not afforded the luxury of "the stay at home mom" status and would not reap the financial benefits of the middle class marriage (Allen & Walker 2009). Women who had to work faced a gender gap in pay and retirement benefits (Estes 2004; Harrington Meyer & Herd 2007). Additionally, cumulative wage gaps existed for women who left the work force because of family responsibilities (Harrington Meyer & Herd 2007). Women of color and single women with children often worked at low wage jobs, with little or no pension and fewer retirement benefits; and unmarried women or women with brief marriages were ineligible to receive spousal Social Security or widow benefits (Harrington Meyer & Herd 2007; Estes 2004). Because of the "gendered policy of the private and public sectors", the majority of

aging women experience a significantly reduced retirement income and an increased dependency on the state (Estes 2004:10; Harrington Meyer & Herd 2007). Currently, the financial well being of women as they age is a significant cause for concern because older women are twice as likely to be poor compared to older men, and they are more likely to live longer than men (Harrington Meyer & Herd 2007).

Family Privacy

For many Americans, the family is a sacred institution and the right to family privacy is vehemently protected. Violence in the home is considered a private, family matter, that is literally and figuratively hidden behind a closed door (Gelles 1990). Because access to the institution of family is restricted by the rule of privacy, behaviors executed within the confines of the family home are not open to social scrutiny and control (Laslett 1973). That being so, pathologic behaviors such as domestic violence, incest, and child abuse typically occur unchallenged and uninhibited.

The great irony of family violence is the oppressive silence that envelopes it. Physical acts of violence are never quiet, and often the visible marks of violence scream for attention. But social stigma of family violence and our peculiar respect for family privacy render many people mute. Family violence is rarely acknowledged, even when a family is in acute crisis. Many people who witness violence are reluctant to report for fear of impinging on another's privacy, of not wanting to get involved, and fear of reprisal (Barnett, Miller-Perrin, & Perrin 2005:8). Since the criminalization of domestic violence was enacted, problems with enforcement have emerged that warrant investigation and intervention at many points. Continuously low reporting levels, police and judicial indifference, and a pattern of victim blaming suggest that many people, including some victims, continue to see domestic violence as a private matter (Kemp 1998).

Older women, like the women in this study, were socialized during an era in which certain beliefs- that family matters stay private, that wives are subservient to their husbands, and that leaving a marriage for any reason is unacceptable- were strongly held (Fisher et al. 2003). These beliefs were constructed from the standpoint of male privilege and they effectively silenced women who were in abusive relationships. There was absolutely no societal support for women who were victims of domestic violence. An abused woman had to consider many things if she wanted to leave her abuser. Leaving would threaten her social and economic status in most cases. Not only did she face stigmatization by friends, family, and church, leaving would also likely mean a significant drop in socioeconomic status, possibly losing her home, losing insurance coverage, losing retirement benefits, and in many cases losing her children (Rennison & Rand 2003).

Domestic Violence

According to Amnesty International, “violence against women is one of the most pervasive human rights abuses” (www.amnesty.org). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Justice current estimates indicate that upwards of 3 million women a year in the US are physically abused by an intimate partner, however, it is important to highlight the limitations associated with these estimates and quantitative research on domestic violence in general (Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence, July 2000). To date there are no uniform mandated reporting laws for domestic violence that would allow researchers to document the true extent of the problem. The data that *is* officially reported is collected from police records or emergency rooms and represent the experiences of particular women, usually women of low socioeconomic status or women of color. Additionally, survey data collected on women in regard to domestic violence has been plagued with

inconsistencies in concept definitions and measures (Strauss & Gelles 1990; Kemp 1998; Langhinrichsen 2005) ¹

Origin of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is not a new phenomenon. References to the practices or effects of intimate partner violence are found in century's old historical writings, establishing and reinforcing female gender oppression in both state and religious practices. Under the Roman Laws of Chastisement from 753 BC, a man could beat his wife if her behaviors posed a threat to his good standing. By 300 AD, Roman and Jewish patriarchal values had been usurped by the Christian Church to cement a husband's authority over his wife. The notion that a woman must be ruled over by a man, first her father, then her husband, has permeated to present day (Herstory of Domestic violence: A Timeline of the Battered Women's Movement by SafeNETWORK, posted through the Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse, Sept.1999, Web 13 Apr. 2009).

The first western scientific reference to the behaviors associated with the phenomenon of "wife beating" appears in the Archives of General Psychology (1964) where the authors (white, male psychiatrists) suggest that battered wives have a seemingly masochistic need that is only satisfied by their husband's aggression and violence (Schechter 1982; Gelles 1980; Snell, Rosenwald & Robey 1964). The issue of 'wife beating' was taken up by the Women's Movement in the late 1960s and the term 'domestic violence' was coined by feminists in the late 1970s to

¹ Feminist scholars are critical of large-scale surveys to research domestic violence arguing that these methods ignore the context in which violence occurs and thus the issues of gender and power (Johnson, 1995). Additionally, feminists contend that national survey data are biased by under-reporting male violence as a result of social desirability and by proposing gender neutral concepts and definitions of violence (Anderson 1997; Langhinrichsen, 2005). A consequence of the publication of findings from large-scale surveys on domestic violence is a neutralization of violence and a co-opting of survivor discourse resulting in the de-politicization of domestic violence (Berns 2001; Alcoff & Gray 1993).

capture the complex and multiple manifestations of violence and manipulation that women endured in their intimate relationships within the private confines of the family and under a system of patriarchy (Smith 1987; Kemp 1998; Schechter & Ganley 1995).

Since the 1970s, domestic violence literature has grown exponentially. Current data on domestic violence represents what family violence researchers refer to as ‘the tip of the iceberg’, as the vast majority of domestic violence goes unreported, even today (Gelles 1990). The silence surrounding family violence, and domestic violence in particular, has been attributed to three factors: lack of awareness, general acceptance, and denial (Stauss & Gelles 1980). For many Americans, the ‘family’ is a sacred institution and the right to family privacy is vehemently protected. Despite political and legislative action to counter family violence, violence in the home continues, sanctioned as a private matter that is literally and figuratively hidden behind a closed door (Gelles 1990).

Definition & Statistics

Domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, is an umbrella term that defines patterns of systematic control in which an individual uses coercive and abusive behaviors including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks, emotional threats and intimidation, forced isolation, and/or economic exploitation against an intimate partner (Family Violence Prevention Fund 2011). Intimate partners are described as current or former spouses, same sex partners, or dating partners. Domestic violence occurs on a continuum that can differ in frequency and severity. The type or pattern of domestic violence can change over the duration of a relationship; commonly aggressive physical or sexual violence will give way to more verbal, emotional or psychological abuse as the relationship continues. Domestic violence may range from a single slap (that may or may not impact the victim) to chronic, severe battering, or from verbal taunting and humiliation

to severe psychological torture (Coker et al. 2000). What distinguishes an abusive relationship is an ongoing pattern of disproportionate power, control, and coercion. The fight is not between people of equal power, but occurs within a relationship in which there is an imbalance of power and the use of abusive control tactics by one party (Coker et al. 2000). Contrary to popular belief and many legal defenses, no causal relationship has ever been established between domestic violence and stress, mental illness, alcohol, or drugs. Simply speaking, violence is caused by the abuser's choice to act violently (Strauss & Gelles 1990).

In the US, the majority of victims of domestic violence are women (Tjaden & Thoennes 2000). All women are at risk for domestic violence, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, age or ability (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2003). Some studies suggest that women with an annual income of less than \$25,000 (who are predominantly women of color) are at 3 times greater risk of intimate partner violence. It must be noted that these studies report on data collected by police agencies and emergency rooms. Women with fewer economic resources are more likely to be reported for incidents of violence to the police and are more likely to seek care in emergency rooms where the incident of abuse is documented, thus their numbers are over-represented in surveillance statistics (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2006; US Public Health Reports 2003). Campbell, et al. (2000) notes that "the theories currently used in domestic violence practice and research generally are one-dimensional in nature and applied uniformly across cultural groups...overall, the applicability of these theories remains uncertain" (5). Middle class and wealthy women also suffer violence and abuse in their intimate relationships but are much less likely to disclose this information or to have a violent domestic event reported by a neighbor (US Public Health Reports 2003). In the 2011 Annual Report of the New York City Domestic violence Fatality Review Committee, 57% of the 458 victims of domestic homicide had a

median household income of \$0 to 45,861.00, while 43% had lived with a household income of between \$48,862.00 and 104,305.00.

One out of four American women will have experienced domestic violence in their lifetimes and nearly 75% of Americans personally know someone who was or is a victim of domestic violence (Family Violence Prevention Fund, Oct. 1996). Younger women, between the ages of 20-24, are at greatest risk of non-fatal violence in an intimate relationship and women who are separated or divorced are at greater risk of non-fatal intimate partner violence and intimidation (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Intimate Partner Violence in the US 1993-2004, 2006). On average, three women are murdered by their intimate partners each day in the US and intimate partner homicides account for 30% of murders of women annually (Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, February 2003; Bureau of Justice Statistics 2006).

Native Women & Domestic Violence

The vast majority of data collected on domestic violence, largely generated by police reports and emergency room records, promotes an impression that only poor women and women of color are abused. Most of the women of color represented by these data are African American or Hispanic. There is limited data on the rates and relevance of domestic violence affecting Native American women (Halinka-Malcoe, Duran, & Montgomery 2004) and caution must be exercised when interpreting this data. Much of the existing data on Native women typically represents women of a specific region or tribal affiliation, and thus is not representative of all Native women. Despite this limitation, the sparse data that is reported is often generalized to imply totality (Halinka-Malcoe, Duran, & Montgomery 2004; Hamby S. 2000; Bachman, R. 1992; Norton & Manson, 1995).

In fact, there is no comprehensive data on the incidence and extent of domestic violence on Native women because no tribal jurisdiction, Indian agency, or federal organization collects this data systematically (Halinka-Malcoe, Duran, & Montgomery 2004; US Department of Justice 2008; Hart & Lowther 2008). Native women are as diverse as women of other racial populations, are as vulnerable to domestic violence, and for a variety of reasons, are as unlikely to report it. For Native women, abuse and violence occurs whether they are rich or poor, educated or uneducated, living on or off the reservation, partnered with a Native man or a non-Native man, or are sober or are substance abusers. However, according to federal studies by the CDC and US Department of Justice, it is suggested that Native women living on reservations suffer domestic violence and physical assaults at rates that exceed women of other races and ethnicities. Thirty-nine percent of Native women reported a lifetime prevalence of domestic violence victimization, and 70% of the violent victimizations experienced by Native Americans are committed by non-Native people (US Department of Justice 2008; Black & Breiding 2008; Hart & Lowther 2008).

Impact of Domestic Violence

In 2003, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were commissioned by Congress to study the scope and occurrence of domestic violence related injuries and their associated costs to the healthcare system. Despite limitations with data collection, estimates of domestic violence victimization among women over 18 totaled 5.3 million annually, resulting in roughly 2 million injuries; 550,000 of which required medical attention. Abused women lost a total of nearly 8 million days work productivity and 5.6 million days of lost domestic productivity. Costs associated with intimate partner rape, physical assault, and stalking exceeded \$5.8 billion each year. The total costs of domestic violence also include nearly \$0.9 billion in lost productivity

from paid work and household work for victims of nonfatal domestic violence and \$0.9 billion in lifetime earnings lost by victims of domestic violence homicide (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003). These statistics do not account for the lifetime physical and psychological effects of domestic violence which include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse, chronic mental illness, obesity, and reports of general poor health (Campbell et al. 2002; Coker et al. 2002).

Issues with Terminology

In this study I purposefully chose to preference the term domestic violence over intimate partner violence during the interview process. This decision may speak to the controversies in defining domestic violence as the terminology is ever changing. The average age of the participants in this study was 69 years old. Many of these women, had they disclosed their abuse when it was occurring in the 1950s and 1960s, would have been labeled as ‘battered women’ which was the first descriptor used from the 1960s to the late 1970s to identify women in violent and abusive relationships (Hanson-Frieze 2008). The term ‘domestic violence’ began being used by women’s advocates in the 1970s and 1980s to emphasize the risk to women within their own family home and it eventually replaced the word ‘battery’ (Kelly & Johnson 2008). The term intimate partner violence gained favor in the 1990s because it acknowledged a broader definition of violence beyond the confines of marital domesticity and heterosexuality (Archer 2000). Subsequently, in more recent scholarship, terms such as common couple violence, coercive controlling violence, patriarchal terrorism and psychological terrorism are being used to conceptualize, define, and differentiate types of violence that occurs between intimate couples (Kelly & Johnson 2008; Johnson 1995).

In my early interviews I found myself struggling with terminology, using battered women, domestic violence, and intimate partner violence interchangeably and I could see that this was somewhat confusing to the participants. I then began asking each woman I interviewed what term they were most comfortable or familiar with and most of the women chose the term domestic violence to describe the abuse they had encountered during their marital relationship. Additionally, once we agreed on this terminology, and to avoid issues of concept and definition confusion, I was careful to clearly explain that in using the term domestic violence we were referring to “a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors that may include inflicted physical injury, psychological abuse, sexual assault, progressive social isolation, stalking, deprivation, intimidation and threats” (Family Violence Prevention Fund 1999).²

The other issue of terminology pertains to the use of the words victim and survivor. Many women who have experienced domestic violence do not identify with the word victim, they see themselves as survivors. However, from a legal and scholarly standpoint, as domestic violence is now considered a criminal offense, two actors must be considered; the perpetrator (which literally translates from Latin as ‘*to bring about from father*’) who is responsible for committing the act upon the victim; and the victim who is harmed, made to suffer, or destroyed. In this study, references to the word victim, although infrequent, were used to connote the abuse or violence inflicted upon a woman by her husband or boyfriend. None of the women in this study referred to themselves as victims, however many used the terms survived or survivor to describe themselves as they reflected on their experiences with abuse and violence.

² I adopted the Family Violence Prevention Fund definition of domestic violence as it is the most comprehensive and widely cited definition to date.

Early Problems with Domestic Violence Research

Women are not exclusively victims of intimate partner violence. A surprising finding revealed by the first National Family Violence Survey (Straus & Gelles 1990) in 1975 indicated that the rates of acts of intimate violence perpetrated by women were as high as or higher than rates of intimate acts of violence perpetrated by men (Straus & Gelles 1990; Archer 2000). These findings were replicated in many early studies that compared women's and men's reports of violence (Archer 2000). Much controversy erupted in the field of family violence research as a result of these findings. Sprague (2005) points out that the original Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), a widely used measure of involvement in domestic violence, was constructed from the standpoint of men and contains several methodological flaws. Measures in the CTS did not differentiate acts of primary aggression from acts of self-defense. Additionally, results from the CTS failed to clarify the significant differences in the types of violence- with male violence more likely to be lethal and men more likely to force sex, and women more likely to scratch, slap, or hit.³ (Sprague 2005; Flood 1999). Many family violence researchers recognized that conceptual definitions of abuse and violence needed to be refined and that measures of domestic violence needed to be contextualized to ensure gender sensitivity- for example, the impact of violence, measure of fear, impact of injury, and motivation for violent acts should be qualified based on gender (Langhinrichsen 2005). Others, however, particularly men's rights activists and father's rights activists, have misrepresented the data to justify their position that women are equally engaged in partner assault (Anderson 2007; Straus 2005; Messner 1998).

³ Major critiques of the CTS demonstrate that the most common types of male perpetrated violence against women- sexual assault, choking, suffocation, and stalking, were not included in the original CTS. Also, the context surrounding violence, for example violence acts in self-defense or violence patterns, were not measured. Additionally, the CTS only measured violence between couples but failed to capture violence committed after the couple had separated, which is when the vast majority of attacks are likely to occur. Finally, the most extreme form of domestic violence, murder, could not be analyzed as the CTS is a self-report scale (Sprague 2005).

Current national and international surveys of domestic violence demonstrate that while women may perpetrate intimate partner violence at equal rates as men, the motivation for violence, the force of violence, and the rates of fatal and non-fatal injury differ significantly between men and women (Anderson 2007; Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2005). Women consistently suffer disproportional rates of physical, sexual, and psychological trauma and homicide. (Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2005; Saltzman, Fanslower, McMahon, Shelley 2002).

The CTS remains one of the most widely used domestic violence surveys, and although revised in response to criticism, it fails to capture the most egregious acts of domination such as coercion, economic control, and social isolation that are commonly found in “regimes of terror and subordination in the home” (Sprague 2005:87). While the body of domestic violence research continues to improve and, our understanding of domestic violence expands, virtually no attention has been paid to experiences of older women who have survived violent or abusive relationships.

Competing Frameworks

Since Gelles & Straus (1979) first reported on family violence, two major theoretical frameworks for understanding domestic violence have emerged; the family violence approach led by family conflict theorists (including Straus & Gelles), and the gender inequality approach led by feminist theorists (Dobash & Dobash 1992; Umberson, Anderson, Williams, & Chen 2003; White 2009; Johnson 1995). Family conflict theory argued that gender symmetry exists in domestic violence because no sex differences in the percentages of women and men who report engaging in partner violence (called mutual combat) have been found in large scale surveys (White 2009; Straus 2008). This perspective argues that gender norms are theoretically

insignificant and other social factors that contribute to domestic violence are of equal or greater importance and require further investigation (Straus 2008).

Some family violence researchers posit that dominance, devoid of gender, is the core of violence (Straus 2008), while others argue that it is the stress related to poverty and racial-ethnic inequality, combined with socio-cultural norms that sanction family privacy and legitimize family violence that fosters domestic violence among men and women (Gelles 1993). Various structural theories of domestic violence have been promoted by family violence scholars. Researchers have used Bandura's social learning theory to suggest that aggression is learned by observing the behavior of others (Bandura 1977; Foshee, Bauman, Linder 1999). Others have focused on attachment theory as a contributing factor in abusive relationships inferring that poor maternal attachment during infancy leads to excessive interpersonal dependency, a trait often found among male batterers (Dutton 1995; Bowlby 1980; Buttell, Muldoon, & Carney 2005). More recent attention has been paid to stress theory which posits that perceived stressors, combined with insufficient or inadequate resources with which to meet the stressors, results in a crisis state. In other words, male perpetrated violence against women can be seen as a build-up of stressors that are associated with a perceived overwhelming demand on resources, resulting in abusive acts (Litton Fox, Benson, DeMaris, & Van Wyk 2002).

Feminist Theory and Domestic Violence

In contrast, feminist scholars contend that issues of gender inequality and power are the ultimate root of intimate violence (Dobash & Dobash 1979; Yllo 1993; Anderson 2007). Feminist insight on gender reveals the power structures that exist around and within race, class, and sexuality (Oke 2008). Feminist theory of domestic violence focuses on the role of patriarchy

and principles of social learning theory to explain how socio-cultural values are transmitted and incorporated through gender (Walter 1984; Yllo 1993; White 2009).

Gender is a multifaceted and dynamic process that is socially constructed and continuously reinforced by “perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine or feminine ‘natures’” (Eagly, Beall & Sternberg 2004:380). The construct of gender is embodied by language and performance in a continuous exchange of communication, interpretation, and a “situated understanding lodged within webs of assumptions” that shift over time and place (Eagly, Beall & Sternberg 2004: 201). Gendered concepts and meaning of femininity and masculinity may vary among racial and ethnic groups and social classes, however, in most societies males appropriate the most power and privilege (Yllo 1993; Anderson 2007). As such, women work to attain social power from a subordinate position within the construct of male dominated society (Oke 2008).

Feminist theorists argue that domestic violence is a system of control embedded in gender inequality and in the historical construction of the family as a site of male dominance (Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Umberson, Anderson, Williams, & Chen 2003). As a system of gender oppression, domestic violence is perpetrated primarily by men, and all men are equally capable of perpetrating acts of intimate partner violence, regardless of socio-economic or racial-ethnic status (Dutton 1995; Renzetti, Edleson, & Bergen 2001).

Patriarchy

The silencing of the “Other” is the hallmark of patriarchy- a system where white, heterosexual, educated, and able bodied men are privileged, or have power over “Other” marginalized groups, i.e., women, people of color, homosexuals, the poor, the disabled, the aged, etc.(Smith 1987) The hegemony of patriarchy infiltrates our individual, collective, and

institutional behaviors. Indeed, it is the male experience that has defined human experience (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule 1986; Smith 1987). Historically, in most societies, men have manipulated both religious doctrine and the state to claim a hierarchical position over women and, to maintain their power, have “systematically and consciously” silenced women’s voices and restricted their status to domesticities, effectively marginalizing women to passive complacency (Smith 1987:25). It is from this male standpoint that the dominant discourse on social relations, or the “relations of ruling”, is known (Smith 1987:3). Men, as “rulers” have organized power, infusing their rhetoric and desires into women’s everyday lives. The “natural gender order”- a hegemonic discourse espoused by men to privilege their rights over the social and economic rights of women has efficiently evolved into an institutional practice (Dobash & Dobash 1979). A repercussion of the ‘natural gender order’ is the promotion of the use of violence against women as a means of achieving and maintaining male power (Kemp 1998), and within this discourse were furtive messages to women that violence was natural and normal part of an intimate relationship.

Theoretical Framework for Study

I was interested in understanding the ways that older women survivors of domestic violence have navigated and negotiated through their life courses. When I began this project I had many questions. How, if at all, had women’s experience with domestic violence affected the typical life transitions into motherhood, child rearing, care giving, the work force, retirement, etc.? How had it affected their health and well being, their socioeconomic status, and personal relationships? How did these particular older women make meaning of their lives? How did they construct *themselves*; their identity and subjectivity? How did they understand themselves as women today, compared to the women they were in their youth? How did/do they understand

themselves as targets of violence in their intimate relationships? How did/do they understand their perpetrators? How did they understand themselves as survivors, if they accept the label of survivor at all? To explore these issues I incorporated a theoretical framework that incorporates Life Course perspective as a platform for understanding historical influences on gender and the impact of domestic violence over time, and Feminist perspectives on patriarchy and gender as lenses from which to view women and domestic violence.

Life Course Perspective

As older women, the life course of participants in this study was extensive and full of experiences, both common and unique, that helped form their identities. The Life Course Perspective, as a framework, is concerned with the intersection of time, place, and events as they shape human development. A major proposition of the Life Course Perspective considers how the experiences of an individual's past, such as a life impacted by domestic violence, are linked to the present and how they, in turn, influence future paths. These experiences, both anticipated and unanticipated, represent turning points that can have negative or positive effects on future life course trajectories (Setterson 2003). Complementing the Life Course Perspective is the concept of cumulative advantage and disadvantage and the ways that certain biological (gender, race, weight, health, perceived attractiveness, etc) and socioeconomic (wealth, education, perceived status, etc.) markers promote or restrain opportunity and contribute to inequality across the life course (Ferraro & Kelley-Moore 2003; Dannefer 2003). The experience of domestic violence is associated with several pathological outcomes including chronic maladies, obesity, substance abuse, PTSD, and depression, as well as poverty, homelessness, and dependency on the state (Allen, Bybee & Sullivan 2004; Campbell et al. 2002; Clark & Foy 2000). The question

is, how did their exposure to domestic violence, combined with other potential advantageous or disadvantageous markers, impact the life course of the women in this study, if at all?

The phenomenon of domestic violence does not occur as a single static event, it occurs as a *process* of violence over time (Williams 2003). It fluctuates, sometimes subtly and sometimes explosively. Domestic violence, like other forms of family violence, is deeply embedded in a web of family relationships and behaviors. To understand the consequences of experiencing or witnessing family violence, it is important to understand that these events can be chronic- with each violent episode building upon past violent episodes or threats. The complexity of family violence cannot be understood by simply examining a single or isolated event, or without consideration of the occurrence of other types of abuse (Williams 2003). A critique of family violence research is that researchers typically study family violence in segments, e.g., child abuse, or domestic violence, or elder abuse; which does not necessarily provide a complete picture of the problem (Williams 2003). Life Course Perspective offers researchers an opportunity to study and unite the various segments of family violence and to capture the multiple dimensions of this experience. Life Course Perspective allows for a broader conceptualization of the problem of family violence in general and it illuminates the ways in which violence influences the developmental trajectories and associated health and socioeconomic outcomes of the individual and the family (Williams 2003; O’Rand 1996)

Feminism

My second theoretical influence is Feminism which is concerned with the social, political, and economic equality of women and men. There are various feminisms, each offering differing critical analyses, but they are linked by the shared acknowledgement of the oppression of women (Jones 2004). Indeed, as Scott (1999:25) argues, “If the group or category ‘women’ is

to be investigated, then gender- the multiple and contradictory meanings attributed to sexual difference- is an important analytical tool.” Post-modern Feminists consider the individual subject/self as a multifarious being, rather than an essential or single identity. The subject/self is ever evolving, in a “continuous state of construction and reconstruction” (Hatty 2000:27). Weedon (1997:33) posits that subjects and forms of subjectivity are “produced historically and change with shifts in the wide range of discursive fields which constitute them.” Discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”, thus discourse can be analyzed as a particular language (Foucault 1995:49).

By linking Life Course Perspective’s socio-historical location and Post-modern Feminisms concepts of subject and discourse I am provided an alternative lens from which to explore gender and domestic violence. In this study, I use patriarchy as the central catalyst for understanding gendered violence. Patriarchy is cited at the root of gendered identity (Frug 1992). According to feminist Dorothy Smith (1987), the unchallenged authority of men has forged the formation of gender roles in society. It is the male experience that has essentially defined human experience (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule 1986: Smith 1987). My intent for part of this study was to interrogate the multiple, competing discourses of gender and subjugation of older women in US culture as a means of understanding the overt and subtle influences on identity construction. My aim was to expose the various competing discourses that older women draw or have drawn upon to construct their identities, including the meaning they made of their experiences in violent and abusive relationships.

In developing a framework for this study I was pressed to articulate a rational linking of Standpoint Theory and Post-modern Feminist perspective on gender. I use Standpoint Theory because I am interested in the ways that gender works to oppress women, particularly in the

patriarchal family structure. I understand the postmodern critique of the fluidity of gender, of the prediscursive, contestable construct *woman*, and that both women and men are as capable of violence as they are of nurturing. But I also know (based on my experience and situated location as a white, middle aged, middle class, lesbian, survivor of family violence) that, historically, power has been appropriated and manipulated by men to oppress women and subordinate other people or groups. In regard to domestic violence, I know that while power operates in all individuals, men exercise disproportionate power/force to keep women under control.

I do believe there is a slow but progressive shift away from masculinist domination and this is where I think older women's ways of knowing/ knowledge is most important. Standpoint theory posits that knowledge is constructed in the interests of, and from the specific social/cultural/historical location of its producer- as locations shift, so does the knowledge produced. For example, women in their 70s have direct, tangible, *lived* experience with cultural shifts ranging from the depression era, through the post war era of the 1950s, through the sexual and cultural revolution of the 1960s, on into the new millennium. What did they see? How did they make sense of these things? From their standpoint as women who lived through a half century of gender abuse/domination, what knowledge do they have and what can I/we learn from them? In the process of self-formation, a person is an active agent continuously creating / recreating herself thru discourse ("practices that systematically form the object of which they speak" (Foucault 1995:49). I am interested in the ways women have been influenced by gender discourses and how they recreate themselves over time as discourses change? I am also interested in the identities they have developed post-abuse. Did they (or not) identify themselves as victims of abuse then and do they see themselves as survivors now?

Chapter 3

Methods & Procedures

“Such tacit knowing, of course, becomes a knowledge only at that point when it is entered into the language game of experience, that is, in the course of telling.”
Dorothy Smith 1997 p.395

My interest in Family Violence research is solidly rooted in my experiences growing up in a violent family. Although we may have been perceived as a ‘typical’ working class family, behind closed doors my father’s relentless persecution of my mother and his children was criminal to say the least. And yet as we sat, tallest to smallest, on the hard, wooden pew every Sunday for Mass, we were the envy of the working class Irish Catholic community I grew up in. My father was a “good provider”, and my mother was a “good homemaker”, and all five of us siblings, we were “good kids”. As a young child, I became aware of the disconnect in my family life in front of and behind closed doors, and learned early on that the safest place to be was ‘outside’.

In college, after years of personal observation, I spent time exploring different aspects of family violence and began working as a Domestic Violence Advocate. In my professional life, I counseled individuals and families about the complexities of violence, abuse, and neglect during each stage of the family life cycle. Initially I was quite zealous about my work around family violence but over time, the distance between my personal experiences with violence and abuse had lengthened and the healing process had matured satisfactorily. By the time I was in my mid40s, I was a doctoral student in search of a research focus. Although I was still deeply devoted to family violence prevention and advocacy, I had come to a point of complacency. I didn’t think I had the energy or the passion to pursue a dissertation on an interesting, but potentially depressing topic.

Then one day, when my mother was 70, she decided that she wanted to talk about her life with my father. My mother was well aware of my work within the domestic violence community, and I was well aware of the abuses she suffered at the hands of my father- but we never really *talked* about it. This was a totally spontaneous act over coffee. I don't know what triggered it, but I sat fixated as my mother expunged herself of decade's worth of anger, shame, and guilt. As I watched, each shift in emotion transformed her features. And as each emotion raged, I felt them with her. For a few hours I watched and listened to my mother tell a story I thought I knew. There was an air of familiarity to this story but it wasn't my story, the story I had constructed for myself. This was my mother's story, and the nuances and detail she provided for her now adult daughter were from her standpoint, her experiences. This was a totally different story and it cast my mother in a light I had never seen before. My mother's story, or testimony as she called it, became a turning point in our adult relationship. In my own taken for granted world I had never considered my mother as anything but my mother. What I was left with was a more complete understanding of her as a whole, complex being- woman, wife, mother, worker, fixer, friend, and among many other things, survivor.

I tell this story because it locates myself within my research. According to Riessman (1993:v), "The construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it". It is this single experience with my mother, sitting in her kitchen sipping coffee, that not only renewed my interest in domestic violence, but it opened my eyes to a segment of the population I had previously never considered, older women. I knew many older women but I never deliberately reflected on what it might mean to be an older women. Who are older women and what do they think about? How do they feel? What's important to them now that they have a lifetime of experiences on which to ruminate? I also knew that there were more women like my

mother who had survived the experience of domestic violence, and I wondered, how did they fare? What impact, if any, had that period of violence or abuse- however short or prolonged- had on the women they had become? Research topic in hand, I began this journey. My research, anchored by Feminist methodology, uses narrative analysis to explore the life histories of 15 older women, around and beyond their experiences with domestic violence and the meaning they make of these experiences. In this Chapter I address Feminist methodology and specifically reflexivity and auto-ethnography as it pertains to my research, and also narrative analysis and the issue of representation as it pertains to my analysis of the stories I was told. I follow this with a discussion of my research procedures, and conclude with a discussion of problems encountered and lessons learned.

Feminist Methodology

According to feminist Dorothy Smith (1987), the unchallenged authority of men has forged the formation of gender roles in society. Men have claimed a hierarchical position over women and to effectively maintain their power, have “systematically and consciously” silenced women’s voices and restricted their status to domesticities, effectively marginalizing women to passive complacency (Smith 1987:25). The system of patriarchy had effectively produced a collective “blindness” in which the abuses of power and oppression by men had gone unchallenged, at least until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. The natural gender order espoused by patriarchy, privileging the rights of men over women, promoted the use of violence against women as a means of achieving and maintaining power (Kemp 1998). Critics of patriarchy argue that its focus on gender relations reduces the multiplicitous ways in which race, class, ability, etc., intersect with gender and effect power and privilege (Kisner 2004). However, patriarchy was a useful framework for this study as gendered power imbalance is the

predominating factor in feminist domestic violence literature. Additionally, the concept of patriarchy as popularized in the Women's Rights movement of the 1970s was generally familiar to the women interviewed for this study.

I propose that women in violent or abusive relationships are in a sense doubly victimized, first by their partner/perpetrator, and secondly by the patriarchal institutions that govern and regulate society (Smith 1987). Smith (1987) calls for a Feminist sociology that explores women's everyday lives and analyses the ways in which women's experiences are structured and mediated by larger social relations. My research focused on the lives of older women, specifically the ways that older women make meaning of their life experiences. I interviewed older women on their experiences of, and beyond, domestic violence- not solely for the purpose of exposing a nearly invisible subset of the population in most, including feminist, literature- but also to analyze the ways that older women's lives are connected to and infiltrated by the dominant discourses of the 'ruling apparatus' (Winterstein & Eisikovits 2004; Smith 1987; Cantor & Brennan 2000).

Historically, women have been marginalized and their knowledge and experiences neutralized or silenced by men in positions of dominance and power (Smith 1987). Feminist perspective offers an alternative account of a patriarchal 'reality' by centering on the standpoint and experience of women (Smith 1987; Harding 1987). It focuses on women as the expert authorities of their own experiences (Harding 1987). DeVault (1991) contends that representing "women's lives more fully and adequately, then, is an act of resistance to partial, taken-for-granted, ideological understandings of social life" (227). As such, feminist research seeks to fully represent women's 'everyday' life and the subjective knowledges they have acquired by living at the margins- this includes experiences that have been formerly neglected such as domestic

violence (Brison 2002; Clifford 2000; Gilligan 1982). It also illuminates the ruling powers and structures of domination allowing for analysis and criticism, and provides a context for political action that may improve the lives of all women (Gilligan 1997; Smith 1987; Harding 1987; Yllö, 1988). In this study, my aim was to open up a space for and perhaps strengthen the voices of these women and their experiences with and around domestic violence (DeVault 1990). Additionally, I sought to expose the mechanisms of patriarchal power that propagates and promotes domestic violence.

Through the years, various feminisms have emerged each with differing views, but all feminists are connected by and committed to improving women's lives and contesting knowledge (Sprague 2005). The manner by which feminists have opposed existing knowledge and developed alternative ways of knowing can be seen in Feminist methodologies. Harding (1987) offers clarification on the distinction between research method (tools of research), methodology (theories and analysis of research practice), and epistemology (the production of knowledge) as elements of research. My working definition of Feminist methodology is Feminist theory applied to research, or to quote Sprague (2005:5) "where philosophy and action meet".

Feminist methodology is an approach, based on feminist discussion, challenge, and critique- of how best to do meaningful research (Sprague 2005). It is a process / project of knowledge production from the standpoint and interests of women that shifts and disrupts the 'natural order' assumed and projected by privileged men (Sprague 2005; Harding 1987; Smith 1987). As a specific field of inquiry, Feminist methodology creates an alternative knowledge based on women's experiences of exclusion and marginality; a knowledge that is more complete because it is more inclusive (Smith 1987, Jackson 2006). It provides a critique of prevailing knowledge and existing assumptions and challenges the source of knowledge and what is truthful

or trustworthy information (Sprague 2005:2). It also encourages feminist researchers to broaden their inquiry and to think differently about the research process and the ways it can be made more useful (Crawford & Kimmel 1999).

DeVault (1996) suggests that Feminist methodology differs from conventional methodology (in both qualitative and quantitative research) because of its commitment to three goals. First, Feminist methodology is about making visible the concerns of all women. It seeks to “shift the focus” of research practice away from the male bias to reveal the complex and diverse perspectives of women, and to expose the “ideological mechanisms” that work to oppress and silence women (98). Secondly, feminist researchers seek to minimize harm and limit the negative consequences that are associated with scientific knowledge and standard research practice. They look for practices that reduce exploitation, for procedures that value and include diversity, and for opportunities to level the power hierarchies that exist between researcher and research participant. Thirdly, Feminist methodology is committed to supporting research practice that actively benefits women’s lives either directly, e.g., by promoting positive changes that impact their everyday existence, or indirectly, e.g., through research and policy change aimed at breaking down social systems of oppression.

Feminist methodologists have been influential in exposing some of the negative aspects embedded in the research relationship. Feminist research practices are aimed at concerns for participants, for identifying and negotiating power relations, and for examining subjectivity throughout the research process (Sampson, Bloor, & Fincham 2008; DeVault 1996; Maunther & Doucet 2003). Feminist methodologists have drawn attention to the structure of the research relationship and the differences and similarities between the researcher and participants in regard to race, class, gender and other cultural domains that influence and shape the research

relationship (Mauthner & Doucet 2003; Hill Collins 1991). They have exposed the power hierarchies that exist in the research relationship and the potential for participant harm in researching sensitive topics and in the misrepresentation, under representation, and exploitation of participants (Ellis 1995; Riessman 1993; DeVault 1995; Baca Zinn 1979; Hill Collins 1991; Campbell 2002).

When critiques about research (both feminist and non-feminist) have been raised, feminist methodologists have responded by proposing alternative ways to rectify shortcomings in order to produce a more complete knowledge. Such methods include reducing power hierarchies through reciprocity, analyzing reflexivity through voice centered relational methods, writing the voices of less powerful, underrepresented groups via strategies such as narrative and discourse analysis, and promoting empirical investigation by ‘third world’ and Post-colonial Feminists (Mauthner & Doucet 2003; DeVault 1996).

The issue of representation in the production of knowledge is one of the most contentious debates in the human or social sciences (Smith 2005; Mauthner & Doucet 2003). Positivist epistemology posits that true or factual information is derived from systematic, distanced, disembodied and value-free observation and they are presented as if they were derived from a “view from nowhere” (Sprague 2005:41; Haggerty 2003). Positivism contends that the subjective experiences of the observer (culture, personality, feelings) only serve to introduce error in the analyses; therefore, every effort is directed at eliminating subjectivity (Sprague 2005). Historically, social science embraced positivist objectivity and obscured the researcher – participant relationship by distancing and privileging the researcher, while simultaneously neutralizing or controlling their personal experiences (Fine et al. 2003). Critiquing positivism, contemporary social science argues that knowledge is socially constructed- meaning that

knowledge (and understanding) is historically, contextually, and linguistically located (Sprague 2005; Maunther & Doucet 2003). In this vein, the notion that subjectivity can be minimized or eliminated is fictitious, as the entire research process- including the influences and actions of the researcher, is embedded in the social world that it tries to understand (Haggerty 2003, Maunther & Doucet 2003).

Reflexivity

Recognizing that objective, value-free scientific inquiry is a myth, feminist researchers argue for reflexivity in the research process- acknowledging themselves as actors within the study and viewing the interview exchange as an open, collaborative endeavor (Ellis & Berger 2000). Feminist qualitative research is characterized by reflexivity: its contextualizing of the research, and the locating of the researcher within the research, including her or his relationship with the research participants (Harding 1987). Riessman (2008:37) submits that when researchers present a narrative account of an individual's life, it is not simply a disembodied voice being transmitted... it is a voice that has been guided by questions and interrupted for clarification. It is a voice that is being manipulated by the researcher's voice, who then transforms it into supportive data and selectively reduces it to fit onto a page. Feminist methods of inquiry call for researchers to acknowledge their hierarchical position in the research relationship and to make as transparent as possible their motivation behind the choices they make, in an attempt to fully understand the situated knowledge of "the researcher, the researched, and the research context" (McDowell 1992 in Rose 1997:305).

Reflexivity is an awareness of the identity, influence, and involvement of the researcher in the research process (Reinharz 1992). Harding (2008) embraces the need for strong objectivity, but her notion of objectivity is not one of distance and disembodiment. She argues

that it is situated knowledge (local, passionate, and embodied) that offers greater information and, therefore, greater knowledge of the object under study. As a Feminist method, reflexivity aims to expose the process of representation, reality, and the authority in the production of knowledge (Haggerty 2003; Denzin & Lincoln 2003). In social science research, most methods of analysis continue to be presented as neutral and mechanical steps (Mauthner & Doucet 2003). Efforts are concentrated on the analysis of the experience of the research participant- of bringing their voice to the foreground, but less consideration (intentionally or unintentionally) is given to the subjective influence of the researcher (Reinharz 1992; Mauthner & Doucet 2003). Reflexivity creates an alternative knowledge by shifting the focus of knowledge production away from the “relations of ruling” (the authority of the researcher) and by “subverting the established procedures of disciplinary practice tied to the agendas of the powerful” (Smith 1987:3; DeVault 1990:96). Reflexivity aims to eliminate hierarchies in the production of knowledge by making visible the local and situated perspectives of both the researcher and the research participants. “Reflexivity embraces the notion that authority is always suspect, and truths are always partial” (Haggerty 2003:158; Haraway 1988).

Among other things, Feminist methodology can be credited for placing greater emphasis on reflexivity in the production of feminist knowledge. Reflexivity is not merely an act of writing; it is a process of decision making, and a performance of accountability and advocacy (Haggerty 2003). Feminist methodology has demanded a standard for strong reflexivity in the practice of feminist and social science research (Harding 2008). As knowledge is partial and situated, the awareness of knowledge production necessarily comes under scrutiny (Haraway 1988). How the subject of the researcher / author represents and is represented in the research process is of central importance. How knowledge is acquired, how it is organized, how it is

interpreted, by whom it is interpreted and under what circumstances or conditions is directly relevant to what claims are made (Haraway 1988; Maunther & Doucet 2003).

As a process, reflexivity is embedded in the production of feminist knowledge. Feminist reflexivity calls for a continuous critical and disciplined self-reflection of the researcher as a subjective identity that both influences, and is in turn influenced by the research process (Crawford & Kimmel 1999). It forces researchers to critique choices that are more overt in the process (i.e. selection of the research problem, methods, participants, time frames, etc.) as well as to acknowledge and reflect on the complexities of self representation. Shulamit Reinharz (1997) suggests that as feminist researchers, we bring three selves into the research process: the research-based self, the brought self (influenced by culture, history, and personal experiences that create our standpoints), and the situationally created self. As such, we are expected to “write ourselves” into the research process and to understand that by bringing our self into the field of study, we are also creating our self in the field of study (Presser 2004:1; Reinharz 1992). Feminist reflexivity demands that we continuously interrogate all three of our selves in the ways in which we interact with participants, how we shape and are shaped by personal contradictions and commitments, how we proceed with research, and how we interpret and report our research (both subjective and objective experiences/data) (Reinharz 1997; Denzin & Lincoln 2003).

A final note, reflexivity is not without critique. Researchers are never absent from their text, even if they try to be detached, distant, and dispassionate. But there are a few ways researchers choose to represent themselves in their work. While the attention to subjectivity in social science research is paramount, one of the critiques of reflexivity is that the claim to *being* reflexive is often worn as a badge of honor, but the evidence of reflexivity (other than a nod to researcher biography referred to as simple reflexivity) is often missing from the research work

and text (Rose 1997; Crawford & Kimmel 1999, Mauthner & Doucet 2003; Fine et al. 2003). Fine and Weiss' (1996) describe simple reflexivity as a brief autobiographical or personal account of the researcher that serves only to establish the researcher's authority- without a fuller social, cultural, historical, political portrayal of self, the self is effectively "sanitized" in the text (170).

On the other hand, over representation of the researcher / self through the text via ruminations on personal subjectivities has the potential to silence the participant voice in both interviews and analysis (Fine & Weiss 1996:170). As Haggerty (2003:159) notes, reflexivity is not a "license to write about our most beloved topic- ourselves". It is also important to note the power differentials in the reflexive mode. Privileged researchers studying marginalized groups are versed in theory and practice from the vantage point of 'the ivory tower'. They have a tendency to silence the voices of their participants with their vast knowledge- a behavior Patricia Clough refers to as "a compulsive extroversion of inferiority" (Fine & Weiss 1996:170). But for some researchers, who have been stifled by the oppression of the dominant, Western, white culture, asserting a subjective presence as creators and interpreters of text is a political act (Fine & Weiss 1996; Baca Zinn 1979).

As a novice researcher I encountered the fine line of prudent reflexivity a number of times in the course of this study, in both acts of interviewing and writing. Early in my doctoral coursework I read several feminist studies that used autoethnography as a reflexive method and I was particularly impressed by the researchers' transparency in all aspects of the research process. I felt that their personal accounts and experiences lent more credibility and accountability to the research process and outcome, and I began incorporating autoethnographic accounts in my own writing.

