LEARNING TO CHANGE: IDENTIFYING ELEMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION
IN FORMERLY ABUSIVE MEN

A Thesis in
Adult Education
by
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ABSTRACT

Transformative learning creates an alteration in one’s perspective, and the meanings held previously are modified to accommodate the new perspective. Men who were abusive toward their partners and learned to change have found a new perspective that allows them to cease their abusive behaviors. This study identified the incidents, along with the feelings and emotions surrounding them, which provided the catalyst for this ideological change.

In-depth interviews of ten formerly abusive men who identified themselves as having changed their perspectives about abuse toward their partners were conducted. The purpose was to uncover the causes for their change as they described them, and to show how the constructs of transformative learning theories support this change. The study employed interpretive analysis and an open inductive research approach that sought to develop themes, patterns and categories of meaning that clarified the personal reflections of the subjects.

A distinct aspect of the study is that it focuses on men’s self-reported perceptions of the critical incidents that initiated their individual change. In doing so, it has produced a rich and personal account of the inner lives of the participants and it extends previous research beyond the realm of psychosocial theories of explanation for behavior. It also applies transformative learning theories to the process of change.

The findings indicate the significance of history as a context for understanding the abuser and the importance of attending to experiences as a tool for use within abuse intervention programs. Most compellingly is the clear indication of the need for abusive men to develop a therapeutic relationship with another person who can assist them in confronting their responsibility for their abuse and provide support and direction throughout the change process.

Additionally, the study contributes to the field of adult education by demonstrating the importance of the individual’s experiences to the process of transformative learning. The information found through this study should prove helpful in providing insight to those charged with program development of abuse intervention programs.
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DEDICATION

My life has been blessed with my husband, Dirk and my children, Lauren, Bobby and Leslie. They are my light and my strength. This effort is dedicated to them.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Programs aimed at educating men about abuse against women are proliferating in the United States and throughout the world. These programs include educational initiatives that strive to teach men how to stop their abusive behavior and to explore the reasons why men abuse their partners. They attempt to inform men about the consequences of their abuse to themselves and to their intimate partners and to promote a more egalitarian view of male/female relationships. Some, but not all, look at the problem of male-female abuse as a value-laden construct of the culture (McKeown, 1997; Kauffman, 2000). Others apply a strictly cognitive-based approach that addresses behavior but fails to explore the underlying ideologies that provide the structure for feelings of entitlement and the employment of abuse as a means of control. Increasingly, more programs utilize the former philosophy in creating treatment methods that explore the problems of patriarchy and men’s privileged position within that society to deal with this catastrophic injury against women and against society (Mills, 2000; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Hearn, 1998). These programs employ a pro-feminist point of view and offer the most promising framework for true ideological change.

This diversity of philosophies in abuse intervention programs that are developed for men provides a structure for the variety of strategies utilized in the curricula of these programs. These strategies include anger management and behavior modification. Other eclectic approaches emphasize a combination of
communication skills, relaxation techniques, and assertiveness training for abusers. These techniques frequently fail to hold the abuser accountable for his abuse and often do not confront the underlying problems of male privilege and societal constructs that support male privilege. Behavior modification strategies can provide significant change in the abusers actions but not in their values, and effective communication concepts along with relaxation techniques and assertiveness training do not foster a change in the basic belief systems of the abuser (Jasinski & Williams, 1998; Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Abuse, 1989).

In an effort to address the shortcomings sited above, a pro-feminist movement is evident in a growing number of men's anti-abuse organizations throughout the world. Support for equality for women and a deconstruction of patriarchy as a means of the oppression of women is the focus of pro-feminist thought. This perspective views men and their position in society, through a feminist lens, as privileged, and sees the need for men to be active in changing men; themselves and others (Hearn, 1998). Research that provides information about the process of ideological change in men who have ceased their abuse and embraced a more pro-feminist perspective would serve to inform the educational content of pro-feminist abuse intervention programs and offer strategies that promote change.

Planning and development of any adult education program requires attention to achieving learning outcomes related to the knowledge that is acquired, skill building, and changes in attitudes or values (Sork & Caffarella, 1989). These
types of outcomes are important to the development of content within abuse intervention programs. The primary goal of abuse intervention is to elicit a change in behavior and in values that is substantive and lasting. A study that provides insight into the reasons that formerly abusive men can identify as significant causes of ideological change for them is important knowledge that can be used in the planning and development of future abuse intervention programs. An examination of the current philosophies used in these programs provides a background for this study and helps in understanding their nature and the benefit that this new knowledge can contribute to abuse intervention.