Autoethnography

Postmodern scrutiny of research practice has raised doubts about the advantage of any one method over another when it comes to acquiring authoritative knowledge about the social world (Sprague 2005). Autoethnography is a research practice that includes highly personalized accounts of the author's own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture (Allen & Piercy 2005). As a form of feminist reflexive research, autoethnography incorporates personal dimensions into research to expose the ways in which domination and subjugation are reproduced in everyday experience (Oke 2008; Allen & Piercy 2005). It acknowledges the fluidity between the personal experiences of the researcher and the surrounding external, socio-cultural experiences that exist. Autoethnography recognizes the subjectivity of the researcher as a complex self, not simply a detached investigator, who comes to the encounter with social knowledge and experience. It allows the researcher to place herself within a social context and use personal experience as a tool of inquiry- to look more deeply at self-other interactions (Allen & Piercy 2005). Oke (2008) suggests that autoethnographic, first person writing allows for the researcher to be transparent in the research process and privileges individuals' voices, subjective experiences, and life stories. In autoethnographic style, the researcher's voice is active, not silent, and it is incorporated into the research process and findings (Charmaz & Mitchell 1997).

Many qualitative researchers have argued that the process of sharing personal experiences can promote a richer, more collegial (vs. hierarchical) relationship between the researcher and participant, potentially allowing for enhanced trust and rapport, a deeper knowledge based on shared experience and mutual understanding, and therapeutic healing for both parties (Allen & Piercy 2005; Gaitan 2000; Ellis & Berger 2000; Arendell 1997). However,

like reflexivity, autoethnography poorly performed has been criticized for providing a platform for self-indulgence and narcissism (Coffey 1999).

Throughout this research I situated myself and my own personal and social experiences as a woman / survivor / subject / researcher in relation to my co-participants to foster an interactional construction of meaning (DeVault 1990; Arendell 1997). However, as a result of this research, I have come to learn that while the ideal of being reflexive and using autoethnography is worthy, the actual process can be rather complicated. I chose these methods because while I have spent more than 20 years acquiring knowledge of family violence from an academic perspective, my understanding of family violence is not solely an objective knowledge. I cannot help but be influenced by the years in which I witnessed, firsthand, violence within my own family. If anything, my social experience with family violence has informed my cognitive understanding of the phenomenon. I find myself continuously referring to my past encounters to help me better understand the reality of family violence in general and domestic violence in particular. And for better or worse, there is a certain 'insider knowledge' that is shared between people who have experienced the trauma of family violence in its many forms (DeVault 1995). A simple disclosure between survivors can trigger an abundance of common experiences. That is not to say that every person exposed to family violence experiences it in the same way, but that there are certain, similar incidents and emotions that translate across age, class, race, and gender (US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics 2008; US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics 2005; Whitfield et al. 2003).

I was raised in a family where physical violence was a preferred method of negotiation and verbal and emotional abuse was commonplace. But my family was not unique. The potential for violence exists in all families; it just needs the right medium to be expressed. While the effect

of witnessing domestic violence can have multiple deleterious effects on children, it is important to note that many children who witness domestic violence do not have adverse outcomes. Indeed, research on resiliency suggests that several protective factors may lessen the effects of witnessing violence- these include female gender, intellectual ability, higher levels of socioeconomic status, and social support for the children (Masten, Best & Garmerzy 1990; Humphries 2001; Coker et al. 2005). My early exposure to abuse and violence in my family of origin undoubtedly helped shaped the individual I am today. I retain both anxious and resilient traits that have been beneficial in my ability to adapt and grow as a human being.

While I have never been in a physically violent or abusive intimate relationship myself, it does not mean that I cannot empathize with women who are or have been. Indeed, it was my experiences with violence and abuse growing up that ultimately fostered my interest in studying and understanding violence as it impacts the family. Witnessing my mother's abuse and sharing in the anticipation of terror each time my father had 'a bad day,' shaped the way I came to understand the complexities of intimate violence. As an adult, my career has been devoted to understanding and caring for families. As a healthcare provider, I have cared for many women and their children who were in violent or abusive relationships. I have counseled women seeking shelter from abusive relationships for over 20 years., As a domestic violence educator and advocate, I have spent several years teaching the medical community about the nature and effect of domestic violence. All of these experiences, that is, my own social reality and the knowledge(s) I have collected along the way, have shaped my understanding of the complexities of family violence. I do believe that personal experience provides a certain knowledge that should not be discounted in research. Sharing my experiences helped me to develop rapport with participants in my study and to gain a greater depth of understanding of their stories (Brison

2002). But I acknowledge that first hand experiences must be contemplated thoroughly and exercised prudently in research. While similar experience may help me gain rapport and allow me a partial insider status, it does not mean that I can assume a total understanding of the experiences of older women who have survived domestic violence (DeVault 1995). DeVault (1995) cautions the researcher against making a “disingenuous claim to commonality” and warns that a shared experience may lead to the development of assumptions and an inaccurate over-confidence (614). Reliance on shared experience may obscure or ignore other diverse dynamics of the individual that could ultimately lead to misrepresentation of her story.

Representation

Perhaps the most daunting challenge for researcher, novice or otherwise, is the issue of representation. The researcher is tasked with creating a meta-story or a hybrid story of the narratives conveyed - listening for turning points, identifying similarities, organizing themes, editing and reshaping the stories to fit nicely into a dissertation (Riessman 1993). Representational decision making may be “a kind of betrayal” (Riessman 1993:13) but this type of summation and reduction are a necessary process of analysis. All forms of representation are partial, limited, and imperfect because we cannot experience, with identical complexity, what has been experienced by another individual (Kenyon, Clark, de Vries 2001; Riessman 1993). Narratives are co-created, they are the “truths we have constructed” that are influenced and organized by larger social structures and forces (Riessman 1993:15). These truths have meaning to specific audiences, at specific locations and time. Riessman (1993:15) notes that “any finding- a depiction of a culture, psychological process, or social structure- exists in a historical time, between subjects in relations of power”. Even with word-for-word translation of a narrative I could not fully represent the experiences of another because meaning and understanding is fluid

and subjective. And each narrative, each text, is plurivocal- open to different readings, interpretations, and constructions (14). The tension encountered by the researcher in aggregating and interpreting life history data is and to balance the stories with respect to the individual (Kenyon & Randall 2001).

What I interpret from the narratives is unique to my experience, my location, and my reading of the text at a given historical time. As I am not an authority on these women's lives and experiences, and because any representation I construct of them is a partial representation, my goal as researcher, is to create another voice. The researcher's voice, my voice, offers an analyzed representation of these women's narratives. Through critical analysis of the narrative, I looked for the "makings" of the story- not only the ways in which the narrator authored her story but also for the "wordless authorities" or larger social forces that co-created this "supposedly objective text" (Smith 1987:19; Riessman 1993:14).

Narrative

Narrative provides the analytical framework for this study. According to Riessman (1993), narrative is one of the first forms of discourse we learn in life. As children we begin to tell stories of our simple daily experiences and as we age, we refine these personal narratives, reflecting on them to learn and share lessons, to evaluate thoughts and actions, and to sometimes intervene and change lives. A narrative then is both an experience and an expression of meaning. The goal of narrative for the story teller is to translate knowledge through the story of their everyday life experience (Riessman 1993). The narrator transports the listener to a past place or event, and describes in detail their experiences of that 'world' at that particular time, often with the intention of making a distinct point or departing a moral lesson. The narrator tends to focus on a specific time or event where there has been a "breach between ideal and real, self and

society” (3). In doing so, they attempt to construct a complete self in the face of a perceived personal or social disruption. They will reflect on and try to make sense of the experience, then try to explain, through story, why things happened the way they did. For example, although the women in this study shared the experience of abuse, they interpreted the motives behind their husbands or partners behaviors differently. One woman felt her husband had been overly-influenced by his male friends, another felt her husband’s ethnicity was directly related to his violence, still another felt her husband learned his abusive behavior from his father, who was a violent man.

Riessman (1993) contends that the context of each narrative is multi-layered, influenced by larger social structures. These structures, such as time or history, and the systems of race, class, and gender, provide dimension to the narrative. Indeed, one of the premises of personal narrative is the notion that all of our stories are in fact co-authored by these various, larger social structures or forces that we live with but are not always cognizant of (Kenyon & Randall 2001). Smith (1989) refers to these structures or forces as the dominant discourse of “the ruling apparatus” and “wordless authorities” that influence us as part of the taken-for-granted world (19, 30). With narrative, the author tells her story from a situated standpoint, informed by the forces that affect her life, and it is from this point that her talk must be interpreted (DeVault 1990; Riessman 1993).

For the purpose of this study, narrative facilitates the central concepts of feminism and life course perspectives. It offers a platform from which older women’s voices can be more readily heard, it exposes power structures, and it makes public the private conflicts and conspiracies that work to oppress women (Gilligan 1997; Brison 2002). Narrative expresses an individual’s lived experience as she intersects with ‘ruling regimes’ of society (Riessman 2008).

It gives privilege to personal experience- the perception of life events and consequences that shape meaning and identity- but it is dependent on and influenced by the social environment (White 1995).

When we narrate a story, we reflect upon our interactions with the environment to make meaning, and we incorporate meaning to shape our identity (Riessman 2008). Life narrative is a conscious, retrospective construction and telling of one's life story involving personal and relational meaning making. We process and sequence our perceptions and feelings, and through a social context- relate our experience to others. We try to connect events and sift through meanings to reflect on a point of action or a moral we wish to share with a particular listener (Riessman 2008). Narrative allows us to “recapitulate and reinterpret” our lives in ways that help us make sense of the past (Riessman 1990:230). Through story telling we are able to better understand ourselves and make sense of our lives by constructing self-narratives or self-identities. These narratives provide a contextualized, temporal sequencing of events and experiences that are continuous- blending lessons from both past and present- that in turn, help us plan for the future (White 1995; Clandinin & Connelly 2000).

From a Feminist perspective, narrative creates a disruption in the fabric of the dominant discourse that subtly supports and promotes the continued subordination of women, racial-ethnic minorities, homosexuals, poor and working class people, and elderly people (Allen & Walker 2009). Narrative allows traditionally marginalized individuals to produce a documented history- a platform from which a position of action may be taken. Narratives impact self-identity by allowing the voice of the narrator to be heard, allowing her to “talk back” and be the author of her own story, as well as allowing her to confront the dominant stories that have silenced her (hooks 1989; Tengelyi 2003). The challenge of feminist research, particularly in regard to

narrative, is to represent the narrator's story in a way in which she retains control over her own words (Riessman 1993).

This study centered on the lives of older women and their experiences with domestic violence. Throughout this project I considered the women who allowed my interviews to be active partners in the research process. Indeed, as each woman recollected constructed her narrative she was producing meaning for both of us. By telling her story, by organizing her memories and sequencing significant events, she was helping us both make sense of a life that was intersected by domestic violence. The interviews became an interactive process. I came to the interview with a general inquiry, but each woman set their own agendas for detailing their life histories allowing for what Anderson & Jack (1991 in Sprague p.141) refer to as “the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint.”

Catherine Riessman (1993) begins her book *Narrative Analysis* by explaining that while narratologists draw on a variety of approaches to analyze texts- from semiotics, hermeneutics, and discourse analysis to deconstructive method and social constructivism- “there is no *one* method” for examining narratives (5). In this study I followed Riessman's (2008) interpretation of thematic narrative analysis. According to Riessman (1993), narrative analysis is “distinguished by an interpretive thrust”- how the narrator interprets her experiences and how the researcher interprets those interpretations (5). Like all stories, life histories combine elements of comedy, tragedy, satire, and romance, but each narrator experiences and interprets each aspect differently. The story she constructs is unique- from the way she imposes order on her experiences, to the flow in which she tells the story, to the meaning she interprets and selects to share. In thematic narrative analysis, the focus is on the content of the story. For the researcher, the methodological task is to examine the “making” of the story- not only the way the story was

put together, to ask “why was the story told *that way*”, but to also examine the underlying social structures that influence the story (Riessman 1993:2; Riessman 2008). Narrators tell their story from a specific location in a world that seems natural to them. Through careful analysis of their story, the researcher is able attend to cultural or historical examples of inequality, oppression, and other “practices of power” that are taken for granted by the speaker (Riessman 1993:5)

Lieblich et al. (1998) identifies four characteristics of narrative studies: (a) a gathering of large volumes of data from text or interviews, (b) the use of research questions or a sense of a general direction for the study, (c) the researcher’s ability to attend to the voices of the narrator, the theoretical framework, and the reflexive self, and (d) that replication is not essential for evaluation. Additionally, Lieblich et al. (1998) defines two aspects of narrative research: the holistic versus categorical approach and the content versus form approach. The holistic approach allows the researcher to examine the story of one person in contrast to the categorical approach in which several different narrations are examined in order to understand the phenomenon of a group. The content approach allows the researcher to analyze the meaning of the story while form attends to the structure of the story. This study incorporates the categorical and content approaches.

Riessman (1993, in Sprague p.141) identifies a common, organizing structure that oral life histories tend to follow that includes six elements: a summary of the story; orienting information (time, place, participants, situation, etc.); complicating action (sequence of events); evaluating the significance and meaning of the action; a resolution (what finally happened); and a return to present (Riessman 1993:18). Embedded in this common structure are nuances of culture and time (the larger structures or forces that influence our lives), woven together to construct the identity of the narrator (Riessman 1993). According to Riessman (2008), “thematic

analysts generally do not attend to language, form, or interaction,” instead their primary focus is on *what* is being said rather than how, to whom, and for what purpose it is being said (59). The key distinction in thematic narrative analysis is that, instead of fracturing the story content looking themes or categories across cases- as is done in Grounded Theory, the researcher keeps the story “intact”, theorizing from the individual case as a whole. The entire biography of each individual is interpreted and then compared (Riessman 2008).

Trauma Narratives

A significant feature of narrative is that when we encounter a traumatic event that violates our natural, ideal world, narrative allows us to reconstruct a complete, “coherent self” in the face of personal or social disruption (Riessman 1993:3; Kenyon & Clark, 2001) . A narrative is both an experience and an expression of meaning (Kenyon & Clark, 2001). It gives us space to perform a retrospective analysis- to reflect back on the event, to scrutinize the circumstances and environment, to help us make sense of the trauma. Embedded in narrative is the prospect of possibility that allows us to re-imagine or re-story our lives beyond the trauma disruption (Kenyon & Clark 2001). This re-storying can become a catalyst for change when we find new meaning from old experiences. While the therapeutic effects of narrative on communication and healing are well documented (Clark 2001; Burnside, 1996; Riessman 2008), talking about a traumatic event is never easy. Some people silence themselves... they simply can't talk because it is too difficult to resurrect a painful or traumatic event that they have long since banished from awareness (Riessman 1993:3.). Some people may refer to the trauma without offering further disclosure or detail. Some will talk about the event and may provide some detail but rely heavily on fillers, e.g. “you know what I mean” or “you know how that goes”, but will elaborate with additional prompting. For some people, having an audience that acknowledges the trauma or

offers an accepting presence opens up a safe place for their stories to flow with great detail and reflection (Riessman 1993).

This is a qualitative, retrospective study using oral life history to explore the meaning 15 older women made of their lives before, during, and after experiencing a violent or abusive relationship. Retrospective studies are often used to describe or explain phenomena across the human experience, and the data collected provide a means for observing and measuring change over time (Myers 2000). In a study such as this, the data is generated entirely from the recollections of the participants. Criticisms of qualitative, retrospective studies are that they lack generalizability and objectivity. However, the purpose of this study was to explore the meaning that a specific population of women made from their experience with a specific social phenomenon (domestic violence). As such, a smaller sample size was more conducive to examining this particular population and phenomenon in order to gain a more in-depth perspective. While the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the population at large, the rich descriptions and personal experiences provided by these women add to the existing body of knowledge on domestic violence, particularly concerning the impact of domestic violence on women over time. Additionally, life history narratives are wholly subjective in nature because they are generated by individual experience. They are not intended to be objective. The participants authored their own stories, from their own standpoint, based on their own experiences. While there may be inaccuracies and inconsistencies in their reflections and recollections, it is the essence or meaning of their stories that is significant (Riessman 2008).

A function of age is the unique ability to look back and provide perspective on experiences and expectations (Settersten 2003). The study was designed to examine the women's life changes over time, as well as the social, cultural, and historical changes over time that

influenced their development as individuals. These life histories reveal the unique experiences and richly detailed lives of older women. They recount the complex range of domestic violence from common couple violence and subtle manipulation to horrific patriarchal terrorism and oppressive control that these women experienced. Although each story was distinct, all the women, regardless of the degree of violence or abuse they endured, tell a similar story of vulnerability and resilience, expectation and disappointment, hope and determination.

Procedures

This study took place in a midsized, Northeastern metropolitan area with a population of just under 150,000, 12% of which are over age 65. The metropolitan center is home to a major research university and large teaching hospital which are the largest employers in the area. Most middle class and upper class individuals and families reside in surrounding suburbs and poor and working class individuals and families reside within the urban center. All of the women interviewed for this study were living independently within this community. Most of the women resided in suburbs, some lived in the city, and one lived on a nearby Indian Reservation.

This study centered on gender and the power imbalance that exists between men and women in domestic relationships, therefore only women that were involved in heterosexual relationships were interviewed. Intimate partner violence among same sex couples, although equally disturbing, is a contextually different phenomenon that requires exploration beyond the scope of this project. Additionally, although the majority of the women I interviewed were legally married at some point in their lives, women that were involved in long-term cohabitating relationships were also included in the sample. In this study I use the term 'marital' to describe the intimate relationship between a woman and man, regardless of whether they were in a common law or legally sanctioned union.

Original Conceptualization

In my original study proposal, I intended to interview a total of 20 older women to understand the ways these women made meaning of their experiences with domestic violence. The sample was to include five life histories of older women who had been in abusive relationships early on in their lives in order to gain background perspective and to develop and enhance research questions. I felt that these life histories would help me to become more familiar with historical influences, social or institutional discourses, and various life course trajectories. Analysis of central themes from the life history narratives would guide and structure the interviews with the remaining 15 women. Once the five life history interviews were completed, another 15 women would be interviewed with a more focused emphasis on what I referred to as marital histories. The marital histories were intended to be structured, centering only on the marriage and subsequent life course of these women. The problem that I encountered was that the life histories highlighted a link between family of origin and individual development, and the influence that the family of origin had on later life values, decisions, etc. (that is, the connection between family, development, and life course).

In the completed life history interviews I found that women invariably reflected back to their original families- telling stories of their parents' relationships or sibling relationships, and connecting, comparing, and contrasting these relationships to their own marriages and life mistakes or accomplishments. In my initial attempts at marital interviews I found that the interviews did not flow as well when I tried to control the story- limiting it to marriage and life beyond marriage. Ultimately, the marital interviews turned into longer, more complex life history interviews. Because I was using a life course perspective to understand these women's experiences in time and place, it proved difficult to eclipse the formative development of family

of origin. As such, I chose to focus on the life histories of 15 older women as the stories they shared provided more complex, and far richer data.

Additionally, I had originally planned to limit the sample to women aged 70 or older so I might focus on a particular cohort, however, this also proved to be difficult. During the first year of interviews, seven months elapsed between my first interview with Frannie, aged 75, and the next age eligible candidate, Ann, who was 84. During that time, through the course of recruitment I was introduced to several women in their 60s who, except for their age, were perfect candidates for participation. In order to obtain a sufficient number of participants in a reasonable amount of time, I decided to revise my age criteria to include all women of retirement age who were interested in participating.

As a feminist researcher, my intent for this study was to, whenever possible, reduce or remove the dichotomy that separates the researcher and the researched, and instead identify and emphasize the connections that link us (Sprague 2005). In this vein, I considered the women in this study to be my research collaborators, not mere objects of investigation. I tried to be as transparent and forthcoming as possible in discussing my life experiences related to domestic violence; in explaining my background as a graduate student, researcher, and healthcare professional; and in answering any questions they had regarding the topic of research and the research process. In addition, to encourage “textual authority” I referred back to the narrator’s knowledge when I had questions about specific narratives that required clarification and as my analysis was refined, I might ask for their response to an interpretation I had made from the data (Sprague 2005:147). I also offered to provide each narrator with a copy of her life history transcript if desired, and encouraged her to create her own pseudonym.

Sampling Design & Selection

For this study, participants had to be older, community dwelling, English speaking women who had experienced violence or abuse in a past intimate relationship. The women who participated in this study were recruited via snow-ball sampling by word-of-mouth. Through my personal and professional role as a Family Nurse Practitioner, I had access to many older women in the community. I had contacts among older women in nursing organizations, through local universities, in a local domestic violence coalition, and through social organizations, e.g. volunteer groups, church groups, exercise groups, etc. Initially I discussed the study with a few older women acquaintances and gave them my contact information. I also shared my study and contact information with my hairdresser, massage therapist, and colleagues I knew would have direct access to older women. If an opportunity arose, my friends and colleagues would then discuss the study with other older women in the community. Most of the women who agreed to participate contacted me directly to inquire about the study. Some women passed their own contact information on to me through a friend. The interview process spanned 5 years. Sometimes my contacts were fruitful and I would interview 3 or 4 women in a year, at other times several months would go by without any contacts at all. The majority of the women I interviewed were complete strangers, some of the women I had been acquainted with through academic, volunteer, or career circles, and one woman was a friend of my mother's whom I had known for many years.

The recruitment design of snow-ball sampling (or word-of-mouth recruiting) is structured in a way that supports freely given informed consent. Once a prospective participant was identified, I called her and explained the purpose of the study as an audio-taped, life history interview that focused on the lives of older women who had experienced violence or abuse in a

past intimate relationship. I also answered any questions the prospective participant had. Additionally, prospective participants were assured that they could stop participating at anytime if they felt uncomfortable. After providing a prospective participant with my contact information, an initial interview appointment was scheduled within two weeks. At the initial meeting I would again review the study, read the consent form out loud, answer questions, and proceed with the interview. Prior to the initial scheduled appointment I would contact the prospective participant to touch base, ask if the participant was still interested in participating in the study, and confirm the meeting time and place if she was. Using this technique gave prospective participants up to three separate opportunities to ask questions and several days in which to consider whether or not they wanted to participate.

The participants were informed at the initial phone contact and again at the first face to face interview that life histories could bring up a host of different emotions, particularly when difficult subjects such as experiences with the loss of a loved one, domestic violence or abuse, or divorce were brought up. Because of the emotional nature of the topic, I encouraged opportunities for questions or clarification, and throughout the interview process I offered several 'checking-in' times to see if the participant was comfortable with continuing the interviews. Prospective participants were informed that they could stop an interview or stop participating at anytime. Additionally, the participants were informed at the initial contact that there was no financial incentive to participate in the study.

Once a woman agreed to participate, I would negotiate the number of interviews, time frames, and interview location with her. I kept my interview schedule flexible to accommodate these women's ever-changing lives. While all of the interviews were tailored to meet the individual needs of the participant, most of the life history interviews occurred in two sessions,

each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. An additional 30 to 60 minute interview was scheduled for follow-up questions, clarification and closure, if needed. All interviews were conducted in private settings chosen at the discretion of the participant. After each interview was completed, I would sit alone in my car and jot down memos or reflections about the visit. Included were observations about the women and their environment, impressions / criticisms of the interview process, and questions prompted by the interview itself.

While all of the women I contacted had expressed interest in participating and had provided me with their contact information, some women declined to participate after further consideration and some women were ultimately not candidates for inclusion. One African American woman I met with, although initially eager to share her story, became concerned about a specific clause in the written consent contract that referred to my role as a mandated reporter. As we read the consent, I noticed her body language shift from relaxed to apprehensive. I came to understand that she was the custodial guardian for some of her grandchildren and she expressed great distrust of the Department of Social Services. She told me that her grandchildren had been removed from their home and separated from their mother because of “*suspected* abuse”, emphasizing the word *suspected* after reading the consent section that stated ‘in the case that a child under the age of 18 resides with you, I am obligated to report child abuse if it is suspected or disclosed’. This meeting occurred early in my interviewing process and I felt very awkward and unprepared to address this enormously complex issue of trust and mistrust. I wanted to reassure her and scrambled to come up with an alternative to meeting at her home but I sensed that she was uncomfortable. I could only acknowledge her concern and accept her gracious decline to participate.

Another woman, who was white, aged 68, and lived alone, agreed to be interviewed after reading and signing the consent to participate. However, a few days after our first interview she left me a brief voicemail message saying that she “had second thoughts about the consent form” and she no longer wanted to continue with the interviews. I called her back but was unable to speak with her directly. I left a message on her voice mail stating that I understood and thanked her for meeting with me. In reviewing her initial interview she spoke quite fondly of her family of origin and her growing up years in a small town. I could not identify any hint of emotional stress in her voice or in any of the interview sections. We had not yet discussed her marriage or any experience with domestic violence. In reference to the legal nature of the written consent form, it is a daunting but necessary contract. One section states that “interviews collected for this study are not protected by law and you should know that references to any illegal activity that may have occurred in your past could be subject to subpoena” and another states, “although every effort will be made to protect your privacy and confidentiality, it is possible that a breach of confidentiality could harm your reputation”. In reading the consent aloud, I tried to neutralize any language that could be considered intimidating but in this case, those statements may have been too disconcerting.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted using an open, semi-structured format, audio-taped, and later transcribed. Depending on the participant, an interview could last from one to two hours and multiple interviews were typically required to complete the life course. Sprague (2005) notes that multiple interviews conducted over a period of time, “enhances a research project in several ways- building trust and comfort, allowing time for reflection between interviews, and enhancing the view of lives and situations as historical, contextual, and changing” (134). The goal of the

life history interviews was to gain a global understanding of the relationships within the family of origin (parents and siblings), the marital and childrearing transition, impressions of marital disruption and domestic violence, work and retirement histories, and later-life wellbeing.

Throughout the interview process I practiced responsive and reflexive interviewing, a model that emphasizes the participant relationship of the interviewer-interviewee and allows for flexibility in the research design (Rubin & Rubin 2005). While my interview guide contained a series of open-ended inquiries to encourage the history, I learned that the initial interview only needed a single prompt, “tell me about yourself, beginning from when and where you were born” (for a list of sample interview questions see Appendix A). This initial interview proceeded for the most part uninterrupted as I listened as these women’s stories unfolded.

In general, the second interview entailed completing the life history to present day. If time permitted, during this interview I would use my notes to get clarification on a topic or ask specific questions- if not, a third interview was scheduled. In the final interview I would summarize passages from the life history; clarify content, reflections, or interpretations; or probe for further explanation of thoughts or actions. In the final interview, in an effort to facilitate closure, I asked the women to talk about how they saw themselves presently, and what did they see for themselves in the future.

During the interviews, I did not probe for details regarding specific acts of violence or abuse beyond what the participant offered for two reasons; the focus of the interviews were centered on the lives of women *after* they left an abusive relationship and dissecting violent or cruel experiences for detail beyond what was shared may have caused unnecessary trauma (Goodrum & Keys 2003; Hlavka, Kruttschnitt, & Carbone-López, 2007).

Learning Curves

I viewed this study as a process of discovery for both myself and the women who participated. As a novice researcher, I struggled with various issues in this research process. I had some unexpected technical issues when I evolved from a standard tape recorder to a digital audio recorder in which I lost a portion of a narrative recording. I had to rely on my field notes and memory to reconstruct the segment of the story that I lost, later reviewing the segment with the narrator for accuracy. I also learned the importance of keeping an organized field note book and to have a detailed road map on hand.

I learned that life history interviews are *lengthy*- particularly when someone has lived a long life. It's important to schedule interviews over a sufficient amount of time to allow for recollection, but also for expression, emotion, and lesson sharing. I learned many things from interviewing elderly women in general: 1) Speak clearly and with enough volume that you can be heard (this includes sitting comfortably close enough so that voices can be clearly recorded); 2) Politely accept offers for coffee, tea, water, cookies etc., if you are hungry or thirsty, and sometimes when you're not; 3) Repeat, clarify, and remind participants about interview appointments and follow-ups; 4) Remember that this may be the only opportunity this woman has to visit with someone and that she has anticipated this visit all day (maybe all week) so be gracious with time; 5) Be gentle with re-direction if a story has derailed and gone off topic and listen for cues or clauses (e.g., Where was I?) that allow for re-focusing.

I also learned to listen more and interrupt less. Although I had constructed an interview guide, I found that after the first few interviews were completed, the guide was becoming more of a distraction. I became preoccupied, worrying about how I could- in the middle of an interview- transition into certain questions that embraced my research agenda. Every attempt I

made to ask a specific question from my interview guide seemed to stymie the natural progression of the interview. I quickly streamlined my interview guide and began relying more on the field notes that I wrote before and after each interview. These notes became a great resource, helping me to gain clarity and organize and refine my analysis. By the last interviews I tended not to rely on a guide as much and instead let the interviews flow unimpeded.

An example of my early forced interview transgressions involved temporal questions about the Women's Rights Movement. I wanted to know if these women's lives were directly affected by the social and political discourse and/or changes impacting the traditional roles of women. I was interested in examining and interrogating the discourses of gender and subjugation of women in US culture as a means of understanding the overt and subtle influences on identity construction. In my first interviews I would ask direct questions, e.g. "How did the Women's Rights Movement affect you?" or, "How did the changing roles for women influence you?" To my dismay, these questions seemed to perplex the women. Although I had tried to time the insertion of these questions to ensure a smooth transition (if a woman was in her 20's during the 1960s I would ask her while she was telling the story of her early marriage or motherhood), I failed outright. The questions served only to disrupt the flow of a cohesive life memory. Some of the women answered with a matter of fact "it didn't" (affect them) and they quickly continued on with their story. Others seemed to consider the question but their responses were rather short. Ann's response reflected the general theme when she said,

"I'm sure I was aware of the changes because there was the news on TV and of course, umm... well there were magazines and things, but at the time I don't think I thought about it. I was too busy. I had a job and I was trying to take care of my kids and raising a family. I didn't think about it."

In subsequent interviews I stopped asking such direct questions, opting instead to inquire about life in general during different decades. For example, I might ask ‘what was it like to be a teenager in the 1940’s?’, or ...’a young mother in the 1960’s?’, or ...’to go back to work in the 1970’s?’ The responses to these questions proved to be more detailed and insightful.

Ethical Issues

First as a human being, secondly as a researcher, I have a responsibility to do no harm. Governing the cut and dried mechanics of both positivist and interpretive sciences is a strict code of ethics (Christians 2003). In that code there is a clear and direct demand that researchers cannot actually or intentionally cause harm to the people they are studying (Christians 2003; Fine et al. 2003). But the rules are less clear about unintentional harm? What is the value of feeling in science? How can we protect against causing *unintentional* angst? This is where things get messy. While all research imposes on participants, research around sensitive topics tends to be more intrusive (Hlavka, Kruttschnitt, & Carbone-López 2007; Goodrum & Keys 2003). And while research on sensitive topics is not prohibited, securing IRB approval can be very difficult, particularly if the topic of interest is one that would ordinarily be kept private, e.g. issues around family violence, neglect, grief, mental illness, etc. (Goodrum & Keys 2003). Unfortunately, there are few resources or studies to help the researcher navigate through emotional territory (Corsino 1987; Campbell 2002; Goodrum & Keys 2003); fewer still that have looked at whether inquiries about prior victimization create distress in research participants by re-exposing them to their traumatic experiences (Hlavka, Kruttschnitt, & Carbone-López 2007). The rigid mechanics of science doesn’t always account for, and certainly aren’t comfortable with, the unexpected and unpredictable experiences or events that are also consequences of the research experience (Denzin & Lincoln 2003). And while Feminist methodology accepts and expects emotional and

moral issues to arise in the everyday worlds of the researcher and participant, with the exception of practiced reflexivity, it doesn't offer the novice researcher any sure fire way to avoid the consequences of unintentional harm (Christians 2003).

Violence is not a fixed phenomenon (Hume 2007). The experience of violence is as diverse and subjective as the individuals it marks. Some people seem to be very detached from their experiences with violence, while others are visibly distressed discussing their accounts (Hlavka, Kruttschnitt, & Carbone-López 2007). Clinicians and counselors have advocated that talking about one's traumatic experiences may be therapeutic or cathartic, and while research that looks at the emotional processing of traumatic experiences support this (Hlavka, Kruttschnitt, & Carbone-López 2007), other evidence suggests that the continual retelling of traumatic events can have detrimental effects (Haaken & Schlaps, 1991). From a feminist standpoint, I feel that my research is important. At the very least, it gives privilege to the experiences of older women and it exposes the gendered power relations that creates and reinforces violence... but at what cost? The trauma surrounding the experience of domestic violence may be lifelong, manifesting itself in many ways, and the research setting represents a place where this trauma will undoubtedly be relived (Hlavka, Kruttschnitt, & Carbone-López 2007; Goodrum & Keys 2003).

The focus of this study is really about these women's lives *after* violence, and the ways in which they have coped with the challenges of living and aging. But in the relatively short time period that they shared the details of the violence or abuse they endured, the air was charged with emotion and time seemed to stand still. I am always conscious that my research has the potential to dredge up stressful feelings or emotions (of anger, pain, sadness, etc.) and I tried to incorporate certain strategies to reduce this potential. I tried to be very clear about my research

experience, intentions, and responsibilities, and I answered any questions as honestly as I could. I also respectfully acknowledged that these women had made a conscious choice to share these stressful or painful experiences with me (Goodrum & Keys 2003).

At the beginning of the first interview, and periodically in subsequent interviews I was careful to stress that I was *most* interested in how these women had lived their everyday lives after they had left their abuser. I reminded them that they did not have answer questions if they felt uncomfortable and we worked together to develop what I refer to as a ‘warning system’ that let them know a difficult question was coming. We had several checking in periods to gauge comfort levels, particularly after reflecting on a difficult passage (Rubin & Rubin 2005). I also reminded them at the beginning of each interview that they could withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. I was quite comfortable with the sensitive interview, relying on my counseling skills and the interview methods I had picked up over time. I did not put a time frame on the interviews because 1. it allowed us to build a rapport, 2. interviewing and sharing about sensitive or traumatic topics requires extraordinary patience and tact, and 3. as violence is a subjective experience, we needed time to learn from each other (Hume 2007; Hlavka, Kruttschnitt, & Carbone-López 2007). In the interviews, I let the participants take the lead in deciding how and when they disclosed their abuse histories, and although I did use an interview guide (loosely), I did not attempt to structure the order of my questions about violence (Goodrum & Keys 2003). Participants’ disclosures about violence came at on their own time and on their own terms (Hlavka, Kruttschnitt, & Carbone-López 2007).

Violence is traumatic and I fully expected that participants might rage or cry as they relived their pain. During the course of the interviews, I had been brought to tears once or twice myself, particularly when a participant’s story triggered a childhood memory of my mother, but I

think controlled emotion is good and can add to the rapport. Emotion is a part of who we are as individuals, being aware of emotion helps the researcher to respond appropriately (Goodrum & Keys 2003). Often, if a woman was crying I would offer a tissue (I came prepared) and sit with her quietly. Sometimes I would offer words of sympathy, and if needed I'd offer to stop the interview for a while- but I tried to stay present. It is important to watch and listen during times of intense emotion, to gauge the participant's level of distress and intervene if necessary, and to hear not only what is being said, but also what is *not* being said (Hume 2007).

Reciprocity was a big challenge. I worried about the "friendly façade" that blurs the line between the personal and the research relationship but at the same time I wanted to relate to and build relationships with the women who participated in this study (Smith 1999; Huisman 2008)⁴. Almost all of the interviews occurred in the women's homes, their personal environment. Listening to a life story, while sitting in the comfortable confines of a person's home surrounded by visual representations of their life, was oddly connecting. But with some of the women, especially the oldest women, an offer for a pot of tea to share during the interview became an offer to stay for dinner after the interview. All of the women who participated in this study were community dwelling, but some had very little socialization outside of a daily visit from the Meals-on-Wheels volunteer. For Delia, I was "the highlight of (her) day".

Although I appreciated a relaxed connection with all of the women who participated in this study, in the majority of cases our relationship was simple and casual, and fit neatly into a standard research design. But with some of the women, the relationship that we developed was more meaningful. After we had established an easy rapport, Sunny, Delia, and Sybil in particular

⁴ Traditional western research models are criticized in aboriginal cultures for attending too much to defining ethical boundaries and not enough to building relationships (Ruttan, 2004). Additionally, defining a boundary in the research setting demonstrates a hierarchical position of power that I wanted to avoid (Smith 1999; Sprague 2005; Ruttan, 2004).

(who provided some of the longest interviews), would often ask me to stay to visit after the interview had ended or suggest we take a drive sometime to visit places they had lived. While I could not offer any financial incentive to give these women in exchange for their time and stories, I did feel that they were entitled to some form of compensation beyond my meager thank-you.

When I had free time after an interview, I did try to spend it with the women who were more socially isolated. I personally enjoyed my time with these wise, funny, and insightful octogenarians. I also developed friendships with some of the younger women and once the interviews were completed, I interacted with them in certain social situations. I never felt harassed or emotionally burnt-out by the relationships I developed as a result of this study, to the contrary I felt (feel) a strong sense of gratitude for having crossed paths with such wonderful women (Hlavka, Kruttschnitt, & Carbone-López 2007, Huisman 2008). I did, however, find myself engaged in a more challenging relationship with one woman who seemed unusually attached to me and the time we spent together (i.e., she would call me at home at odd hours or ask me to run errands for her) but I knew instinctively that this relationship did, indeed, need some order and boundary. I politely reoriented this woman to the interview schedule and my role as a graduate student and researcher, and I casually declined suggestions that I take her to the Mall.

Many of these women spent upwards of three hours telling me their life story- disclosing among other things, very intimate details of love, betrayal, and violence. These narratives represented the experience and expression of meaning for women whose lives were complicated by domestic violence. As such, these stories were intensely emotional. While some women demonstrated a more stoic demeanor in their delivery, others seemed quite drained by the end of

a difficult passage. Being present with these women while they share these histories was quite profound and while I tried to attend to each woman's need, I often left an interview feeling emotionally exhausted. It is not uncommon, particularly in qualitative research that investigates more emotionally sensitive topics, for participants to feel a sense of abandonment when their role in the research process is complete (Kruttschnitt, and Carbone-López 2007, Huisman 2008). In general, I paid extra time attending to the termination interview, trying to prepare the women in advance that we were working on the final interview and that I would not be seeing them again. Sometimes I had to negotiate the timing of a final interview in order to minimize any potential feelings of abandonment the women may have had. For example, if the final interview brought up a painful recollection or expression of emotion, we would talk through it as usual, but I would schedule another meeting, not necessarily an interview, just to touch base (Huisman 2008).

Transcription & Analysis

Each interview was audio taped. Approximately one third of the initial interviews were taped using a cassette recorder, and with the advent of newer technology, the remaining interviews were digitally recorded. Life histories of older women can be quite detailed and lengthy. All of the women that I interviewed were over 60 and had experienced a significant amount of a projected life course. It seemed that the older the woman was, the longer the interviews ran- in some cases upwards of 120 minutes of tape were recorded. On average, each interview amounted to 25 typed pages. When all of the interviews were completed there were approximately 750 pages of transcription (not including field notes). I personally transcribed each interview.

Early on in the interview process I focused on interviewing one woman at a time, meaning that I would complete the entire series of interviews with one woman before moving on

to the next. After each interview I began the laborious task of typing and I transcribed each interview in its entirety. Before my typing commenced I would listen to the entire interview and consult my field notebook to refresh my memory of the participant and the encounter. I listened carefully for content and made copious notes, because- as a novice researcher beginning an interpretive analysis- I thought every spoken word was vitally important. And, although thematic narrative analysis focuses more on content than form or language, in these early transcriptions I paid special attention to what I called emotive details- episodic laughter, tears, sighs, long pauses during more painful recollections, etc. (Riessman 1993). Since I am not a skilled transcriptionist, the first 3 or 4 interviews took several months to complete. As my interviews progressed, and I gained more experience with the process, I began to attend more to the content of the story. Soon I was able to preview the audiotape and screen for forms or features of discourse that were particularly meaningful or insightful before I started typing. I would jot down notes on particular segments of the story, on interesting exchanges, or on expressions of emotions in the form of a rough-draft- a tool that helped me refine and focus my analysis (Riessman 1993). This did not, however, reduce the amount of typing I endured. I still transcribed all of the interviews, but in time and with increasing practice, I was able to summarize sections. For example, if a woman told a story that was not pertinent to the focus of my analysis, I would make a note of the topic of the story but I didn't transcribe it verbatim. Also, when my interview schedule was full and I was working on 2 or 3 interviews simultaneously, my induction skills improved. By scrutinizing the interview content across several drafts, I became more proficient at listening / reading for emerging patterns in the discourse.

Riessman (1993) states that “analysis cannot be easily distinguished from transcription” and notes that “close and repeated listening, coupled with methodic transcribing, often leads to

insights that in turn shape how we choose to represent an interview narrative in our text” (60). Thematic narrative analysis is a multi-level, inductive process that begins with the first exchanges between the interviewer and the interviewee. Each exchange is influenced by a variety of factors (e.g. the narrator’s and researcher’s agendas, value systems, prior theoretical interests, etc.) that can stimulate or change analytic ideas (Riessman 1993).

My process of analytical induction is represented by five levels, each requiring repeated listening, careful reading, and systematic notation, each more refined than the last. The first level began with the task of listening and re-listening. Each woman in this study was interviewed at least twice, but more often three times. After an interview, I would sit in my car and make notes about the session- jotting down references or statements that I thought were important, curious, humorous, etc., and questions I wanted to clarify in the next interview. Before each subsequent interview I would listen to the interview that preceded it, re-familiarizing myself with the woman and the significant people and events that she had talked about. If a third interview was scheduled, I would listen to both interviews before our meeting and review my field notes. By the time our interviews were complete, I would have listened each woman’s story at least two or three times.

The second level involved the actual transcription process. When I was ready to transcribe an interview (usually within a few day of the recordings), I would again listen to the tape- this time attending to and making notes on language (use of grammar, slang, vulgarity, etc.), form (speed of speech, pitch changes, emphasis, etc.), and content (separating important and inconsequential narratives) in advance of typing. And as I typed, slowly and laboriously, repeatedly listening and re-listening to sections of narrative, I would pick up on details I had

missed. I worked on one life history at a time-, identifying, isolating, and ordering relevant events in chronological order from past to present.

The third level of analysis involved a broad comparison of narratives to see how they were organized (i.e., How did the life history unfold? Was there a common plot line? How was the story sequenced?) and to examine turning points, emerging patterns, and themes that represented meaningful events. As I identified narrative segments, I incorporated Riessman's framework (20) of oral history evaluation to provide structure. I coded each segment according to O (orientation to person, place, situation), CA (complicating action or sequence of events), EM (evaluating for meaning), R (resolution-what finally happened), and P (return to present). Also, to help me organize data visually, I developed a story map based on Connelly & Clandinin's (1990) work that sequenced each story according to time (past, present, and future), place (social "worlds" that included self, family, intimates, activities, and work), and person (self and other significant people)(Appendix 2 & 3). I then selected particular sections of narrative to illustrate general patterns, underlying assumptions, turning points, and meaning.