Background of the Study

Domestic abuse treatment programs that focus on power and control issues as values constructed for men through patriarchal beliefs still present in this society, are becoming more popular. Educational concepts emphasized within these programs usually consist of opportunities for men to confront the issues of accepting responsibility for the abuse they commit, examining the power and control that is inherent in emotional and physical abuse, and realizing the connection of their own abuse to the dominant patriarchal culture. (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998).

In a study, completed in conjunction with the National Institute of Mental Health, Jacobson and Gottman (1998) provide evidence that abusers comprise at least two distinct personality types and suggest intervention and prevention methods to deal with these divergent personalities. Their research describes some attitudinal beliefs that promote abuse. It has contributed greatly to the body of
knowledge available that reveals the nature of the abuser. However, the majority of studies that evaluate the effectiveness of abuse intervention programs only examine the ability of the program curriculum to curtail abusive episodes (Jasinski & Williams, 1998; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Williams, 1986). There is a lack of evidence in the empirical literature related to ideological changes in abusers. The cessation of abuse should be a primary goal of abuse intervention programs but changing attitudes about gender roles, male power and privilege, and the basic equality of women and men is an outcome that promotes cultural change and contributes to the deconstruction of patriarchy. My goal with this study is to move beyond the examination of the elements that promote abuse and the effectiveness of specific interventions that eliminate the use of abuse, to encompass the study of the social, environmental and psychological characteristics that promote an ideological change to non-abuse.

The research available that examines the reasons why some domestically abusive men learn to change their behavior is growing but currently limited to men who are participating in or recently completed abuse intervention/education programs. This research does not address informal or non-formal learning that may have led to ideological change. Additionally, there is little research data on men who have remained non-abusive for periods beyond six months. The questions that remain include the following: What is it in the educational or experiential lives of men who exhibit an attitudinal and philosophical change that precipitates their learning to become non-abusive? In addition, what clues or
instances are contained within their previous experiences that indicate their ability to learn to change?

There is also little in the research on abuse intervention programs that identifies the meaning of the abuse previously ingrained in these men, or the contextual and content issues that might prove useful in promoting attitudinal change. I would like to explore the meaning perspectives previously at work in my participants that drove their abusive behaviors. The questions then include these: What are the similarities or differences in the experiences and views of abuse held by these men? Moreover, what are the similarities or differences in the reasons offered for their change?

Effectiveness of abuse intervention programs is of utmost concern to researchers within the domestic abuse field. More research needs to be conducted to determine the processes and techniques that would assist men in realizing a transformation, in their view of women, of their own abusive behavior, and of the psychological, social and cultural issues that contribute to this devastating social enigma. I intend to explore both the meanings of abuse in the lives of these men and the reasons for their change to a non-abusive perspective.

Research and practice within the field of Adult Education contains a rich bounty of knowledge related to learning that promotes change. For example, Mezirow (1981, 1985, 1990, 1991, 2000) writes of a theory of Adult Education that includes learning to make autonomous choices through critical reflection of assumptions, validation of assertions through reflective discourse, and subsequently acting on those new insights. There is support in the education
literature, in the area of transformative learning, for the development and use of critical reflection to promote the recognition and acknowledgement of feelings and emotions necessary for ideological change, and for reflective experiential learning as a catalyst for change. Neuman (1996) showed the importance of both feelings and emotions as a trigger for reflective learning, a catalyst to greater self-awareness and a means to initiate change.

Promoting change in abusive men through a lens of theoretical constructs from transformative learning serves to ground the desired changes in a research perspective that allows for focused understanding of underlying epistemologies that support male abuse against women and the fostering of change within well-investigated educational methods.

Transformative learning includes the processes of self-examination, self-reflection, and self-change along with the understanding that, because individuals do not exist in a vacuum, personal change will affect and be affected by the individual’s social environment. In relation to ideological changes that may be exhibited by abusive men who move away from the power and control paradigm that supports domestic abuse, theoretical viewpoints, such as transformative learning, that highlight personal changes in an individual’s understanding and view of their intimate relationships are valuable tools that can lead to changes in perspective and changes in lives.