The narratives represented for analysis are direct quotes from the participants. At times, while telling a pertinent story someone might be derailed by a memory and wander off topic for a while. In these cases, I edited out but summarized the section of departure for the reader. Also, I included all of the relevant exchanges between myself and the woman I was interviewing. Any filler comments that I made e.g. "right", "um hmm", "ok", etc., were edited out to conserve space. Kenyon and Randall (2001) caution the narrative researcher to respect lifestories because they "are the most intimate possessions human beings have" (13). Some passages in the analysis are presented verbatim, and although lengthy, I felt that the words, as well as the tone of the narrative, best represented the uniqueness of the woman speaking, the power of the story, and the

meaning she was interpreting. I did not want to dilute these particular passages by trying to edit or condense them. While other narratives were edited for brevity or clarity, every effort was made not to alter the essence of the story.

The fourth level of analysis involved a more focused reading of the select narratives in which I went back and re-read each section looking for explicit and implicit references to gender discourse and I coded them accordingly. For the fifth level of analysis, although not traditionally considered part of thematic analysis, I examined the similarities and differences between the women according to age and racial cohorts. I did not set out to provide a comparison analysis but there were interesting similarities and differences between these women and the ways in which they constructed and told their stories that I felt needed to be recognized and included.

Participant Demographics

Fifteen women, who at the time of interview ranged in age from 60 to 89 years old, agreed to be interviewed for this study. Eleven of the women were white of European descent, four were Native American. Without prompting, all of the Native women identified themselves by tribal affiliation, three were from Northeastern tribes and one was from a Southwestern tribe but had grown up on a Northeastern Reservation. Two of the white women specifically referred to their Irish and Italian ethnic identities as being important and influential. Two of the white women and all of the Native women described early childhoods in which religion or spirituality played an important role. As older women, religion and spirituality remained or became more important to the Native women and five of the white women. At the time of their interview, two women had not completed high school, two were high school graduates, five had gone to a business school or had an Associate's degree, two held Diplomas after attending three year

Nursing schools, one had a Bachelor's degree, and three held Doctoral degrees (one EdD, one PhD, and one MD).

Based on their interviews depicting their families of origin, three women described being "poor" or "very poor" during their childhood, three described working class families where both parents and sometimes an older sibling worked, eight described middleclass upbringings in which only their fathers worked, and one woman- the daughter of a Steel Executive, described a privileged childhood in a family that was "very well off". All 15 women were interviewed at least once in their own homes. At the time of interview, based on comments that described their current economic or retirement status, as well as my own observations of their living situations, five women were living in subsidized senior housing and would be considered poor or lower class⁵, three women were renting an apartment or flat and would be considered lower middle class, and seven women were living in homes that they owned. Of the seven women that owned their own homes, six would be considered middle class and four of them had remarried and had dual incomes. One woman was single and upper middle class.

At the time of interview, two of the women were disabled and had been collecting social security disability insurance for several years. Four women were working fulltime; two women were within five years of retirement and two were within a year of retirement. Five women were retired but continued working between 8 and 20 hours per week. One woman, aged 73, had retired from fulltime work a week before our first interview. Three women, representing the oldest of the cohort, had been formally retired for several years. During their working years, ten of the women worked outside of the home in factory, cleaning, clerical, or retail positions; four women worked as registered nurses or educators, and one woman was a physician. Only one woman described working because she wanted to, not because she had to. This woman had been

⁵ Based on Thompson & Hickey's (2005) Class Models.

twice remarried to wealthier men and had the opportunity in midlife to stop working to pursue her interests in painting and dance.

Nine of the women were either married to or living with their partner by age 19, the remaining six embarked on the relationship by age 23. Five of the women, three Native and two white, were in what would be considered as common law relationships with their abuser. The remaining ten women were legally married to their abuser. The length of time these women spent in an abusive relationship ranged from 2 to 40 years. As is common in many abusive relationships that evolve over years, the women who were in relationships that lasted a decade or more described a period of time when the physical violence they endured began to dissipate but the control and coercion they were subjected to remained or escalated (Higgins & Follette 2002; Kelley & Johnson 2008). All but two of the women had children with their abusive partner.

The Women

The life histories of elder women are represented in this study. These women are incredibly unique and complex individuals who shared a common experience of domestic violence. Some of the women came from wealthy backgrounds and some were impoverished. Some describe husbands or partners who were controlling, verbally abusive and mean- but not physically abusive. Some women describe experiencing a single episode of explosive violence that forever fractured their relationship. Some women lived through a chronic pattern of patriarchal terrorism where they were repeatedly beaten or raped by their husbands. Some women were isolated from their families and communities. Some women struggled with a succession of abusive men, some remarried “wonderful” men, and some never entered another intimate relationship with a man. Most of the women worked outside of the home in addition to

their responsibilities as homemaker and mother. Some women went on to become activists, educators, healthcare providers, business women, and artists.

The Octogenarians- Sunny, Sybil, Delia, and Ann

Sunny, a white woman, was 89 years and 8 months old when we met for our first interview. She was frail, with crippling arthritis, but still living alone in an apartment attached to her daughter's home. She was married to a "closet drinker" for 42 years. She describes her late husband as a man who was mean and indifferent to her when he was sober and who 'shoved her around a couple of times when he had been drinking" but who was 'not really violent'. She stayed in the marriage until her husband died at age 65 and she has been alone since. She worked in the retail clothing industry until she was 83 and an accident forced her to retire.

Sybil, a Native woman, was 87 years old at the time of our first interview. She was a retired Registered Nurse who lived alone in a subsidized senior apartment complex. Her husband was a white man who had been in the army and was an alcoholic. He regularly beat and terrorized her and their children. Sybil endured a beating from her husband that subsequently resulted in the stillborn death of her fourth child. Sybil was left by her husband when she was 26, her eldest sons were four, and her youngest son was two years old. She never had another intimate relationship. All of her sons have died. She lives in a subsidized senior apartment complex and some of her grandchildren live nearby.

Delia, a white woman, was 86 years old when we met. Delia was an artist and dancer. She was thrice married but was now a widow, living by herself in an apartment surrounded by her paintings. She had a vibrant retirement- taking dance lessons, painting, judging art shows, and running a studio. Her first husband was very controlling and violent. She raised his daughter from a previous relationship along with their own 3 children. He left her for another woman

when her children were in high school. She remarried a man who “was a drunk” who took to pushing her around when he was drinking. They were together for ten years before she left him. She met and married her third husband when she was in her 60s and although she describes this husband as a “good, church going man”, she felt betrayed by him and his family when he died.

Ann, a white woman, was 81 and had retired from a career in Social Services. She grew up in a small village in “the north country” and lived there, in her own home, until she was 80. She moved to a senior retirement complex to be closer to her daughter and granddaughter who lived nearby in a larger city. Her husband was a small business owner. He was very controlling and both verbally and emotionally abusive to Ann and her oldest daughter Vickie. Ann states that she was never afraid of her husband, even when he threatened her, she “never backed down”. When she heard her husband was having an affair with a woman from work she went to the office and, with her camera in hand, “caught them right in the act”. She was in her 40s when she divorced and she never remarried.

The Septuagenarians- Frannie, Clara, Penney, Tanner, and Hattie

Frannie, a white woman, was 75 years old at our first encounter. Her husband was a career military man and their time as a young family was spent overseas. Her husband was an alcoholic who was physically, verbally, and emotionally abusive to Frannie and their three sons, especially in the early years they were together. At various times he raped Frannie, stabbed her with a kitchen knife, and tried to choke her. The physical abuse abated as the years went on and the family grew, but his verbal and emotional abusive escalated. After 28 years of marriage and many flaunted extra marital affairs, he divorced Frannie and remarried a woman half his age. Frannie had five adult children but was not close to them. She became a Born Again Christian and had “dedicated her life to Jesus”. She lives in a flat with a female roommate from her church.

Clara, a Native woman who was 73 years old at our first interview, had just retired from a janitorial position cleaning a medical office. She has never been legally married by western standards but had a traditional ceremony which bound her and the Native man that fathered her first three children together. He abandoned the relationship after “5 or 6 years” and moved to the city where he ‘legally’ married a native woman from another tribe. In their time together Clara said her husband never hit her, he just never spoke to her...” It was as if he wasn’t there”. His children were not welcomed by his new wife. Clara raised her children, and some of her grandchildren, by herself. She lives in her own home on a Reservation.

Penney, a Native woman, was 71 when we first met. She has been physically disabled from birth and used a wheel chair. She described herself as an artist and activist. She had been involved in the American Indian Movement in the 1970s and has won many awards for her portraiture. She has two sons; her eldest son, also an artist, is also physically disabled, and her youngest son has severe cognitive disabilities. Her husband, a Native man, began physically and verbally abusing her shortly after they were married. She endured his violence and abuse until he threatened to harm her one year old son. Pregnant, she packed their and left her husband. She refused contact with him after that. She shares a subsidized apartment with her younger son who is now in his late 40s. She continues to win awards for her artwork.

Tanner, a white woman who was 70 at our first interview, was still working as an Associate Dean at a local university. She had two adult daughters, the youngest of whom is cognitively disabled. She stayed with her husband, who suffered from bipolar disorder and struggled with alcohol abuse, until his death. He was controlling and at times verbally abusive, but he was unpredictable and had an explosive temper. She lives near her daughter and is actively planning her retirement.

Hattie, a white woman, was also 70 when we met. She was a retired RN, who enjoyed working one day a week. She married her “true love” when she had just turned 18, after six months of courting. He hit her for the first time during their honeymoon. His violence escalated from there. He was charming and everyone thought they were a wonderful couple but she became “a nervous wreck”. She lost weight and her hair started to fall out. With the help of her parents and church she was rescued. She left her husband and her marriage was annulled. She became a nurse, met and married a “wonderful” man, and went onto raise three “wonderful men”. She and her second husband live in a home in the country.

The Sexagenarians- Roseanne, Barbara, Dottie, Orla, Toni, and Martha

Roseanne was a 64 year old white woman when I began interviewing her. She was a semi-retired Professor, working part-time as a consultant. She had a long-term cohabitating relationship with a man who was verbally and emotionally abusive. He was not physically violent but was able to scar her with his words. After he left the relationship, she struggled with alcohol and depression. She dated other men and women but none of the relationships lasted. She has accepted her “issues with intimacy”, is sober and spiritual. She lives by herself in a home in a suburb, surrounded by many friends.

Barbara, a Native woman, was 63 at the time of our first interview. She was a gifted student but was not sure of a career path when she met her husband. He was a Native man from a different tribe and he was an artist. Both were influenced by and active in the American Indian Movement. By the time she decided on medical school, she had four small children. As her medical career began, her husband became suspicious of her. He became verbally abusive to her and the children. He began isolating her from her family and demanding she stay at home. He tried to sabotage her career and would threaten to leave with their children. When her residency

finished she accepted a position out west. She packed up her children, all under the age of 13, and drove by herself across the country. She phoned her husband and told him he was not welcome to join them. She never remarried. She lives in a large, extended household with some of her children and grandchildren.

Dottie, a 63 year old white woman, was an Executive Assistant when I met her. She was working fulltime but planning her retirement. Dottie's early and adult life was surrounded by violence. She had three relationships that were abusive. She got pregnant early into the relationship with her first partner. He began beating her up while she was pregnant. She tried to leave but he stalked her. She met another man thinking she had escaped the violence but this man was also abusive- his brutality culminated in a severe beating that left her near death. She stayed in that relationship for 8 years and had two more children. Her last boyfriend was verbally and emotionally abusive. After several years, she ended that relationship, went back to school, earned her bachelor's degree and took a job at a university. She has remained single. She is a Domestic Violence Advocate and volunteers at a local Women's Crisis Center. She lives by herself in a flat in the city.

Orla was 62 years old and working at a large university when we met. She is a white woman who was happily remarried. She is a three time cancer survivor. She met her first husband when they were both in college. She knew he had a temper, and that his father beat his mother, but she thought with time and understanding, he would get better. He didn't. His behaviors worsened after their two children were born. He became more manipulative and began having affairs and threatening her with divorce. He played on her low self-esteem. Finally, after 10 years of emotional and psychological pain and suffering she got herself a lawyer and "took him to the cleaners". She is healthy, remarried, and lives in the suburbs.

Toni was also 60 when I interviewed her. She was a white woman who had retired from a career as an Executive Assistant but she had gone back to work part time at a university. She has been very happily remarried for almost 20 years. Her first husband, and the father of her only child, was an Italian immigrant who had been in the US for several years when they met. She was 18 and he was 26. He was extremely controlling and demanding. His family spoke only Italian and she was expected to become a “good Italian wife”. He isolated her from her friends and family, controlled the finances, instructed her on dress, and forbade her to socialize with people from work. Shortly after their son was born he started hitting her. She stayed in the relationship, tolerating the abuse, for 8 years until a neighbor showed her a newspaper clipping identifying her husband as a solicitor of prostitution.

Martha was a 60 year old white woman when we met for our first interview. She was a Secretary and was planning her retirement after working 30+ years with the State. Martha was a teenage rebel. She rebelled against her parents and school. She dropped out and ran away from home. She was pregnant with her first child at 18. She got married but she barely knew her husband. He started hitting her shortly after they met and it never stopped. After her second son was born he beat her, leaving her with facial bruises and cuts. Women she worked with reached out to her and helped her find shelter. She was a single, working mom for several years until she met her second husband. They live in a home in the suburbs and dote on their grandchildren who live nearby.

Each of these women had a rich story to tell, complete with intricate details that made each story unique. But the first thing that I noticed as I collected the interviews was that each story, no matter how diverse the woman telling it, shared an almost identical plot line, a recognizable cast of characters, and a sequence of events- although offset by time and

circumstance- that eventually unfold in comparable patterns. The plot of the story is about a woman's life that is impacted and dissected by domestic violence. The evolution of their abusive relationship from courtship to resolution lasted from a little over two years in the case of Penney, to over 40 years for Tanner. And as the relationship evolved, so did the abuse. Each woman told their story in a remarkably parallel way, naturally segmenting their stories beginning with their recollections of growing up in their family of origin, then reflecting on their middle years in an intimate relationship and with child rearing, and ending with their impressions of where they are in their lives today. These segments gave organization to the analysis and are represented by the three analysis chapters. Within each chapter are sections of narrative that contain meaningful reflections and turning points that I found significant.

I conducted the first three life history interviews with Frannie, Ann, and Dottie. The initial interview was fairly unstructured. I began each interview by inviting each woman to tell me the story of their life, beginning with when and where they were born. By the time I finished the interviews with Ann, I noticed that these women's histories were following a similar plot line, and for the most part, this plot line persisted with all of the women I interviewed. All of the women began their stories by recounting their years growing up in their family of origin. This was followed by telling the story of their abusive relationship with their husbands or partners, having and raising their own children, and the end of the abusive relationship. Finally, they reflected on their lives after the violence and abuse, their current life situations, and some talked of future plans. Each analysis chapter follows these three thematic segments. Embedded in the narratives are reflections on gender beginning with the role they took on as girls in their family of origin to their roles as wife and mother in the marital family, and the meaning these women have made of their experiences with gendered violence. Chapter 4 is titled Early Life Narratives,

and discusses reflections on the family of origin, issues with self perception and identity, and launching into the adult world. Chapter 5, titled Marital Transition Narratives, discusses marital life, childrearing, and issues surrounding the abuse or violence they incurred. Chapter 6, entitled Life After Narratives, explores the women's reflections of life after their experiences with domestic violence- on being alone and starting over, on emotions (guilt, remorse, and resilience), and on the future.

Chapter 4

The Early Life Narratives

“We understand backwards, that is the problem. We are all picking up the pieces.”
Clara, age 73

The stories that an individual tells of her life bind together events that have occurred over time. In the present, she organizes them in such a way that past reality becomes a lesson plan for future reality. Older women are able to envisage themselves over extended periods of time simply because of their long lifespan (de Vries & Watt 1996). Unlike younger folks who have yet to live out a full life and are thus future-oriented, individuals who have experienced longer life spans are more past-oriented. They tend to focus on distant mistakes that were made or lessons that were learned to assist them with retrospective and prospective interpretation and understanding (de Vries, Blando, Southard, & Bubeck 2001). When I began this project, my intent was to interview women on their experiences with domestic violence from marriage onward. I was, at first, frustrated that each woman I interviewed would instead begin her story from her earliest memories within her family of origin. I came to understand that the events of our early life give color and character to our lives over time and that it was important for these women to begin at *their* beginning, to provide a backdrop or setting that might help them to explain their future choices and life trajectories.

One of my first interviews was with Dottie, a woman in her early 60s who I had met a year earlier. At the time I was taking a class on Family Violence and Dottie had come to talk with my group. She was very candid recounting her experiences with domestic violence and appeared very open and relaxed with our questions. At the conclusion of the class she left her contact information if anyone wanted to get in touch with her. Later, when I was ready to start my research I called on Dottie, explained my research and asked her if she would be willing to

share her life story with me. She seemed to be genuinely interested in my proposal and enthusiastically agreed to participate. I was thrilled because in Dottie I saw a teacher, someone who knew something about domestic violence, someone who was comfortable talking about her own experiences, and someone who was unassuming and patient. Also, I felt somewhat relaxed and reassured because I already knew Dottie and her story. At least I thought I did. What I quickly came to realize was how unprepared I was to hear how thoroughly violence had penetrated her life from her earliest recollections as a young child. The inspiring, activist who shared her experiences with domestic violence with my class was only a part of who Dottie was.

This interview represented a major turning point for me, reinforcing the insidious nature of violence. Family violence permeates the household but to the outside observer it often goes unnoticed. It has to be this way in order for violence to thrive. It uses appearance as its greatest disguise. It is often veiled behind the idyllic family photograph, hidden by the tidy household, and masked by well behaved children. After twenty years of working in the field of Family Medicine, I know the pathology of family violence- that no human being regardless of race, class, gender, or ability is immune from it, and yet I too am easily deceived by appearances. I didn't expect a pleasant looking, middle class, older woman to recount such a horrific upbringing and as Dottie shared the details of her story, I found myself feeling a little uncomfortable. Admittedly, I was disturbed by the graphic images of child abuse that she projected for me, and despite my experience- I began to feel anxious. Should she be telling me this? Should I encourage her? Should I redirect her to the seemingly safer topic of marital violence? This anxiety persisted as Dottie revealed her stories of childhood abuse and neglect, but I continued to listen.

Ultimately, one of the many things Dottie taught me was that a woman's life history is at the very least complex. Women's lives are not always orderly and predictable. Despite appearances, our lives are sometimes entwined with violence in its many forms and subtleties. Violence can be encountered early within the family of origin, or rear for the first time in the marital family, or for some women it may not be encountered until late in life in the form of elder abuse. Dottie, like all of the women I talked with, helped me to understand that the experience of violence or abuse may complicate a life but it doesn't have to dictate the outcome.

Most of the women I interviewed did *not* witness violence or abuse in their families of origin. In fact, most of these women had experienced a very loving and stable family environment growing up. Two women, while saying they enjoyed a relatively happy childhood, had sudden recollections of episodic events in which their fathers had acted in a violent or abusive manner toward themselves or a family member. Three women shared their memories of growing up in homes where violence was commonplace; where they both witnessed and experienced violence, abuse, and neglect. In all the cases where there was physical or sexual abuse or aggression in the family of origin, it was perpetrated by the father. However, in some cases, the women recalled more painful verbal or emotional injuries inflicted by their mothers.

None of the women specifically addressed gender as they told their stories of growing up but their stories are imbedded with gendered messages on what it meant to be a girl in the first half of the 20th century, and what expectations they faced as young wives and mothers. I had to pay close attention with the analysis of gender references because they were so subtle or implied.

Family of Origin Influence

As each woman began her story or early life in her family of origin, four distinct family typologies emerged. For some of the women, particularly the oldest women, recollections of

childhood and family relationships were absolutely cheerful and bucolic. The majority of the women recounted ‘average’ or ‘typical’ families with mostly good memories and no real recollection of parental arguments, violence, or abuse. Three women described violent or abusive upbringings and shared mostly dark, unpleasant family memories with few high points. Two of the women shared what were mostly good family memories but had experienced rare or infrequent violent or abusive events that affected them deeply.

Family Types: The Romanticized Family

The ways these women recall their early lives growing up in the parental household is so different. Most of the women came from homes that would be considered, at the very least, to be stable. Five of these women, Sunny, Delia, Ann, Penny, and Barbara described particularly idyllic childhoods and invariably gushed with happiness when they told their stories of being little girls, then school girls, then teenagers. These recollections were highly animated and marked with smiles and laughter. On several occasions these women would run to fetch a photo album or direct my attention to family pictures on a wall or mantle to help complete the image of their ideal family for me. When these women described their growing up years they did so without prompting or hesitancy. These stories flowed effortlessly and were full of detail and imagery.

Delia, aged 84 at the time of interview, tells the story of growing up in an ocean side community just before and during the Great Depression. Her father was a fisherman so, although “times were tough for everyone”, he always had work and could provide for the family. She describes a particular fondness for her father-

Delia: “I was born in, actually the hospital was in Gulfport, which is all the way out on the north shore, as far as you can go. It is the last big town out there in Gulfport, and then just east of that, about five miles is the very end of the island and that is Orange Point. (Pause)... ah, it is very rural, at least it was when I was born in 1927. Very rural area, a

farming area. A place where as soon as you're five years old you are down on the beach by yourself going swimming, and I am not kidding about that. We all swam and stayed on the beach almost all day long, kids my age and right through high school without any supervision. There was never any adults... which today sort of makes me wonder how we survived that. (Pause) Anyway, we had a wonderful, wonderful life as kids. We had five square miles of playground and we went from one beach to the other, the bay, or to Long Beach Sound. In the wintertime we played in the woody area, what little there was out there. There was never any supervision by parents and yet we all survived and had a wonderful life. My mother and father were both 40 when I was born. I had an older brother and sister. I had a sister who was 14 when I was born and a brother 13. They were not too happy about this little kid sister that was hanging around (laughs). My mother, I learned quite a bit later on, probably when I was a teenager, was not too happy about having another child at her age. My father was *delighted* and I spent a lot of time with him. He was not only a fisherman and an artist, but he was very interested in the local Indians and he studied the local Indians and so we would go out together, when I was a little kid, and walk the fields and look for Indian arrowheads and that sort of thing. And I will tell you one very funny story. He dug up parts of pots that were, when the Indian chief died for instance, they buried all of his belongings and they broke up all the pottery and buried the pottery along with him. My father was studying the Indians he would dig up pottery, and spend the winters when he couldn't go fishing, putting all the pottery together on the dining room table. He would take me with him lots of time when he was looking for this. We had a wonderful relationship. I tell my friends about this a lot because all of the people that lived in this little village they just let the kids run. I don't know why this is the way it was but that is the way it was. And when we needed a snack we just went into the farmer's field and pulled up a carrot or whatever and we were never yelled at. So this was this wonderful way for kids to grow up, in my opinion. That is the way I grew up...

The "Good Family"

Five women, Tanner, Bobbie, Toni, Orla, and Martha typically described their family of origin as being "good" or "normal", and they did so with an affectionate tone, but they didn't spend as much time or attention to detail when discussing their childhoods. For example, Delia's recollections of growing up in a fishing community or Ann's memories of growing up in a mountain village account for almost 30 minutes of taped interview, while Toni and Martha spent less than 10 minutes recalling their youth and family. Also, with these women I had to use more prompts or direct questions to get them to elucidate. The following represents Toni's account of her family growing up and is a typical representation of a "good" family.

- VC: “So how was it, um, growing up in, in Old Bay as the oldest daughter, middle child?”
- Toni: “Well, I always said that I was, you know, the middle child and, you know, I got the brunt of everything, but I, I don't believe that. I just like to yank their chain every now and then. I also said to my father whenever I walked in the house that ‘your favorite daughter’ was here and my sister would scowl at me, and um, and then as she became an adult, you know, we would, um, tease each other about it and maybe I was the favorite because she was younger and prettier than I was. You know, just that sort of thing, but I don't know if it really seriously bothered her or not, but, um, I don't, I don't remember a whole lot of my childhood. I don't remember a lot of affection from my parents. I, I, there was no abuse, absolutely none. Um, but I don't, us kids always played together. We'd go out. We had a big yard. We'd go out and play baseball in the yard. And everybody had five kids. So there was always plenty of people for teams. And, of course, you know, the little ones like me, and girls, didn't get picked as often and then you get stuck, you know, one of your brothers, who was like “you're stupid” and you can't run and that sort of thing, but that's just sibling stuff.” (long Pause)
- VC: “Umm. Did you, did you feel loved though even if there wasn't a lot of outward affection type thing. Did you have sense of security?”
- Toni: “Oh, yeah! Yeah! Yeah, but I just, I have pictures where, you know, we would be sitting and, you know, I'd be sitting on my dad's lap and we would be doing different things as a family, but I just don't remember, I guess the one thing that I do remember is sitting with my mom when I was a little bit older, 10 or 12, and combing her hair and rolling it up in the rollers. And that, that was a fond memory and I always wanted a daughter so I could have somebody do that for me, but it just, that wasn't meant to be, but I do remember that. I remember sitting with my dad on the couch, watching TV or visiting with somebody. And I remember when they would have adult company over and we would be upstairs and my brothers and I would be goofing around and somebody would always have to come up and scold us and tell you to go back to bed. You know, it was just giggling, laughing type thing, so I don't have any bad memories.

The Traumatic Family

Clara, Dottie, and Sybil, who experienced extremely abusive or traumatic childhoods, tended to recall vivid details of neglect, beatings, and sexual abuse with an air of chronological detachment, as if they were reciting a recipe. These recollections were so thoroughly detailed I rarely needed to interrupt with a prompt or for clarification. And although these narratives were delivered in a somewhat aloof manner, they were not void of emotion. Often, after talking about a difficult memory these women would sigh or give a short laugh, as if to say “can you believe

it?” Sometimes they would cry- no sobbing or weeping, just a few silent, flowing tears.

Dottie used the most matter of fact delivery in sharing her story, and then she would follow it up with a thoughtful analysis of why the event might have occurred. For example, in recalling the way when, as an adolescent, her father would watch her while she took a shower she said the following...

Dottie: ” In hindsight, I can look back on things that my dad used to do, you know, he used to make comments about you know... we’re all very much endowed breast wise in my family- all the females, my daughters.... And he would make a comment about, you know “you go through the doorway twice” you know, meaning that my chest would go through first and then... I mean he was always like... he’d supposedly come into the bathroom to...to show me how to use the shower and just walk in and open the shower and I’d be naked and I remembered that when I was like 12 or something... like that... so there were always little things that as I look back on now were just inappropriate for a father to be doing and you know saying to your daughter. But he never, you know, he was older at that point so he didn’t bother me like he did my sisters. And to me he, he was the victim because my mother in my eyes... my mother was the nag.”

“In hindsight,” Dottie recognizes that her father was a sexual predator but she seems to think herself fortunate that he was too old to abuse her the way in which he abused her elder sisters. In this passage, Dottie also displays a common phenomenon of child abuse where the victim attempts to defend the perpetrator or rationalize the abuse . For Dottie, her father was “the victim” of her mother’s abuse. This is her first reference to her mother’s harsh criticism which she ultimately identifies as the most destructive force in her life.

Sybil’s recollection of childhood generated a great deal of emotion for her, but again, her story delivery was reserved. Sybil seemed to want to provide balance to her memories in such a way that she would share a good memory along with a bad one. She tended to tear up and would sometimes cry when she talked about her mother and, in the following passage, how badly she wanted to protect her mother from her father.

VC: “Was your father mostly abusive when he was drinking or did...”

Sybil: “So sometimes he was real funny when he was drunk... (Pause) and he would tell us- he would make fun of my uncle or somebody and it would make us laugh. Or he would buy us things... or you know, if he was drinking with a buddy and he come home late he would bring meat or a pie or something for my mother so she wouldn't get so mad (laughs). But he could be real mean if he was drunk or not. Once he come home from work... and if you didn't catch a ride at the line you had to walk 3 or 4 miles to get home cause there was no bus line... and he walked home and he come in and my mother was taking care of my sister who was just little... she was maybe 1 or 2. And there was no dinner yet and it made him real mad! And he started yelling. And he's yelling and fighting and he tried to pull my sister away from my mother but she wouldn't let her go 'cause she knew he would hurt her so he slaps my mother across the head so hard her ear started to bleed... (here she cries and wipes her eyes with a tissue)... (pause) And, I cried and ran to my mother and he pulled me off her by my hair and threw me on the ground so hard I peed my pants... I didn't even know it. I was 10 years old and I peed in my pants”...

Clara's affect when she recounted growing up on the reservation with an abusive father was the most detached and impersonal. She tells of growing up the eldest child of Native parents- her father was a community leader who followed Traditional Native teachings and her mother was a Christian.

VC: Was there any conflict that you remember as a kid between him being Traditional?

Clara: I don't remember any conflict in that area, but he kept the tradition of the man beats the wife. That happened ever since I can remember, every weekend. You get to Wednesday and then you start worrying that Friday was coming, because it was always awful. My brother and I one time tried to jump in and he just threw us aside, so we just watched.

VC: Was there alcohol involved with that?

Clara: Oh, yes. Him. My mother never went anywhere. She stayed home with us. She never drank, that I know of. They used to have friends over and they would play cards and they would have beer. Now, I don't remember if my mother had any or not. It doesn't seem like it. It was not a pleasant thing. We would be running away. I remember up here at the cemetery there used to be a road along it and there were big bushes and a fence. It was nice. I remember we had this great big carriage. My mother would put all three of us in and we would go. He worked for a coal company and he had this big old truck that made a lot of noise.

You could hear him coming down the quarry, so we would run from tree to tree, bush to bush, hide behind houses and go up Woodstock road...

VC: Because he was looking for you?

Clara: Yeah. Of course, he accused her of all the things that he was doing. That seems to be every household's activity. Yeah, that was not very nice. It was not very pleasant at all.

VC: Did it mellow, that behavior, did it mellow as you got older? Did it get less?

Clara: It got less, but not until I had my kids and did not live here anymore. Because, when I was a teenager, he beat on *me*.

VC: Did he beat on Samuel too?

Clara: I don't remember that. I had to take it for all three of us because I was the oldest. Then she went to work once we were older... When I was old enough to watch them. In the summertime we would go up to gram's. We would go up there all summer. I know I had to stay out of school a couple of times with a black eye. I remember one time he chased me down and I started running away. This man who used to live where Jennie lives... there was a big old house there, was coming down the road. Drunk as a skunk, which he always was... and he saw my dad. He would always take off his belt. I always had a belt buckle on my back. He saw him hit me. He sobered up like that. He came across the road and he grabbed him and said, "Don't you ever hit her again." Actually, he didn't... he never hit me again. He wanted to but . . .

VC: From that point on?

Clara: Yeah.

VC: About how old were you?

Clara: I probably was 12 or 13. Cause I got married young because I was pregnant... at 17. *Now* I know that you don't have to. We understand backwards, that is the problem. We are all picking up the pieces.

In this passage Clara made interesting generalizations about domestic violence in her family of origin implying that, from her experience, violence and abuse is a standard practice. Her father “kept the tradition of the man beats the wife”, and that false accusations were common place and “seems to be every household's activity”. And while she escapes physical beatings by

the time she is 12 or 13, she endures other forms of his abuse until she gets pregnant and marries at 17. She also implies that getting married was not necessarily something she wanted to do but it was an expected consequence of an unplanned pregnancy, and she again generalizes, retrospectively, that “We understand backwards, that is the problem. We are all picking up the pieces.”

The Repressed Family

The remaining two women- Frannie and Roseanne, shared what were for me, the most fascinating childhood recollections of home life. Initially they talked about happy childhoods, growing up in the small, safe microcosm of the neighborhood, whether it was in the city or a rural town. The images they painted for me were of pleasant days on the farm, summer camps, and family gatherings full of affection. But then, either prompted by a question or a memory, they would suddenly recall, out of context, an episode of brutal violence or cruelty that they had witnessed.

Frannie grew up in a large, middle class, Irish-Catholic family. The family lived in the city but rented a summer home on a nearby lake every summer. Her stories tended to be very detailed and she wanted to be sure her details were accurate. In this passage, she tells a story about her father, a business man and local politician who she loved but also feared. Initially, Frannie recalls her father’s authoritarian and patriarchal oppression with an implied admiration. She begins her family of origin narrative by explaining her position in the family, and quickly inserts a reference to her father’s alcohol habit that would resurface throughout her family of origin narrative...

Frannie: I am number four of eight siblings. I was the fourth girl. So, three years after me came a boy. So, I was kind of like the baby for three years. And I came from a good

family. My father, every once in a while would go on a binge. I mean, no more than just a weekend.

VC: What do you mean by binge? Like drinking?

Frannie: Yeah. He'd go out because we lived across the street from, it used to be a restaurant but then eventually it turned into more of a barroom than it was a restaurant. And so, he'd go over there with the boys, with the guys and And when he was drinking, he was different. He was a very straight-laced, good man, 'head of the house' definitely. If we did anything wrong he wouldn't hesitate to hit us but I can't remember being hit... maybe twice.

VC: What kind of hit, though?

Frannie: He would hit us with his hand.

VC: In the face? On the head? In the ...?

Frannie: In the back of the head maybe and you know, on the shoulder or But we had a good healthy fear of him. I mean, there were 8 of us so I'd say maybe two times in my whole life I remember being hit. But when he came home drunk we didn't ... he was different. Sometimes very melancholy, kind of open... He'd say, you know, "come on, sit over here and talk to me", which that wasn't too much like him, you know.... And then he'd tell us how much he's loved us. It wasn't too much like him. (long pause). He showed his love when he was sober but he didn't often, he didn't say it, really. But when he had a few drinks in him he did, he would tell us how much he loved us.

And I was kind of like a little pet to him because he was the only one that ever referred to me as his 'little Jess', his 'little girl'. If he would go shopping on Saturday mornings he would take me with him up until the time my little brother got older. There were times when he would come home ... times, I mean, one, maybe two where he came home and he wasn't melancholy, he was nasty. We were so scared of him. I can remember running upstairs and hiding and my sister saying "hide, get under the bed, get under the bed!"

And I can remember my mother telling us, you know, "that's enough, that's enough!" But he didn't go after us when he was like that.

Frannie then goes on to give two examples of her father's violence toward her siblings. In one episode he "went after" her older sister for breaking a curfew. He tried to hit her but she ducked under his arm and he ended up hitting the door with enough force that he broke his hand... "And so from that point on he didn't use his hand. If he had to get anything across, he used a belt." In the second episode, Frannie's younger brother Eddie was whipped for not coming home from the store fast enough...

Frannie: And my father took him downstairs in the cellar. I can remember hearing it. And boy, he really gave him the belt down there. He couldn't sit for a week! And that was it... that was the last time Eddie ever did that. And it really wasn't meanness, I don't think. I think it was just my father's way, maybe some learned thing that he had gotten. But my grandfather, his father- wasn't that kind of a man, you know? I just can't understand that part.

Frannie seemed genuinely conflicted by her father's behavior. She's not sure if her father's aggression and violence is his prerogative or "meanness" and she doesn't know why he is violent, implying that he didn't learn that behavior from his father. But then she changed the subject and went onto to talk at length about fond childhood memories with her family at camp, which included her grandparents and cousins. She talked about being diagnosed with epilepsy as a young girl and the struggle she had learning to cope with the illness. Then she began talking about the time she met her future husband. She was recalling her nervousness about being on her first date when she suddenly stopped and said-

Frannie: Oh... There was one other ordeal. I was a senior in high school and I had another brother, too, who was much younger than me...my brother Eddie. My brother Eddie ... my brother Eddie was four grades younger than I was, but my brother Robby was a kid. And my older sister Veronica, she married a fella that had been in the navy. And the style that year for girls on the beach was you had to have a really true navy hat, you know? A white sailor hat. And then you would turn it inside out and wear it down like that. And everybody would autograph your hat. If you had one of those you were 'In Like Flynn', that was the real thing... And so I had one. And it was up in my bedroom.

So, this one morning everybody was getting ready to go to school and everything and down comes my brother Robby with my sailor hat on. And I said to him "where do you think you're going with that on?" And he says "I'm going to wear it to school." And I said "no, you can't do that!" "That's mine!", I said, "you take it right back to my bedroom and put it up there." And he said "No! I'm going to wear it to school." Well, my father said, "Who do you think you are talking to him like that, are you his boss?" And I said "no, I'm not his boss...That's my sailor hat he has on." And he said "you just watch your mouth!" "I'm going to have to take you down a peg or two!", he said.

And from that point on it's like something took over him, you know what I mean? And he didn't stop. He just kept talking and talking and he got me up against the wall and he put his hand right on my throat like that (demonstrates a choke hold) up against the wall and it was like a nightmare. And I could not breathe. And so my first reactions were to defend myself. And so I reached my hands up and I grabbed his head like this and of

course in the process of doing that my father was bald, my fingernails just cut right in there and there was blood running down. And he stepped back. It must have shocked him because he stepped back and he said, "A daughter that would do that to her father." I said, "A father that would do that to his daughter." I don't know whether I said that or my mother said it, but somebody said it.

Frannie recounts this last memory of her father's violence with a sense of shock and disgust. From her tone, he is no longer admirable and respectable. She goes on to describe how her father threatened that she had better have a paying job by the end of that day. She took the bus after school to get her working papers and by the time she came home that night she had a job. She was only 17 years old. Frannie said she and her parents never talked about "that incident" again. Interestingly, despite his occasional "binges", her father was sober during all of the violent episodes she described. Frannie, who was deeply religious, seemed to struggle with her comprehension of patriarchal power. She vacillated between a near veneration of the role of the man as being the more powerful, "head of household", a role to which she willingly defers, and a profound disappointment that the man- in the form of her father and her husband, would be so abusive toward her.

Roseanne also described a happy childhood growing up in a close knit, rural community. Roseanne referred to herself as a "mid-life baby"- her only sibling, a brother, was 13 years old when she was born. She adored her father and talked at great length about the kind of man he was. He was a hard worker who had a job in town, but he also worked the family farm. Everyone knew him and he was a friend to all. He participated in local theater productions, he sang and danced. He enjoyed life, he loved to laugh, and he was a devoted father, especially to her. But he was a "*raging alcoholic*". I asked her how her parents got along and she described a somewhat distant relationship but it was not violent or abusive. For the most part he was "pleasant drunk" although he could be "mean and obnoxious" at times. Later, in the middle of recalling some

fond memories of early childhood she stops abruptly and recalls a suppressed event that demonstrated her father's temper. In an instant, her demeanor changed from one of serenity to an almost agitated excitement. One day the cat scratched her father...

Roseanne: ...”and looking back it was so bizarre... I don't know what came over him... this rage, I mean he got really *enraged* and he *beat that cat to death* on the front porch. My mother and I heard all this screeching and commotion... and all we could do is look at each other. I mean, I don't know what he did to that cat but the porch was a wreck with blood and... I mean, it seemed like it was forever but it all happened in like a split second...and when it was over my father took the cat outside and that was that. We never saw it again. My mother went right out and cleaned up the porch and it was never talked about...I mean, we *never* talked about it. (long pause) I don't know why he did it... To this day I haven't got a clue.”

This episode left Roseanne traumatized. While she loved her father she became inwardly fearful of him, and she later recalled that she believed she had “lost trust in him”. Like many of the women in this study, the issue of trust and lack of trust played a significant role in their childhood, adolescent, and adult development.

On Self-esteem

Again, the majority of the women interviewed recalled good relationships with their parents. Some women described themselves as “daddy's girl” or intimated a closer relationship with their fathers, while others respected their fathers but had a closer relationship with their mothers. Most of the women never witnessed violence or abuse in their own homes growing up, in fact several women could not recall ever witnessing their parents argue. For the women who did experience physical violence in their family of origin, it was usually by the hands of their fathers. But to some of the women, their mothers were most abusive, not physically but verbally and emotionally.

With the exception of Dottie, Clara, and Sybil, the women spoke of their father's abusive or violent behaviors as isolated events that seemed natural and subsequently inconsequential. But the women whose mothers were abusive- in action or in words- often reflected back on the negative impact that relationship had on them as they aged. Even Dottie and Roseanne, who both had witnessed their father's violence, significantly downplayed this experience in comparison to their mother's relentless psychological abuse. Dottie, Roseanne, and Orla described distant and often antagonistic relationships with their mothers. They each felt their mothers were overly critical of them as children and young adults, particularly related to their appearance (being too fat or unattractive) or their behavior (not doing what their mother wanted them to do, or becoming the women their mothers wanted them to become). They each felt unloved and unsupported by their mothers as children and adolescents, and these feelings persisted throughout adulthood.

The majority of women studied mentioned that at some point during their adolescence they felt awkward or insecure, either in reference to status or body image. This can be a normative experience for girls and boys during early adolescence when they are transitioning away from the security of childhood toward a tumultuous period of physical and emotional change, ever shifting social identity, and experimentation (Greenberg 2008). A few of the women recalled feeling bad about being too poor, or in Tanner's case too wealthy. The Native women felt very secure in the close knit Reservation community but when they had to leave to attend the mostly white high schools, they felt quite vulnerable. Almost all of the women remembered feeling self conscious about their bodies, either being too tall, or too skinny, or too fat, or too ugly. Frannie and Penny had physical disabilities that caused them a considerable amount of distress as girls, but by the time they were young adults they were more self-

confident. Growing out of insecurity and low self-esteem by young adulthood seemed to be the pattern for most of the women with the exception of Roseanne, Dottie, and Orla. For these women, their struggle with body image and low self-esteem was linked to excessive maternal criticism and it has plagued them throughout their lives. They described mothers who were cold and unaffectionate, hyper-critical, ridiculing, and emotionally abusive- key contributors to the development of low self-esteem in children (Schacter, Gilbert, & Wegner 2011)

I hadn't expected this finding. My focus had been on the effects of patriarchal abuse or violence between the domestic partners with the husband / father as perpetrator. What unfolded was this disclosure of maternal psychological, emotional, and verbal abuse. Particularly interesting to me was the fact that Roseanne and Orla did not experience parental domestic violence or abuse in the family of origin. Dottie's history was complicated by physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her father, and although she never witnessed physical violence between her parents, she described parents who were emotionally and verbally abusive to one another.

Despite the fact that the more devastating abuse that they experienced was perpetrated by their mothers, there was still a patriarchal influence in the abuse that Roseanne, Orla, and Dottie received. The excessive criticism they endured from their mothers was largely directed at their failure (as adolescent girls and later as women) to achieve an acceptable standard of feminine beauty. They were seen by their mothers- who were oriented to and influenced by male objectification - as being too fat or too ugly (Sassatelli 2011). And this early assault on acceptance, self worth, and self respect resulted in a pathologically low self-esteem that afflicts these women and their ability to form trusting relationships to this day. Although these women experienced forms of domestic abuse and violence in their own intimate relationships as adults,

their essential trauma narrative consistently wound its way back to the stories of maternal maltreatment.

Dottie and Roseanne maintained a distant or detached relationship with their mothers until their mothers passed away. Orla describes eventually ‘coming to terms’ with her mother, but the negative impact of this relationship is evident and surfaces at the very beginning of her initial interview. Orla first hints at her relationship with her mother as she introduces her family of origin-

Orla: I'm the oldest. There had been several miscarriages. They wanted to have a big family. It just didn't happen. But, I had a great life. My father worked hard. We didn't have a whole lot but, you know, they saved and moved up in the company. Very secure, loving family. My father ... that would probably be the thing that would make me cry, the model of my dad. He was terrific... terrific.

My mom, she was strict and I think a lot of my problems came from my mom... with, you know, my life was going to come out with therapy and all that..., but, it was a great childhood. We walked to school. We were always outside playing with the neighborhood kids. It was like, we would walk to church. My mom was involved in everything we did, Girl Scouts, piano lessons. We weren't indulged at all.”

She does not elaborate on “the problems” that came from her mom, instead she goes on to describe her life growing up in the suburbs, her extended family, her family’s close friends, until she reflects back to being sick as a child and her relationship with her mother unfolds...

Orla: I was always sick... *always* sick. When I was four, I had appendicitis and they found it was my lymph node, so I had a history of always being sick. I always got a lot of stuff, so I think my mom ... I don't know, my mom and I kind of didn't get along. She was hard on me.

VC: How so?

Orla: Yeah (pause)... But the lymph node thing --

VC: That was cancer?

Orla: Yeah, yeah. Well not when I was a baby, but they said that the lymph node caused my appendix to burst. But back then, we just didn't know what that was. A lot of

things had been going on. And then it seems like maybe 20 years later we found out I had Hodgkin's disease.

VC: Okay. So... you were always kind of a sick kid?

Orla: Yeah, but I always wanted to get out there and do stuff. It was always... I was never sickly, but when I got sick, I *got* sick - tonsils, adenoids... Accidents all the time. My mother would call her mother and say, "Let me guess, it's Orla." It was always me. It was rough because I was gawky to begin with and then we went to the Middle School... I didn't know anybody. Tall, glasses, pimply. It was just ... I think my self-esteem issues started then.

And it was hard. I think my whole life path was with my low self-esteem. My mother would get so mad at me because she was very confident, a very pretty woman. My sisters were just like her... but I was different.

Again, she chooses not to elaborate when I ask specifically about the ways in which her mother was hard on her until she connects her low self-esteem to the differences she had with her mother- especially around physical appearance and perceived beauty, as she was growing up. Later, as she goes on in separate sections of the interview to reflect on their relationship when she was a young adult and as her current self, she sees that she and her mother were indeed quite similar. Yet in the same passage she implies that it was her mother's overbearing behavior that caused her to end her relationship with her boyfriend the week he was going to ask her to marry him. She also implies that her inability to live up to her mother's expectations influenced her decision to become involved with her future husband, despite his "horrible temper".

Orla: My mom and I clashed. It was awful.

VC: Was it clashing because you were the first born? Was it, or did she clash with your sisters?

Orla: No, her and I, we've talked about it now. And we are so much alike now, and she was so... I always thought I was a disappointment to her because I didn't live the way she did. I think she was just frustrated with me. Not, you know, understanding that now, that she must have been so frustrated with me because she saw such potential and I was just blowing it. Because I was smart in school and I didn't want to go to school. It took me... I did go back to school, I eventually did. I wanted... The stupidest girl in my high school graduated

college. I said, "That's it. If she can do it, I'm doing it." So, I buckled down a little bit and moved back home and really just, for awhile, stuck to the books. And I graduated the University. But that was, it took me six, seven years after I graduated high school before I did that.

VC: Were you working too?

Orla: Yeah. I was working at the University, going part-time. And I was feeling better... Then I found a boyfriend... and I was dating a very serious boyfriend too at the time and we were going to get married. But ... and it didn't work out. Um, my mother was just very overbearing, so I said, you know... It was the week before he was going to ask me to marry him. I said I don't want to go out with you anymore. I just couldn't do it. I didn't know. I don't know if that would have made a difference but then, after I realized I think I made a mistake, he had already found somebody else. It was hard. It was really hard.

VC: Like, you could just be replaced?

Orla: Yeah. If you just beat this, getting it started again... I was replaced like in two weeks and they were engaged right away. It was my ring.

I was like, wow. You really didn't love me like I thought you did. So, I began the drinking and the guys and all that started again and then two years after that, I met my children's... my first husband.

VC: How, about how old were you at that time?

Orla: I was 26. I was 26 when I met him. He was at the University. He was a student at the University too. He was a bartender at this bar I used to go to. Yeah, we hit it off. He was like a lot of fun. He was like, we became best friends. But even then, he had a horrible temper, horrible. I thought I was going to change him... make it all better...

But, again, all of this time I'd been struggling with my mom, her opinion of me and I just never felt like I measured up.

VC: Yeah. Was she vocal about it, I mean...

Orla: No...

VC: Would she criticize you or...

Orla: Yeah, yeah. Sometimes she'd even kick me out of the house. Then my father would come find me. It was just tones and just the looks. She still does it to me but I give it right back now. I still see it and my sisters see it. I still struggle with this woman to like me. And when she is gone, I'm gonna miss her terribly. That

is who she is. You know, and I've come to accept it, you know. She's just got issues with me.

The development and consequences of low self-esteem are well documented in the child abuse and domestic violence literature (Clements, Sabourin, & Spiby, 2004; Longmore, Manning, Giordano & Rudolph 2004; Few & Rosen 2005; Kim & Cicchetti 2006). Orla's issues with self-esteem were echoed by more than half of the women in this study, but the early experiences that influenced their self-esteem were varied. The admission of feelings of low self-esteem came spontaneously from these women as they each described the girl that they once were. At some point, when they shared their memories of growing up in the family of origin they would comment, completely unprompted, on feelings of awkwardness, ugliness, or just not fitting in.

Orla, in addition to the criticism she felt from her mother, expressed that much of her insecurity as a young adolescent girl stemmed from feeling physically unattractive- of being too tall, too skinny, too "pimply and ugly". Toni, Roseanne, Martha, Dottie, and Tanner also talked about dissatisfaction with their physical appearance as girls and young women. Much of their dissatisfaction focused on their perceived weight problems, and for Dottie and Roseanne, who also felt emotionally abused by their mothers- issues with weight and self-esteem have followed them into late adulthood.

In one narrative, Roseanne talks about her relationship with her parents and links her lifelong struggle with her weight and low self-esteem. She loved her father but his alcoholism made him "an absent presence" in her life, and her relationship with her mother she describes as "toxic".

Roseanne: So, for almost all of my adult life I have felt very harmed and --

VC: In, in what way?

Roseanne: In the sense of just being very afraid to get close to anybody, not in friendships. Well, yes, even in friendships. I mean, I'm rather a, a, I'm not someone who wants to talk to you every day. I'm not that type of person. My very best friend, Patty, and I can go a week or two without talking to each other and then pick up and just like, and I pick up very well with people. I need a lot of alone time and I think my weight is a way of keeping people away from me, specifically, intimacy. I think I frame my whole life of sort of protecting myself from... So, I, I think that my whole life has been spent not getting hurt.

VC: Because --

Roseanne: Of my mother.

VC: Because as a, as a little girl, young girl --

Roseanne: Yup. And I think that I went into psych which helped me tremendously because then I learned how to detach from that stuff. So that the self-esteem impairment, which would logically come out of that, didn't affect me as much because I found the right work for me. And in my work, I was very successful.

So that self-esteem component that com--, that lack of self-esteem that comes from any long ago..., it was endless. I felt the abuse from my mother.

I did not weep when she died. I don't weep over her now. I felt very relieved that I was no longer responsible for her. I did cry a little bit the night she died because I wasn't there. I was in Michigan, doing a, a professorship, visiting professorship up in, in Duluth, and everybody said, "Oh, don't you want to come home?" and I went 'No! I don't want to go home'. My brother and I have this all ironed out. It's a memorial service, blah, blah. And that night I did shed some tears and my mother did come to me in some sort of vision in which she said, "Yes, I was mad that you weren't here, but I'm in a better place now. This is very nice where I am." And I remember thinking, thank God. But I was not that effected by her death other than relief. She was a very cruel, mean person and for whatever reason, she held on to that with me...

While physical appearance was always included as a source of low self-esteem, some women suggested additional causes. Tanner was uncomfortable with her height as a girl but her

father's community status and the family's socioeconomic privilege contributed to her feelings of awkwardness and isolation as a girl. Barbara felt like she had a very healthy self-esteem when she was on the Reservation with her People, but when she went to predominantly white schools she often felt insecure and unsure of herself. Dottie reflected on the many causes of her chronic low self-esteem, including her upbringing as a "poor farm girl", in addition to the child abuse she suffered and her struggle with obesity. In the following story Dottie reflects on her low self-esteem and the impact it has had on her over time...

Dottie: I have always had low self-esteem... always did... which you know has its own manifestations. I've only started in the last four-five years going to class reunions, my high school class reunions. The first one I went to I just was so uncomfortable and everything else, because I've no nice, no happy memories from my high school years or my school years and nobody else remembers me the way I remember me you know? ... and now I mean, I just have a great time with all these people, you know? But... in fact, I just had a get together with someone the other night and I realized as I came away, that it's not them looking at me and remembering anything about my childhood. It's me going into that brain mode, if you want to call it that, when I come in contact with them... it's almost like I change my personality. The personality I can sit here and have with you and, and people in the office or whatever, changes when I go in contact with them because I'm bringing back all this old baggage from my preconceived concepts of remembering when I was in high school with them.

VC: So during those high school years...what do you attribute to your self-esteem?

Dottie: Well I mean there were a lot of factors you know. We lived outside of Barton so we went to church and did things in Barton, but I went to school in Payton. So in those days as a farmer, I mean, I didn't ever have any opportunity to participate in any activities in stuff like that... I couldn't stay after school... I had to go home and help with chores.

I was always needy and I think probably it was a direct result of not ever having my mother's attention when I was a kid... and my brothers and sisters, I mean Daddy was not only sexually abusive to my two sisters he was physically, horribly abusive to my brothers, horribly abusive. And so when the four of them had the opportunity at 17, they bolted and did not look back... so I had abandonment from all of them and I was real close with my oldest sister because she was 13 when I was 3, and my mom had the surgery, so she was my mother. You know, so here I have the abandonment of all them leaving, I'm on the farm, I'm isolated, I have no other kids around me I have nobody to teach me.

My mother didn't teach me anything. I had no concept of cleanliness, no concept of being a girl, nothing... absolutely nothing. And I was always, I can remember as a first grader when I was still going to the little red schoolhouse up on the corner. You know, playing... trying to have this little boy as a boyfriend. And being rejected and feeling that rejection and then feeling like that there was something wrong with me because he chose this other little girl instead of me.

You know? Totally ridiculous, mundane sort of situation but that is the way it was interpreted by me. And at least that's the way I'm remembering it, which can be just as powerful. I had no one to talk over these things with.

(Dottie goes on to talk about her feelings of intense insecurity and links it to her lifelong struggle with being overweight. As a little girl, she found a way to make friends by stealing loose change from her father.) ... So I would steal change from him so I could buy candy from the candy store and have it to give to other people... but that I also ate... so that's when my issues with food started. Food became a really good friend right about now, you know.

But I just never felt like I belonged. I never felt like I had friends, I was always trying to do something to get attention to fit in with people, behaving in ways that I thought people wanted me to behave. I don't think I ever knew who I was, ever.

And I just... you know my head takes me to different things all throughout school. Never had boyfriends, always wanted boyfriends. Would you know..., and when you want something like that so badly, the behavior just turns people away you know? Like I mean like I would be so needy trying to get a boy to pay attention to me that I'm the last one that he would pay attention to.

(I asked Dottie if she had any girlfriends or teachers that she could talk to in high school. She talked about seeing an old yearbook and coming to the realization that, despite her memory of the time, she was active in clubs and quite social in high school. She seemed bewildered by her inability to connect her memories of that period with those of her friends)

Dottie: And... and my... (sigh). *Their* memories of me was that I was a great friend, that I was solid as a rock, that I was just a terrific person, just always pleasant, blah blah blah blah, that's just not the way I remember. (pause) And... and you know I just, I just don't carry any of those kind of... Now it makes me wonder if things that happened to me since high school somehow have clouded the way I remember things from high school. I just don't remember, you know if I, if I ever laughed, you know I mean, I know I must have, I know I must have had some good times. But I at least know that I never..., I did not have any..., I didn't have a best friend. I didn't have a girlfriend to call on the phone and talk to, you

know, somebody, you know could help you get through a rough spot. I really don't remember having anybody.

Dottie was a fast talker and she liked to self-analyze. When she talks about the disconnect that exists between the way she is perceived by others and her own self-perception she makes frequent references to her 'mind', or her 'head', or 'going into brain mode' to explain her feelings of worthlessness and isolation. As an adult, in retrospect, she realizes that others did not think of her the way she thinks of herself, in fact, they remember her as being a solid friend and they enjoyed her company. She attributes part of this disconnect to her need, or ability, to suppress her insecurity and present a different image of herself noting, "it's almost like I change my personality". Roseanne and Orla also shared that the impression other people had about them as being easy going, responsible, dependable, and professional was not at all the way they saw themselves. Often, even as adults, they felt insecure and ill prepared.

A final profound analysis that Dottie makes is in reference to her silence and being unable to talk to anyone about the abuse she was enduring or her feelings of loneliness and loss. She is forced to bear these experiences by herself and she remembers this pain. In one of many childhood examples where she felt stinging rejection, she both rationalizes and acknowledges her pain as an adult by saying it was a ... "Totally ridiculous, mundane sort of situation but that is the way it was interpreted by me. And at least that's the way I'm remembering it, which can be just as powerful. I had no one to talk over these things with."

Only as older women did Dottie, Roseanne, and Orla begin to address and overcome their feelings of low self-esteem, insecurity, and lack of trust. All three sought individual psychological counseling to help them with this task. Roseanne explains that one of the first steps she took toward overcoming the impact of her mother's abuse was to confront her. In the following passage she describes the first time she found her voice, stood up to her mother, and began to separate herself from her mother's negative influence. It also provides an example of her mother's ambivalence toward Rosanne's weight-

VC: Did you ever lash right back out at her at any point in time or you just --

Roseanne: I was way too afraid of her when I was young. Way too afraid of her. When I got in my 30s, and after lots of therapy, now, my mother would probably answer that question that I did lash out at her. Come to think of it... because she's told me I had a terrible temper. So, I don't remember lashing out at her about the stuff she said to me, but I do know we fought all the time when I at, in adolescence, about anything I would want to do separate from her. Any independent, anything, have a party, have whatever, she, no, no, no. The only word out of her mouth was "no," and then I'd go to my father who would help me pull it off... So, naturally, that would just fuel her rage but, so, she would say, I believe- that I was "very confrontational". I never confronted her about how she treated me until I've had a lot of therapy and I tried to do it the right way.

VC: How did that go?

Roseanne: It, it shocked her -- -- that I talked back. It would, the only incident that I could remember was, as she was handing me sticky buns, she was saying, she was handing me the sticky buns that she wanted me to try, saying, "I just wish you could do something about your weight." And I remember, at that moment, I stopped and I said, "Do you have any sense of how ridiculous that statement is? That you're worried about my weight while you're handing me the sticky buns I didn't even ask for." And she was stunned. And I said, "I am so tired of you criticizing," I remember this vividly. I said, "I am so tired of your criticizing my body. I have never once criticized your body." She was totally thrown. She immediately backed off. She said, "I didn't mean to do that. I didn't mean to do that. I didn't mean..." Whatever... and I just left the room. That was, that was a banner moment for me in therapy. It didn't change anything with her after that but at that moment it did. She was shocked!

On Launching

Final findings from the Early Life narratives involved the transition from adolescence to young adulthood and launching away from the family of origin. In these passages the women talked about leaving home for work or school and the myths and misconceptions they had about dating, sex, and marriage. It's at this point that they really begin to contemplate the gendered meaning behind the stories they told of limited options for work and school, of feeling pressure to marry, of feeling generally ill prepared to be an independent adult. Sometimes these reflections were expressed as 'aha' moments and the women would excitedly link their feelings

of powerlessness or indignation to a historical time or event- for example Tanner's defiance of her parents' wishes when it came time for her to choose a college and career path. She wanted to go to college to study Nursing, and they wanted her to go to a prestigious, private college in order to find a husband. It's when they begin to reflect on their early adult decisions that they begin to link morals or lessons to their stories. These early adult decisions represented critical choices that were being made by 17, 18, and 19 year old women, and it is these choices that would have a significant impact on their life course trajectories.

As they became young adults, all of the women in the study could recall an eager excitement and romantic anticipation of leaving home and striking out into the world. Even for the women who came from violent and abusive families, leaving was a desperate attempt to escape a bad home life but it also represented a new and thrilling adventure just the same. And although these women's memories were tempered by a life's worth of wisdom and experiences (both good and bad), as they told their stories- with much laughter and chagrin- of starry-eyed, teenaged desires, I could catch a glimpse of the girls that they once were. In the following narrative, Toni remembers feeling unprepared and awkward as young woman leaving the confines of her Catholic school community to enter a public high-school. She also reflects on her adolescent opinion of marriage and her sexual naiveté.

Toni: Everybody was Catholic. We all belonged to the, went to church together. We belonged to all the organizations together. The CYOs, whatever they were. We did, everything revolved around the church and I didn't have any non-Catholic friends. Until I went to the public school. So, you know, here I am, enmeshed in all of these other people and seeing, you know, who the popular ones and, you know, the boys wouldn't even look at me kind of thing. I mean they didn't know me. And as I said, I was feeling insecure and I started to eat more, gain weight, and because I wasn't doing any activities and I, I didn't want to go the gym to wear those little gym suits that we had to wear because, you know, at 110 pounds I thought I was fat when I was 15 years old. And, you know, if I knew today what, then what I know today, I'd be very different, but as far as my perception of what a young woman should be I, I probably, I don't know. I would only think that I just would want to get married and have kids and cook meals for my husband. I don't know if I even thought about having a career.

I guess years ago I thought about when, when I did get married that, you know, I would work for a few years and have my kids and stay home and baby sit. And for me that wasn't how it was, you know. We had a home and if we wanted to stay in that home, we needed two incomes- so Mike went to a sitter six months after he was born.

VC: Did you, how was your mom with, so, I mean, you were her first girl, but do you remember conversations with her about your role as a woman?

Toni: No.

VC: No conversations of 'Now when you get married, you're gonna need to do this...' or 'I need to teach you this to do that...'?

Toni: No. My mom and I never even had a conversation about our per--, my period. She gave me a book that, um, that I was to read and it was hard for me to really understand it. That we weren't, we didn't have that kind of open relationship. That I felt even comfortable saying, 'mom, will you explain this to me? I don't, I don't know what it means.'

VC: How about girlfriends later on. Did, were any, any, close friends that you could compare things with?

Toni: You know, I'm sure that we did talk about that. I was 16 before I got my period and my girlfriends were 14 when they started theirs and today they're like 12 when they start. But, um, and I didn't, I didn't know anything.

I didn't even know how you got pregnant and I thought, truly, you're gonna laugh, but I thought when somebody stuck up the middle finger, that was how, you know, that meant, I mean I know what it means, but -- that was how you got pregnant. By sticking the finger in there and it just, I didn't know. When did I find out? I don't know... probably when I was a little bit older.

You know, just the girls talking about somebody talking about sex and all I had to do was listen and, you know. I remember talking with one friend the first time she had sex and it was before she was married and it was like *really*? Oh, what, what do they do. But, yeah, you know, so, it, you know, we did compare notes. I mean not specifics, but --- but she was the only person I ever spoke to about it. She probably doesn't even remember the conversation.

VC: And about how old were you then, what grade?

Toni: I was, was probably 18 because it was, well, I was married when I was 20, so it was, it was after I graduated from high school.

After high school graduation, some of the women went to right to work and were excited about the prospects of making money and living as, according to Hattie, "a real adult...going out with friends at night and having a drink... a midnight curfew was a real big deal". Frannie went to work for the phone company, Sunny worked for a large Department Store, Penny worked as a

secretary, Delia took a job with the Army as a clerk, and Anne worked in a school cafeteria. The rest of the women planned on going to college or trade schools, but as Sybil, Sunny, and Tanner expressed, the career opportunities for women were quite restrictive, as were the expectations of parents. Sunny came from a secure, white, middle-class background and her choice of college reflects her deference to her father's and older brother's expectations and aspirations...

VC: And you mentioned, um, that you went to college?

Sunny: I went to college in the Northeast.

VC: Was that unusual for that time for you to --

Sunny: No, no, it wasn't. No, most, not all, most of the girls, my friends, my close friends in high school, all went to college. Most of them from Bell Isle, not all of them, but most of them went to the State University. That was the quote "college" or, you know, my brother went to the State University. I went to, to a, an all-girl school in the southern part of the state by choice. That was what I preferred to do. I studied home economics.

VC: How long were you in school, in college?

Sunny: I got an Associate Degree in two years and then I, why I chose two years, mainly 'cuz I was wearing, of all of my family, I was the one that was the most, most, what do I want to say, conscious of what expense my family, my father, was going through so there were two of us in college at the same time.

And I knew my brother was a lot smarter than I was and his career meant, to me meant much more, was much more important than mine.

VC: Why was that?

Sunny: Well, because he would have to support a family. And, as far as, you know, my father trying to keep two of us in school, so I chose to go to a smaller school and, and get an Associate Degree instead of spending four years. And, it was expensive then, but I guess I didn't, I knew my father was, you know -- We weren't poor. I don't mean that, but, you know, two kids at that time in college...

While Sunny is conscious of her father's economic investment in his children, she assumes a subordinate position to her brother implying that she is less worthy to attend the more prestigious university. This was a common occurrence at the time when a woman's college diploma was less valuable than a marriage license. Perhaps Sunny's internalized assumption was

that once married she would not need to work, and knowing that she would make less money if she entered the work force her education was not worthy of a higher investment. Little did she know that she would work until she was 78 years old. Tanner's example demonstrates class differences. Her parents see college more as an opportunity for a prosperous marriage. She interprets her father's rejection of her ambition to be a nurse as being 'beneath her', while at the same time he rejects her consideration of a medical or judicial degree as being unsuitable for a woman because they are men's roles.

Tanner: And, I guess, at some point I decided that I wanted to be a nurse and my parents were just absolutely horrified. You know, "You're going to college, you know? You're not gonna be a nurse!" And, ah, so, then I think I said well, then I'll be a doctor and my father said well, "No, women aren't doctors!" I would be a lawyer. "No, you can't be a lawyer!" Women just get married and have babies. Well, that didn't sit well with me. We were always clashing over those kind of things.

VC: Did your, did your mother support that too or...?

Tanner: My mother was kind of quiet about it. My mother went to college, you know, but she never worked. And my sister and I, particularly me, I think I was the instigator. I would say, you know, "how, how can you not work?" You know, "what, what do you do all day?" You know what do you, I mean, you know, she took care of the house and, you know, did most of your own work and everything. Ah, I always thought, you know, I never wanted to do that. That would just be way, way too boring, so I always said that I was going to have a career and, ah, I didn't, I didn't want to just get married, you know, I really hadn't, I hadn't really, that really wasn't in my plan. It was their plans, but not particularly mine. So, before, I guess probably my junior year we looked at, they took me to look at different colleges and I loved Cornwall 'cuz, I don't know, we must have done the whole northeast because I remember we looked at Barkley and Cornwall and I don't really know what else, but I really liked Cornwall and my father said, "Well, you know, you're gonna go to a state school, you need to go to one...", we lived in the Northeast, so we looked at Northeast State and I had a friend who was going to Northeast State. Our original plan was that we would both go. She wasn't a real close friend, but she was somebody that was in my group of friends. So go to Northeast State. And, ah, the more I thought about it, I thought, you know, it's just too big. Way, way too big. And we had looked at, then we looked, I can't remember, we looked at Heidleberg which, ah, my family was Lutheran, so it was a Lutheran school and, ah, it had always been, ah, just men and they were going co-ed and they were going to let three women there. You know, you wouldn't want to associate with the three women that were there, but anyway, I said "no way am I going here" and then we went to Bransford and I really, I really liked

Bransford and my parents were, they were enthused about it because the whole town, Lawton, *is* the school, you know. That's really all that's there. And they told us, I think it was at the Inn or something, that if you go to Bransford, you marry a Bransfordian. Well, they thought that was a good idea, so, ah, we finally agreed on Bransford...

Many of these women entered their first intimate relationship with a man when they were still teenagers. Some of them had dated in high school, and as Sunny said “we fooled around and kissed some but that was it!” But none of them fully understood the complexities of a sexual relationship. They didn’t really know what was expected of them in this new role, living with a man that wasn’t their father. They had negotiated relationships with parents and siblings but with a new husband or partner, they were in uncharted territory. All of the women had a specific rationale for marrying or cohabitating. Many of the older women acknowledged that marriage was an expectation. Sunny and Ann both recalled their mothers preparing a hope chest for them while they were teenagers. Sunny fondly remembered that each year for her birthday she “... got something to put away for later, you know, to set up house with... so I’d be ready.” Most of the women recalled feeling both excitement and fear at the prospect of getting married. For Tanner, Hattie, and Penny it was simply as Hattie put it, “the next step.” For some of the women like Frannie (who met her husband only a few weeks before they eloped), and Clara and Martha (who got pregnant) their excitement and fear was tempered by shame and disappointment in having gone against their parents’ wishes. Delia was conflicted about marriage but “knew without a doubt” she “wanted to mother” her boyfriend’s two year old daughter.

Frannie and Sybil were the only women interviewed who had eloped. They talked now about the regret of a hasty decision but of how heady and romantic the notion was when they were young. They felt desperate to be with the man that they “had fallen for”, despite their parents’ misgivings. They were remorseful of the way they had sacrificed jobs, integrity, and

respect to run away and marry. But it wasn't necessarily passion that pressured women into marriage. Toni also felt pressure to marry, but for her it was the pressure of an unspoken social expectation:

Toni: ... So I think drove to work, or to school. And, ah, so, that was a year. I went in September and I graduated in August. During, during that year, I don't know when in that year, but was when I met John. He worked for the Village of Old Bay. And was working on my street at the time and, ah, I thought he was kind of cute, so, um, I, I knew some of the other guys because they might have been people I had gone to school with or it was somebody who knew my mom because my mom worked for the Village of Old Bay as well. And we'd be talking or I might be there with her, I don't remember exactly, but, um, I just, I do remember seeing him and thought he was cute and the next thing I know, he was asking me out. So, I was just thrilled. And --

VC: Did you feel any kind of pressure up until that time either from family or friends or just your own that, that you're 18 and haven't dated? Did you feel a pressure to date?

Toni: I did. I did, because that was at a time when a lot of, not only my friends, but just girls I went to school with, high school with, were getting married and I didn't have anybody.

And it bothered, it did bother me. It did bother me. So we met. We went out, um, for a while. Um, my guess is that was probably 1970 when I met him because I was engaged at Christmas of 70. And we were married in May of 72. Now when I announced my engagement to my parents, I recall they weren't very excited. But I was, I didn't think much of it then. But now looking back, you know, I can see that they weren't really happy about it.

VC: Right. How long were you together, how long did you date before you got engaged?

Toni: I would, I would say six, eight months. I don't know. But they saw something that I obviously wasn't seeing and all I could see was, I found this guy who liked me. And wanted to marry me. So, we planned the wedding and everything and, um, we there we were... a nice, middle-class family.

But Toni, like most of the other women interviewed, felt ill prepared for marriage. For Clara, "It certainly wasn't what I expected". For Sunny, "You know you have these images, or fantasies about him bringing you flowers and being romantic and all that... that never happened". For Martha, "I was thinking about being free, like a real adult... only I wasn't free". Orla felt pressure to marry her husband despite growing conflict in their relationship, his emotional and psychological manipulation, and her feelings of isolation...

Orla: -- I just thought that was normal, to be treated like that. Then it just began after that. He was chipping away at my family. He was trying to really separate me from my family. I really think he married me because he thought my parents had money and we were going to get it. There were several times he had asked me to borrow money from them and I wouldn't do it. We just don't do that in my family. That's their money, it's not our money. I think he realized, I think my father was onto him, but never would say anything.

My ex-husband gambled and my father was a bookie, so he was into my dad for a lot of money too. So, he started getting angry at them. He is the one who pointed out to me, "You know, your father has a drinking problem." I never realized it, so I started looking at my parents not the way I should have been. He was pulling me away from them.

VC: Was he manipulating all your --?

Orla: Yeah, he just... he zeroed in on my low self-esteem but then, he never hit me.

VC: Mmhmm.

Orla: He always threatened, Argh! He would come home mad at somebody else or whatever was going on in his life. So, I started living my life just to make peace, make peace, make peace - whatever it takes, make peace. Sometimes I was tired and didn't want to fool around and I had to. Sometimes it wasn't nice. Um, I just became... He took my soul. He took my soul.

Some of the younger women, who were in their late teens or early twenties during the cultural transitions of the 1960s, seemed much less enchanted by the idea of marriage. Roseanne thought of marriage as an act- as "something (she) would probably do" eventually. But none of the younger women talked about marriage in the romanticized way the older women did. For these women, marriage represented an acceptance of the status quo, and for some it was an act of desperation. They used marriage or co-habitation as a means of escaping either the routine or the dysfunction of their home life. Orla felt pressure to marry because she was getting older and ultimately she "settled"...

VC: So, tell me about that. Tell me about the marriage part. So, were you in love with him or was it one of those --

Orla: Settled. I settled. My sister married the love of her life and her way was so much fun, and with Randy. His name was Randy. I loved his family. I loved his friends. We had a good time. We did become friends, but the whole time he had a very bad temper. He was always telling me how awful his growing up was and I could see that his father beat his mother, cheated on her, blah, blah, blah. And I said how awful for you. We can do better. I'm trying to think... We should not have gotten married. We settled. We both did. I wanted to get married. Right before we got married, we almost didn't because he got real mad at my sister. He was screaming at her and stuff, my youngest sister, and she decided to not even be in the wedding. She couldn't stand him. She never liked him. She was 10 years younger than me and she said, "I don't want to be in your wedding. I don't think you should marry him." I think that's when the whole fight started.

But, you know, everything was in place - the dress. The flowers... and I didn't want to do that. I was, you know, I was 28. He was five years younger than me. He was good-looking and, you know, had a great career. He was going to work for the government and I thought he was so smart, you know. I remember that night we got married. The tradition in our family was we could go to my mother's because, back then, the gifts would come ahead of time and there would be a room where the gifts were displayed. People would come and then we'd go back to my parents after the wedding and we'd sit around and talk. I remember we did that and he couldn't wait to get out of there. He just wanted to go. So, I remember driving away crying my eyes out.

And he used to travel a lot. He worked for the government. He was an accountant. That first year, we didn't see each other that much and the history would come out that that was just perfect for him. He was cheating on me before we got married, but I didn't know it.

Later in the interview as she reflects on her life she confirms that she “settled” but here she offers an explanation for her choice that reflects not only her own insecurity but also a social message of female desirability tied to youth.

Orla: I settled. I was so afraid I wasn't gonna get married. I should have, I don't know. It probably seems so --

VC: Do you think you would have done, I mean --

Orla: Who knows? I think I would have ended up with, I don't know... my personality. Again, I still blame myself for it. It's just habit. That low self-esteem, I felt I deserved it. Who knows what I would have done that's better. There were a lot of guys, really great guys, I broke up with. We always call it the ‘Carpenter’s

Curse'. If they like us, they're doomed. (laughter) We went with the ones who don't like us, and those are the ones we shouldn't be with. But I don't know... I never met anyone that was good enough for my dad.

You know, even if he hadn't cheated on me, it wasn't gonna last. I was just choking. I could not live like that too much longer anyway. So, I think he did me a favor. But, like you said, the emotions -- Sometimes people won't talk about it because, physically you can see -- Like it's in your head. "I deserve it." Pretty much, "I deserve it." That was him, you know. "I deserve this."

Martha and Dottie both fell in love with men they knew their parents wouldn't approve of. Feeling a sense of freedom and growing independence, both women began experimenting sexually. For Martha, dating "bad boys" was a way she could rebel against the confines of her structured, middle class family,

Martha, "... (I) craved the attention he gave me. I thought he was really good looking and he was, in the beginning he was really sweet. And of course, I just went against anything my parents said or did at the time. I was sneaking out and running away... And of course one thing leads to the next and I'm pregnant and then things really got bad".

Dottie's account of her early sexual exploration is tied to her feelings of insecurity, abandonment, and low self-esteem. She begins to take great risk with her exploration, first with men who use her casually for sex, then she dates black men, which at the time was still absolutely taboo.

Dottie: "...So that was it, I went off to college. College lasted a year because I just went crazy. I had freedom. I could do whatever I pleased. There was nobody telling me what I could do and what I couldn't do. I barely went to classes, survived the first semester and ended up failing out my second semester. In that period of time, I was, I just turned into this wild child just trying to have that male attention that, you know, the pattern was set for me of never ever being able to recognized, and first of all I didn't think I was good enough to be able to. So when I went to college I discovered other races and other ethnicities... that they'd be glad to have me. So I could have a man with them... and one of the school dances I allowed myself to be picked up by some student from South America, Central America, I don't know Peru, Guatemala, I have no idea. And we went for a ride..., I redefined naïve. Went for a ride, didn't know what the clue he was trying to do and I'm lucky I didn't get myself raped...

And then, but then I discovered there was a building being built outside of our dorm, and so we would flirt with some of the construction workers. So then we were up at a bar, I turned eighteen in January and we were up at a bar and there was this one guy that was always there, well I found out later that this guy was fricking forty-five years old, this black guy. So, I don't even remember, but I ended going out with him a couple times and he raped, well no, he tried to rape me and left me on a country road and I have no idea how I got back, I can't remember but he wasn't able to, his problem, my problem, I don't know he wasn't able to... well that's how the Dean of Women found out and in those days they had the right to expel you, they had the right to do all kinds of things... and cause girls still had curfews in the dorms and I mean, I had already gone in that direction and I wasn't participating in the campus because I had already decided that I couldn't fit into any of these things... and I remember that I was in the health center, doctor's bed, whatever, and they let me out and stuff like that... and I just craved attention so bad and my parents didn't even come down and I remember the Dean of Women telling me that if I didn't stop, if I ever saw or was seen with or whatever, black people again that they would expel me from school and I don't know what was going on... I tried to get attention by pretending to pass out in the dorm so they took me to the health center and that got me a little attention for a little while but I just didn't allow myself to fit in anywhere. I just assumed it and so I didn't even try... so I wasn't getting to know anybody that were students. I had discovered this other world out here that I *could* fit in to.

Although she feels a new found acceptance, Dottie goes on to explain that it was during this time that she began “hiding” certain behaviors that she felt would anger or disappoint people, particularly her family and white friends. She hid her relationships with black men until she got pregnant, then she hid from her family and friends. She left her rural community and immersed herself into an urban, mostly black neighborhood, severing ties with her family. When she began being physically abused by her boyfriend she became further isolated. She no longer had a relationship with her family and felt she could not turn to them for help.

Observations on Differences

For the most part, the younger women seemed to struggle the most with the transition into adulthood. Perhaps this was more related to their coming of age in the 1960s, and the radical changes in social behavior affecting the younger population. The Civil Rights movement, the Sexual Revolution, the Women's movement, etc. combined to create, at least initially, a decade

of social and personal criticism and inquiry. And while the older women seemed to move into and accept their adult roles more smoothly, all of the women made some comment or reference to the myths and misconceptions they had about entering marriage or cohabitation. They all expressed some degree of delusion and disappointment, particularly after their abuse started.

There were other differences that I noticed early on in the interviews between the younger and older women, and also between the Native and non-Native women, as they talked about their early lives. The oldest women, the octogenarians, tended to reflect back on their family of origin with great fondness and the time in which they grew up as if it were a magical, golden age. Even Sybil, who as a child was both witness to and victim of family violence, recalled the 1930s and 1940s as an idyllic time to grow up. Every one of these women at some point in their Early Life narratives referenced not having to lock your doors and playing outside all day long without any direct supervision, but with lots of neighborly support. Also, nobody had any money but everyone was rich in spirit, and trust abounded. This theme of ‘a better time and better place’ was threaded through the entire life history for these women... each of them, at each segment of the life course, would find an opportunity to imply that ‘things were different then’. While it may not have been a wholly accurate representation of childhood in the Depression Era, it was a shared reality for these women.

The youngest women, in comparison, did not romanticize their family of origin or their youth whatsoever. They offered fairly brief depictions of the 1950s childhood without much of the detailed and decorative descriptions the older women shared. This did not coincide with my understanding of the 1950s family which I found to be perplexing and somewhat personally disappointing. But my impression of mid-20th century America was shaped by the syndicated reruns of *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* and *The Donna Reed Show*, and their

construction (produced exclusively by privileged, white men) of a totally unrealistic representation of the ideal family. It appears that the women who grew up during this time did not come from these types of families.

There were also differences between white and Native women. The Native women all recalled growing up financially poor but certainly not needy. They described or implied that everything they needed, from food and shelter to love and support, could be found within their extended families and within their Reservation communities. While they did acknowledge experiencing feelings of adolescent awkwardness or vulnerability, for the most part it was related to having to leave the security and exclusivity of the Reservation- which up until the time they graduated from grade school had comprised their whole world. They had all been raised on the Reservation- it's where their large, extended families lived, where they attended ceremonies, and where they went to primary school- all among their own people. But going to high school at age 13 or 14 meant leaving the sanctuary of the Reservation to be immersed in an alien culture of predominantly white students and teachers.

At the time Sybil, Penney, and Clara went to high school in the 1940s and 1950s, they had experienced blatant racism from their white peers and teachers. For Barbara, who went to high school in the 1960s, racism was still rampant but among the Native students there was a growing, open resistance to oppression that coincided with the Civil Rights Movement and culminated in the American Indian Movement in the early 1970s. Yet despite the poverty and racism these women faced, none of them mentioned feelings of low self-esteem, depression, or isolation. Penney had a physical disability that made it difficult for her to walk but except for a brief time in early adolescence, she didn't feel unhappy with her body image. In fact, from my

interactions with these women, they seemed to generate an aura of confidence and self respect that the white women didn't have.

Another cultural difference was noted in the way in which the white women and the Native women attended to the actual telling of their life histories. All of the women had a beginning, middle, and end of their stories that paralleled their early life, middle life, and later life. The white women were very focused on making sure they organized the timing or sequencing of their stories from past to present. Kenyon & Clark (2001) refers to this practice as time oriented story-telling and the white women were remarkably proficient at it. The white women's stories unfolded from the most distant recollection of early childhood and proceeded systematically through each subsequent phase of life- from elementary, middle and high school, to college or work, to marriage and cohabitations, childrearing, separation or divorce, etc. Frannie was particularly adept at making sure all her dates were correct and would stop mid-story to correct a discrepancy. The Native women on the other hand were much more story oriented. They stayed within the general framework of beginning, middle, and end but would arbitrarily blur those boundaries if they had a funny story to tell or if they found a story to be meaningful. Additionally, in general the Native women's stories were more colorful and humorous, even when they described painful experiences they would try to find some humor in the lessons they had learned.

Summary of Key Findings

The women in this study were diverse, coming from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some of the women were Native American and some were white. Some were wealthy, some middle class, and some poor. Some had loving parents and stable home environments, others did not. Each life was unique and representative of specific social, historical, and familial influences that shaped

each personal biography. In attempting to understand the phenomenon of domestic violence, researchers have focused on relationships and behaviors within the family of origin and have come to the conclusion that domestic violence, like the individual lives it impacts, results from a “complex constellation” of factors (Anderson 1997:65).

Key findings of the Early Life narratives demonstrate the complex and conflicting nature of abuse and violence as it impacts individuals and families. While all of the women in this study experienced some degree of domestic violence in their own marital relationships, most had never been exposed to domestic violence growing up. The majority of women studied described generally happy childhoods with no exposure to interparental domestic violence in the family of origin whatsoever. Countering the intergenerational transmission of violence theory, these women had no previous experience with interparental domestic violence from which to model behaviors (Makepeace 1981; Jackson 1999; Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2005). Two of the 15 women had witnessed rare, paternal physical violence directed at themselves, a sibling, or a pet but *not* at their mothers; and three women reported pervasive violence in which they witnessed their mothers being abused by their fathers, and were themselves victims of abuse as children and adolescents. Despite the fact that these three women had prior experience with multiple types of family violence, it did not prepare them for, or protect them against, the violence they suffered in their own intimate relationships. These women were as equally shocked and bewildered by their first encounter with domestic violence as their cohorts who had no previous exposures to violence.

This variability in exposure to abuse in the family of origin and subsequent abuse in the marital relationship is consistent with current domestic violence research. There is no single variable or dynamic that predisposes an individual or family to domestic violence. While the

intergenerational transmission of violence exists in some family typologies, for others it does not. Domestic violence does not discriminate- it occurs in rich families and poor families, in families of color and white families, in rural and urban families, in young families and mature families, and in heterosexual and same-sex households. The vast majority of domestic violence victims are heterosexual women. While power operates in all individuals, with heterosexual domestic violence, men use coercion and disproportional force to control women. The decision a man makes to act abusively is not a learned behavior, it is not caused by military service, or alcohol use, or stress. The decision to act abusively is an individual choice, promoted by patriarchy as a hegemonic masculinist discourse that gives privilege to male power and status, and supported by the social tolerance of violence against women as a means of achieving and maintaining male power (Dobash & Dobash 1979; Kemp 1998).

An interesting finding emerged from the Early Life narratives that was unanticipated. All of the women in the study expressed some degree of adolescent low self-esteem, particularly around body image and feminine performance, although some felt shame and insecurity around their family's social or economic status. For most of the women, feelings of low self-esteem and insecurity abated by late adolescence and young adulthood. Research on children and family violence, in particular the witnessing of interparental domestic violence, suggests that girls are at increased risk of developing significant low self-esteem and subsequent psychological symptomology (Makepeace 1981; Jackson 1999; Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2005). According to this literature, I had expected that the three women who experienced multiple types of family violence growing up would have reported more problematic histories of low self-esteem, but this was not the case. Two of the women, who were Native, made no reference to low self-esteem beyond adolescence, and the references they did make were minimal and fleeting. The third

woman, who was white, reported a history of extreme low self-esteem that followed her through life and impacted to social and psychological wellbeing. However, this woman did not attribute her low self-esteem to her exposure to paternal violence. She, and two other white women (with rare or no family of origin exposure to paternal violence) who shared similar struggles with lifelong, pathological low self-esteem directly related their symptoms to chronic and excessive maternal criticism.

Despite maternal responsibility, the abuse that these women were subjected to was rooted in patriarchy and the masculinist construction of gender ideology (Sassatelli 2011; Yllo 1993). Contemporary scholarship of gender recognizes that the constructs of masculine and feminine are social creations that are not universal, and that there is much more fluidity between feminine and masculine categories and ideals (Carty 2005). However, when these women were growing up in the 1950s, the social boundaries of gender were much more rigid and the messages young girls received were directed at achieving an acceptable degree of feminine beauty and behavior in order to find a suitable husband. Their mothers, and to some extent their fathers, were heavily invested in this goal. The chronic, excessive criticism these women received from their mothers was largely directed at their failure (as adolescent girls and later as women) to achieve this standard of feminine beauty. They were perceived by their mother's- who were oriented to and influenced by male objectification – to be too fat or too ugly or too awkward (Sassatelli 2011). Messages these young girls received from their mothers- that they were unattractive and undesirable, were internalized. As a result, as adult women, they continued to struggle with persistent feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and shame that ultimately interfered with their ability to form trusting relationships and caused significant emotional and psychological pain.

Chapter 5

The Marital Transition Narratives

“But I didn’t really know him til after we got married. After we got married... that’s ah, well that’s when you really get to know someone. That’s when you learn their secrets...”
Sybil, age 87

The Marital Transition narratives represent the years that encompassed the women’s first intimate, cohabitating relationship, which for most of them coincided with marriage, up until the point this first relationship ended. The majority of these narratives were recorded during our second interview which proved to be a much more relaxed, less awkward encounter than our initial introduction and interview. Although our rapport seemed well established, I noticed that the mood of the marital stories was much more somber than the Early Life stories. It was not necessarily words that were said, but how words were said, or left unsaid. There was much less animation and although there was emotion expressed, it was usually sad or subdued. Although they provided great detail in describing some of the trauma they endured, they told their stories with a different cadence and tone. Where childhood and family of origin was romanticized in some cases, with a kind of slow or lingering reminiscence, marriage talk was stark and fast but without vivacity. In some cases, (e.g., Anne, Frannie, Dottie, Tanner) it seemed as though they were almost anxious to share these stories with me. Frannie and Dottie, in particular, would describe memories of their relationships at fever pitch, then stop and ask, “is this what you want?” In other cases, (e.g., Roseanne, Martha, and Clara) the mood of the marriage story was quite melancholy, but more vague. And while many women gave graphic examples of the abuse or violence they suffered, including rape or watching their children suffer abuse, they did so using a much more detached tone. The recollections that they shared of marriage and their

experiences with domestic violence were almost business like, especially when they talked of their partner, their relationship, or their personal domestic violence experiences.