I propose that identifying critical incidents in the lives of formerly abusive men who exhibit a change in their behavior toward their partners would shed light on the contextual elements of their success. Identification of these elements would provide valuable information that could guide program and curriculum development for abuse
intervention programs. The use of transformative learning theories as a framework for change in formerly abusive men allows for further insight into the nature of transformative learning in the education of adults. Can transformative learning adequately account for the changes experienced by these men, and if so, how does transformative learning intersect with these changes? Additionally, how will their experiences with ideological change bring additional clarity to the process of transformation through lived and learned experiences? These questions provide an additional structure for the examination of the stories of formerly abusive men that will be obtained in this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how formerly abusive men learn to become non-abusive, and what kind of ideological changes in their understanding of abuse, women, and the tenets of patriarchy have resulted in the cessation of their abusive behaviors. Additionally, this study examined the use of transformative learning theories within the field of Adult Education to explain and support these changes. The process of transformation in the belief systems of these men was uncovered through the exploration of incidents or experiences that they viewed as critical to their ideological change. Through the interview process, I explored the underlying beliefs regarding power and control in relation to gender that were held by these men prior to their change to a non-abusive paradigm. A better understanding of their previous ideology in relation to patriarchal tenets provided additional insight into the dynamics of the change process. Through in-depth interviews, I identified some causes for these changes and analyzed
them through the lens of transformative learning theory as discussed by multiple adult education theorists.

Theoretical Framework

Learning within the context of abuse is problematic to say the least. The education concepts that served to ground this learning encompassed a process that allowed for the deconstruction of old paradigms and the reconstruction of modes of thinking that encouraged a sense of respect for the self and others along with a belief in equality among people that is not affected by gender. Transformational learning is an educational theory of adult education that is constructionist in nature and supports ideological change in long held meanings about gender issues and abuse toward a perspective of social justice and equality.

Mezirow (1991) views transformative learning in the context of two paths capable of leading toward change. These paths involve learning through the tasks of problem-solving solutions to specific problems or "instrumental" learning; and cultivating an understanding of the meaning expressed by others concerning their values, feelings and perceptions about these problems, or "communicative" learning. The use of critical reflection and personal analysis to foster this understanding results in a transformative learning experience that allows the individual to alter their perspective and change the personal meanings they associate with social and psychological constructs.

Transformative learning and change start with the individual's experiences, which are described by Mezirow (1991) as socially constructed. These experiences are deconstructed through the use of critical reflection, which allows the individual to question the rationality and integrity of their own assumptions, then to evaluate the
consistency of thought and action. Finally, through rational discourse with others, assumptions and questions are evaluated in order to promote mutual understanding. According to Mezirow (1991) it is through this process of evaluation of one's experiences by means of critical reflection and rational discourse that transformational change can occur.

Kegan (2000) in his contribution to Mezirow’s most recent text, *Learning as Transformation*, speaks of the need to broaden the concept of transformational learning to include the life span and to concentrate succinctly in the epistemological change rather than behavioral change. Additionally, he advises adult educators to acknowledge the present epistemologies of their students in order to foster epistemological transformation. Kegan’s thoughts speak particularly to the focus of this study in that my goal was to engage formerly abusive men in critical examination of the epistemological paradigm shifts that fostered a behavioral change toward non-abuse.

Transformative learning, although based on the theoretical views of Habermas’ and his critical learning theory, is different in it emphasis on personal change. Habermas writes within a profoundly social context that supports the concepts of emancipatory learning, and is rooted in the struggle of oppressed peoples to achieve freedom from social and political domination (Taylor, 1998). Mezirow’s concepts of perspective transformation, as Taylor (1998) points out, are conceived in individual and personal change. It examines the processes of self-examination, self-reflection and self-change with the understanding that personal change will affect and be affected by the individual’s social environment.
In relation to the constructs of transformative learning theory, I maintained a feminist perspective toward the central issues of this study. Specifically, a feminist post-structuralist view toward change in abusive men that includes an examination of patriarchy and the issues of power and control over women as exhibited by men along with how these social processes inform the social identity of women (Hersford & Kozol, 2001). Johnson (1995) suggests that feminist theory related to domestic abuse, or what he calls “patriarchal terrorism,” is assuredly an explanation for some types of domestic abuse but is not exclusive. Rather, he asserts that abuse against women is broken into two forms; that of patriarchal terrorism, and what he describes as common couple abuse - a type of abuse, which is dependent on environmental stressors and is often employed by both men and their female partners. Johnson (1995) supports his beliefs in two kinds of abuse in intimate partnerships by suggesting that the research in this area has been inconclusive because different studies look at different populations and arrive at conclusions that are appropriate to each group. The majority of abusive incidents can be placed within the context of either patriarchal terrorism or common couple abuse. He further asserts that the majority of the studies relating to patriarchal terror utilize data obtained from domestic abuse shelters whereas the common couple abuse data is generally derived from broader surveys of larger populations.

The issues of male privilege, power and control that are central to feminism are clearly identified within the context of domestic abuse and mirror the overriding concepts of dominance. According to Walker (1984), the techniques of control often exhibited by men over women have been associated with more general control tactics used with prisoners of war. These include, a) isolation, where the women is separated emotionally
and or physically from the support of family and friends, and b) distorted perceptions, where the abuser frequently interchanges charming, manipulative and seductive behaviors with hostility in a effort to confuse and thus control the women. Threats of abandonment and/or abuse, trivial demands made by the abuser that are often unachievable, the use of degrading and humiliating names and accusations against the women and occasional indulgences with unexplainable declarations of love, also serve to maintain a sense of imbalance for the women and continued control of the relationship for the abuser. Finally, c) the use of physical exhaustion, where the batterer interrupts sleep patterns with demands and abuse, assist in maintaining power and control. The specific psychological and physical aspects depicted above illuminate the relationship between abuse as a hallmark of patriarchal philosophy and its effects on the dominated.

Feminist theories and particularly post-structural feminist theories infuse the positionality and agency of the female as socially constructed and related to the view a woman takes of herself because of the abuse of the male partner. The relationship between positionality and agency influences a woman’s sense of self, her creation of knowledge, and what she determines to be true (Tisdell, 1998). These social constructs held by the abused women highlight the hierarchical tenets of male privilege, power and control that pervade a patriarchal society. The issues that are central to feminism are clearly identified within the context of domestic abuse and mirror the overriding concepts of dominance.

Abuse is a means of maintaining and preserving the power and dominance of men within a given societal construct and is present in many situations unrelated to women. These observations are based on the hegemonic view of patriarchy and abuse of women.
Feminism as the means of identifying and challenging patriarchy is multifaceted. While it serves to promote the emancipation of women from the constraints of patriarchy there is a need to adopt a feminist view that provides a mechanism to deconstruct the tenets of patriarchy as is oppresses both men and women rather than to destroy both patriarchy and along with it masculinity.

The post-structural feminist focus necessitates the use of multiple viewpoints within the transformative learning research that move beyond Mezirow’s basic tenets to embrace more inclusive perspectives, especially those that address the paradigms of power, positionality and feminine learning. The encompassing ideas embedded in the issues of domestic abuse, and the reasons for men’s abuse toward women, are the tenets of patriarchy and its premise of inequality, imbalance of power and silencing of women’s voices. Belenky and Stanton (2000) add dimension to transformative learning theory by recognizing those who have been silenced and have not experienced the kinds of reflective discourse that are so central to transformative processes. Belenky and Stanton warn that the consequence of ignoring these people is failure in the search for justice to which transformative learning ascribes and leaves behind the contributions of the marginalized. The need to foster reflection and integration into full society of people engaged in asymmetrical relationships, be they women or men, is essential in tackling the pervasive issues of domestic abuse.

Abalos (1986) and Brooks (2000) both describe the use of narrative and story telling as feminist techniques that promote reflection and discourse about underlying ideologies that can be effective for both men and women. Abalos (1986) indicates that abuse in men is strongly influenced by familial and cultural values held by the society
that nurtured the young male and that exploration of these familial and cultural tenets through men telling their stories can be effective in deconstructing these abusive behaviors.

Research Perspective

The research perspective for this study is social constructivism. Schwandt (2001) defines social constructivism as knowledge based on the social construction of reality by individuals in collaboration with the physical, social and cultural environment in which they live. He delineates two strands of constructivist thought, that of radical constructivism and social constructionism. Radical constructivism is influenced by the work of Piaget, who believed that knowledge is mediated by cognitive structures and viewed as the result of construction resulting from an interaction between the mind and its environment (Schwandt, 2001). It is based in the psychological realm of individuals constructing knowledge that is influenced by environmental forces. Yet, the individual creates knowledge through inner reflection and discernment of experiences. Conversely, social constructionism views reality as the outcome of social relationships (Robinson, 1992). There is a mutual construction and understanding of meaning between the individual and others through reflective discourse and interaction.