In retrospect, most of the women expressed a sense of profound disappointment around their abuse and their loss of innocence and in some cases the loss of love shared with their partner. They used words like “shocked” and “stunned” to describe how they felt when their abuse started, and many expressed- through words, utterances, or action, that their partner’s betrayal was much more painful than his abuse or violence. For the most part, the women expressed regret about their experience with domestic violence, but acceptance of the things that happened to them. They understood that they could not change the past, but they could learn from it.

One of the most interesting findings from the narratives about the Marital Transition was that the deepest emotions expressed by these women had little to do with their own victimization, but were directed at the pain, guilt, and remorse they felt for their children. These emotions were linked to their sense of helplessness as their children witnessed and or became victims of abuse and violence, the loss of the nuclear family, feeling that they abandoned or were responsible for their husband’s abandoning the family through divorce or separation, feeling unable to provide for their children financially or in some cases emotionally.

Encountering Domestic Violence

Intimidation, coercion, physical assault, or rape of an individual is criminal and punishable by law. However, in the case of domestic violence up until the last decade of the 20th century in the US, in many places these acts were permissible if they happened within the confines of marriage and the privacy of the home. All of the women interviewed for this study had experienced some form of domestic abuse during their marriage or cohabitation that would

correspond with Kelly & Johnson's (2008) definition of Coercive Controlling Violence, that is, a pattern of power and control including "emotionally abusive intimidation, coercion, and control coupled with physical violence against partners" (478).

Emotional abuse, name calling, manipulation and intimidation were commonly experienced by all the women in this study however, the form of abuses or violence the women experienced was wide ranging. Clara and Roseanne suffered psychological abuse (i.e., manipulation, intimidation, pathologic indifference) almost exclusively. Sunny, Ann, Tanner, and Barbara endured psychological abuse mostly but experienced one or two episodes where their husbands or partners used physical force against them- usually in the form of a slap, push, or shove. Hattie, Martha, and Penney experienced the shortest relationships but they were extremely physically violent. In these cases, the women were punched or kicked severely or were hit with objects, choked, or stabbed. Toni, Orla, Delia, Sybil, Frannie, and Dottie experienced years of both psychological and physical abuse, although to varying degrees. All of these women experienced abuse that would be considered patriarchal terrorism⁶. Toni and Delia both experienced physical violence on more than a few occasions but not to the extreme frequency and degree that Dottie, Frannie, and Sybil endured. Orla implied, and Frannie described experiencing marital rape.

All of the women described the pain, frustration, and disappointment they felt trying to make the relationship work and all, without exception, felt that the psychological abuse, particularly name calling and verbal assaults on their physical appearance, lack of intelligence, or inability to please their partners had the most damaging and prolonged impact on their self-

⁶ Johnson (1995) defines patriarchal terrorism as "a product of patriarchal traditions of men's right to control "their" women, is a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systematic use of not only severe violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics" (p.284).

esteem. And all of the other women who endured physical or sexual violence could recall, with exceptional detail, the first time they were physically assaulted by their partners.

Confusion & Bewilderment

In the following passage, Frannie offers a particularly disturbing account of gendered messages she received and internalized as a young woman of 19. She knows that she is in trouble and that she is “dealing with something” that she is unfamiliar with. Her first reaction is to flee but then she is faced with the responsibilities of being a good wife and mother. Even though she is being beaten, the message she understands is wife most important, mother is next most important, and self is least important. Later, as an older woman, she reflects on the meaning of marital rape and begins to question traditional male privilege; the demands for attention and the expectation of service.

Frannie: “When I met my husband it was new. Everything was new – feelings and everything (long pause and deep sigh)...so we got married against my parent’s wishes, of course.

VC: How long had you known him?

Frannie: Not very long. I think it was about two weeks before he gave me the diamond... and then he was due to go overseas and he, so he wanted to get married before he went overseas. So it was against my parent’s wishes. They wanted us to wait until the following May when I turned nineteen and so he really talked me into it and, of course, with all my feelings and all my emotions involved I definitely was going to do what he wanted and so we left. I mean I left all of my responsibilities, everything that I was doing here, I just dropped it all, which just really went against my character, *really*, but I did do it. (She goes on to explain the difficulty they had in trying to find a priest who would marry them outside of their parish)

So we were married (long pause and sigh trails off). ...Then we came back home and it wasn’t until I was – I can’t remember if I was pregnant with my first child or maybe after the first child had been born. No, I think I was pregnant with my first child that I began to see that there was kind of like, I’m dealing with something here that I didn’t know how to deal with – was anger and, of course, I wanted to avoid anger at all costs. Do whatever I could do. I took it for my own... “What did I do?”, you know, and that was the beginning of – one day we were sitting in our little, tiny, small kitchen and I was serving food to him and he said ‘some one of these days I’m going to – like this’... and he lifted

his fist in my face (she demonstrates). He was talking to me seriously. So I backed up against our kitchen door which was about a foot and a half behind the chair. So I backed up against the kitchen door when he went like this (pumps fist) and he had no intentions of hitting me. He was just making a motion. So when he brought his fist up, the lady next door opened the kitchen door pushing me forward and he caught me right on the chin and I started to slump right down and, of course, he was just mortified after that.

VC: Why had he said that he was going to do that to you?

Frannie: He'd get angry over things. I can't even say what they were. He wouldn't want to get up in the morning. I would get up and cook him breakfast and he had men that were – we didn't have a car so there were different guys from the base that would stop in the morning and take him out to work. So I would get up and I would cook him a nice breakfast and everything and he would not roll out of bed until they were downstairs tooting the horn and I was mortified over this. He'd just throw his clothes on and go out that way and so that was one contention with me trying to wake him up when it was time to get up. He didn't want to be woken up and that was a real contention between the two of us. I remember... I had one child and he was really – I came to the conclusion- jealous over my attention to the baby. I had never had a baby before and I *just took care* of the baby. Diapers and washing things in the washing machine... (She goes on to explain the difficulties of using an old fashioned, portable washing machine and sharing a communal bathroom with the other families in the building. When she finishes this part of her story she pauses and then says...)

I do remember one day I put the baby in for a nap – you want me to be absolutely truthful? – and he came home and he wanted to go to bed and have a little bit of sex before he went back to the base and I told him “No, not now... Really, not now...”, and he was indignant over this and he said (loud, sharp voice) “Now! *I said NOW!*” ...and I said “No, not now... I just got the baby to sleep.” I said, “There's going to be another time.” He said, “I said NOW!” -and he took the back of his hand and he grabbed a hold of me and he whacked me right across the face. I was absolutely mortified. I just let a yell out of me. I couldn't understand these actions and then he proceeded to hit me. “When I say I want something, I want it and I want it now!”, he said, “I am the head of this house. My word is law!”

And I'm crying and boo-hooing by this time. And I just let him do what he wanted to do... My heart was broken more than my feelings were broken. This I couldn't tolerate. This went against my grain, so I just avoided the whole thing. I finally put my foot down... eventually... over a period of time. “That's it!”, I said. “I'll not take this from you.” But then over a period of time he would do it again. Over a period of time, when I had my children, then he knew exactly how to get me. He knew exactly how to get to me. If he couldn't visibly, forcefully cause me to do whatever he wanted then he would start abusing the kids and this would break me. This would absolutely break me. I have pushed them into rooms before and stood there in front of the doorway knowing that this is it, I'll give my life. I'll kill him if I have to. Over a period of years he would continue to do it. He knew exactly where to get me.

VC: In that one episode when you were younger where he wanted sex and started hitting you... did he rape you?

Frannie: I mean husband and wife, at the time I would have never call it rape, but absolutely, yeah, I had been raped.

Well, as time went on he got the message clear... when I found out what was the reason for that first initial one...that rape... was that he had been drinking with a few of the guys on the way home from work and this man from next door, Elmo, from the deep South, is going to give advice to my husband about being head of the family and 'you've got to put her in her place'. He said, 'that's it, you've got to put her in her place so that she knows who's who'... and this was what he was starting to do. He listened and listened to the guys... and listened to the guys and I'm sure that this was in his heart to begin with... and all it took was just adding that fuel to the fire to have them say 'that's okay to do that' and so that was the beginning... and once you start something like that it's like a snowball. It starts a little tiny bit at first and then you think well, this is the end of it and, no, it slowly over a period of time gets worse and worse and worse and you slowly over a period of time look for the end of it...this is the end of it, okay...He's not going to do it anymore... and then time goes by and everything is just fine. And time goes by... and here we go again and that's sometimes even worse... and over a period of years this was the pattern that it took.

Yes, there was rape in there (pause). I would never admit that to myself (long pause). I would never admit to the fact that he used me. Let's see, I'm seventy-five. It took me up until the time I was about sixty-six years old one day sitting contemplating over my life. All of a sudden I gave into truth. That's all I can say is I stopped protecting him in my mind and I gave into truth and that he could not do right by me. He could not do right by me. He used me. He used me because if you're going to marry a girl you would love and protect her. Protect her innocence and protect her reputation. You would protect it with your life if you love her. It didn't mean that you had to have self-gratification of 'I want this'. I want to get married right away because 'this' is what I want. It's not that I want the girl or the family or the responsibilities, but here's my self-gratification and I realized he did not do right by me, not at all. He used me and that was hard, but it was good for me to finally come to that conclusion that I had been used.

I'm not saying that there wasn't any feelings between us. He had a rough time growing up and he had no love in his family. There was no love in there and for him to see my family, to come cold turkey off his family into my family when he first met me.... But you can't marry somebody to fill in what they don't have... then you're going from the pot into the fire. That was how the marriage began and the anger... I would say probably the anger was co-existent with the alcohol because there's been two or three times in our marriage that his commanding officer said "Enough! You are not to go to the club. I've cut off your club. They'll not let you buy anything there!" Two or three different times that's happened. Then when it's happened... it's like he's three weeks with no alcohol and all of a sudden you're seeing a different person come out."

Excuses & Accountability

In the previous section, Frannie rationalizes her husband's abusive behavior even though she's "sure that this was in his heart to begin with". She attributes her husband's behaviors, to the misogynistic influence of his friend "Elmo" who was "from the deep South" and to his drinking. Several women in this study also attributed their partner's choice to be violent or abusive to something else, some *other* phenomena. For example, Tanner links her husband's violent outburst to his mental illness and alcoholism. Dottie, Hattie, Sybil, Penney, Sunny, and Delia also had husbands who used or abused alcohol, but all of these women also recounted episodic violence or abuse when their husbands were sober. Toni, Delia, and Sybil also mention ethnic or cultural differences as influencing their husbands' negative behavior. Toni had never dated before she met her husband but once married, she was subjected to his abuse and violence which she felt was directly related to his Italian ethnicity. She imagines a marriage were she will have more freedom and independence but she is disappointed and frustrated by a controlling husband that she doesn't really know, and cultural expectations she feels she cannot live up to. She also hints at the suggestion of scandal associated with divorce.

VC: What was his background?

Toni: He's, was from Italy. Right from Italy. He had only been in this country a few years. His parents didn't speak any English. They were here, too. He was the only one, the only other family member that was here, um, his father's brother lived here and that was what brought them over here. His father's brother was here. So they all lived in Old Bay. The three of them lived in an apartment in Old Bay and I said they didn't speak English, so it was difficult to communicate. Bill spoke okay English. It wasn't great, but it was okay. I found that I was doing a lot of talking and if he got a bill in the mail and didn't know what to do, he gave it to me to, to, you know, at the time I didn't think anything of it. But, you know, again, hindsight is 20/20. You look back and you think I shouldn't have done all that, but there's nothing I can do about that now.

VC: Yeah. Was he significantly older?

Toni: Six years.

VC: Six years, which is a lot for an 18 year old.

Toni: It was, it was! So, ah, we planned the wedding. And like I said we were middle class and it wasn't a time when you went to the Sheraton Inn and had a sit down dinner in the ball room. We were at the American Legion Hall. We had a buffet meal. It was no frills. And my parents were paying for it. So, he didn't like that. That we weren't doing this fancy-dancy wedding and I said, 'well, this, this is what we can afford to do', so we went with it.

Um, we went to Italy on our honeymoon. I didn't know the language. It was very difficult for me to be there. I was unhappy and I mean I know I wasn't happy then when I was there. I was moody. Um, it was, there was a time when I held grudges and if you were, said something mean to me, I would be mad at you for hours, maybe days. And, you know, you couldn't understand why I wouldn't be talking to you or why I was mad and I didn't know how to express myself, other than, you know, maybe what my mother did was yell and I, that's not what I wanted to do, especially in this foreign country. It's like, 'how am I gonna get back home?'

So, but I thought I was in love and, ah, actually when we came back from Italy, we ended up, we were living with his parents because that's what you do in Italy. You move in with your parents and it was not a happy time for me. I wanted to be on my own. You know, I left my parents' house and go to his parents' house???

And another thing with, with Bill was the Italian husbands have control and they do what they want. They have expectations. Their dinner is going to be on the table when they get home and the house is going to be clean and, you know, the kids are going to be taken, bathed and taken care of and everything. They do nothing -- But eat. And then maybe go sit on the porch or watch TV maybe or hang out with their friends. And that's exactly what Bill did...was he hung out with his friends and his friends were his Italian friends down in the city... And Toni wasn't included in that.

I had the wives of his friends as my friends, but we were all in the same boat. Some of them were brought up in Italian families, were familiar with it, and accepted this. Um, but I have to tell you, two of those wives that I know of were divorced before I got divorced.

Um, so, they didn't, they were Italians, grew up in that kind of that thing, but they were *American-Italians*. So, they could speak the language, number one. Understood what their husbands were doing because their fathers did it. But had decided at a certain point they weren't gonna put up with this anymore, so they were, each of them, two of them that I know, that I knew, were divorced before me.

(She goes on to tell the story of the first argument she and her husband had and how her feelings were hurt when he chose his male friends over her...) ...and I got mad and said, "I married you to be with you and your leaving me?" And he didn't care, he was going to go anyway. That was the first, the first time that we argued about it. And --

VC: And you're 20?

Toni: I was 20. And it just didn't really get any better from then on. You know, we were married for 12 years. Mark was born four years after we got married and he was ecstatic that it was a son. Um, I remember having a birthday party for Mark and

we had birthday parties when we were kids. We had cake and ice cream and that was it. And he wanted to put on this big spread and we had a big argument over it. That was the first time he slapped me. And, um, it was very hard to put on a happy face when your parents and your siblings are coming over and you're trying to celebrate this happy occasion and for me it wasn't.

Sybil was Native and married a white man, against the wishes of her mother and family.

Initially her mother's fears are about a mixed marriage between two different races and cultures, and the problems that will arise because of these differences. She would have preferred that Sybil marry a Native man. After she is married, and the violence and abuse starts, Sybil reflects on her mother's wisdom in seeing what Sybil could not yet see.

Sybil: When we first got married it was good. Like it should be, you know? We were in love, you know newlyweds and ah... For a little while it was good. He had joined the Army and ah, he was a military man and he.., first we lived stateside and um, ... I got married because he would... he was a good provider, you know? He had a job, you know? So I felt real good about that- and I got a job at Mercer's which didn't pay a lot but we were doing ok. We were doing better than a lot of my friends and um... And I, you know, I wanted to see the world a little bit, and ah, get away from my family and the Rez. I had a lot of white friends from school and I had a lot of Indian friends from home, but um... I guess I was restless. My mother was so mad... she was real mad! (pause) Cause she knew! (laughs) She could see what I couldn't see! And we, um, we had a little ceremony at the La Farge Town Hall... But I didn't really know him til after we got married. After we got married... that's ah, well that's when you really get to know someone. That's when you learn their secrets, and um,... Oh and ah, his family was mean to me. Not at first to my face, but later his father would call me names like 'make your squaw do it'... right to my face! And you know, once his father tried to hit me... can you believe it? Cause I would stand up for myself, you know. And um, and he, um Paul would, you know, stick up for me at first but then by the time I got pregnant with David and Allen, and it was already bad. Because he was, by then he was drinking a lot and ah, he um, he would come home and *he* would be the one calling me 'dirty squaw' and bitch, you know? And *he* was the one hitting me.

VC: So, how long were you together by that point?

Sybil: Well, um, let see... See if I can get the time right... We went steady for my senior year, got married in '42 and the boys were born in '43. So two years.

VC: And how long were you together all together?

Sybil: About 8 years. He left when Phil was two.

VC: So... you were on your own at...?

Sybil: Let's see... I was 26, I guess. Just a kid (laughs)

VC: Just a kid with three little kids in tow...

Sybil: I know! (laughs) Can you believe that? I don't know how I did it but I did it... I had a lot more energy back then (laughter).

Social Perception of Leaving

Most of the women thought of leaving, but particularly for the octo- and septuagenarians, trying to get help or support proved difficult. After the public ceremony, marriage quickly morphed into the private domain of the home. The sanctity of 'home' and 'family' was, and are still, private domains. When these women were young wives and mothers, these domains were under the exclusive patriarchal rule of the husband/father. Most of the women felt that they could not talk about violence in the home because according to Delia "you just didn't talk about it", and Toni, "I was just too ashamed to admit it". Societal messages regarding divorce and the break-up of the traditional nuclear family were scandalously oppressive.

The stigma of divorce and the implied failures associated with it left many women with a tarnished reputation among their extended family and community. Divorce was not only looked down upon, in most cases divorce left a woman with little to no resources. They risked losing the financial support of their husbands along with their insurance and retirement benefits. Most of the women in this study were homemakers who felt they lacked the necessary skill to secure a job, despite the limited job opportunities available to women at the time. Most of those jobs women could get in the 1960s and 70s were tied to gender and were low paying, making it difficult to support a family. This inability to provide for their children, and the possibility that their children would be taken away from them in a divorce, influenced many of these women to stay with their husbands or partners and endure the domestic violence.

Toni struggled with the idea of divorce, despite serious violence and chronic verbal abuse and intimidation. I had asked her if during the first 8 years of her marriage had she ever thought of divorcing her husband:

Toni: I think I thought about, about that, but I think, like I said before when I got divorced, to me that was failure and I didn't want to be one of those statistics. I don't, I don't think in the 70s that I would have had the confidence enough to, to go out on my own after having been, you know, subject to the abuse that I had. I liked my job. I did well in my job. And I got promotions so that I knew that I, I knew I wasn't intellectually stupid and, but he just, you know, made me feel that I couldn't do anything else, so I, I guess I was aware of it. It's just, and because of how he treated me, I just still have this sense that I couldn't do anything on my own just from what he had, the way he treated me. I just didn't feel I could. It wasn't that I didn't want to. And you know it was the thought, you know, who's going to want me. I just felt like I was going to be alone for the rest of my life and at that time I didn't want that.

Here Toni expresses ambivalence and her insecurity with being a woman. She is a failure if she leaves her marriage, she is uncertain about her abilities, and she is insecure about her beauty and value as a woman. Even though she knows she is smart and can succeed, she is plagued by the fear that she is just not good enough without a man. Delia, describing the social confines of her marriage in the upper class, also refers to the stigma women faced if they left their husbands.

Delia: So, that was life with him. He was tough. He wasn't helpful. He wasn't nice.

VC: Did the girls get that too? They knew how he was?

Delia: They did. We all tried to hang in there and I was not the type of person to get a divorce. I wasn't brought up that way. So I didn't even think about it. I thought I just had to get through this, get the kids grown up with a mother and a father. That is the way I was thinking. Until I couldn't take it anymore. Not when I was being threatened. Not when the kids were being hit, which happened a couple of times when he was mad at me and the kids were trying to get him away from me and then he hit them. So it had to be the end.

And it was... It was hard because in Belvedere, which is a very high..., people live very well in Belvedere, and we were members of the Country Club which the kids and I never got to because we never had any money, but he was over there all the time. So it was hard. It was just a hard thing to go through. So it's not only, it's not only, the, it's not only trying to fight these battles, or, in your own, the privacy of your own home, it's the stigma around everything else that comes with it. Nowadays, I think women are in a much better social place to say 'I'll do what I want.'

VC: But... for older women, it was a totally different?

Delia: It was! I was lucky in a way when I was married to John and the kids were little, I had wonderful neighbors who, whose husbands were good people. You know, so I had a very good example to kind of compare what was going on in my house and their house. They helped me learn. And that, that's why eventually I just had to -- say "absolutely, that's it!" And I knew I had to leave.

VC: During, during that time, did you have friends that you could confide in, women friends or men friends, to say, "this is what's going on".

Delia: Yes I did. But, you know, you don't want to air all your dirty laundry...but I had a few, yes. But I was embarrassed, or ashamed I guess because you know this was happening, and I, I left but he had already been seeing his secretary. I wish I had left him alone.

Delia never fully disclosed the abuse she was enduring to her family or close friends although she admits that some of her neighbors "probably knew what was going on". Later, after her first divorce, Delia recounts a story of being treated badly by a group of women at her new job as a secretary because of her status as a divorcee, feeling that the other women mistrusted her or were jealous of her and tried to sabotage her work.

All of the older women in this study shared the same basic perception regarding the stigma of divorce. They were in a double bind, ashamed at the abuse they were enduring in the private confines of the home, and too ashamed to tell anyone about it. Anne was the only older woman who, after several years of torment, acknowledged it was less shameful to divorce her husband once his extramarital affair became public knowledge. With the exception of Toni, who was also heavily influenced by family, religion, and ethnicity, the other younger women who were married, Barbara, Martha and Orla, did not seem bothered by the shame or failure of divorce whatsoever. They never mentioned their feelings related to the stigma of divorce, instead they focused on the process of leaving their relationships. Barbara and Martha were motivated by

fear and the protection of their children and their narratives on leaving detailed how they escaped with their children. Outside of vague descriptions of the violence or abuse they suffered, they rarely ever mentioned their husbands. Orla, on the other hand, seemed to take great pleasure in recounting the way she was able to take her husband “to the cleaners” during their divorce. Although it was stressful and acrimonious, divorce for Orla was a welcomed release and she saw no shame in it.

Silence, Support, and Saving Graces

Embedded in their narratives, both during and after their relationships, the women referred to people who, in some way, helped them in their efforts to leave their relationship or gave them a helping hand when they were on their own. I came to refer to these people as the ‘Saving Graces’. For Sybil, a Saving Grace was her friend Gertie and a doctor’s wife who intervened at just the right time. For Roseanne, her best friend Debby was there to provide clarity and boost her self-esteem. Barbara and Dottie found support and encouragement from teachers, and Frannie and Hattie from their churches. Toni, Martha, Tanner, and Sunny, all gained support from the people they worked with. Penney, Clara, and Dottie found strength in activism. Anne and Delia received support from their children and the work they did in their communities. Orla credits her father for giving her a good example to follow in life, and the neighbor who stood up to her husband one day. But many of the women, particularly the older women, expressed sadness, bitterness, or indifference towards their parents who refused to help them leave their abusers.

For some of the women who did try to get support from their parents, the prevailing message they received was that the abuse they were being subjected to was a consequence of poor decision making and something that had to be dealt with. All of the Native women, but

only one white woman (Hattie), in one way or another got unconditional help and support from their parents or families when they disclosed their abuse. Some of the women, Anne, Toni, Martha, and Orla ‘wished’ they had told a parent what was going on earlier or asked explicitly for help because, in retrospect, their parent(s) would have helped them but they felt ‘too ashamed’ or ‘embarrassed’ to admit their abuse. When Toni finally told her parents she was divorcing her husband, her father’s response was “Finally!”

Frannie had come from a secure, middle-class Irish Catholic family and had “married down”. She was just 18 when she eloped with an enlisted man, Harry, two weeks after meeting him on a blind date. Shortly after their marriage, when she and her husband are stationed overseas, he begins beating her. She describes her mother’s response when she calls to confide in her.

VC: Did you ever talk to your parents about... when things were getting bad for you?

Frannie: Oh well... in the beginning when we were overseas I got a chance to call my family. Back then it wasn’t so easy to just make a phone call but I finally got through- and, ah... it was sad in a way... in a way... because, cause I could hear all the family things I was missing and I was just so homesick at that point and ummm..., but at some point I told my mother how terrible it was and she said... and I’ll never forget this, she said “Fran, your father and I made it very clear to you before you left... you made your choice, you live with it. Now that’s it, I’ll not hear of it again.” I was devastated, I mean, I felt so alone. But we never spoke of it again.

I think at ... I felt so ashamed. I felt I had gotten myself into this mess and I had disappointed my parents. And I disappointed myself. And, I mean...I just regretted the whole darn thing but what can you do? I was stuck in a foreign country. I just picked my chin up and got on with it.

In this case, Frannie is doubly victimized- by her husband who beats her, and also by her mother who refuses to intervene out of principle. The principle her mother adheres to reinforces the patriarchal message that it is a woman’s duty to respect her parent’s wishes, to stand by her man, to not disgrace her family, and to keep quiet and private. Sybil’s experience was quite

different. She had grown up poor on the reservation. Her elopement to a military man improved her economic resources while they were married. After eight years of extreme violence and torment, Sybil, abandoned by her husband, began a new life with her young sons. The message she receives from her mother when she calls for help is similar to Frannie's, except that there is less of a sense of shame and disappointment, or of failing herself and her parent. Rather, she looked at her marriage as a mistake, one that her own mother had made, and that like her mother, she would need to find a way to deal with the problem. Sybil accepts her marital predicament as she reflects on her family of origin, witnessing her mother's abuse at the hands of her father and knowing that her mother stayed with her father until he died. But Sybil's family does not abandon her, they try to support her in different ways, sometimes with money, sometimes with solidarity, and eventually she is encouraged to return to her mother's home when her husband leaves her. Additionally, Sybil has the support of her friend Gertie.

VC: So did you- did things change when you got married?

Sybil: Oh yeah... everything changed. First we moved away to the base so I didn't know anybody and that was real hard. And, um, I missed my family cause I came from a really big family and all my aunties and cousins lived nearby, and my grandparents... everyone was gone. But, um, and my Ma was also mad at me for leaving... she didn't like Paul and she didn't want me to get married to a white man cause , um, she didn't trust him and she knew how hard it was gonna be for me... and, um- I didn't know how hard it would be but she did. But um, I met some nice women on the base and, most of the ladies were white and they were nice but my best friend was this girl from the Islands named Gertie... we were both brown with dark hair and we used to laugh and tell people we were sisters (laughs hard)... but the best part is they believed us!! (laughs harder).

VC: Oh no...

Sybil: But Gertie was alone too, so we kind of knew what the other was going through. (Pause) But, um, the- that's when things changed... it was like now he's got me, now I'm his and he knew it. He didn't want me to work. Like "no wife of mine is gonna work"... and, um, at first it made me feel kind of proud and special but after a while you feel like you're in jail. And I'm – I was kinda independent and it got to the time when I wanted to do what I wanted to do... and that's when the fights started. He never was rough with me when we were dating you know? And then-

VC: Did he ever show anger like if he was mad?

Sybil: Um, no... never in the beginning. He had a real good sense of humor and he laughed a lot but I don't think I ever saw him angry and...

VC: How long were you together before you got married?

Sybil: He would never curse or.. oh um, I knew him from my brother and we went on a couple of just friend kind of dates, like double dates and-, cause, um my brother really liked him and they played sports in school. But after about six months we started to go out alone. That's when my Ma started to get mad... she didn't want us to be alone, um she didn't think it was right for us to be together, but we were kids and I thought I must be in love and , um, that's powerful stuff... You do dumb things when you're a kid in love (laughs). But um, then we ran away and got married cause it just seemed like the thing to do. And later, when things got really bad, after my first sons were born things got- he would come home sometimes drunk, sometimes not, and he would just start pickin at something until he got himself, um- like if dinner was late or the baby was crying too loud- just silly things he'd get so mad at. And after one bad fight I was all bruised and, I mean I couldn't open my eye and my lip was fat and Gertie said to call my Ma. But when I did all she said was "you made your bed, now you gotta sleep in it". And it hurt... but I knew she was right and *she* knew she was right. She sent me some money but she had my brother call me and tell me not to come home... I, um, I knew I couldn't. I knew I had to just..., I had to figure it out cause that's what she had to do.

Tanner gives another perspective on silence when it came to her marriage and how she thought other people perceived it. Tanner had grown up in a wealthier family. She and her husband were college educated and living comfortably in the middle class. She never confided to her family the details of her marriage or the degree of her unhappiness, and she is surprised and perplexed when her sister, with whom she did not share a particularly close relationship, suggests that she get an Order of Protection against her husband.

VC: But did he, was he ever critical of you, I mean...?

Tanner: Yes. He was critical of me. Yes. Um, or that, you know, that I was, you know, turning the children against him or talking to Maura on the phone and, and not telling him... or I mean, you know, then he would get a little bit paranoia and, um, I guess she was in college at that point, because she never lived here. She went to college when we moved here.

And, anyway, the one episode that I have to tell you about is what you study about. Um, and I don't, I don't remember what lead up to it except that, you

know, it was a long drunken time and he used to, you know, literally, just live in this room.

Um, and it must have been a weekend and I wasn't close to my sister, but my sister called on the phone, 'cuz I remember I was in bed, and I must have gotten up and locked the bedroom door. Why I'm not sure. I was talking to her. I was lying down in bed. I was talking to her.

And I mean I never discussed this with my family. They never knew anything other than that, you know, he was, he was not working and he was not well, but, you know, they didn't ... they didn't know the extent of anything or his mother either for that matter. Um, but, anyway, my sister called. I don't know if I had just talked to my mother, but my sister was a social worker at that point. She might have even been in school to be one at that point. And I remember she said to me that, that I could leave and I could get, um, what do you call it, a court order.

VC: Court order of protection?

Tanner: Yeah, yeah. And I, but I don't know how she knew what was going on because I hadn't told her, so I still can't... I'll have to ask her... I can't remember how that went, but, anyway, looking back on it. What must have happened he must have picked up the phone when she called and knew that it was her. He hated her!

And he came up the stairs. Heard me talking on the phone... went to open the door. The door was locked and he broke the door.

VC: He was drunk?

Tanner: He was drunk. Yeah. This was, you know, Saturday or Sunday morning. I don't know. It was a weekend. Broke the door. Ah, I don't know if he was trying to get the phone away from me or but I just remember that we collided and ended up on the floor. And he fell on top of me and I don't know, I don't know if he me by the arm or whatever, but I bit him. I bit him on the arm. That was a joke in my family because I had a friend, Janey, when I was two and I had bitten her in the arm. And her, my mother took me over there and told Janey to bite me so I would know what it felt like (laughs).

Anyway, anyway, I must have really, you know, felt threatened. I mean he didn't hurt me. He never hurt me. Never hit me. Never, you know, but the physical blocking or whatever he was doing, I, I bit him to get him away, you know, get him off of me and he got very upset. He went downstairs and called the police on me. You can imagine. I couldn't have been any madder...broken every window or something. I was so furious.

So the police come, uh, and, you know, they talked to us separately. Well, he's, he's in his bathrobe, you know, obviously drunk. And, you know, I was all upset but I could tell a coherent story of what, of what happened. Oh, the other thing he did was he took my favorite, I had two antique lamps. One was a man and one was a woman. And he took one of them and he broke it. Just, you know, banged it against the door before, before he called the police.

Um, anyway, you know, I don't know what the police, the police, I don't even remember what they did. They talked to both of us. They wrote it all up and they left. Um, but, you know, that, that was my episode of abuse... it was frightening.

VC: It had to have been hell.

Tanner: It was. It was.

Leaving

The decision to leave an abusive relationship is incredibly complex. Each woman who is being abused has to carefully consider her options. She has to weigh the consequences of each option and decide if it is viable, and if so, how and when it can be implemented. Planning requires great attention to detail, and for many of these women, such plans are put together in secrecy and under extreme duress. The window of opportunity to escape an abusive relationship can open and close quickly, and contemplating all of these decisions- from timing and orchestrating an escape, to locating temporary shelter or housing, to finding a job or financial support, to finding child care or enrolling children in a new school system- can be emotionally and psychologically overwhelming (Anderson 2007).

It is evident that a degree of pathology existed in each of these relationships, and while all of the women contemplated leaving their abusive partners, some women- particularly the older women, opted to remain in the relationship for various reasons. Indeed, Sunny and Tanner stayed with their husbands until the men died in their late 60s and early 70s respectively. Sunny did not mourn her husband, rather she felt “excited” and “free to get on with (her) life”. Ann and Frannie stayed married to their adulterous abusers for over twenty years, although they were very unhappy. Ultimately their husbands left them, which both women found ironically painful- having endured so many years of abuse, this act was a final humiliation for them. Delia, Clara, and Dottie also felt ashamed when their abusive partners eventually left them and each were re-victimized by violent or abusive men in subsequent relationships. For the remaining women, the

decision to leave was time oriented. Some women left spontaneously, out of fear. Hattie, Penny and Martha escaped following violent beatings, at the first opportunity they had. Others planned their departure. Toni felt the time was right to leave her husband after he was written up in a local paper for soliciting a prostitute; Barbara orchestrated a cross country move with her children once she finished medical school; Orla met with an attorney and arranged an Order of Protection before she served her husband with divorce papers.

But for most of the women, particularly those with children, even though their intimate relationships were so destructive and demoralizing, the thought of leaving was overwhelming. There were so many things to consider... Could they manage financially without a job? If they had to work, would they make enough to support their children? How could they face their families and friends and community knowing they had failed at marriage? Were they as stupid, and ugly, and fat, and useless as they had been told over and over again? Who would ever want to be with them? For many of the women, these fears that were conjured and manipulated by their partners, and sometimes reinforced by family and friends, kept them bound to the relationship.

All of the women fantasized about leaving their abusive relationship at some point, but timing was crucial and each woman arrived at her decision to leave based on wholly unique circumstances, even for Sunny and Tanner who physically 'left' their husbands when the men died. Time was also a factor that dictated how the women were able to grieve the relationship. Clara reflected on her overwhelming inexperience when she talked about being left with five small children. Clara had been physically abused by her father, and had witnessed his chronic abuse of her mother. She got pregnant, got married, and had her first child when she was just 17. While she was never physically abused by her husband, she endured exceptional psychological

abuse. In this brief passage she was talking about being left by her husband. Even though she felt rejected by him from the time they were forced to marry, she was still hurt when he left her- but she didn't have time to think about it.

Clara: But that was sad for me too but you get past it. You don't have time to wallow in self pity. With five little kids? You have to move on.

VC: Right, right. When he eventually left, were you panicked at all, or you just thought-

Clara: There probably was panic. I don't remember. I guess I was because somebody had always been taking care of me. I never was me. I didn't know who *me* was. I went to school, I was a kid and then I was a mother. I was 17 when I got pregnant. He left when I was 23. What did I know? I didn't know anything.

On the Decision to Leave

In the following two passages Toni and Delia reflect their process of coming to terms with leaving and divorcing their husbands. For Delia, who was in her mid 80s when I interviewed her, the decision to leave was equated with a loss of innocence.

VC: But, you know, I think a lot of messages to women back then were, you can't do this without a man. You really can't do it without a man...

Delia: That's absolutely right. I think, when I was born, when I grew up, and especially with the type of people that I grew up with, there weren't any divorces. There weren't any -- wasn't anybody being slapped down. Really, it was a very nice little setting for kids to grow up in, because you didn't see any of that, or hear about any of that. I didn't hear about any of that until I was probably almost out of high school, and then there was one incident where one of the girls had to get married. That's the only thing I can remember that was really bad-bad, you know, while I was young.

VC: Right.

Delia: So, I wasn't, I wasn't --

VC: Exposed to any --

Delia: Yeah, I mean, I wasn't very smart about going out and living out in the world at that point. I was, I lived in this little village where everybody knew everybody, and the policeman lived right across the street from me, and he was my friend, and, you know. It was just a, whole different way to grow up. It was wonderful. But it didn't really

prepare me.

I hated working in the City, because they were making me aware of what I had to be afraid of. That was the first time I started really worrying about who I was with, and where I was. I may have mentioned it, and I was coming home from work and I had to take the subway, and this young man, good looking young man stopped me and said, “you're so gorgeous, I'd really like to start photographing you”. And I said “no way, are you kidding?” I'd never seen him before in my life. And it made me uncomfortable, you know? So, it was things like that that started to get me to understand that not everybody is brought up in an area like I was -- and, pretty innocent, in lots of ways. I, I found out about all of that, as I got older, but it took me a while. And it took me a while to finally say, in my marriage, to John, that, this just has to stop. I can't, I can't live like this, and I can't have my kids living like this. So yeah, I was ready.

VC: That was a really big step, to...

Delia: But, I should have done it much sooner. Except that I, I thought I was being a good mom by keeping the family together. So...

VC: But, isn't that the whole message that you got? That was the message. It's that, even then, even that was, even into the seventies... divorce was still a, you know, you, it wasn't, I mean, people were getting divorced more and more, but it still was, the message was keep your family together.

Delia: That's right. That's absolutely right. And if you were divorced, you were kind of looked down on. Definitely.

For Toni, divorce was becoming a much more common occurrence by the time she left her husband, but her feelings of insecurity surrounding divorce persisted. Toni had endured both physical and psychological abuse, as well as public humiliation when her husband was written up in the local newspaper for soliciting a prostitute. Toni recalled the exact moment she realized she was ready to leave her marriage.

Toni: Well, there were pleasant times, I think, but I always felt, um, looking back now, you know, that I was not smart just because of the way he made me feel. I think and so, you know, I couldn't really have any ideas of my own and because if I did come up with something it would, you know, I would literally be told that's stupid and then so I started to believe that I was stupid.

And I really feared that I wouldn't be able to survive on my own and until, you know, when I, several months after, you know, praying and thinking about it and realizing, I can do this! I don't need somebody else to do this. I've got a job. I can, I can, if I have to get an apartment, I'll get an apartment! If I have to move back home, I'll move back home! But I can do this on my own.

VC: That was a big step!

Toni: But it took me awhile to get there... because I'm much more confident that... I mean had I waited, you know? Had I gotten out of the marriage earlier, chances are Matt and I wouldn't be together. Where would I be? Who knows? I may not even be, you know, here anymore. I, I just don't know. I don't know what I would have done.

VC: When you're thinking about divorce did it play as much of a thing... as this idea of failure or what will people think, you know, what family would think or anything like that?

Toni: No, 'cuz I had come to terms with all of that and when I woke up that one morning, I just knew what I had to do. Just, I just, you know, I looked for my sign and, you know, and I talked to different people and nobody would tell me what I, you know, you need to get divorced or nobody told me what to do. I just, I just had to talk about it and, you know, people would say, well, you've got to do what's best for you and for Tommy and it was months. I mean I think that it was a good six months that I finally, when I woke up this one morning, I knew that's what I had to do and when I called my parents, as I said before, and my father said "it's about time", so it just was an eye opening thing for me because I knew I had to do that and I was confident that I could do this. So, it's unfortunate that I... that women have to go through something like that to realize their potential on their own.

Frannie tried to do everything she could to stay in her marriage and keep her family intact, even though she and her children were being abused by her husband. She stayed in the marriage out of commitment to her vows and because of her religious influence. Several women in the study directly mentioned feeling ashamed of thinking of divorce or wanting to leave and linked this shame to religious teaching. For Frannie, the decision to leave was, ironically, made by her husband. After enduring decades of abuse and infidelity, this final act absolutely infuriated and humiliated Frannie. She tells of a feeling of helplessness and humiliation when she is served divorce papers, but those feelings quickly turn to anger, then into action when, she realizes that it is her time to take control-

VC: After he left, you began your life on your own, but you had been working full-time right along at that point in time. How old were you when he left?

Frannie: Forty-six I think.

VC: Forty-six. How in your life – did it get better with things? Did things get worse?

Frannie: No, it never got worse. My life was better. I went to a work study program at Union to find out what I would be qualified for because I knew I would have to be the breadwinner of the house...that I could never depend on him any longer. Even though the checks were coming in I couldn't depend on him. I did this work study program and I did really well. They told me all the things that they would put me through – the schooling and everything. Then I went to this one lady who was the psychologist and she said 'you came through everything with flying colors, but there's one area that we're concerned about'... and I said 'what area is that?' and she said 'it's your feeling towards your husband'. She said 'you should really hate him and I don't detect any hate or anger, anything there.... You should really be upset over what this man has done to you'... and I'm looking at her and I said 'on the contrary...I pity him because he has given up the best thing that he ever had, so that's where he is at. I'm not angry at him. I'm not upset with him. I just pity him.'

VC: But if he hadn't given up 'the best thing'... would you still be in an abusive relationship?

Frannie : No. By that time I knew... because of what I was learning in my Christian relationship... I knew who I was and I knew where I could stand and I knew what God allowed me to do. In the past I thought I *had* to do these things. In the past I thought I *had* to live this abusive kind of life. When I began to read the Bible I realized I didn't have to. There was no way. My kids used to say to me, "Ma, God does not mean for you to live that kind of life", and I said "Well, until he shows me – he showed you and he showed you, but until he shows *me*... I stay with my husband because that's what I was taught. For better, for worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and health death do us part."

VC: Despite the alcohol, despite the other women, despite the abuse of you and your children?

Frannie: Yeah, all of it.

VC: The beatings?

Frannie: Well...that's what I was taught! That's what I thought I was supposed to do... and then that one day when my husband came home on Christmas Eve – well, he DIDN'T come home on Christmas Eve that time. We lived with my son and his family. And he didn't come home all night. Christmas morning he came home and he said he was leaving... out of the blue... and then he said "Get your things together". I said "why?" He said "because I'm leaving. Are you coming or aren't you coming?" I told my kids when God opens the door and shows me that it's time then I move and when he said that to me all of a sudden I knew this is it. This is it. I'm not going. I'm not leaving. I am not going into a sinful relationship that he's got somebody on the side, which I didn't even know that at the time.

VC: Everybody else did?

Frannie: Everybody else did. My mother-in-law knew.

VC: Your children knew?

Frannie: My children knew, yes. When he left I said ‘where are you going?’ He said ‘I’m taking my things and I’m going out to the veteran’s quarter out at the base’... which they could stay at maybe one or two nights because of the previous military – but not longer than that. Come to find out he stayed one night and then he moved right in with this girl. (She goes on to tell the story of how she was served divorce papers and her feelings of shock, indignation, and humiliation- but then she takes action!)

I didn’t know what to do. First of all, the only man that I knew that I could trust was my pastor, so I went to him and told him what had happened and he said, “Well, has he been unfaithful to you?” And I said “Yes.” “Have you been unfaithful to him?” And I said “No!” And he says (she wags a finger at me for emphasis) “Then don’t let him divorce you... You divorce him. You get yourself a good lawyer and you divorce him!” I said “Okay”. So the only lawyer that I knew of was... well, my sister who was married to a lawyer. I took it to them, but I didn’t want him involved in a family case so he referred me to a lawyer who took my case and so, therefore, *I divorced him!* I forgot why I was telling you this part of it...after a while I stopped thinking about it, so now it all rushes back to me...(laughs).

Planning the Escape

For some women, the decision to leave was immediate, others developed their plan to leave over the course of years. Penney and Hattie left their abusers as soon as they could following a violent attack. When Hattie told her husband she wanted to go see her parents, a fight ensued. He threw her against the wall and threatened to kill her. The next day, while she was at work, she called her parents and her priest. They organized a group of people from her church and before her husband came home from work that evening, she had completely moved out.

Hattie: It was like a sting operation! (laughs) He didn’t know what hit him. And for the first time in a long time I felt safe...truly safe. I had all these people with me you know, and he couldn’t do a damn thing about it. He didn’t even try...he didn’t say one word! Just tucked his tail between his legs and turned around!

When Penney left, she had a one year old son and was newly pregnant. She also had a physical disability that made it difficult for her to walk. She describes some of the problems she

faced as a newlywed and why she made her decision to leave her husband. Penny described feeling shocked, then betrayed by her husband and his behaviors. Ultimately, she is frustrated and feels deceived, but Penney was very independent and had a very supportive family-

Penney: Um, I went with him probably almost a year, um, no, it was a year before we got married, but, um, I, when I had Terry I was living at my parents. I had gone, I had left the apartment I had. I had to come back home and I was living with my parents when Terry was born. And got married and I still stayed there and he was supposed to be, ah, getting an apartment for us. Well it got to be like October and, you know, we got married in June and still nothing so I said "All right, forget about it and I'll, I'll just stay here", and he said "No, I'll, I'll find something". So he did and that next month we got an apartment and I stayed with him, it was from November till June and I left him that June. So it was just like seven months we were together. And that was abusive too.

VC: That was also abusive?

Penney: Yeah. Um, in fact, the night, we went out one night and, ah, we had an argument and he was, he was trying to get at me you know what I mean? And... and I, I was able to, to keep away from him, but after that I slept on the couch. And Kyle had, I mean Tracy had a carriage and I took that to our living room and we slept in the living room. And that was probably, I don't know, over, over a month like that. And he came back one night and he tried to take, ah, Terry into the bedroom and I wrapped my legs around the carriage and he couldn't take him. So then he got mad and he came at me and I was sitting on a couch and I laid down... and he grabbed my hair and he was trying to hit me. And he said, um, "I'm gonna throw you down these stairs", 'cuz we were on the second floor. But anyway he finally calmed down. *That was it for me.* So next morning I called my mother and I said 'can you come after us? I'm leaving.' So I left and then the next day I went back and I started packing and he came back from work and he said, um, 'don't go..., I'm sorry. It won't happen anymore' and I said 'that's right, 'cuz I'm going and I'm not coming back.' So that was it.

VC: You never went back?

Penney: I never went back.

VC: And at that time you were pregnant with Kyle?

Penney: I was one month pregnant with Kyle. Yeah. So, it, um, --

VC: So what made you say that? What made you, was it just something that you're not gonna do this to me. You're not, I'm not gonna put myself and my children and... it was cut and dry?

Penney: Right. Yeah, because I could see that..., the way it was anyway, was that he would get paid on Friday and go out. Whatever money he had left, he would pay the rent. Whatever he had left, we would get some groceries. And on Monday he would borrow from his boss and then he would have to stop practically every night to bring groceries home 'cuz he didn't have money to buy it. I said I'm not living this way. Um, that was,

that was another one of the reasons, you know. He just wanted to drink and so I said I don't, I don't want to live this way. And, yeah, and, and, he got his income tax back and at that time I was going to the doctor's for Kyle and so I'd ask him for money and he would give me twenty dollars. I'd pay the doctor ten and I'd keep ten and that's all the only money I had! I remember one time, ah, taking Terry, in the carriage. The drug store was just a block away and that's all I had... ten dollars to buy diapers and medicine... I couldn't even buy him an ice cream... no ice cream. And I said I'm not living this way. No way, you know? Um, and so it, it was those, again, those things that, you know, just builds up. No way! I was done!

Barbara had been thinking of leaving her husband for several months and she saw an opportunity to put a plan into action when she finished medical school and began preparing for her residency in another state. She had 5 children under the age of 13 and had been dealing with her partner's psychological abuse for several years. She and her children had "perfected the art of walking on eggshells". Her partner was isolating her and her children from family and friends and was demonstrating increasingly threatening behavior.

VC: So, if you can, go back to that time. Was it, was it hard picking up and leaving, and just, knowing that it was just going to be you and them, and -- ?

Barbara: Oh, it was very difficult leaving this area, leaving my support group, my parents, but Mike had come between all of us, so... He wouldn't let the kids see their grandparents, so we actually met in secret. We had the one-half day off at the medical school that he never knew about, so we'd always get together at those times. We'd go to lunch, we'd go sit at somebody's house and have, you know, a get together. Because he said if they... he would make them disappear. He would take them away and we would never see them again. *My kids!*

VC: That's what he threatened?

Barbara: Yeah. So, in the, I mean, I did my interviews with different places and I decided to go, you know, this is where I was going to go, out to the Northwest, and, they made the arrangements to take my household goods out there. I didn't have much. But nothing that was worth moving to (laughs). So, I, my parents knew that, and they knew where I was going to be, and Mike was going to stay here. For some reason, I can't remember what his excuse was, but he wasn't going to drive out looking, he was going to come later. And then I drove with the kids out there, but my stuff had already gone out before us, and, it was, it was the first time in thirty-six years that I actually, or thirty-seven years, that I actually left home. You know, this has always been my home. So...

VC: Far away from home.

Barbara: Yeah.

VC: Right. So, what was he doing? He, so, was he just manipulating things with the kids and he had that power, to tell you can't see...

Barbara: He threatened.

VC: Was he? Was he threatened by your family and friends and... ?

Barbara: Was he intimidated?

VC: I mean, why did he want to isolate you from them?

Barbara: Well, it was part of his upbringing. His mother was like fourteen when he was born, and she didn't marry his father, she married a guy that was an isolationist... A survivalist, basically. He was extremely abusive to his family. It's the way he was raised. He was like the outsider in his own family. And, he, I guess, learned abuse and alcoholism right at that point. He was not alcoholic himself. He never drank... never! He thought it was poison to your spirit.

(Barbara goes on to discuss her own family of origin, her partner's increasing paranoia, and then returns to his threatening behavior)

VC: Yeah. So, but he did, he would make threats like that?

Barbara: Yeah.

VC: And you, did you feel like he would carry through with them?

Barbara: Yes, I did feel like he would carry through with it. Angus was really young when I told him, 'you know, if you ever... if your dad ever tells you I'm gone, or I've died, this is what you have to do'. I had him memorize my parent's phone number. He was really young, you know. He was, but he was exceptionally bright so he could remember things like that. I remember when I told him about the pedals in the car (laughs)!

(Barbara goes on to talk, with humor, about how she taught her children safety or escape plans, including how to drive a car if they needed to get away.)

VC: So you get out West, and you just --

Barbara: About six months out there, I just told him... I told him 'don't come'.

VC: Wow.

Barbara: Yeah. "We're not together anymore. That's it".

VC: Yeah. And you didn't -- he didn't push the issue.

Barbara: No, he didn't. And they didn't. The kids were older then. So. He couldn't actually take them away because then I was working and then *I had all the resources*.

Staying

For a variety of very personal and complex reasons, many of the women in this study endured decades of violence or abuse at the hand of their husbands or partners. Delia and Dottie were left by their first abusers only to be re-victimized by abusive men in subsequent long term relationships. Ann and Frannie lived with their abusers for over twenty years, until most of their children were fully grown, before their marriages were ended. Sunny and Tanner chose to remain in their relationships for over 40 years, despite persistent psychological abuse, until the deaths of their husbands. None of these women made direct statements regarding why they stayed in these relationships but they all implied fear of financial insecurity. Sunny, Ann, Frannie, Tanner, Dottie all worked; and all but Tanner worked in low paying jobs. Tanner held a position in higher education, but based on her narrative, she and her husband also had incurred the largest debt load. Delia entered the workforce taking a position as a secretary after her first marriage ended. Ann was the only woman to express confidence that she could make it on her own. Regardless of the reasons these women chose to remain with their abusers, all of them had entertained thoughts of leaving. All of them had fantasized about a life alone, or with a new partner, and all had at one time or another formulated a plan to leave.

Sunny's husband was verbally abusive until the day he died. In the beginning of their marriage, he'd "pushed (her) around", but he "never hit" her. When he drank he was particularly mean, and over the years his drinking increased. She summarized her choice to stay with the following:

Sunny: ... over time you got used to it. It was tolerable. We each did our own thing. We both worked. I had my friends and he had his. I, we had friends together too, but you just keep busy. See, I really loved to work. And, and the only time we were really together was in the evening, if he was home, and at night and we slept. It wasn't that bad. I learned to ignore it.

Sunny witnessed her husband's death from a sudden heart attack while they were at home. She described his dying, the paramedics arriving, and his eventual pronouncement of death at the hospital with great detail and absolutely no emotion. But when she talked of rediscovering herself after her husband's death, she became quite animated. Her husband's death was her release. Tanner's tone was much more melancholy when she shared her marriage narrative. She acknowledged the complexities of her relationship with a man who suffered with mental illness and alcoholism. She seemed genuinely conflicted between caring for him, and a need or obligation to care for him. She was candid with explaining how a debt burden largely generated by her husband, had complicated the marriage and her future, and how she felt trapped by this. She wanted to leave and her family wanted her to leave, but she couldn't. In the following narrative she demonstrates her ambivalence toward her relationship with her husband, her learning to disengage, and her frustration with her predicament.

VC: Towards the later part was it more like a comfortable relationship, companionship wise, or was it --

Tanner: Yeah, I think so, although we still had, um, you know, our altercations, you know. He always said I worked all the time, you know, and I was always, always busy with something and, um, I don't know.

We didn't at that point have a real comfortable relationship. Um, at some point, and maybe it was during all those years of the drinking, I think I just disengaged. I, you know, I went through the day-to-day, but I emotionally I disengaged from him and, and so when it was hard to change that, even though, you know, we were still, still together.

You know, that was a protective thing, I'm sure, a way to survive. And he used to say that I compartmentalize, well, I mean, if you've got a call at work that, you know, your husband is, you know, drunk and just went over the middle of the Boulevard and he's in the police station, and you'll have to, you know, and then you have to go back to work, you know. What were we supposed to do, you know? That was self preserving too.

Tanner's husband also died at home, but his passing was expected. She found him in his chair, and unlike Sunny, Tanner expressed sadness when reflecting on her husband's death. But like Sunny, she too felt relief and released when her husband died.

Observations on Differences

Both Barbara and Penney are Native, and I noticed an interesting difference between the narratives of Native and Non-Native women in regard to their decisions to leave. The Native women seemed very secure in their decision to leave, whether it was an impulsive move or a planned move. In comparison, the white women expressed greater anxiety and much less confidence in themselves and their abilities when they decided to leave. In their narratives, the Native women didn't talk about their fears of financial insecurity, of not being able to provide for their children, or of feeling unqualified to find work. They didn't express any need or desire to keep the nuclear family intact for the betterment of their children. Instead, in their narratives about leaving or being left, they focused exclusively on the need to keep their children protected and on their children's future well being. Contrary, the Non-Native women talk quite a bit about worrying with much of their 'leaving' narratives focused on the dilemmas they faced if and when they left. Would they be able to get support from family? Would they be able to find a job? How would they provide for their children? Who would take care of the children while they were at work? What would their family, friends, and neighbors think of them if they left?

The non-Native women seemed to have more doubts about leaving because they lacked both financial and social resources. The Native women all lacked financial resources but they had great social support from their families and community which seemed to reinforce their ability to act on their decisions to leave. The Native women I interviewed, although they suffered similarly from the various forms of domestic violence and abuse as their white counterparts, expressed a greater personal freedom that I think contributed to their ability to act decisively. There are cultural differences that Native women are exposed to from birth that, I believe, account for this sense of control and freedom to act. Native women in this study, even though

they live under the influences of the dominant white society, were brought up in a matrilineal Clan system, in one of the few remaining matriarchal societies in the world. As such, what they understood of their role as women was much different from the white women in this study.

Summary of Key Findings

Most of the women in this study affectionately recounted their girlhood dreams of finding Mr. Right, getting married, and becoming mothers. Most graduated from high school and entered the work force in the few, lower waged jobs available for women, and some women went onto college or a trade school. Two of the women got pregnant before they got married, at 17 and 18 years old respectively. Most of the women were married or cohabitating with a male partner by age 20, the rest by age 23. They all expressed delusion and disappointment with the transition into marriage, feeling that it was not what they had expected, but with their first encounter with domestic abuse and violence, they expressed a sense shock, bewilderment, and betrayal. Initially, many of the women felt that they were to blame for their abuse, and took responsibility for somehow failing their husband or family. As the abuse continued, however, they began to blame their husbands or partners for their, and in some cases their children's, abuse. All of the women thought about leaving their abusers and gave careful consideration to planning their escapes, but their ability to leave was based on a myriad of complex factors.

The significant findings of the Marital Transition narratives are reflective of the socio-historical values of mid-20th century America and the complexity of domestic violence and the pervasive impact it has on the family. Influenced by patriarchy, women of this era were indoctrinated to be obedient and subservient to the male, as head of household. They were taught that male perpetrated violence, as a means to keep a wife or child under control, was tolerable and acceptable. They were also programmed to protect the sanctity of the family as a private

institution and promote the image of a family harmony. This combination of social forces effectively silenced women who were being abused (Anderson 1997). Most of the women suffered without ever disclosing their abuse to others outside of the immediate family. When some of the women tried to disclose their abuse they were shamed for their betrayal of privacy, chastised for making poor decisions, and lectured on how to be better wives and mothers.

Additionally, there were institutional gender barriers that impeded women's escape from domestic violence (Anderson 1997; Khaw & Hardesty 2007). Mid-20th century American women had limited educational and job opportunities. They were dependent on the economic resources of their fathers until they entered marriage, where they became dependent on their husbands. Their financial dependency and lack of education, as well as a gendered labor market that forced women into low wage jobs, effectively prevented many women from leaving an abusive relationship (Walker 1984; Rothenberg 2003; Anderson 1997). The privacy and seclusion of the household, coupled with the cultural support of patriarchal principles and violence, readily facilitated the practice and acceptance of domestic assault but these women were never prepared for it (Anderson 1997; Gelles & Straus 1988).

The type, frequency, severity, and length of exposure to domestic violence seemed to have a significant effect on life course trajectories and outcomes for the women in this study. Some of the women experienced routine and extreme, coercive and controlling physical and sexual violence; some experienced moderate physical violence but marked intimidation and coercion; and some experienced rare to no physical violence but persistent emotional and psychological abuse. For all of the women, the abuse and violence started early in the relationship. If the relationship went on long enough, the pattern of physical violence shifted toward more chronic psychological and emotional abuse. Consistent with the literature on

domestic violence, all of the women felt that the psychological and emotional abuse they endured was far more damaging than any physical assault they were subjected to (Rhodes & Baranoff McKenzie 1998; Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek 1990; Vitanza, Vogel, & Marshall 1995; Kelly & Johnson (2008).

The range in relationship duration for these women was from 2 to over 40 years. The women who were able to leave their abuser relatively early in the relationship, within 2 to 5 years, seemed to be the most robust. These women were able to garner support and rebound quickly once they left their relationship. They were young enough to gain employment, go back to school, or remarry. Their lives proceeded without significant subsequent disruption and these women tended to be financially secure. The women who had endured the longest exposures to violence and abuse before being left by their husbands were much more somber, were less educated, and were financially insecure. They expressed much more anxiety and insecurity about leaving, echoing their abuser's claim that they were "too stupid" to get a job. They feared they would not be able to find work, or housing, or be able to provide for themselves and their children.

The impact of domestic violence on the life course was most pronounced for the women who endured the longest exposures to abuse, but it also affected their children. Child age and length of exposure to interparental abuse and family violence were mediating factors for psychological symptomology in adulthood. The women who left their abusers early, within 2-5 years, while their children were quite young, had strong and supportive relationships with their adult children. Additionally, they did not mention any untoward outcomes for their adult children. Of the remaining women with children who stayed in the abusive relationship greater than 10 years, half mentioned a child or children who went on to have mental health problems,

drug or alcohol addiction, or legal troubles. In general, the types, severity, and duration of abuse predicted long-term negative sequelae for both mother and child. The longer a woman and her children stayed in the abusive relationship, the weaker the maternal/child bond was throughout the life course and maternal reports of adult-child mental illness, substance abuse, or delinquency increased. These findings are well supported in the domestic violence, psychology, and criminal justice literature (Roustit et al. 2009; Davies & Cummings 2006). Finally, some of the women were currently estranged from their adult children and this poor relationship had the potential to further impact the women's later life course. A poor maternal/child relationship puts limits on the social and economic assistance older women get from their children as they age, and worse, it may place a mother at risk for elder abuse (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998).

Chapter 6

The Life After Narratives

“I wish I could have talked to someone but in those days you just didn’t do that. You didn’t hang your dirty laundry out to dry so to speak. You know, ‘Silence is Golden’, right?”

Frannie, age 75

In most cases, I met with the women participating in this study three times. The third interview typically captured the women’s narratives of life after domestic violence and allowed me the opportunity to ask questions or clarify details of a story. My initial expectation was that these interviews would be upbeat, energetic stories of survival, resilience, and growth. What I encountered was usually a much more somber reflection on loss, with most of the women in this study stating or implying deep remorse about their experience with and around domestic violence. Although I found these women to be remarkably courageous and resilient, their stories of success and accomplishment were tempered by their references to sadness, grief, and regret. This Chapter is organized differently than the previous in that my observations of differences between the women are presented along with specific narratives.

Stories of Regret

The overwhelming emotion that emerged from the Life After stories was regret. There were also many stories of resilience to be sure, but they were often tempered by remorse. The stories told of the reality of life after their imperfect unions and were filled with passing disappointments and regrets. With every success or accomplishment these women achieved on their own, came struggle. There were struggles with children, with work, with paying bills, with addiction, with ex-partners and with other intimate relationships. Although all the women

expressed great relief upon leaving their abuse, they told a similar story of the difficult and often painful circumstances they encountered in their efforts to make it on their own.⁷

Some women, like Dottie and Roseanne, would analyze their past and look at how their own behaviors, specifically related to their low self-esteem, attributed to their poor choices in partners and how over time they have learned to accept themselves. While both women were clear that they did not take responsibility of their partners' actions, they tended to express regret for, or mourn for, their past selves. Dottie would frequently say, "I can't believe I did that, but I did" or "if I could go back, I'd do things differently". For other women, like Ann, Delia, Clara, Toni, and Barbara, their expressions of regret seemed more related to the idea, or image, of lost love and feelings of betrayal by their partners. Tanner and Frannie also shared these emotions, but they seemed to regret most the time that was lost to the relationship. Frannie was particularly lamenting of this having spent almost 30 years trying to keep her marriage intact despite extreme physical and psychological abuse, only to be left for a younger woman. Ann, upon reflecting on her abusive marriage and her life afterwards, gives an example of the melancholy and regret that permeates these stories-

Ann: You know Ginnie, I can't say that life has been easy. I am very fortunate, don't get me wrong, but I have suffered, my children have suffered, and for what, you know? Our life was better after I divorced because we didn't have to put up with his stuff anymore... there wasn't the fighting, or the drinking, or the unpredictable... the unpredictability. But um, it was hard. It IS hard, but it's better now. But it was hard to watch the kids go to school and not be able to get them new clothes, or if they wanted something really special, but um, you know there was no money for it. I, we got by, but we didn't have anything extravagant that's for sure. We got by. But you're still sad, I mean, I wish it had been better, for my kids especially. That part was always, has always

⁷ I never asked about regret during the interviews because 1. You can't change the past, and 2. Women in abusive or violent relationships often have little or no control over their situation and asking them if they regret their past implies that they had choices. This type of question only serves to reinforce feelings of helplessness, generates additional and unnecessary feelings of frustration and guilt, and further victimize women who have endured domestic violence.

been the worst for me. You always wish it could have been better, you know, but I can't change that. I can only try to do my best. That's all you can do.

While most of the women tended to have a melancholy affect when telling their Life After stories, Sunny, Sybil, Hattie, Penney, and Orla had a much different response toward their abusers and the time they shared together. For these women, regret was expressed not as remorse or sadness but as anger and annoyance. The narratives they told about leaving their abusers were often humorous and full of spunk which matched their personalities exactly. Their stories tended to focus on courage and determination from the beginning with their family of origin, despite poor health, physical disabilities, or low self-esteem. From the moment I met them, they all had a certain scrappy, gutsy charisma. All of these women were driven and highly resilient. They were determined to leave their abuser, they were determined to find the resources they needed to achieve this goal, they were determined to start over, and they were determined never be abused again. The women in this study have all faced, and continue to face, adversity to some extent and they are all strong and persevering. But these five women, in particular, were the most consistently optimistic, encouraged, and confident.

The Children

The verbal and nonverbal expressions of regret and remorse that accompanied the Life After stories, especially when the women talked about their children, were almost palpable. While body language and nonverbal communication was evident throughout the interviews, there was a marked shift in tone and presence from the Early Life and Marital Transition narratives. The Life After narratives, heavily punctuated by more somber posture and expressions, took on a more reflective, poignant, sometimes depressive air. Statements of sorrow, shame, and guilt were often accompanied by deep, heavy sighs, or a distant stare, or tears. For some of the women

whose children witnessed, and in many cases survived, the domestic violence that infiltrated the home, this interview focused heavily on maternal remorse and regret, particularly around the relationships these women had and have with their children today.

Although the stories related to their children were not always painful, they were by far the most emotional. Barbara talked about the effort she made to reconnect with her children when they moved away from her abuser and their father. Barbara was in a unique position in that she was able to provide both emotionally and financially for her children. She worked diligently to make sure her children received the familial and professional support they needed. She also made sure she didn't interfere with her children's relationship with their father as they grew into adults. But most of the women I interviewed did not have similar resources at hand. For the older women, the act of leaving was particularly difficult because it was tied almost exclusively to financial resources, and the gendered economics of that period favored male privilege. Women were primarily homemakers and those who did enter the work force were relegated to the few jobs that were available to women and they made very little money. Nobody outwardly acknowledged domestic violence during the middle of the 20th century and professional support and counseling for children involved in domestic violence during the 1960s and 1970s would have been extremely difficult to access, if these services existed at all.

During their marriages, some of the women secretly taught their children sophisticated escape plans and how to seek safety if anything happened to them. Barbara taught her oldest son, who was 10 or 11 years old, important phone numbers to call if she should disappear and how to drive a car if he needed to escape. Sybil taught her pre-school sons to run to neighbor's house for help if their father started hitting her. And Anne made sure her children knew their way to her parent's home and to the police station. Some of the women, particularly those with small

children or infants, had to act spontaneously if they were under threat. Toni escaped with her young son to a hotel one night. Martha had to hoist her toddlers through an open window to get away from her husband. Frannie, knowing a violent beating is imminent, tells a story where she has to make a decision to leave her sleeping children, in order to escape. In terror, she makes a decision to leave her sleeping children in their beds as she flees from her husband. Despite her fear, she tries to hide near the house so that she can listen for her children. As she finishes her story of abuse, the narrative melts into a story of the physical, psychological, and emotional abuse her children suffered at the hands of their father. Like most of the women who experienced violent assaults, Frannie's recollections around the acts of violence she endured are incredibly detailed. While she relived this story she became quite animated, motioning how she ran and hid, how she peered between fence slats to watch over her children; and how relieved she was when she found help.

Frannie: It wasn't easy. It was not an easy life. The violence got worse. When we were in Japan one time he was going to the base. I don't want to get my stories mixed up here. It was on a weekend I think... because in the area where we lived you had to have a Japanese servant. You had to because all around you were Japanese people so you had to have a Japanese person in the house who could speak Japanese and English also so you wouldn't be left without being able to speak the language. That gave the nationals a chance to come in and on the base and earn money that they would never be able to earn off the base. So I had given this one really sweet maid that we had, I had given her an early – told her to go home for the weekend...and he came home.

We had the only telephone. There were ten American type houses and they used to call this red house- our house, everybody used to call it 'ten high', which was about a quarter of a mile from the gate going into the base which, was another three or four miles to where the main part of the base was. So we had the only phone there and so he had called and he said "I want you ready... I want you ready to come to the club with me" and I could tell that he had been drinking and I said "I can't go because I gave Keiko the afternoon off." Well, he was furious, he was just furious. "I'm coming right home. You're going to the club if you like it or not!" So I got the kids in bed and I got them all settled and they were all asleep and I was scared to death.

VC: How many kids at that time?

Frannie: Marshall was still alive. Marshall and Robbie and Carl, three. So I made sure that they were asleep. Under a situation like that I tried to keep things down, but I didn't know what to do. There was nobody around and I knew he was – I could tell by his voice he was out for blood. He was really angry, so I just didn't know what to do. I could hear whatever vehicle was dropping him off and I got so scared that I ran out the back door. No. I ran out the front door. We had a big, high fence so he couldn't see me. So I ran out the front door and there was a small gate in the fence where you could get out, but all Japanese people could use the rest of the property out there but they couldn't come in. So there was that gate. So I ran out the gate and I closed it ...and I hid there because I wanted to watch the house and to see whether he was going to hurt the kids at all, so I hid there.

So he came and he's yelling. Not really, really loud, but I could hear him go from the kitchen looking for me and I wasn't there. He knew I was there somewhere, so then that made him even worse! So he started hunting for me and I knew he was going to start looking in the perimeter pretty soon, so I ran up to – there were railroad tracks not too far from us and I knew that there was a Japanese American family that lived about less than an eighth of an mile up those tracks. I knew how to get to their house and so I figured if I can get to their house I can get some help. I could hear him. So I made it up to their house. I was scared to death. I was just scared to death. So I made it up to their house. He didn't attempt to go into the bedroom. He checked and he had been through there so he knew I was not far from there. So I made it up to their house and her husband was home and he was going to come back with me to the house. When we got back home, he had left to go back to the base and then when he came home again he was still drunk. Nothing else was ever said about it, but that's the type of terror I had sometimes taking care of the kids. It was not an easy thing. (long pause)

And then he would really get at the boys... it was when they began to – I would say school age. They were all in school, or mostly, when we were at the air force base in Westmoreland. Those ages... there it started that he would get *them*! He would come home and he would be angry about something and you had to wait until this anger finished itself, wore itself out, so to speak. If you can only get him to lay down or to pacify him one way or another so that it would stop, but until that time... all of us would suffer.

The kids are all in bed sleeping and he would go into their bedrooms, turn the lights on, pull them out of bed, make them stand up, *these little boys*, and take them in the hall and start to abuse them and I wouldn't tolerate that.

VC: What kind of abuse?

Frannie: Usually when he did something like that he would go for Robbie first. Sometimes Robbie would get hit, but the other two didn't get hit then, but nevertheless they suffered just the same, the fear and everything that happened. Whenever we would go on a vacation somewhere, if there was going to be a fun thing..., always before we would go... and the outset of going like packing the car or something, he would go into

one of these tantrums or anger things and it would spoil the whole thing for the kids. Spoiled the happiness. It's like buying somebody a nice pair of pants and cutting the seat out of it. You know what I mean? We're going to go on this really nice vacation and have fun down by the ocean and they had all their toys and everything and he would lose his temper and then we would all shake and shiver for hours and then it would pass...(long silence). They suffered... they really suffered. All my kids suffered because of him.

The suffering of their children was by far the greatest regret the women reflected upon.

All of the children in these narratives were helpless innocents caught in the crossfire of violence or abuse- whether as witnesses or actual targets. Leaving the abusive relationship was a great relief not only for the women, but also for their children. All of the women who left (or were left) when their children were young, recall a period of blissful liberation that came over the home when the perpetrator was gone. They used phrases like "we were finally relaxed" and "we could breathe easier" and "no more walking on eggshells" to describe the way they and their children felt. Delia tells the story of moving out of her house and realizing how much her daughters had been effected by her abusive relationship-

VC: Did he stay or you sold everything and moved out?

Delia: It was all sold. He was going to move. I had to move and an interesting thing happened then. I found an apartment in Belvedere where we could live and it was right in the village and so I hired a moving truck, John was still getting things out for himself and what he did was, when we arrived with the moving truck, everything that he wanted me to have was out on the lawn, everything. Furniture, clothes. It was a good thing it was a nice day like today. If it was raining it would have been a mess. I really had to laugh, and I don't know why I laugh, but it was funny. I said "Oh my gosh". So the kids and I, and the moving guys, we moved everything. Moved into this apartment in Belvedere that afternoon and I cooked dinner that night and we were all home and my girls were *so happy!* And Jackie, who was having trouble eating, I think her nerves were getting her... my youngest, she said "Mom, that is the best dinner I ever had!" You see? All that stuff that was going on, I had no idea how much it was effecting those girls. Not only me, but the girls! They were going to school and I thought they get out of here, then they go down to their rooms and they go to bed. They don't have to deal with all this stuff, but of course they were. I will never forget it. I will never forget that...sitting in our little apartment.

VC: How lighthearted ...

Delia: Yeah, and eating... and eating and everybody was very happy. And Jackie, who always had trouble eating, ate everything! You just don't realize what that kind of atmosphere does. It just effects everyone.

The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

The timing of when children were removed from the violence and abuse in the home had a significant impact on their adult development. Martha, Penney, Sybil left their abusive relationship when their children were quite young, under the age of five, and they did not refer to any negative repercussions their children may have had in their narratives. Indeed, the impression that they left was that they had strong, well bonded relationships with their offspring as children and adults.

All of the other women, whose children were older than age five during the marital relationship, were deeply troubled by their children's exposure to abuse or violence and expressed a great deal of guilt and remorse in their narratives. Of this group, Barbara's children seemed least effected by their experience. Barbara, whose children ranged from toddler to early adolescent when she left her husband, had a strong emotional support system and was independently financially stable. She and her children struggled for a short period of time as they adjusted to their new life but overall, Barbara's relationship with her children only seemed to strengthen. Their devotion to one another as adults is evident in her narrative and I witnessed it first hand, as I met many of her children and grandchildren during the course of our interviews.

For the rest of these children, who were exposed to the stress of violence or abuse for longer periods of time, in some cases their entire childhood, the effects of abuse seemed most pronounced. Many of the older women's children struggled with various mental health issues as they became adults. Several adult children had difficult and distant relationships with other

people, especially intimate partners. Anne's eldest daughter married a violent and abusive man and became dependant on alcohol; two of Sybil's son's were alcoholics; Frannie's oldest two sons were drug and alcohol addicted and had serious mental illness; all of Clara's children struggled with alcoholism and two of her daughters had been in violent relationships. From the narratives, many of these children had difficulty negotiating their relationship with their parents- distancing themselves from one or both parents as adults. Sunny had a very detached relationship with her adult daughter, even though they lived in the same house.

The younger women's children seemed to fare better but that is not to say that they were free of pathology, it just seemed less pronounced. Some of the younger women who had adult children would reference distant or dysfunctional relationships with their sons or daughters, sometimes reflecting that they felt their children blamed them for breaking up the family or causing trouble for their fathers. In the following passage Orla describes her experiences navigating child custody, her ex-husband's continued manipulation, and the impact it has had on her relationship with her son-

Orla: I stayed in the house but he did convince me that on weekends, he wanted to see his children, so I left the house and stayed with my parents so he could visit with the kids. I was still catering to him. He had just..., it was like "All right, okay, whatever you say."

He started using the kids to get to me. You know, I didn't want him taking it out on the kids, so I would do whatever he said. So he would leave the kids out of it. It was horrible for them, just horrible. My son is still angry about it. It was..., I have never been able to give my kids the life I had. But he was just... He's still doing it. He's still using them.

VC: Yeah, but they know it? They know it when he's doing it...

Orla: They know it, they know it. It's hard for... Jennie has accepted it. Jennie's so smart, you know. But I just feel sorry for her because she has had no good example for a man. I mean Hal's (her second husband) tried. He was a little rough around the edges and they butted heads at first. It was hard. That was tough. Hal took us on when she was in Junior High... What a jerk! (laughs).

VC: Did she know your dad?

Orla: Yes, yes they did. The boys, it was hard for the boys because that was one great... I wish he was there for a little bit longer cause he was a great example. Robert had a tendency to hit me when he was little and his father thought that was funny. My father told him, "Don't you ever do that again!" He said to my husband, "What's wrong with you?" And he goes, "It's cute." He goes, "No, it's not!" Then, you know we'd get home and he would say, "Your father is such an asshole, nah, nah, nah." Oh, is he?

Orla goes on to describe the difficult relationship she has with her son Robert, who, as an adult, was displaying more abusive tendencies toward her.

Orla: I just feel, what gets me, what gets me going now, still upsets me is that it hurts the kids. It hurts my kids. I feel like I've let them down, a lot of times. I haven't been able to give them what I had. We don't have a whole lotta money, but my parents didn't give me everything I asked for either, so -- But that's family life. You know, Robert, my son, is still very angry and for some reason right now he is bullying me.

His father told him something a couple of years ago... I don't know, he won't tell me. "Dad said something about you that I'm gonna take to my grave with me." That made me so mad because I have a right to defend myself. "What did your father say?" Nope, not gonna say it. So, he's still messing with them.

VC: Yeah. And you.

Orla: He still would like me just to disappear. He's bizarre. He's just, he's a horrible man. But, cause he's hurt my children... He would do anything for them, I think. I would like to think that. I don't know.

VC: But he, he manipulates, you know...

Orla: The only time it... and he goes after them because that's the only time it bothers me. And my son would go like, he pushes, he plays me. He's his father. He left when he was 16.

He (Randy) tried taking the kids away when I met Hal and the Judge said, 'No. They're fine.' He met Hal. We had a social worker. We had the kids. Each had their own lawyer. It was horrible. It was just awful and he wanted joint custody. I said, "No." Then he wanted split custody. I said, "No!" I said, "I don't want anything changing for them anymore."

And, you know, it got thrown out, but he had told them when they're 16, they can make up their own minds, but he'd also warned Randy to stop influencing the kids. And as soon as Robert was 16, there was a car. This big fancy house... And you know he was doing this behind my back, you know? It was this, this and this and Robert fell for it.

And I should have fought for him more but, at that point, I saw where his father was. I found it was a clearly dumb choice on my part. I said, if I have a chance to give this to my kids and it means giving him up... Go. I shouldn't have done it. Cause Robert's an ass. My son is an ass. He's like his father. He's a bully. He bullies me now. Cause last time we talked, he said the F word to me on the phone and I said, 'Do it again, I'll hang up. I'm not gonna talk to you until I get a written apology.' So that kind of... he backed off. He's very angry with me. He 23 years old and he brought up the divorce again. He calls me up and screams at me. But I told him --

VC: How old was he?

Orla: He's 23.

VC: I know, but how old was he when you divorced?

Orla: Jennie was five and Robert was seven. But we had been married almost 12 years. But even when we were married, I keep trying to say, 'Your dad was never there, so what are you missing? What are you missing?'

Dottie, Clara, and Anne had daughters that went on to experience domestic violence and abuse in their own intimate relationships. Each woman had tried to help their daughter's leave domestic violence to varying degrees of success, and all expressed tremendous guilt- feeling that they had modeled that role for them. Dottie, who was in her 60s, described a very close and open relationship with her daughter, Karrie. She had long been a domestic violence advocate and provided unconditional support to Karrie while she was in an abusive relationship and through her struggle to leave. Dottie, although she grappled with her own guilt, never felt that Karrie blamed her for either of their experiences with domestic violence. Clara and Anne, in their 70s and 80s respectively, while supportive, had a harder time articulating or demonstrating their support. Clara's daughter remains in an abusive relationship and struggles with substance abuse. Anne's daughter, who also had problems with alcohol, eventually left her abuser. Both women intimated that their daughters blamed them for the abuse they witnessed or experienced as

children and adults. Anne was strongly affected by this and tries to balance her older daughter's criticism with her younger daughter's support.

Anne: One, one thing that hurt me somewhat... and I got over it... was after my oldest daughter was married and she left her husband. He was a drinker and very abusive to her, she had two children, and ah... I said I would never persuade my children to stay in an abusive marriage- never! And, ah, but she went for psychological help and she said to me one day, 'you know, mom,' she said 'I'm kind of angry at you...' and I said 'Why? What are you angry about?' And she said, 'I don't know why you stayed with my father. Why didn't you leave him, you know, and look what it's done to his kids' and that hurt me. That was her way of putting it. Karen (her younger daughter) said the same thing to me in a different way. Karen said to me 'mom', now how did she word that... Ah, she felt sorry that I'd put up with what I had put up for as long as I had and she thought I should have left her father earlier, that we would have been all right, but she didn't hold it against me. My oldest daughter holds it against me. She doesn't now, but she did in her way of stating to me... She blamed me for what, what we had to go through. And that hurt. That hurt. Yeah. I mean, I love my daughter. I love her. She's the one saw everything.

VC: Do you think that in time she came to understand despite her own circumstances that it's not the easiest thing to be in an abusive relationship?

Anne: Yeah, right, she did. Yeah, she did. As a mother you, you want everything right with your children and they're still... they're little children no matter how old they are. Now my son in Florida... he went to Florida because he has arthritis and it's a better climate for him. And, ah, he's done everything he could to make a living as he brought up his two children, I think I told you, and they are so good to him and I was talking to him Saturday morning, he called me, and I said, you know, "Frank, you're a grown man, but" I said "you're still my little boy and if you're sick, I want to know about it, you know, and if there's anything I can do to help you, I want to be able to help you". You know and that's something you never lose is the fact that those children you brought into the world and you want to do what you can for them... for as long as you can.

It is not uncommon for adult children with long term exposure to family abuse or violence to suffer negative physical or psychological outcomes. Nor is it uncommon for these children to estrange themselves from their parents in varying degrees. Several women in this study were completely cut off from their adult children, and others had strained relationships, but most had decent relationships. Tanner's daughter was an adult when she asked her mother why

she didn't leave her father. Here Tanner expresses her conflicting guilt and frustration over her decision to stay in the relationship-

VC: Did, um, was he ever verbally abusive to the kids at all?

Tanner: Um, he would yell at them. He was a yeller.

VC: In his, in his drunk moments never took it out on Maura or --

Tanner: No, no. He, they pretty much, um, stayed away from him. I remember in the, in the latter part of the 80s when Maura was here once and, because I remember, she said to me once, 'Why don't you divorce now?' You know, she couldn't understand how I could tolerate, I don't know either, but after it was all over, um, and I think to some extent she probably blamed me, um, you know, for not doing something about, and I mean I blamed myself, but he was, you know, the most impossible person, too... and because of his knowledge, um, I mean one time he was in the hospital, he signed himself out against medical advice. I mean you couldn't get him into a hospital. He just hated hospitals. He, he would get hypomanic in the hospital and it was very scary for him, you know. So, whether it was, it was for, you know, like when he had to be hospitalized for his congestive heart failure, he, he didn't like that either. And so he was worried about, you know, what it was going to be like at the end and he had enlisted his sister to come and take care of him if he was on hospice. My sister-in-law is a nurse. Fortunately, we didn't have to get into all that. And I know Maura said, you know, after, after that whole siege and, you know, he stopped drinking and everything, you know, then, then she said, you know, she could understand, you know, why I had done what I did, but during that time, you know, she couldn't see why, you know, I didn't just get out.

At the time of our interviews Frannie's relationship with her children was complex. Of her five children, only two lived nearby and she describes a relationship with them that seemed perfunctory but distant to me. One of these children, a daughter, had agreed to go to counseling with Frannie to work on a 'friendship'. She doesn't speak to her other three children. Throughout her narrative, whenever Frannie talked about her children she would cry. She seemed to carry an excessive amount of guilt was often conflicted as to why she and her adult children did not have closer relationships. In this passage, Frannie reflects on her remorse for not leaving her relationship sooner and her desire to reconnect with her children.

Frannie: Well...I know now that I should have gotten out earlier...but then I was 19 and living in Japan. I wish I could have talked to someone but in those days you just didn't do that. You didn't hang your dirty laundry out to dry so to speak. You know, 'Silence is Golden', right? And it has taken me a long time to heal and to really look at the damage to my children, and now *their* children suffer...and I have so much guilt about that...about not leaving. But it's hard to explain because for every bad memory, there were some good ones... so you live for those. I didn't want to be divorced because I thought I was better than that...you're not supposed to get divorced. My vows were for better or worse.. And...I didn't want my children not to have a father. But then I realized, they never really had a father...the man they knew was not a father to them. And they... and in some ways I am a much stronger woman, knowing that I am independent, I make my own decisions...I feel very good about that... I am not that vulnerable child anymore. God has really helped me to grow. But in other ways I feel bad because I could take his abuse because I was an adult... but my kids (tearful)...I thought I was protecting my kids by staying with him...(long, tearful silence)...But even that I talk about it, I think it helps. And I go to counseling, have been going to counseling for a few years with a Christian counselor... and I'm learning to see how to understand things and to try and recover some of the past...I made mistakes. I definitely made mistakes! And I'm learning how to talk with my kids which has been really hard but I want them to know how sorry I am. One of my daughters comes with me and that has been a real blessing.

Empowerment and Adventure

When the relationship was ending, many of the women expressed a new feeling of empowerment. Even though they were unsure about their futures, they were discovering a freedom they hadn't had before. They were no longer beholden to a father or a husband. They were asserting themselves and making independent decisions. Several of the women could recall with great detail, the exact moment they felt empowered for the first time. For Delia, it was seeing her belongings on her front lawn, for Nancy it was one morning lying in bed, for Hattie it was gazing upon a hole her husband had punched in the kitchen wall, and for Sybil it was putting her husband's clothes in the furnace when she realized he was gone for good. And despite the fear and vulnerability they felt in those early days on their own, the women described a feeling of anticipation and excitement at the thought of finding work and an apartment, and overall they expressed a sense of relief and peace. For women who had children they described these early

days on their own as a time of renewed bonding with their children. Frannie gives a touching example of empowerment, boosted by some policemen and her neighbors, of finding a voice to say, “That’s it”!

VC: You mentioned that the physical abuse stopped at a certain point in time for you.... But was there emotional or psychological abuse? Did they continue?

Frannie: Oh yes! Right... well there were a couple more instances of violence. This place that we moved to from Salem when he said “c’mon, we’re getting out of here” – this apartment complex that we moved to... there we had met some people. They were Christians also. They lived across the street. It was one or two times the violent temper came out of nowhere. I had been visiting over across the street and one of my children came over and said “Dad’s home, come home”. So I came home and, of course, the air is full of this tension and he was really violent.

I think I’ve said before that he knew better than to come at me, but then there were times when it went beyond that. I could see that he was really violent and I remember him picking up the roast that we were supposed to have for supper and I remember him picking it up off the counter and it came flying through the air... and it hit me and went down on the dirty rug and that was it! I said “That’s it, this is the last straw!” and I got up – I had never done this before – I got up, I walked out the door, walked out the door of the apartment building and left. And I went to these people that I knew across the street. At least I had somewhere to go. In my past life I had no place to go. I had no recourse whatsoever.

He came and called the cops and everything to get me back home again and they said to me “You sit, you stay right there because he has no business ever treating you like that, none whatsoever! Don’t you accept it!” And this is the first time anybody had ever said this to me, ever. So that was one time that the violence came out. Those are the last of the violent things that I remember.

And when he moved out and then all of a sudden I’m living as a single mother now, but he kept calling on the telephone and he would threaten and threaten and threaten over the telephone. And I would still live with that awful fear that if I say “no” to him, in ten minutes the car is going to be out there and then he’s going to come in and be violent. One day, one of my kids said “Ma, you don’t have to take that anymore”. One day I could remember saying to him “I’m sorry. No, I don’t think you can do those things any longer” and I hung up the telephone for the very first time in my life! It was the power that I had that I hung up the telephone. So if he comes, he comes..., if he doesn’t he doesn’t. But now he has no control over me because his authority over me was no longer there. He divorced it. In other words, “I’m leaving you”, so therefore take your authority with you, mister, because it no longer applies to me! You can’t do that to me any longer because you are saying we’re not husband and wife. You’ve got somebody else, so that negates your authority, sir!