Other early influences of social constructionism include Kant, who argued that the mind provides a formal structuring that allows for the conjoining of concepts into judgments and that structuring itself has no content until interaction with the world actuates formal constraints (http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/k/kantmeta.htm). Additionally, Vygotsky posits that individuals are inextricably related to each other and
their physical surroundings, and that individual mental functioning reflects social processes (Gergen, 1999).

The work of vonGlasersfeld (in Robinson, 1992) proposes that individuals mentally construct their world through the process of experience and interaction with the environment and others. He emphatically and critically states that contrary to realist ideology there is no "true" or "real" world that is "independent of any knower" (p. 16). Rather, the world is constructed by individuals who act as "cognitive organisms" capable of constructing a reliable world on the basis of their experiences in it, and building ways of thinking and acting that are appropriate to this constructed reality. This theory as applied to the social constructions that support and promote the privilege and power of the man as abuser to his marital partner reveal the ideologies of a patriarchal society as socially constructed and accepted by the individual as reality. This study pre-supposes that the patriarchal mindset is socially constructed and contributes to the abuser's assertions of power over his partner.

This study explored the learning experiences of men, who have ceased their abuse and experienced an ideological change in their attitudes toward their partners and toward the concept of abuse as a means of control. They have socially constructed a new reality for themselves that is the result of interactions with some aspect of their environment that has influenced this change. The strands of radical constructivism and social constructionism are both of importance in that changes described by these men were a result of both an inner reflective process and a socially interactive process. The identification of the internal and external environmental aspects that facilitated this new social construction of non-abuse was the object of this study.
Data for this study was collected through a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with men who have made changes in their abusive behavior based on an ideological change in the understanding and knowledge of women’s roles and patriarchy. I conducted interviews with men who were identified through professional contacts within the field of domestic abuse.

Methodology

This study utilized an interpretative, qualitative method that identified causes for and processes of change, through the recounting of participant histories and the reporting of critical incidents and reasons that served to initiate an ideological and behavioral change in formerly abusive men. A purposeful sampling selection process was used. I interviewed ten men who were identified as meeting my study criteria by sources within several county and private organizations in southeastern and central Pennsylvania and Delaware. The study criteria included a history of abuse toward their female partner, a self-reported ideological change in their view of women and abuse, and sustained non-abusive behavior toward women for a period of at least one year.

The data collected consisted of narrative stories of the lives of the participants and writings related to their thoughts about abuse and change. Triangulation of the data was achieved through information from referral sources, participant stories and writings and the use of member checks that provided clarity and meaning to the data from the participants’ viewpoints. A thick, rich description of the findings contributed to the credibility of the study along with the use of journaling, field notes and a commitment to openness about my own positionality as a white, middle class woman and educator. The
use of referral sources to identify appropriate candidates for the study increased the
trustworthiness of the data.

Themes and patterns that emerged from the data were discovered through
narrative analysis, which included several readings of the transcripts and the
identification of meanings within the dialog. These meanings were coded and compared
with the data in each transcript to determine categories that represented the similarities
within the narratives. The major categories found within the transcripts were then
discussed and analyzed for significance and meaning to the field of domestic abuse and to
the application of transformative learning theories.

Significance of the Study

Much of the success currently achieved by abuse intervention programs is based
on the cessation of abusive episodes within the intimate relationship (Jaskinski &
Williams, 1998). Anecdotal comment from counselors in the field as to the nature of this
change, reveal an overwhelming opinion that the cessation of abuse, for a majority of
clients, is attributable to the threat of incarceration and continued scrutiny by law
enforcement personnel. There is little support for the idea that abusers, especially repeat
offenders, undergo an ideological transformation intrinsic to participation in an abuse
intervention program. The theory of transformative learning offers support for the
infusion of content that would encourage transformative learning experiences into abuse
intervention program curricula. The identification of transformative experiences and/or
critical incidents that spark ideological transformation in some men will lead to the
development of educational constructs that promote a pro-feminist approach to the
deconstruction of patriarchal concepts, and will enhance the present curricula to support
lasting ideological changes in men’s behavior toward their partners. In a social context, examining the ways men are able to learn to change their behavior, as well as their ways of thinking about domestic abuse, is important to fostering social justice and a more egalitarian view of gender relationships.