It was the most wonderful feeling that he could call and if the conversation got to threats or anything, I would take the phone and hang it up. He would call about three or four minutes later and he would rant and I would keep hanging up again until it finally got through to him that he can't do that anymore and stopped doing that.

Sunny was one of the few older women that worked outside of the home by choice. She started at a local department store as a "salesgirl" when her daughter was just seven, and had worked her way up to a buyer after 20 years. She found solace in her job at department store and she liked the stability and routine. She had almost 30 years with her company when her husband died, and she "couldn't wait to go back to work" after his funeral. Here she describes her feelings-

Sunny: So after my husband died, I was, my life changed in a blink of an eye. My parents were gone. My sister was gone. She lived, I don't know where she lived then, Bradburry then I guess. And my brother lived in Florida. The other brother was deceased. I had no family left at all.

And just, you know, in a blink of an eye, my whole my whole life changed. And I, I was free. I mean I was excited that, for the first time- and this sounds terrible- but I was free to get on with my life. I just had made up my mind I had to cope with it and it was up to me to do something myself, whatever I choose to do. So, I, I took about a week off, I guess, and I went back to work. I really didn't have much option. I had to go back to work really. 'Cuz my, you know, income from my husband was gone and... (Sunny goes on to explain how she organized her finances and went back to work. But then she decided the time was right to relocate to be closer to her daughter.)

VC" Wow. And then, so you had a couple years on your own there, right?

Sunny: Yeah. I had a couple years there. And, um, as I say, Lucy kept saying "why don't you move?" and I said, you know, I said, "don't pressure me" until I... and then I realized, as I say, my whole, my whole life changed so overnight, friends and everything. My friends that, the couples that we always went with, ah, my husband was the first one and the first man in the group that passed away and they never, not one of them ever called me.

Afterwards... so I had to, I had to make new friends. And Lucy said, "Well, if you have to make new friends there why don't you move here and make friends?" I mean they were people I knew. It was a small town. You knew everybody, you know, but I never associated with them socially. You know? It was just till I started playing bridge and they were the ones that gave me the going away party when I left there. My old friends didn't. They didn't even come say good bye.

VC: Wow... after all those years?

Sunny: I know! But... So my whole life, everything changed, you know. My social life. My, everything just changed overnight and I had to, I had no option but to make, make the best of it and go on. Which I did. So when I moved here, um, I was in, Nellie was born in, in, ah, I moved here in September, August or September. She was born in November. I started building this apartment in January, right after I moved here, because I, you know, I had no idea what I was going to do when I moved here.

Shortly after her apartment was completed Sunny decided it was time to go back to work...

Sunny: And, um, so then after I got the apartment built and settled and moved in, I told Lucy I'm going to go back to work. I said I'm not going to just sit here and baby sit the rest of my life. And so I applied for a job at Campbell's and got it right off. So I worked at Campbell's until they sold. And then I worked, stayed on with Bonden's, worked there until I, I was eighty-three and I was still working there.

VC: Oh, my goodness.

Sunny: I would have still been working if I didn't have the car accident. I enjoyed it so much. I enjoyed getting out, seeing people because I, you know, I didn't know too many people here, so I, it was, it was fun for me to get out every day and meet people and make new friends and, and I enjoyed it, you know.

Like Sunny, all of the women talked about the feeling of liberation they felt when they were out of the relationship and living on their own, despite the struggles they encountered. Entering the work force for the first time was a rewarding experience for many of the women, although they related a feeling of conflict in having to spend time away from their children. Some of the women went to trade schools or colleges for the first time, or went on to obtain advanced degrees. Some became more involved in their community activism. Many of the women marveled at the freedom they had to make new friends and developed new relationships. Sybil tells the story of how she got to Nursing school and the rewarding career she had. Abandoned her abusive husband and faced with the daunting task of supporting herself and her three young sons, Sybil saw an opportunity and took advantage of it.

VC: So how did you survive? After he left... did you go back home?

Sybil: Well. Um. No. I didn't know what to do at first. I only knew how to take care of my family. I knew how to clean... so I did that for a while cause I could do it when the boys were at school and I could take the baby with me. But I didn't... that's what my

mother did her whole life to make money. She cleaned white women's houses. And, um... And I did it for a while but I wanted more, you know? But, ummm... Then I met this lady. I used to clean her house and... who kind of took me under her wing. Her husband was a doctor at the hospital and he got me a job cleaning there. At St. Vincent's. And um, they had a nursing school and um, one day I was talking with Sr. Charles Michael. She was a nun and a nurse and the head of the medical floors and...um... and I told her I wanted to be a nurse. And (laughs) the next thing I know I'm in Nursing School. It was real hard. I had to find someone to take care of boys. We got up at 5 o'clock every day because I had to be on the floor at 7 am sharp and sometimes I couldn't get them until 8 or 9 o'clock at night if we were busy on the floors. Cause the student nurses ran the floors in the junior and senior years, and if it was busy you had to stay and get the next shift settled. But um... and sometimes (laughs) the nuns would take them. They were real nice! I'd never seen a nun before I went to St. Vincent's! But um, the boys loved them and they were real good to us. And, um... the boys would stay at the convent next to the hospital until I got out. And we did this for 3 years. It was real hard to run everybody around but in the end it was worth it cause Nursing was a good career. I worked until I was 75. I worked on every floor at St. Vincent's and got to be Supervisor... (Pause) Everybody cried when I left.

All of the women expressed satisfaction with their job or career choices when they were on their own. The women who had college or trade school educations obtained while they were in their 20s, seemed immensely satisfied with their work careers. Today, all of these women would be considered middle class or upper middle class. The women who were older, who had no formal post secondary education or training, and who could not afford this privilege after divorce or separation, entered the work force in lower paying jobs. Their stories are reflective of their efforts to, as Clara put it "(you) work hard to get promoted, to move ahead" and they all seemed proud of their accomplishments. The only regret these women expressed is that they did not have the opportunity to go to college. The majority of these women had struggled financially throughout their work life and continued to do so in retirement or semi-retirement. Only one woman, Dottie, went back to school for a college degree later in life.

Finding Someone Else, or Not

At different points throughout this research project, I would find myself thinking about my mother. My mother was in her late 40s when she left my father and I remember, in the beginning, my siblings and I would urge her to go on a date, or try to meet ‘someone nice’. Her response was always the same- she was ‘too old’ to go on dates and she was ‘too old’ to fall in love again. In time, she convinced us that at middle-age, she *was* old. When I began this study I imagined the lives of women who were mostly my age... mature women who were single again. I was in my mid 40s when I began these interviews and *I* certainly didn’t feel old or unattractive or incapable of being loved. Why did my mother feel that way? And did other women share that feeling? How did they navigate love a second time around? I thought this topic of finding new love would be groundbreaking, with many rich and interesting findings but again, my fantasy and the reality these women introduced me to were not necessarily congruent.

There was not much to be said about love a second time around. In comparison to their other narratives, when they did talk about new relationships, or the idea of a new relationship, the story tended to be unusually brief and direct. Sunny, Sybil, Clara, Anne, and Frannie were all adamant that they had no desire to get involved with another man, let alone remarry, but their reasons were different. After 40 plus years in a bad marriage, Sunny just wanted to work and enjoy her friends; Sybil, Clara, and Anne each offered a variation of “I didn’t want to pick up after another kid”, and Frannie felt that God intended her to be with only one man. Toni, Hattie, Martha, and Orla all remarried, and they all used similar descriptors for their second husbands: “good man”, “great guy”, “nice guy”, or “wonderful man”. I thought these narratives would be romantically redeeming but the story, and the manner in which they told it, was modest and for the most part, uneventful. They wove their new partners into their narratives suddenly, usually

like, "... and then I met Joe" or "and then I started dating Stan and we got married in 1984." All of these women seemed genuinely happy with their marriages and their second husbands, but they didn't really give much detail about them, at least compared to their first relationship.

Only the women who had difficult subsequent relationships wanted to share the story more completely and spent more time reflecting on the lessons they learned from those encounters. Delia, Dottie, Penney, and Roseanne all re-entered the world of dating. Delia remarried twice, the second time to an abusive alcoholic whom she divorced, and the third time to a church-going man who eventually died, but the relationship was very problematic. Dottie entered into two subsequent long term cohabitating relationships and both were violent and abusive. She left her last relationship when she was in her late 40s and vowed she'd never be with another man but she is conflicted. She mourns the loss of a life-long companionship and the love of a "healthy man", but sadly, that she was "happy to at least have a love relationship, even if it was a sick one". And despite her feminist and domestic violence activism, she still blames herself for her abuse, commenting that she was "the common denominator" in her abusive relationships.

Dottie: It's a real sadness with knowing that you're going to spend the rest of your life and never have the companionship of a partner. I'll be 63 years old in January. As my daughters say I'm intimidating, I'm set in my ways, I can be a royal bitch sometimes. I would still like to have a companion, but that's probably not going to happen. I'm really glad that I saw what it was like to at least have a love relationship even if it was a sick one and the regret that I have is that I've never had a relationship with a healthy man. Thank God I've got friends who have good marriages because I'd be even more cynical than I am. I'm very much a feminist and I'm very much an activist, but I've got good friends, who've got good solid marriages and I've got good friends that are guys that are in good solid marriages. It just wasn't me. So there are times when I beat up on myself and I get thinking well, the common denominator here is you, so I haven't worried about trying to find somebody else because I'm not convinced I'd do any better about selecting him.

Penney swore off men when she was in her 30s after dating “a couple of losers”, one who was abusive and controlling. Roseanne dated both men and women but, by the time she reached her 40s, she realized she had significant trust issues and could not feel secure in a committed intimate relationship. Both Penney and Roseanne reflected on their issues with trust that made it hard for them to be fully present in a relationship.

Roseanne: So, for almost all of my adult life I have felt very harmed in the sense of just being very afraid to get close to anybody..., not in friendships. Well, yes, even in friendships. I mean, I'm rather a, a, I'm not someone who wants to talk to you every day. I'm not that type of person. My very best friend, Debby, and I can go a week or two without talking to each other and then pick up and just like, and I pick up very well with people. I need a lot of alone time and I think my weight is a way of keeping people away from me, specifically, intimacy. I think I frame my whole life of sort of protect... So, I, I think that my whole life has been spent not getting hurt.

This is the longest standing relationship I've ever had. Jimmy was one year. Kathy was one year. That's the extent of my capability for intimacy before they dump me. And (laugh), and I have a little insight into that from a guy later on that I went out with who, I believe, hit the nail on the head. He said, “I felt like I could never get close to you.” I think he hit the nail on the head and it was helpful and Jimmy and I are still friends... So, it's like *friends* I do really well. Something else gets screwed up. I don't know what it is but we are still to this day friends and I'm even friends with his second wife so it's pretty interesting. Um, at that time, late 70's, because of Kathy, I could not seem to recover from that and in retrospect, Ginnie, it's probably because I thought I had found the answer.

But I never had any trust... with my friends, the ones that are still around, my God, they're 40-year-old relationships, 30-year relationships, there's no fear in them anymore. We know each other like books. We know what buttons not to push and what buttons to push. So, there's no fear.

Where Roseanne was analytical in her assessment of her trust issues, Penney was angry and defiant, but both were tired of being hurt. Penney reflects on her dating experiences after she left a very violent and abusive alcoholic. She also addresses what many of the women inferred, that as young women they had an absolute lack of knowledge or understanding of domestic violence and had difficulty even putting words to the abuse they were experiencing.

Penney: Well, um, after I got married, um, and both of my children are handicapped, um, that was so hard. I, ah, I guess part of it was 'cuz I went through it myself. (She had a birth defect and had been wheelchair bound for many years when I interviewed her)

And I questioned, questioned “Why, why me?” “Why them?” You know and, ah, the other thing that happened too was, um, I had, um, my best friend went out with my boyfriend when I was about sixteen and it, it changed my, my thoughts in trusting people and for... I would say ten years that I didn't trust and it was a bad time in my life. Um, I was angry at what happened with me, with my sons and... just angry. And, and didn't, I lived, ah, I lived with that anger and things that I did and I never, I never really realized that until a long time later that that's what I was doing so I thought... one of the things I, how I felt was if anybody said anything was, “You know, if you're not gonna die for me, then don't tell me how to live!” You know and that's, that's a heck of a way to live. But that's how I felt at the time. You know, I was really angry.

Um, but then, um, I, ah, I went with this one guy who was an Indian and he was, ah, controlling. At that time I didn't know what that was and what it meant, um, and, and I went with him for three years and he was like two different people. Um, he was very good to me, ah, helped me in a lot of ways. Um, but when he drank, he was like a different person.

And then at one time he was, was so mad that he wanted to kill me and had a knife right on my neck and said “You were..., you're gonna tell me who you were with right now or I'm gonna kill you!” I said, “You saw me. You knew who I was with”. I was with my sister-in-law... and, ah, but by then I just screamed so hard that my nose bled and that's what stopped him. But then after that he stalked me for about six months and, again, I didn't know that's what it was. I didn't know it had a name. You know and, ah, it was bad.

I can still see that, that trust in, in men, it will never be that. It will never be that. I tried to date after that and I remember one night I was out and I'm having fun and we sat down and my date said, he said, “Ah, well, let's go home”. I said, “No, I don't want to go home. I'm having fun”. And I could see a change in his face and I said, “Okay, let's go”.

And I realized then that it was never gonna change. Um, and it, it, so that when I turned thirty-five and I said that's it! I'm tired of being hurt. I don't, I don't ever want to put myself in that position again to be hurt, and so I said no more! No more men in my life! Um, and it's weird because I don't like being alone and I was always afraid and yet that's what I chose, but I guess it was better than being hurt, you know.

Only Roseanne, Barbara and Tanner, in their 60s and 70s respectively, remained open to the thought of dating. Barbara, who had left her ex when she was in her 30s, laughingly noted, “It hasn't happened yet.... But I'm open to it!” Tanner had been single for the shortest amount of

time. She was planning to move and was looking forward meeting new people and involving herself in new activities. She wasn't looking to date but said, "if it happens, it happens."

Roseanne was the only woman to actually ponder what a relationship might look like if she were ever to try another-

Roseanne: I can't quite imagine it. Um, this person would have to be, male or female, would have to be... they would have to have their own place. Um, I'm not sure about the living with anybody thing. It'd be nice if they were kind of like that and so it'd be nice to have someone as a partner, as a semi-partner I guess. Remember, at 17 I said I need to be married to a traveling salesman...I, I just don't think the 24/7 thing would work for me, but would I like it? Yeah, if... yeah I would. Who wouldn't? I don't see it happening, but... You never know. But I'm not against it. I would not be opposed to it. I would just know how set I am in my ways. I would assume the other person would be rather set in their ways and we'd have to do some negotiating.

Observations on Differences: Self-actualization, Resilience and Future

I found all of these women to be self actualized and resilient, even though some are still plagued by feelings of melancholy, insecurity, and low self-esteem. For example, Roseanne knew she was a successful woman, because of her interactions with others and her many performance citations and professional accolades, but she could not always see it or feel it for herself. She, like the rest of the women I interviewed, was very humble when talking about her own accomplishments. The women tended to summarize their achievements, e.g. raising children as a single parent or going back to school or work, as tasks that "just needed to be done" In general, the women were quite self-effacing and seemed reluctant to talk positively about themselves. Unlike other narratives where their words flowed easily, they had trouble generating stories about their life successes and would respond with great modesty to my questions about how they survived and thrived. I tried to select examples from their narratives that I thought demonstrated both self actualization and resilience, but for the most part these qualities were reflected more by the women's actions than their words.

Martha, who had dropped out of school, talked awkwardly about her recent job promotion in administration, but her non-verbals demonstrated pride and satisfaction in this accomplishment. Dottie, who had a most difficult life, seemed awkwardly shy and uncomfortable when I praised her hard work and accomplishments in education and activism, but she was beaming when she showed me her “wall of fame” upon which hung her baccalaureate parchment and pictures of her children and grandchildren.

I believe that self actualization and resilience are both manifestations of inner power. Self actualization refers to a sense of achievement and fulfilled potential. The women in this study have come to an understanding and acceptance of who they are, particularly the eldest women. These women are looking externally now, reflecting on a long life, and appreciating life at its most complex. Their achievements are the culmination of age and experience, and imbedded within this life experience is a tenacious thread of resiliency. Some of these women seemed naturally resilient (Sunny, Orla, Penney, and Hattie) while others seemed to develop resilient characteristics over time (Dottie, Frannie, Roseanne). All of the women identified as survivors, all seemed self aware, and they all seemed to have developed strong support systems. The majority of the women that I interviewed appeared to be well in control of their lives, despite sometimes difficult relationships, or retirement fears, or failing health.

In comparison to the non-Native women, the Native women seemed much more confident and self-assured regardless of age. In their narratives, at different points they referred to traditional teaching on balance and harmony, and the need to be of a good mind despite life’s adversities- as these are things that are to be expected. None of these women, despite physical, emotional, or financial setbacks, complained about their situations or indicated worry. Additionally, the Native women differed from the non-Native women in their deference toward

men. The Native women inferred and spoke to a traditional egalitarian system of gender balance with roles and responsibility to self and the community. Although they experienced gender violence, they considered the incidents to be a violation of traditional teaching. They never gave an indication that they were subordinate to men in any way. Contrary, with the exception of Anne, Tanner, Roseanne and Dottie, the white women, despite their personal histories of gender oppression, violence, and abuse, still tended to imply in their narratives that male domination and female subjugation, especially in relation to marriage, was the natural order. This was particularly true of the women, like Delia and Frannie, who held very strong religious beliefs and despite their histories of abuse and violence, still feels that man has a divine, God given authority over women.

With regard to inner power, the oldest women were the most secure and sure of themselves. The octogenarians- Sunny, Sybil, Delia and Anne were likely in their last decade of life and were quite firm in their opinions and expectations. Whenever I interviewed these women I was sure to be given advice and direction about life in general, in addition to my lessons on domestic violence, survival, and resiliency. Sunny liked to say, “Now listen...”, and Anne would address me by name when she wanted me to really pay attention to her wisdom. The septuagenarians- Tanner, Frannie, Hattie, Penney, and Clara were the most reflective. They seemed perplexed that they were in actually in their 70s because, according to Tanner, she didn’t “feel that old”. These women were tentative and more tempered with giving out life advice. The sexagenarians- Roseanne, Barbara, Dottie, Orla, Toni, and Martha, although secure with themselves, still seemed to be developing that strength and security. They offered the most relaxed and laid back interviews, peppered with vulgarities and humor and a more ready acceptance of contemporary social trends, but their interviews were laced with statements of

uncertainty like "I don't know" or "I'm not sure", particularly in reflecting on the future. Toni and Orla both commented that they were 'still trying to figure it out' and Roseanne was fond of reminding me that she was 'still a work in progress'.

In the following section, Toni, Ann, and Orla offer different examples of attaining security as they aged. Toni reflects on her early insecurity, how she had changed once she left her husband and created a life on her own-

VC: And has that level of insecurity evolved as you have gotten older or you reached like, I mean did you just turn around one day and say "I'm fine. I'm fine the way I am -"

Toni: Well, I didn't, didn't realize... I mean I *realized*, you know, that I was going to get divorced... that I can do this on my own. And I was at a wake this one time and I went into the wake by myself and someone in the back of the room said to my cousin, 'Oh my God, look at her! Do you see how she walked into that room by herself? So confident!' And my cousin told me what she said... and this was just someone who's an acquaintance of mine- And I was just, I think I, you know, I just stood taller after she told me that.

I, I didn't know that that's how, that people perceived me as being a little mouse kind of thing, first of all. And then, you know, I'm on my own and all, and people are noticing that I'm carrying myself a little differently and I'm much more sociable and all.

It's just, it was nice to hear that and I think hearing it, just, you know, just boosted it a little bit more. So going out with that group of friends that I had when we would just go out and, you know, some of the men there were single and it was, we were all just very comfortable together and it wasn't, um, I mean we had wonderful, I mean one girl would always try to get somebody together. Come on, why don't you go dance with her kind of thing.

But I wouldn't, wouldn't think twice about picking up, you know, somebody's hand and say, all right, come dance with me. You know, three years before that I wouldn't have done that. I wouldn't have done that. And I would do it today even though I'm married.

Anne presented with a typical grandmotherly appearance that belied a very tough, resolute woman. She had been reflecting on her middle life, after she divorced her husband, when she realized that she had a powerful voice. She stood up to her husband and his lawyer in court, and she felt very empowered by her public display of courage and fortitude. This new ability "to speak up and not be pushed into a corner" served her in other situations with work,

friends, and family. In the following passage she is recalling her younger self and what she would have liked to have done differently, and how she is today-

Anne: Ah, I think that I would have been more, what is the word I want to use, um, ah, I would have more trust in myself that I could have made a life with my children and for myself. I wouldn't have had that fear they'd be taken away from me. Because I went back to work after thirty-six years of marriage and, ah, it was less than that, twelve years and I had to go back to work to pay bills and I'll, I would have stood up to my husband more and told him you don't scare me. I can care for my children... And I didn't say that. I, I wanted everything to be peaceful. I wanted my kids to have a peaceful existence and I did the best I could, you know?

But I feel there's so much in life, Ginnie. There's so much good in life and why, ah, I know moving into this place (referring to the Senior Living Apartments) and, first of all, all I heard was complaints, complaints, complaints. And, well, you know, you can complain about everything and everybody, but how fortunate we are today! And I can't let these people... and my first thought was, ah, because I wanted to make it more pleasant for these people especially the ones who are in their apartments most of them and that's why I started planting flowers outside. I got criticized by some of the women here, I think it was jealousy. The one, she was "the hostess", and she felt she was the one that, the social director in here and when I started doing things I kind of --

VC: Stepped on her toes?

Ann -- yeah... stepped on her toes and I, I didn't agree I was doing that, but I still feel that if you can help somebody else, you're helping yourself. And that's my philosophy and I'll be doing it to the end of my days! And nobody is going to push me in a corner and keep me there. 'Cuz I'm not doing anything wrong. Nobody!

Orla had survived devastating low self-esteem, domestic violence, divorce, single parenthood, and three different forms of cancer. Her outlook on life seemed only to improve with each obstacle she overcame and I asked her about her strength to endure and bounce back-

VC: Do you think of all those things and think they have made you stronger?

Orla: Yeah.

VC: You said, you said they made you stronger but you have had experience with your ex, and the stuff he put you through, but all that - your health, you were basically a single parent that whole time - Has that strengthened your resolve? Has it --

Orla: I know you can come out on the other side. Yeah, I know that, and I don't know if it strengthened my resolve... probably in the marriage I didn't recognize it. I just know that I would get so anxious about stuff, and now- if it's gonna happen, it's gonna happen. I don't know why everything keeps happening to me (laughs).

I try not to be that person... you know, bitter. There's a reason for all of this. I just don't know what it is yet. But maybe it's to guide my children better. I don't know. But man, this has been one shitty life so far (laughs).

Pretty good too, it's just that I'm tired. I'm getting tired. That didn't, it didn't change.

VC: Yeah. It's been a long haul for you.

Orla: It's not just, you know, "Poor me. I was cheated on." It all strengthened my resolve I think. I don't know if it's an age thing or maybe it's just finally that is the result of that. I'm just comfortable with who I am. It's almost like the scars are not something to be embarrassed about, they tell a story... "I think I can get through almost all of this, I learned a lot. Thank you."

So, when you find that humor, you're not thinking about, "Oh, how pitiful". I was at the gym the other day and I couldn't get this trainer. He's this young guy and they're all drooling over these blondes and I go, "Oh, God. Hello?? Come here." You know, I said. "Come here and talk to me." You know, but I made a joke about it. "I hate to take you away, but we do have an appointment." I'm not, "oh, it's me." I'm not looking at myself because I still have that horrible self-image of me, myself.

But I've accepted it and I'm like, people are gonna like me not because of that, you know. I don't let that interfere anymore. I go, "Aw, screw you", to myself. I don't know if it comes with age or just so much shit! (Laughter) But I know I'm just not gonna waste anymore time!

When I asked the women to talk about their thoughts on or plans for the future, the general tone of the interview shifted from a mostly somber meditation on loss to a more lighthearted, optimistic, and humorous exchange. When I asked Sybil what her future plans where she laughed and said, "What future? I'm almost 88 years old!" All of the women had plans, but their focus was age dependent. The women in their 60s, all of whom were still working at least part-time, were focused almost exclusively on retirement and spending more time with friends and family. The women in their 70s were all retired but their 'future' stories were focused on worrying about health and money. Tanner was planning a move to a smaller

townhome to save money. Clara had just retired at 73 and wasn't sure if she should find a part time job to make ends meet. Hattie worked one day a week for extra spending money but worried about how she could maintain her house if her husband died. Frannie worried about her worsening health and if she should consider an assisted living community. The oldest women seemed to be the most complacent with their lives. They reflected on their past life as mostly happy, sometimes painful, but always meaningful. Their 'future' stories evolved around spending time with loved ones and enjoying the time they have left but there was no underlying connotation of worry or fear.

Delia, at 86, was a vibrant and petite, red-headed woman. She kept to a busy schedule of social and civic activities. She was very proud that she had passed her driving test for another year. In this passage, we were coming to an end of our third interview when I asked her to reflect on herself, today, and her plans for the future-

VC: So, and so how would you describe the woman that you are today, now, this period of time, the woman that you've become?

Delia: Oh, I'm pretty, I'm pretty happy person. I have some very good friends that I see a lot of. I have kept on with my choral work, so I have something fun to do besides stay home and take care of the cat and the house. I'm a little short of money right at the moment, but that's because I've seen so many doctors lately. But, I can't really complain about my life, except that I don't have really enough money to travel. That's the only thing that kind of bugs me, because I would like to go out to see my daughter, with all of her houses that she builds for animals. I think that would be really a fun trip, and I haven't seen her now in about five years. So I'd like to do that. And I may figure it out, yet. But I really, I don't have any, I'm not upset. Most of the time, I'm really happy. I have a kind of a crazy cat, that needs my attention and I kind of help my daughters as much as I can. I don't know...

VC: Do you have plans for the future?

Delia: No, other than, other than trying to get to see my family that's out of town, I don't really have any real plans. I'll probably stay in this area. Because I like the people that are here that I know. There's things that I do with them. Um, I haven't even thought about that. Hmmm, plans for the future? I haven't really

thought of plans for the future. Um, I want to do some more artwork. The last couple of years, I really haven't felt that great, so I haven't been producing very much. And, framing has gotten so expensive, I haven't done a whole lot of it, but I, I want to get, do some more artwork. I would even want to get back to tap dancing.

VC: You were a dancer too?

Delia: Yes.

VC: When was the last time you danced?

Delia: Um, it's been about, almost two years. Because, I, I didn't take up dance until I was sixty.

VC: Oh my. That's amazing. You're an amazing woman.

Delia: Oh yeah, right!

VC: You are! When you think about it, that when I, like, so, you're 86 years old, so to me, this is, these are ideals to live up to, you know. You're resilient! You know, if it is mistakes that you made, and had to learn from, or --

Delia: I really think it is. I think that, I know that I was not very experienced, even in high school, because I came from this little town, and I was just with all these people that I knew all the time, and I really, it just, it took me a long time to really weigh things, and think things out. I just kind of jumped into things.

I, I did that. But I don't really regret any of the things that I jumped into, because I think it was all a learning experience, really. And, so now, I don't know, I'm happy. Even by myself. As -- just recently, I was thinking jeepers creepers, I'm always sitting around here by myself watching television, but then a day later I said to myself, well what's wrong with that? I mean, you can still do all your housekeeping, I still do everything myself. I don't know. I have a pretty good life. So I really can't complain.

Sunny was planning her 90th birthday when we first met. She was still living alone, independently, but she could no longer drive. She was receiving lunch from the Meals-On-Wheels Program and had befriended a driver named Sheryl, who occasionally took her for rides and outings. She was telling me about some of the people she visits with on Sheryl's route and how she sees herself in comparison-

Sunny: Well, Sheryl takes meals to one lady that lost her husband apparently about maybe two, four years ago and she said she, every day, she will cry about something.

You know she just can't, um... the other day I was there, she, she usually comes out and says good bye to me and she said, "Tell Sunny that I had to go to the bathroom. I don't want her to see me crying." She was just so depressed. She can't, she can't get over it, you know. But, you know, I just made up my mind I had to, I had to do it for myself.

VC: Right. Nobody else is going to do it for you.

Sunny: No one else *can* do it for me. And so I'm not complaining. I'm not, I go day-by-day. Do the best I can and if I don't feel good some day, I ache more days, I just, you know, I don't complain about it. I, it's just the way I'm gonna have to be.

And, um, you know, there are days when my back aches terribly, but I don't, I don't complain to Lucy about it. I just get my meals and do the best I can. I'm doing good.

VC: When you think about your life so far, are you satisfied with your life?

Sunny: Oh, yeah. I'm satisfied. I had a good life. I *have* a good life. I'm almost ninety and I'm still making friends. I love my young friends like Sheryl, and all of my old friends that are still around. You always wish things could be better, you know... I wish I didn't ache so much or I wish I could get out more but a lot of people my age are in worse shape so I'm really grateful for what I have... And I look forward to little things and I try to stay busy and I think that's good. Like Sheryl and I will talk about the basketball games so I get a kick out of watching them and then we talk about it, so that's a lot of fun.

Sybil, who was 87 when we met, had recently been diagnosed with cancer and had declined chemotherapy. I did not ask her about future plans but she offered, at different times, comments that implied she was living day to day. She was going to weekly luncheons, or was going to visit family in the North at the end of the week, or she was having her great-granddaughter for dinner. I asked her to describe the woman that she had become today-

VC: So tell me about yourself now... like who are you today?

Sybil: Well all I can say is I'm an old lady with no regrets (laughs)... I think I got a good life and, ah..., I got the best out of it. I don't really think about it a lot (laughs)... But, ah, I got a good family, I got good friends, I get out and do things. I like to have a schedule you know, like Wednesday we have lunch here, and Fridays I go to the community center for lunch... mostly it the same people but they're my family too. I dunno... I'm happy, you know?

Happy, but still living and learning seemed to be the final lesson imparted by the women I interviewed. They were resilient women, although very modest. Many did not seem to think of themselves as particularly strong or powerful until their achievements were emphasized. They thought of themselves as survivors, but this was not a title that was exclusive to their experience with domestic violence... they had also survived childrearing, the workforce, subsequent bad relationships, illness, poverty, etc. And while they had learned many lessons from their encounter with domestic violence, they learned many more lessons as they continued living beyond that experience. They are resilient and they are survivors, but they are simultaneously sad and remorseful, angry and defiant. They are incredibly brave and complex women who, despite age, are unfinished and still learning.

Summary of Key Findings

Many of the women in the study found creative ways to defuse or resist their abusers and protect their children from violence. All of the women, at one time or another, fantasized about leaving the relationship and establishing an independent life. Some women developed elaborate escape plans for themselves and their children. Timing and support were the key determinants for leaving, and although they expressed overwhelming feelings of fear, insecurity, and anxiety, once the women had left, or were left by their abusers, they felt an immediate sense of relief and liberation. Their initial insecurity and fear soon gave way to pride and accomplishment. They found housing, and jobs, and childcare. They bought cars, got promotions, and went back to school- and with each success and achievement they felt increased confidence. All of the women went on to develop intimate relationships with other, but they were not necessarily sexual. Some women did go onto be happily remarried and other invested in deep and lasting friendships.

However, a significant finding of the Life After narratives was that despite their burgeoning independence and the successes they achieved throughout life, most of the women

expressed a persistent and chronic sorrow for the abuse they and their children were subjected to. While all of the women in this study demonstrated remarkable strength and resiliency, these attributes were tempered by grief and regret. This seemingly conflicting duality speaks to the complex range of emotions that people experience after exposure to trauma (Bonanno 2004). Competing feelings and emotions are common in trauma recovery, where resilience and grief are not oppositional, but simply different aspects of the overall experience of coping and adjustment (Bonanno 2004; Anderson 2010; Lemaire 2010).

Unfortunately, in the domestic violence literature there is either/or tendency to focus on resiliency as a survivor outcome or survivor physical and psychological symptomology (Yllo 1993; Richards 1992; Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998; Higgins & Follette 2002). To the contrary, I found the women in this study to be remarkably courageous and resilient, but they were also quite vulnerable and sad. This coexistence of resiliency and grief was expressed by all of the women as they reflected back on their lives and contemplated the lessons they had learned and the meaning they had derived from their vast experiences. The Life After narratives demonstrate the complex emotions that the women in this study expressed as they reflected on their lives after their abusive relationship and through their subsequent life course. Although there were many humorous anecdotes and stories of courage and optimism, the general tone of these was one of remorse. Typically, each story of success was followed by an expression of loss, guilt, or regret. This was particularly true when the women talked about their children.

Maternal guilt was another major theme of the Life After narratives. Feelings of chronic guilt and shame have been linked to low self worth, depression, isolation, substance abuse, eating disorders, and PTSD (Campbell & Lewandowski 1997; Bonomi, Anderson, Rivara & Thompson 2007; Higgins & Follette 2002). All of the women whose children were exposed to abuse, no

matter the duration, mentioned feelings of remorse, regret, guilt, anger, shame and self-blame that persist to this day. Mothers whose children were also beaten and abused, or whose children were exposed to domestic violence for longer periods of time, expressed and demonstrated the deepest emotions of guilt and remorse, particularly because those children also suffered significant psychological symptomology as adults.

Very few studies have looked at maternal guilt among older women or maternal guilt over time (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998). The women in this study were clearly resilient and wise. While they talked openly about their grief, shame, and remorse but they did not blame themselves for the abuse they and their children were subjected to. They *did* blame themselves for not leaving the relationship sooner, despite the real and perceived obstacles they faced. In retrospect, they felt they had exposed their children to prolonged periods of abuse. Additionally, while they all expressed chronic grief and remorse, they did not express or indicate any personal emotional or psychological distress that interfered with their ability to function. Most of the women in this study, while quite self-actualized and resilient, just seemed to live with a subtle, enduring grief that has abated over time but has never fully gone away.

Chapter 7

Discussion

“People's tacit knowledge of what they know as a matter of daily/ nightly practices surfaces as people speak and as what they speak of is taken seriously, undistilled, untranslated.”
 Dorothy Smith, 1997, p 396

In this study, 15 older women shared their life histories with me. Each woman's life was affected by domestic violence in some form, and for the majority of women, this experience occurred relatively early in their life course. The following is a discussion on the analysis of meaning these women obtained as a result of their experiences with and beyond domestic violence, as well as an analysis on their experiences with and around gender discourse, both from Life Course and Feminist perspectives. Included is an account of observations and reflections derived from the study. The discussion concludes with an evaluation of the study strengths, limitations, and implications, as well as recommendations for further research.

Finding Meaning in Narrative

When we narrate a story, we reflect upon our experiences to make meaning, and in turn, the meaning that we make from these experiences helps to shape our identity (Riessman 2008). Storying helps us to make sense of our lives because it allows us an opportunity to revisit and reexamine the events and relationships that entwine to create the rich fabric of life experience. We draw meaning and depart lessons from our experiences, for ourselves and others to consider. Often, the stories we tell are inexact and imperfect, meaning specific dates and times may be inaccurate or the story is retold in a different way. Kenyon & Randall (1997:27) note that “there will be different stories of the same event, for different purposes and for different times”, but it is

the essence of the story that is important. It is the essence of the story and the meaning we derive from it that shapes our understanding.

Embedded in our experiences are overt and covert structural forces that contribute to our understanding of ourselves and the social world in which we live (Kenyon & Randall 2001). Structural forces, for example social policies, power relations (including cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender dynamics), or economic realities that influence society can inhibit our stories, silence our voices, and limit our possibilities (Smith 1997; Reissman 2008; Kenyon & Randall 2001). Indeed, prior to the latter 20th century, women's entire experience- both public and private, was based on the myth of femininity that projected women as vulnerable, fragile creatures in need of protection from a masculine father/husband figure, and who could only find true happiness in fulfilling the responsibility of marriage and motherhood. This myth, wholly conscripted by the men who organized and governed religious and social institutions, successfully stratified women and men into unequal roles and occupations (Anderson 2007). Thus, these structural forces, what Smith (1987:3) refers to as the "relations of ruling", exerted subtle but ever present influence on our experiences and perceptions and they, in effect, co-author our stories. Narrative allows us to examine and reflect upon the various systems that shape our whole experience. Sharing a story provides us with an opportunity to consider how our 'realities' are constructed, and to reconstruct and re-story our lives in ways that help us make sense of the past and navigate the future (Reissman 1990:230; White 1995).

One focus of this study was to understand the meaning these women found in their lives around, but also beyond, domestic violence. The meaning that these women discovered and shared, and the meaning that I uncovered through analysis, is re-presented here as a joint production. However, I alone, was responsible for selecting and interpreting the points of

meaning presented for discussion.⁸ For this study, the women share a life history impacted by domestic violence and the plot was remarkably similar... a young woman leaves home to be with the love of her life, full of dreams and ideals that are quickly and violently dispatched. She struggles but eventually leaves (or is left by) her perpetrator, and begins a new life. But that is the only part of the story that could be generalized, as each woman's life experience with, around, and beyond domestic violence was unique and complex. There was no common identity of a victim, no picture of a quintessential abuser, and no singular cause for the abuse or violence.

As the narrative is constructed, attention must be paid to the elements of time and place, plot and scene, and voice, and within these elements are significant and meaningful messages or lessons (Connelly & Clandinin 1990). The themes presented in the analysis were my interpretations of collective turning points from the life history beginning with the women's experiences growing up in their families of origin, working through their experiences in violent or abusive relationships, and culminating with their present experience as older women living in the community. But the details and complexities of each story provided distinct perspectives on childhood exposure to abuse and violence, the development and impact of self-esteem, strength and courage, guilt and remorse, subsequent intimate relationships, and resiliency. Embedded within each story were subtle messages on gender, power, and subordination that reflect a social state created to support and maintain male privilege. Additionally, the participants presented me with a non-verbal story, told in the ways they contorted their bodies in response to a memory or the ways they sighed heavily, or cried silently, or laughed sarcastically that, although not spoken, was equally telling.

⁸ Narratives accounts are in reality co-produced, as are studies of narrative accounts in which the researcher's interactions with the narrator often influence analytic ideas. The researcher, in interpreting the data is also influenced by prior theoretical interests and "fore-structures" of interpretation (from Heidegger (1927), based on experiences from everyday life (Riessman, 1993:5)

Life History Narratives

The life history narratives in this study were organized according to three distinct trajectories that were shared by all the women. The Early Life narratives reflect on the years spent growing up in the family of origin. The Marital Transition narratives represent the years spent in the marital relationship, including experiences with domestic violence, and culminating in the end of the relationship. The Life After narratives recount the women establishing independence and the subsequent unfolding of their lives to present day. The combined narratives represent the individual life histories of older women who had experienced domestic violence. Each woman crafted her history based on her own unique experiences but many commonalities were found across the narratives that provide insight into the ways women's lives were shaped by social, cultural, and historical factors. I used Life Course and Feminist perspectives as theoretical tools to highlight the ways in which these structural forces contributed to and complicated the women's lives and their experiences with domestic violence.

Using Life Course perspective, I was able to gain insight into the fascinating lives of a diverse group of older woman who ranged in age from 60 to 89 years old. A unique facet that life history narrative provides is the ability to see into the past, to map the trajectories of life's significant turning points, and to evaluate their outcomes. A turning point, such as an encounter with domestic violence, has the potential to modify life trajectories and alter outcomes for women as they age. Elder (1985) notes that, "the same event or transition followed by different adaptations can lead to very different trajectories."(35). In the domestic violence literature there is a tendency to focus on single populations and single types of violence, such as domestic violence, child abuse, or elder abuse, that impact a family (Campbell, Rose, Cub, & Ned, 1998; Patel, 2001; Khaw & Hardesty 2007). Largely missing from the domestic violence literature is an

evaluation of the impact of domestic violence on the outcomes of women and children over time, and little attention has been paid to the types of family violence that co-occur across the lifespan, or to any interaction between different types of abuse or multiple abuse experiences (Williams 2003).

The interdependency of life (or linked lives), the variability and consequences of life experiences (also referred to as cumulative advantage or disadvantage), and the importance of human agency are three tenets of the Life Course Perspective that, when applied to older women survivors of domestic violence, were particularly revealing. To demonstrate the heterogeneity in intergenerational transmission of domestic violence, while all of the women in the study experience some form of abuse in the marital relationship, *most* of the women in the study reported no prior exposure to any form of family violence in their Early Life Narratives. Four women did witness interparental domestic violence or were themselves the victims of paternal (physical or sexual) violence growing up. Additionally, of the women with children in this study, four had adult daughters who went on to experience domestic violence in a marital relationship. The most interesting finding about the impact of abuse in the family of origin had nothing to do with the paternal violence that I expected, but it was related to the subtle, pervasive effects of patriarchy. Three of the women reported significant low self-esteem and subsequent psychological pathology (i.e. eating disorders, substance abuse, anxiety, and psychiatric hospitalization) as a direct result of chronic and excessive maternal criticism related to ideals of feminine body image and behavior.

Further, in regard to life trajectories, linked lives, and outcomes, I found that the impact of domestic violence on the life course varied for women and children. Key findings of the Marital Transition and Life After Narratives demonstrated that the type, frequency, severity, and

length of exposure to violence had the most significant impact on developmental trajectories and outcomes for both women and children. The women with children who left their abusers early, within 2-5 years (while their children were very young), had the best outcomes in general. These women seemed the most robustly resilient, had higher educational attainment, and were financially stable as older adults. Additionally, the children of these women had no untoward effects from early exposure to domestic violence as they aged. The women and children who experienced more extreme abuse and violence, and multiple forms of violence (domestic violence and child abuse) for prolonged periods (greater than 10 - 20 years), had the most deleterious outcomes. These women tended to be most dependent on the marriage, had limited education, worked in low wage jobs, and were the least financially stable. Although these women demonstrated resiliency and optimism, they were much more somber in demeanor and their Life After Narratives referenced more profound feelings of shame, grief, sorrow, and remorse. Additionally, while none of the women in the study mentioned a personal history of long-term emotional or psychological problems, half of them reported having an adult child that had significant psychological symptomology, addiction to drugs or alcohol, or legal problems.

A cautionary finding can also be seen when considering the projected life course of these women in relation to their adult children who, as a result of the long-term sequelae of domestic violence, are negatively impacted by mental health problems or who are estranged from their parent(s). As they age, many women turn to their adult children for social, financial, and situational support. If the adult maternal / child relationship is significantly compromised, these women may lack the support they need as they become more vulnerable with age, and worse, they may be at risk for elder abuse (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998; Williams 2003).

A final finding, discovered as a result of tracing the impact of domestic violence across

the life course was related to individual agency, resiliency, and lingering grief. Although the timing and circumstances surrounding each woman's separation from her abuser was varied, all of the women eventually left, or were left by, their abuser and established a successful, independent life. Each woman underwent a complex planning and decision making process to achieve their independence that involved negotiating and overcoming the various, constraining social structures, e.g. lack of support, lack of housing, lack of employment, lack of education, etc., that complicated their leaving. For some women, this process resulted in a quick escape and for others the process spanned an entire marriage until the death of their husband. Consistent with other Life Course studies on the aftermath of trauma, the key factor that reduced a woman's vulnerability and improved her likelihood of a successful transition to independence was a supportive social structure (Settersten 2003). When each woman felt she had secured the necessary structural and emotional support, she was able to manage on her own.

Some of the women in this study were naturally hardy and resilient, while others attained growing resilience and security with each obstacle they overcame. At the time of our interviews, I found all of the women to be remarkably strong and resilient however, there was a tone of regret and remorse that permeated their Life After Narratives. A criticism of domestic violence literature is that survivors of domestic violence are typically described and classified as being *either* resilient and thriving, *or* vulnerable and failing (Yllo 1993; Richards 1992; Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998; Higgins & Follette 2002). Thus, this literature neglects to present the full complexity of emotion, coping, and agency that individual possesses. In this study, the women were several years, and in most cases, decades removed from their experiences with domestic violence. And while they had gone on to establish rewarding and successful lives, they still grieved. Throughout their Life After Narratives they tempered their stories of achievement and

resilience with references to lost innocence and love, to guilt and sorrow for their children who suffered in the crossfire of domestic violence, and to anger and regret for feeling unsupported and not leaving sooner. This finding demonstrates the complex, co-existing emotions and behaviors that are common in trauma recovery- where resilience and grief are not oppositional, but are simply different aspects of the overall experience of coping, adjustment, and recovery (Bonanno 2004; Anderson 2010; Lemaire 2010).

Both Life Course and Feminist perspectives consider the ways that time, place, and events intersect to shape human development. The socio-historical location of an individual influences her identity, affects her choices, and potentially alters the course of her development (Settersten 2003). From a Feminist perspective, it is the male experience that has defined human experience (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule 1986; Smith 1987). Historically, in most societies, men have manipulated both religious doctrine and the state to claim a hierarchical position over women and, to maintain their power, have “systematically and consciously” silenced women’s voices and restricted their status to one of oppressed subordination (Smith 1987:25).

Feminists assert that the social construction of gender, as a masculinist conception and endeavor, created separate, unequal social classes for males and females that were defined by masculine or feminine roles. The construct of gender has become institutionalized, embodied by language and performance in a continuous exchange of communication. Gender is a “situated understanding lodged within webs of assumptions” that shift over time and place (Eagly, Beall & Sternberg 2004:201). While gendered concepts and meaning of femininity and masculinity may vary among racial and ethnic groups, in most societies males appropriate the most power and privilege (Yllo 1993; Anderson 2007). It is from this standpoint of male power and gender

inequality root of intimate violence originates (Dobash & Dobash 1979; Yllo 1993; Anderson 2007).

I used Feminist and Life Course perspectives to investigate the social, cultural, and historical influences that gave shape to the identities the women in this study formed over time. These women were young adults during the mid-20th century and were immersed in a cultural ideology of patriarchy that wholly marked their lives. This period is defined by cultural values and a social order that were heavily influenced by religious doctrine. These forces scripted and organized women's lives to promote subservience to men and allegiance to the nuclear family.

As young girls, the predictable future for these women involved a fixed sequence of stages that started with courtship, then marriage, the motherhood, followed by launching children, and culminating in the resolution of marriage through the death of a spouse (Settersten 2003). The family was a private domain, and following divine order, was headed by the man as the authority, with the woman serving him as a subordinate (Gerami & Lehnerer, 2001). Male dominance, coupled with the sanctity of family privacy and the social tolerance of male perpetrated violence used as a means of controlling wives and children, provided the optimal, furtive condition for domestic violence to occur. Complicating the lives of women who were experiencing domestic violence during the mid-century were institutional forces that worked to relegate women to the home. Women were not encouraged to pursue higher education and most jobs available to women were lower waged. Those women who did go onto to college or trade school were funneled into traditional female careers (also lower waged) to be teachers, nurses, or secretaries. If a woman was able to leave her abuser, she had to negotiate and overcome a numerous social obstacles to gain independence.

These life history narratives describe the unique and richly detailed lives of older women

and the meaning they have derived from their experiences with and beyond domestic violence. Embedded throughout these narratives were subtle and obvious references to patriarchy and gender inequality, as well perceptions of gender as it intersects with age and ethnicity. In the following section, I use Life Course and Feminist perspectives to gain further insight into the “wordless authorities” that shaped these women’s lives (Smith 1987:19). This is followed by observations on aging and race in which I discuss the heterogeneity of aging within and across cohorts, as well as cultural differences that provide an alternative perspective on gender discourse and experience.

Women, Wordless Authorities, and Lived Experience

Little is known about the experiences and outcomes of older women who have been abused in an earlier intimate relationship. The majority of domestic violence studies focus on younger women and do not address women in later life who, considering their age, duration of abuse, and cohort values that enforced and reified women’s secrecy, self blame, and shame, represent a unique population with a unique set of concerns (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998; Higgins & Follette 2002). Older women who were being abused in their intimate relationships were isolated and silenced, literally by their partner’s intimidation and figuratively by society at large. For many older women, their abuse histories have remained unspoken for years (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998).

One goal of this study was to explore older women’s life histories during and beyond domestic violence with a critical eye toward the subtle, oppressive powers that further complicated their abuse. Stories of domestic violence often relay the obvious effects of abuse, but embedded in these stories are anonymous and pervasive abuses of power that are manifest in the form of social practices (Westlund 2006). In this study, I was interested in uncovering the

other “authorities” embodied in the collective and institutional influences that women of this particular generation were obeying, in addition to their husbands or partners (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule 1986:27; Smith 1987:19).

My conceptualization of this study, having been developed during my doctoral study, was heavily influenced by my student / novice feminist / research apprentice zealotry. I embarked on my initial interviews fantasizing that these older women would have great stories of a feminist awakening that neatly coincided with the Women’s Rights movement. These fantasies were quickly dispatched. For the most part, while these women were attending to their lives, they were only peripherally aware of the Women’s Rights campaign and the subtly changing roles and opportunities for women. Early on when I asked direct questions about their recollections of the social changes occurring during the 1960s and 70s, or the impact these changes had on their lives, they considered my naiveté, then quickly educated me on their lived reality. Anne, somewhat flustered, summarized her relationship to feminism and the Women’s rights movement as follow-

“I’m sure I was aware of the changes because there was the news on TV and, of course, umm... well there were magazines and things, but at the time I don’t think I thought about it. I was too busy. I had a job and I was trying to take care of my kids and raising a family. I didn’t think about it.”

I promptly realized that people don’t necessarily perceive events and meaning simultaneously when the noise and chaos of life being lived supersedes, and if they do, they gauge the relative importance of the event to the priorities of their everyday experiences. I stopped asking direct questions about gender and instead started listening for gendered references and meaning in their narratives.

In fact, with the exception of Dottie who referred to herself as a feminist, none of the other women ever overtly addressed gender in their narratives. But their stories are embedded with gendered messages on what it meant to be a woman in mid-20th century: about the roles, expectations, and opportunities they had as girls, young women, wives, and mothers. There were several obvious messages ranging from a mother's disapproval of her daughter's weight, to parents selecting a college for a daughter based on perspective husband material, to a husband's claim of "I am the head of this house. My word is law!" But the subtle meaning behind these messages, although unspoken, was that a woman's value was not tied to her ability, but to her appearance, her potential to land a husband, and her obedience.

Dorothy Smith (1997) states, "The knowledge people have by virtue of their experience is a knowledge of the local practices of our everyday/everynight worlds" (394). What these women learned about being 'a woman' as they were developing in the mid-20th century was a conscripted message, penned by patriarchal powers of the state and religion. From birth they were molded, scripted, and continually refined in order to perform a role called 'woman'. Their lives were governed by a socio-cultural framework of gender inequality and male dominance (Yllö, 1993; Williams 2003). As young girls, their primary expectation, wholly sanctioned by the patriarchal powers that be, was to marry and raise a family; to be a good wife and mother.

For these women, "the everyday/everynight" reality of patriarchy put them at a distinct disadvantage (Walker 1979; Smith 1997; Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998). They were socialized into a role of obedience and submission, in a society that condoned male dominance, had favorable attitudes toward the use of violence, and cherished family honor and privacy (Jackson 1999; Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998; Rothenberg 2003). Thus they became prime targets for intimidation, control, and subtly endorsed aggression- oppressed literally by their partners, and

figuratively by society. Not surprisingly, from internalizing messages that implied or imposed submission, inadequacy, guilt, secrecy, rejection, and shame, the women's narratives are full of references to failure and loss.

Failure Talk

Failure Talk presents itself in the Early Life narratives with messages to young girls that they are too fat, or too tall, or too ugly. This message is projected onto the girls from a larger social expectation that they should be slender and attractive if they want to find a man. For some of the women in this study, the message was painfully and relentlessly reinforced by their mothers. For these women in particular, feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and low self-esteem persisted throughout the life course. Failure Talk is also woven into expectations for finding and keeping a suitable mate. Tanner's parents discouraged her becoming a doctor because it is a man's profession and they pressured her to select a college that would better her prospects of finding a husband. Dottie had to move far away from home and hide from her family because she fell in love with a black man. Frannie and Clara felt intense guilt and shame when they eloped with boyfriends their parents didn't approve of.

Once married, Failure Talk appears in the form of criticism, again scripted by patriarchy that demands women perform certain roles and responsibilities designed to meet the needs of men. And once again, this script is reinforced by intimates within the confines of home and family, and by society at large. As their abuse begins, the women's partners criticize their lack of beauty, lack of intelligence, lack of obedience, poor sexual performance, poor housekeeping, and/or poor mothering. As tension mounts in the relationship, the insults and accusations increase, culminating in a physical, sexual, or psychological assault. A few of the women who tried to seek help from family early in their abusive relationships, received messages- usually

from their mother's- that reinforced their sense of failure as well as the imperative to be silent. Variations of the messages like "you made your bed, now sleep in it" and "don't air the dirty laundry" implied that these women were to blame for their predicament (reinforcing self blame and guilt), that they should accept responsibility for it (reinforcing women's assumed 'need' to be responsible and be accountable to the family), and they should be quiet about it (reinforcing family privacy and perceptions of family honor).

Failure Talk was also pervasive in the messages these women received about leaving. The supremacy of the nuclear family and the stigma of divorce were so powerful that the very thought of leaving was overwhelming. Societal messages implied that women who left their husband's or 'broke up the family' were weak, selfish, and shameful. Complicating the stigma, social barriers related to gender inequality such as lack of education or job skills, limited and lower waged job opportunities, and the responsibility to care for children, served to instill fear and reinforce self doubt (Walker 1979; Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998; Higgins & Follette 2002; Rothenberg 2003).

Loss of Talk

As a result of these deeply internalized social expectations, most of the women in this study were trapped in a double bind situation- abused by their partner in the privacy of the home with no social support or resources to escape (Rothenberg 2003). The majority of these women did what Sybil did, "... so I put up and shut up", and fearing negative repercussions (ranging from fear of bringing shame on the family, of retaliation, of poverty, of losing her children), most never disclosed their abuse and their histories remained unspoken for years (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998). This Loss of Talk was manifested in a variety of ways throughout the narratives. There was a literal loss of talk that affected some of the women. The sudden ambush of their first

attack left some women bewildered, confused, and totally at a lack of words. Other women did not have the actual vocabulary to talk about the things that were happening to them because they didn't know words like battering, or domestic abuse, or stalking.

The figurative Loss of Talk invades the narratives once the women have made the decision to stop talking. This is *not* a failure to talk; it is an act of resistance. Some of the women like did talk and were able to escape their abuse with the help of family or friends early in the relationship. Other women tried to talk, but were rebuked. And some women, perceiving the overwhelming repercussions of talking about their abuse or pain, were effectively silenced by fear. But, while they may have stopped talking to others, they never stopped talking to themselves. They were always thinking. These women were active agents, who although confined by the bonds of marriage and oppressed by outside social forces, still worked to resist their abuse and planned for their escape or release. They thought about ways to redirect their abuser's attention and reduce tension if possible, to protect themselves and their children, and to escape. Even the women who stayed in their relationships the longest had these self-conversations about leaving and establishing a life on their own. Once the women did leave, or were left, they were able to recover their voices as well as their independence.

Recovery Talk

The kind of talking the women did in their Life After narratives, particularly for the older women, was most reflective of a shift in their understanding gender oppression and a recovery of self. In reflecting on their experiences as younger women, they often used phrases like "I wish I had..." or "Hindsight is 20/20" to express their evolving knowledge and wisdom. The tone they used was sometimes regretful but more often encouraging. All of the women seemed very proud of their independence and success, especially in overcoming adversity, which

they continue to encounter. In the Life After narratives, there was relatively no mention of, or implied reference to, self doubt or insecurity. Many of the women talked about becoming ‘another woman’ as they got older with statements like, “I’m not that woman anymore” or “...that’s not who I am now”- and they would give examples of how they had developed (or for the younger women who were still developing) strength and confidence. Anne was adamant that no one was going to put her “... in a corner anymore” and Toni felt she could now “hold (her) head up high.”

Observations on Heterogeneity

As a result of this study, I had the great privilege of getting to know 15 unique and fascinating women who shared a common domestic abuse history. The women that I interviewed ranged in age from age 60 to almost 90, and came from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Throughout the course of my interviews with these women I noticed certain similarities and differences that I feel are significant and worthy of reporting. The commonalities they shared were primarily related to their abuse stories, their recovery stories, and the gender oppression they experienced as younger women in the mid-20th century US. These experiences crossed the boundaries of age, race, ethnicity, culture, and SES and were presented previously in the analysis and discussion. The principal differences I noticed were related to age and racial differences within the cohort.

Age-related Differences

While there is a vast body of literature on aging, few studies have looked at perspectives of aging across aging cohorts (deVries, Blando, Southard, & Bubeck 2001). There was almost a 30 year span between the oldest and youngest woman I interviewed. The oldest woman was born in the early 1920s, was directly impacted by the Great Depression, was a WWII bride and was

mother to Baby Boomers. The youngest was a Baby Boomer, born just after WWII, raised on television, rock and roll, and Cold War paranoia, who married at the height of the Civil Rights and Social Movements of the 1960s. These women were affected by very diverse influences that were sometimes obviously, sometimes subtly, apparent in their life narratives.

Storying & Cohort Values

All the white women presented their life histories in a predictable, linear format starting with their birth and ending with their current life status (Riessman 1993; deVries, Blando, Southard, & Bubeck 2001). In comparison, the eldest women in this study were much more attached to the nostalgia of their youth with recurrent references to an idyllic time gone by. In their narratives, they tended to ruminate more on their family of origin and happier memories of their past, spending lengthy amounts of time describing the people, places, and events that infused their early lives. According to Bluck (2001), older individuals tend to be more interpretive with autobiographical recall and more likely to focus on feelings when recalling everyday events. The youngest women, in contrast, were much more pragmatic with their stories which were typically short and much less descriptive. The older women were quite serious with their storying and they were most concerned that they were providing me with enough information. The younger women while sticking to format, were more relaxed in general with the interviews and used less structured language with more fillers (“you know”, “and so”, “whatever”, etc.) and used more humor and expletives.

Interestingly, it was the oldest women who were the most vocal about women’s independence, particularly in their Life After narratives. Even Delia who had been married three times felt that it was important for women to “be able to stand on their own two feet” and not be dependent on men to meet their needs. I thought that the younger women, having grown up in

the era of social change, would have had more of a more progressive attitude toward women's roles, particularly in the marital relationship, but they didn't express this. The women in their 60s described the same role expectations (that they get married, raise a family, and be a good wife and mother), expressed the same role frustrations (they felt insecure, unfulfilled, fearful, and had no one to talk to), and felt the same shame and stigma (that they were bad wives or mothers; that they and their family would be disgraced and looked down upon) if they left, as did the octogenarians and septuagenarians. Also, the younger women talked much less about being independent women or women's autonomy in general.

It is difficult to determine an exact meaning behind the storying differences in these age groups. Both are located at different at different life stages that focus on different spheres of meaning (Gubrium, 2001). While both stories are informed by a shared experience of domestic violence, the women's cohort location and the social and cultural messages they received mediates or influences the story they tell (Gubrium, 2001; Bluck, 2001). Although they share a common event in life, the stories they tell, or the meaning they interpret may be completely different. The oldest women were approaching the end of life course and could reflect on *all* of their lived experience. Clearly, they felt compelled to teach me. The tone they used was much more authoritative and in each narrative they summarized a lesson meant to caution or advise me. Perhaps the younger women saw me as more of a contemporary, assuming that I understood the influences of their life course. And as these women were still very active in middle life and still learning; they all referenced variations on the theme of "being a work in progress". They were still figuring out their independent womanhood, living in the moment and not necessarily thinking about the meaning behind it. Perhaps they felt uncomfortable offering me advice. The

interesting thing to me is that despite a difference of 30 years in age, all of these women received and internalized the same gender messages.

Self-assuredness

All of the women that I interviewed appeared to be well in control of their lives, despite some situational hardships. And all of the women in the study seemed to have achieved self actualization and integrity to some degree. The eldest women were clearly the most secure and content with their life (Erikson 1963). Nearing the end of the life span, the octogenarians were looking more externally at life, reflecting on and departing lessons to me that they had learned with time and experience (Webster 2001; Erikson 1963). They were very direct with giving advice. Their future plans were more focused on more short term, day to day, goals and objectives but they seemed very comfortable with this. Researchers have noted that elderly people tend to be more past-oriented and reflective, projecting themselves back over a longer life course (Schmotkin 1991; deVries, Blando, Southard, & Bubeck 2001).

The women in their 70s seem most perplexed by their age, feeling that old age had somehow snuck up on them. All of these women were still very active and independent, and they didn't "*feel* that old." This phenomenon of social aging versus biological aging versus perceived aging is widely referenced in the gerontology literature (Schroots & Birren 1990, Neugarten & Hagestad 1976; deVries, Blando, Southard, & Bubeck, 2001). These women tended to be the most tempered and tentative with their life advice and lessons, and they seemed to have the most well organized future plans. Roberts (1992) suggests that future orientation is a process of expectations and fears that are fueled by past experiences, and it is typical of retiring or early post-retirement aged older adults.

The women in their 60s were in the transition to retirement, and while secure with themselves in general, still seemed to be developing their confidence. Their interviews were laced with statements of uncertainty like “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure.” Reflecting on the future, they commented that they were “still trying to figure it out” or that they were “still a work in progress.”

Emotional and Economic Stability

All of the women in this study identified as survivors. To some extent they all seemed resilient and self aware. They were living independently and had developed strong support systems. However, in comparison, on the continuum of adaptation, the youngest women in the study had the most emotional vulnerability (Masten 2009). Most of these women expressed some anxiety and fear of retiring and living on a fixed income, although they were looking forward to retirement. Some of these women were still part of the Sandwich Generation and commented on feeling increased stress related to their care giver roles. And 3 of the 6 women in this group also mentioned struggling with significant mental health issues. Interestingly, these women also experienced both child abuse and domestic abuse within their lifetime that they felt contributed to their symptomology (Williams 2003; Roustit et al. 2009).

Not surprisingly, the youngest women were also the most economically stable. All of these women were working, most at full time status, and half were remarried- reaping the benefit of a dual income household. As the women aged they became increasingly poorer and dependent on public assistance or subsidies. All of the eldest women received the Meals-on Wheels program, three lived in subsidized housing, and two were wholly dependent on social welfare programs (Food Stamps, Public Assistance, or Social Security Disability Insurance) to survive.

Differences between Native and Non-Native Women

Gendered violence is a pervasive social ill that is experienced by women globally, across all age, racial, cultural, and economic boundaries (WHO report, 2013). Four of the women participating in this study identified themselves as Native American women. Native American women experience domestic violence at extraordinary rates with 39% of Native women reporting a lifetime incidence of abuse (Black & Breiding 2008). Native women are abused by both Native and Non-Native men, on and off the Reservation (George-Kanentiio 2000; Black & Breiding 2008). Three of the Native women in this study were Haudenosaunee⁹ and tribal members of one of the ‘Six Nations’. The fourth Native woman was from a Southwestern tribe but had grown up on one of the Six Nations territories under Haudenosaunee influence. As such, all of these women held vastly different social, cultural, and spiritual views, not only from the dominant white society, but also from other Native societies.

One of the most important differences, particularly as it applies to this study, is that the Haudenosaunee are one of the last remaining matriarchal societies on the planet (George-Kanentiio 2000; Goettner-Abendroth, H. *Matriarchal Society: Definition and Theory*, web accessed 15 Oct. 2013). In matriarchal societies, women, in particular mothers, hold authority and are responsible for the political, moral, and social wellbeing of the community (Goettner-Abendroth, H. *Matriarchal Society: Definition and Theory*, web accessed 15 Oct. 2013). Haudenosaunee society was organized to maintain balance and women, because of their ability to create life, were given the power to protect the lives and wellbeing of the People (George-Kanentiio 2000; Wagner, 2001). In the Haudenosaunee culture, women are at the center of community life, responsible for selecting leaders, controlling property, feeding the community,

⁹ Haudenosaunee refers to the People of the Longhouse and is comprised on a confederacy of six tribal Nations: the Onondagas, the Oneidas, the Mohawks, the Cayugas, the Senecas, and the Tuscaroras. Iroquois was the name white, Europeans called the Haudenosaunee (George-Kanentiio 2000; Wagner 2001)

and naming children- and in earlier times, were responsible for declaring war and deciding the punishment of crimes (George-Kanentiio 2000). Prior to European contact, the construct of domestic violence did not exist in Haudenosaunee society (George-Kanentiio 2000). Family violence was considered taboo, but if a man abused his wife or children, repercussions were swift and enacted by the community as a whole (George-Kanentiio 2000; Porter 2008). And, contrary to the dominant white, European patriarchal culture that oppresses women, there is no oppression of men in the matriarchal Haudenosaunee culture. Contemporary traditional Haudenosaunee continue to follow a matriarchal system and although there are very specific gender roles and responsibilities, women and men are considered equal and they work together to maintain balance in the community (George-Kanentiio 2000; Wagner 2001).

Storying and Cohort Values

All four of these women had grown up on a reservation and maintained themselves according to traditional Longhouse teaching. However, the dominant European American culture was always present and invasive. Two of the women described some Christian religious influence through a parent or partner. Three of the women attended primary school on their reservations but all had gone to public high schools. Three women married Native men, and one, Sybil, married a white man. At some point in their lives, they had all worked and lived off of the reservation. Although they shared similarities with the white women in this study, the Native women describe always having to work hard to maintain and protect their cultural identity, particularly when it came to their role as women.

The Native women differed from the non-Native women in regard to their social relationship with men. The Native women inferred and spoke to a traditional egalitarian system of gender balance, with harmonious female and male roles and responsibilities that serve the

Clan and the community. None of these women ever expressed feeling subservient to the men in their lives. Although two of the women witnessed their father's abuse of their mother, and three of the women experienced gender violence inflicted by a Native man, they considered the incidents to be a violation of traditional teaching and a consequence of assimilation. As young women they were more exposed to and influenced by media and socialization with the 'outside'. They saw and understood the oppression of women, particularly in the white community, but they did not seem to internalize this type of oppression. While they were forced to engage and comply with the dominant culture when it came to things like educational and job opportunities for women, they expressed a desire to better themselves. All of the women shared resistance stories of overcoming racial or gender barriers in their lifetimes.

Despite the fact that they had been abused, or had witnessed their mother being abused, they did not talk in terms of failure or of a need to blame themselves, as the white women did. They were resolute in laying blame for their abuse solely on their partner. Additionally, Native women's narratives were reflective of balance, whether or not they intended it. They all mentioned at some point the need to maintain balance and harmony in life and whenever they told a sad story, they were quick to follow it up with humor, or if they said something bad about a person, they would also try to share something good about them. This was also true of their abusers. They acknowledged that their abuser was responsible for his actions, but they also acknowledged that he was sick, spiritually or psychologically. In the narratives referring to their abusers, the Native women tended to be more compassionate toward their abuser. They expressed anger and disappointment with their abuser, and they were sad about the outcome of the relationship, but they did not dwell on it. They talked of the importance of being balanced

and having a “good mind” despite adversity, and to the need to relinquish thoughts, or events, or even people that interfere with this Traditional mandate.

Reissman (2008) and Webster (2001) note that personal life histories are nested in a larger cultural context and the way we tell our stories are reflective of our cultural norms. The way in which Native women narrated their stories was quite different from the white women, requiring that I pay closer attention to their patterns. The white women in the study presented a linear, chronological life history with a beginning, middle, and end, in an uninterrupted sequence, which Kenyon & Randall (2001) define as a “clock-time” story (6). They focused on staying on track asking, “where was I?” and they did not want to “jump ahead” or “get ahead of” themselves. The Native women’s narratives tended to be nonlinear and more episodic and recursive, focusing more on an important memory or message, instead of sequence. Kenton & Randall (2001) refer to this type of narrative as “storytime” which is “extremely personal” and reflective of the ways certain people give order to memories that are meaningful or important (6), but for a white, Western interviewer, these narratives were sometimes hard to follow (Reissman 1993). Additionally, the Native women laughed more during their narratives, often telling humorous stories to balance some of the more emotionally distressing ones. Every lesson they learned, and imparted to me, came with a self-effacing story and laughter.

Self-assuredness

There were also observable differences between the Native and white women. The Native women, regardless of their age, seemed much more confident and self-assured compared to the white women. Unlike some of the white women who, despite their histories of oppression and abuse, still felt that male domination and female subjugation was the natural order, the Native women never expressed or implied feelings of subordination to men. Additionally, they seemed

to be highly resilient, with narratives that reflected stories of overcoming hardship and resistance to many forms of oppression. I believe this inner strength is influenced by the full equality and respect Haudenosaunee women are given in their community, and by the unconditional support they received from their extended families. While structural forces in the dominant society work to silence and suppress women, Haudenosaunee society demonstrates an alternative history in which “all humans are created equal and by natural law granted an inalienable right to life, economic security, and participation... without qualification by age or gender” (George-Kanentiio 2000:53)

The Native women seemed very poised and in control during their interviews. Their narratives had relatively few references to feelings of fear, anxiety, or distress. Despite multiple traumatic experiences (in addition to domestic abuse and gender oppression, all of these women experienced historical trauma, racial discrimination and poverty at some point in their lives) and routine situational hardship, these women did not complain about their situations or indicate worry or regret in their narratives, although at times they did mention and display sadness. Overall, compared to the white women’s narratives, the Native women’s narratives were more humorous and focused on positive outcomes. These women were well composed during our interviews. Although they frequently demonstrated emotion (sadness, crying, laughter, etc) they didn’t *verbalize* as much emotion as their white counterparts. With the exception of some expressed guilt regarding their children’s exposure to their abuse, the tone of Native women’s narratives was much less somber, regretful, and remorseful.

Emotional and Economic Stability

All of the Native women in this study described growing up economically impoverished, but with very loving mothers, supportive extended family, and a strong sense of security within

their community. In general, the Native women seemed more confident in their decision to leave their abusers, whether it was an impulsive move or a planned move, and they rebounded quickly if their abuser left them. When thinking about leaving, the white women's primary concerns were inadequate financial resources and lack of social support. In contrast, while all of the Native women lacked financial resources, they had great social support from their families and community which seemed to reinforce their ability to act on their decisions to leave their partner and to recover when they were abandoned by their partner. The Native women did not express as much anxiety or insecurity about providing for themselves or their children. They didn't express a need to keep the nuclear family intact or feelings of guilt when the traditional family unit was dissolved. Instead, they focused exclusively on the need to keep their children protected, fed, and healthy.

While many of the white women mentioned an overwhelming sense of bewilderment upon leaving, the Native women acted quickly to restore balance to their lives. With support of family, they found full-time jobs and housing. Sybil, Clara, and Barbara went to school part-time to improve their economic status. At the time of the interviews, all of the Native women were thriving. Sybil, Clara, and Penney were retired and living in subsidized housing. Penney and Clara received some form of social assistance (Heating Assistance, Meals-on Wheels, SSDI, etc.). Barbara was semi-retired, working part-time in health care and living comfortably in the upper middle class.

Conclusion

The majority of research on intimate partner violence continues to focus young women and on physical violence and its aftermath (Jackson 1999; Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2005; McGarry 2010). Women who are impacted by domestic violence suffer disproportional physical

consequences and report higher levels of emotional trauma compared to their male partners (Jackson 1999; Anderson 2007). Few studies have addressed the emotional and physical consequences of domestic violence over time (Williams 2003), and fewer still have looked at the lifetime effects of abuse and violence in older populations, suggesting that there is a considerable need for more research in this area (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998; Higgins & Follette 2002; Langhinrichsen-Rohling 2005). This study explored the life histories of 15 older women and the meaning they found from their experiences with and beyond domestic violence. Additionally, considering patriarchy as the root of domestic violence, I used Feminist and Life Course perspectives as a theoretical framework to expose the subtle but oppressive socio-cultural power structures that further complicated the abuse these women experienced.

Life history narrative gives privilege to the personal experience and allows the narrator authorship of her story (Reissman 1993). Sharing a story of adversity allows a woman to contextualize her experience, provides her the opportunity to define the event from a distance, and allows her to choose what lessons to depart (Anderson 2010). As difficult or problematic a past has been, the events we experience, both good and bad, mark us. These experiences and our perceptions of them help to shape the story of our lives, and until we die, our life and our experiences will continue to unfold. While we cannot change our past experiences, the meaning we make from these events is absolutely alterable (Reissman 1993; Kenton & Randall 2001). We can enhance our possibility by resisting the dominant, taken for granted stories and uncover alternative meanings and reconstruct our stories, from one of abuse to one of endurance, from one of victim to one of survivor (Anderson 2010; Kenyon & Randall 2001).

This study represents an alternative reading of domestic violence survival in that it is told from the perspective of community dwelling, older women. The bulk of domestic violence

research excludes older women, focusing instead on young women's experiences from a contemporary perspective (McGarry 2010). This perspective is not reflective of the unique life experiences of older women who were influenced by cohort values and cultural attitudes that are much different than today's standard (Wolkenstein & Stermann 1998). Additionally, although limited, much of the research on older women and domestic violence that is available comes from clinic population samples and mental health case studies (Wolkenstein & Stermann 1998; McGarry 2010; Howell Dwyer 2012).

Native American and white women, from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and ranging in age from 60 to 89, shared their stories. The diversity of race and age range offered different cohort perspectives, allowing an exploration of the ways in which violence impacted the development of both individual and family trajectories across the life course. Also, most of the domestic violence research focuses on a single type of abuse in a particular population. As a result of this life course perspective I was able to examine the impact of different types of abuse, and multiple abuse experiences (i.e., coexisting child abuse and domestic violence) that exist within a family.

In considering outcomes experienced by abused women, Anderson (2010) notes that domestic violence research tends to focus on outcomes that are either pathologic or resilient. The findings from this study indicate that women, as complex beings, experience both potentially pathologic and resilient traits simultaneously. Deep emotions of grief, regret, sadness, remorse, and anger co-existed with happiness, forgiveness, courage, and fortitude (Bonanno 1994). While emotion varied with each participant, the strongest references to pain, guilt, and regret expressed by the women in this study were not linked to their own abuse, but rather to the maternal/child relationship. Two findings related to the maternal/child relationship were most notable. First,

most of the women who had children and remained in their abusive relationships for upwards of 10 years or more had intense guilt and remorse about their children's exposure to domestic violence. Children and mother's with the lengthiest exposures to domestic violence had more psychological symptomology and weaker relationships. Second, three of the women in this study experienced emotional abuse by their mother's as children, and for them, the impact of excessive criticism on their level of self-esteem was significantly traumatic, affecting their subsequent intimate relationships including those in which they experienced domestic abuse.

Additional themes reflecting perceptions and meaning regarding intimacy, family, work, retirement, and future plans were also explored in this study. Romantic intimacy was referenced by all of the women but it didn't seem to be an important topic for most. Four of the women who had left their abusers within ten years were happily remarried. Seven of the women had never entered another intimate relationship with a man. Of these seven women, five were adamant that they were never interested in finding another partner, while two remained open to the idea. The women who expressed the greatest desire for romantic intimacy were the four women who had entered subsequent abusive relationships and they all eventually stopped dating by their 40s. Most of the women had good relationships with their children and extended families, but some women had more stressful relationships, and two of the women had distant or no relationship with their adult children. All of the women found work and seemed to thoroughly enjoy their working years, despite some guilt for having to leave their children alone while they worked. All of the women were resilient and optimistic, and future plans were reflective of the developmental stages of each cohort. The oldest women were most content with planning for day to day, while the youngest women busied themselves with retirement plans.

There are notable limitations of this study that warrant discussion. First, it is a small study the findings of which cannot be generalized, even to a similar population. However, the focus of the study was to explore older women's experiences and meaning around domestic violence and that objective was achieved. Additionally, while the perspectives of Native American and white women are represented in the study, it would be enhanced by incorporating the experiences and unique influences of a greater diversity of older women. From a research perspective, although narrative analysis as a method of qualitative exploratory inquiry can be revealing *and* transforming, the validity of the method and thus the results of the findings are routinely criticized by positivist scholars (Angen 2000). However, qualitative researchers posit that there is no absolute truth or uncontested certainty (Angen 2000). Indeed, a tenet of narrative inquiry is that human experience is subjective and open to interpretation by both the author and the reader. It is assumed that human memory is flawed and that during reminiscence, a person may forget or confuse certain names, dates, or locations- but the focus of narrative is the essence of the story and the meaning it departs (Gubrium 2001).

This study has several implications for further research, practice, and policy. Very little is known about the population of older women who survived domestic violence (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998). Williams (2003) suggests that more in depth, interview studies, like this one, are needed to help researchers learn more about the nature and interactions of families effected by domestic violence or multiple violence experiences. Domestic violence research would also be greatly enhanced by larger scale studies that look at the life time effects of domestic violence and the impact of domestic violence on individual and family life course trajectories (Williams 2003; Higgins & Follette 2002).

Additionally, while the permeating effect of domestic violence on the family is known, attention has been narrowly focused on either pathologic outcomes (i.e. substance abuse, poor health, anxiety, depression, etc.) or resilient outcomes, but not both (Anderson 2010). This study demonstrated that older women survivors of domestic violence experienced simultaneous behaviors indicative of mild pathology along with resilience in their everyday lives and they were thriving. Future studies need to examine the effect and impact of domestic violence from a more holistic perspective. For example, what role does human agency play in reducing adversity or impacting a disadvantaged status (Schafer, Ferraro, & Mustillo 2001)? The women in this study were able to organize, prioritize, and mobilize their resources in the face of trauma and despite being structurally disadvantaged. A final vein of study that warrants further, explicit exploration is the role of the maternal/child relationship in the development of self-esteem and the role of maternal excessive criticism is subsequent domestic violence victimization. Most domestic violence research that links child abuse and the development of low self-esteem, particularly for girls, implies a relationship to paternal violence or abuse. In this study, maternal abuse in the form of excessive criticism was directly related to the development of pathologic low self-esteem, in the absence of interparental or paternal abuse.

The results of this study indicate the co-existence of both resilience and grief in older survivors of domestic abuse and demonstrate that some, but not all women exposed to traumatic events, go on to develop psychological distress (Higgins & Follette 2002). This information may be of use to clinicians, therapists, and community service providers who work with older populations of women. The high rate of domestic violence warrants that all women be screened for exposure to violence, but more emphasis needs to be placed on screening older women for prior abuse, particularly in the presence of depression. All of the women in this study expressed

varying degrees of grief, guilt, and shame. Chronic grief, guilt, and shame have been linked to feelings of low self worth, withdrawal, and isolation, all of which are symptoms of depression (Richards 1992; Howell Dwyer 2010). Additionally, considering the traumatic impact of domestic abuse on development and the life course, older women and their adult children may have weaker relationships affecting familial social and/or financial support as the women age and possibly predisposing her to elder abuse (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998). Individuals who work with or care for older women should pay special attention to all aspects of independent functioning and recognize warning signs (depression, isolation, strained relationships, lack of support etc.) that require intervention (Wolkenstein & Sterman 1998; Higgins & Follette 2002).

Finally, while domestic violence is a problem that affects women of all ages, current policy is directed at young women in acute crisis and their children. Efforts to enact legislation and obtain funding focus primarily on young women and domestic violence shelter populations. Unfortunately, domestic violence is not a static event. While the physical pain is relatively short lived, the psychological impact of domestic violence is insidious, infiltrating the lives of all who are exposed to it and persisting throughout the life course. This study highlights the unique needs of older women survivors of domestic violence. Unlike women today, older women who were abused had no social resources from which to seek help. There were no education campaigns, no shelter systems, and virtually no legislative protection for them. Indeed, there was no public acknowledgement of domestic violence at all. The one thing these older women may benefit from is education and counseling aimed at their particular developmental perspective. The vast majority of older women survivors of domestic violence have never disclosed their abuse. They continue to remain silenced, partly because they have had no invitation or opportunity to talk.

Media campaigns, education, and advocacy training that addresses the holistic needs of older survivors, as well as survivors as they age, is warranted and long overdue.

In the half century since the Women's Rights movement in the US, there have been some remarkable advances for women, particularly in opportunities for education and employment. Attitudes toward gender inequality are also changing, but slowly. Gender continues to influence social interaction and social structure- from the development of gender identity in infancy, to the division of masculine or feminine roles and responsibilities, to the structural organization of women and men into different roles and occupations with different resources and rewards (Anderson 2010). Pervasive attitudes of male dominance, including the use of violence as a performance of masculinity, continue to persist, often fueled by religious doctrine (Anderson 2010). As a result of these attitudes and structural inequalities, the epidemic of domestic violence continues. Despite social progress, and despite three decades of domestic violence advocacy, research, education, and legislation, violence toward women remains an accepted standard. I am, however, optimistic that continued effort directed at gender equality will eventually reduce the incidence of family violence, and domestic violence in particular. It is difficult to see the subtle shifts of progress from my own standpoint, but viewed from the standpoint of elder women whose lives have spanned three quarters of a century, I am reassured that we are, indeed moving forward.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

Why don't we begin by you telling me about yourself, starting from when and where you born?

What was life like growing up with your family?

Tell me about what it was like when you were a teenager... did you date?

Tell me about life after high school graduation... did you go to college, trade school, work?

Tell me the story of your courtship and marriage... how old were you, how did you meet, what kinds of things did you do together before you married?

When did you begin to experience abuse or violence in the marriage? How did you feel?

Looking back, what resources or supports did you feel you had, if any?

What barriers or situations did you face in the relationship that made it difficult for you to leave, if any?

What was life like when you were starting over? What support systems did you have, if any?

How did leaving, or being left, affect your relationship with other family members (children, in-laws, family of origin)?

Tell me about the life changes you encountered living on your own, going back to work or school...

What kind of relationship do you have with your family today? With Friends?

How do you see yourself today? How would you describe the kind of person you are?

Do you see yourself as a different person now, compared to when you first married? How so?

What do you think are your greatest strengths and accomplishments?

Appendix B: Sample Schematic Organization of Story Map for each participant

	The World of Self	The World of Family	The World of Intimates	The World of Activities/Activism	The World of Work
Family of Origin (early experiences) Birth to Marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background • Self-identity • Roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roots • Personal history • Meaningful Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting the context for intimate relationship • Past connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidents • Community experiences 	Early work experiences
Marital Experiences Marriage to Divorce, Separation, or Death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background • Self-identity • Roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Family of origin (FOO), Friends, Family of procreation (FOP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength of connection to Intimate Partner • Positive experiences • Negative experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidents • Community experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work experiences including paid or nonpaid labor
Present Life Experiences Post Marriage to Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current status • Self-identity • Roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current support systems • Relationship with FOO • Relationship with FOP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current connections • Involved in intimate relationship/re married 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current work experiences including paid or nonpaid labor
Future Intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes • Personal development • Self-identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retirement expectations

Appendix C: Sample Schematic Organization of Theme Map for each Life History

General Themes	Supportive Themes	Overlapping Themes
Family Issues	Family of origin abuse Parental Intimacy Parent / child relationship Specific Gender expectations / messages Specific messages re: her intimate relationship, abuse, responsibility (I told you so; you made your bed; etc)	Parental child relationship Gender expectations / messages Guilt
Vulnerability	Feeling different (too tall, too fat, too ugly) Moving a lot during childhood Sense of abandonment Health Issues General low self-esteem	General low self-esteem
Gendered Role Expectations	(micro) Comparing family roles & relationships (macro) Messages from society- friends, school, church, media Awareness of changing roles / expectations?	Feeling need to be responsible Fear of disappointing others
The Abuse	Role of ETOH Ethnicity / immigrant status Military experience Control & intimidation (subtle and to point of terrorism) Forms of Isolation Physical & sexual abuse Love & obsession Infidelity	Isolation Shame Feeling responsible Feeling overwhelmed
Pivotal Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪What ended the relationships: arrest, injury to child, serious physical injury to self, he left for another woman ▪Why I didn't leave...I was afraid, didn't want to admit failure, ashamed...of what family and friends would say, what would church think, didn't have a job, didn't know what I could do for money, didn't have child care 	
Saving Grace's	People who were positive influences throughout life	Support
Melancholy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Episodic remorse, regret, resignation that occurs ▪Transgenerational guilt...wanting to be good, excel, please parents... family expectations...wanting to be a good wife & mother, lots of guilt surrounding their children and their experiences and the impact IPV has had on them as adult children 	Guilt for failed relationships Guilt for not leaving sooner Guilt for exposing children
Resiliency	Humor Being humble, asking for help Fighting back/ overcoming fear Finding self Sink or Swim attitude Activities/Activism - getting involved, gaining focus Retribution & Forgiveness	Finding self Acknowledging support (friends, family, church, community) Giving back (micro: talking with children and grandchildren to help them avoid mistakes; macro: DV activism, volunteering)
Timing	Issues re: timing...readiness to leave FOO, readiness to leave marriage (or to be left), to go back to work, to remarry/involve with someone	Remorse, guilt Optimism, renewed energy

Appendix D: Snapshot of the Women

Name	Age	Race	Type of Abusive	Length of Relationship	Children	Status at time of Interview
Sunny	89	White	Primarily Psychological	> 45 years, stayed with husband until he died	Yes	Retired, living alone, independently in home
Sybil	87	Native	Extreme Physical & Psychological	< 10 years, husband left her	Yes	Retired, living alone, independently, subsidized senior apartment
Delia	86	White	Physical & Psychological	< 20 years, two abusive husbands	Yes	Retired, living alone, independently in apartment
Anne	84	White	Physical & Psychological	38 years	Yes	Retired, living alone, independently, subsidized senior apartment
Frannie	75	White	Extreme Physical & Psychological	45 years	Yes	Retired, living independently with roommate in rented flat
Clara	73	Native	Primarily Psychological	6 years	Yes	Newly retired, living alone, independently, in own home
Penney	71	Native	Extreme Physical & Psychological	< 5 years	Yes	Disabled, living independently with disabled adult son in subsidized senior apartment
Hattie	70	White	Extreme Physical & Psychological	< 5 years	Yes	Newly retired, remarried, lives with husband in own home
Tanner	70	White	Primarily Psychological	> 45 years, stayed with husband until he died	Yes	Newly retired, living alone, independently in own home
Roseanne	64	White	Primarily Psychological	1 year	No	Semi-retired, living alone in own home

Barbara	63	Native	Primarily Psychological	13 years	Yes	Semi-retired, living with children and grandchildren in her own home
Dottie	63	White	Extreme Physical & Psychological	< 20 years, three abusive partners	Yes	Working Fulltime, living alone in rented flat
Orla	62	White	Physical & Psychological	< 10 years	Yes	Working Fulltime, remarried, lives with husband in own home
Toni	60	White	Physical & Psychological	< 10 years	Yes	Semi-retired, remarried, lives with husband in own home
Martha	60	White	Extreme Physical & Psychological	< 5 years	Yes	Working Fulltime, remarried, lives with husband in own home

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