Additionally, this study holds significance to the field of adult education and to transformative learning theory building by its examination of perspective changes that take place within the minds of men who have engaged in the power and control tactics embedded in their life history and relationship experiences. Given the emotionally charged nature of abuse itself and particularly within the context of intimate relationships, this study provides information about the structure and process of perspective transformation in a specific context. Critical reflection and reflective discourse surely play a part in transformative learning but other emotionally based methods of perspective change that emerged from the narratives contribute to the expansion of our understanding about the intricacies of transformative learning.

Finally, this study hold significance for me personally because I have worked within the fields of nursing and post-secondary education for many years and have seen the struggles of women adversely affected by the impact of male privilege in our society. A heightened consciousness of the issues of gender inequality emerged as I worked within a community college setting where many of my students were older women returning to school and in doing so beginning to assert their independence. In some cases, this resulted in a change within their marital relationship that proved to be threatening on varied levels to their partners. I chose to volunteer and later serve as a board member for a domestic violence shelter in response to confidences shared by my students.
Uncovering methods that reveal the capacity of men to transform their beliefs about abuse toward women and to move away from patriarchal attitudes addresses the pain and confusion of these relationship dynamics. A research study that worked to find ways to improve the lives of women was my primary goal.

Definition of Terms

In order to maintain consistency throughout this study the following terms are defined to provide a clear understanding of their meanings.

Abuse: “intentionally or recklessly causing or attempting to cause bodily injury or placing another person in reasonable apprehension of imminent serious injury to herself, himself, or another” (California State Department of Justice, 1999. Sec. 13700). *Note: The terms; mental, psychological or emotional abuse will make use of the same definition with the appropriate insertion of these adjectives for the word, “bodily.”*

Abuser: A person who uses any forceful physical, psychological or emotional behavior on an intimate partner for the purpose of coercion (Walker, 1979).


Domestic Abuse: “a continuum of behaviors ranging from degrading remarks to cruel jokes, economic exploitation, bodily injury, sexual abuse and other physical and psychological assaults that cause or place a person in reasonable apprehension of imminent serious injury to herself, himself or others” (Pence, 1999, p. 39).

Ideology: System of beliefs in which one or more organizing principles connect the individual’s views on a wide ranges of issues (Pearson Longman, n.d.).
Patriarchy: Literally, "rule by the father;" hence, any social or political system that grants privileged status to males and permits or encourages their domination of females. Most Western cultures have been, and continue to be, patriarchal in this sense. (Philosophypages.com)

Perspective Transformation: “the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings” (Mezirow, 1990).

Pro-feminism: An ideology for men that recognizes the problem of male privilege in patriarchy, the dominant cultural system in our society, and in the world (McKeown, 1997).

Victim/ Survivor: A woman who has been the target of any form of domestic abuse can be said to fall along a victim/survivor continuum. The continuum is a product of the woman’s view of herself and a manifestation of her own development and self-identification (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Abuse, 1989).
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

A critical review of the literature for this study is necessary to describe the historical and theoretical foundations of domestic abuse as evidenced in the descriptive and empirical research available in this area. It is also essential to present current research related to philosophies and methods of treatment for men who abuse their female partners through the empirical literature on abuse intervention programs, and to explore the process of change experienced by formerly abusive men through the lens of transformative learning.

In order to situate the study within its broadest context the first body of literature is related to the history of domestic abuse and the theoretical foundations that have been found to support and deconstruct it. A second topic is transformative learning theory as a framework that may support and explain how men learn to change their abusive behavior. I will present the theory of transformative learning as offered through the work of Mezirow and through the contributions of other educators and researchers (e.g. Abalos, 1986; Boyd & Meyers, 1988; Brooks, 2000; Cranton, 1997; Kegan, 2000; and Scott, 1997) who have added to the evolving nature of this theory of adult education.

The studies chosen for this review reflect the variety of theoretical thought and practical experiences of researchers and practitioners within the field of domestic abuse and transformative learning. Research related to exploring the historical, social and cultural roots of domestic abuse is found primarily in the sociological and psychological fields of research. A broad and diverse theoretical view of the roots of domestic abuse
and the current beliefs surrounding it are examined. Some work has been completed within the field of adult education especially in the development and analysis of abuse intervention programs. A few studies have investigated transformative learning theory or perspective transformation as a mechanism for change in abuse intervention programs. These inquiries served as a grounding base for my work. Additionally, several studies relating to the social constructivist theory of knowledge from the education and domestic abuse literature provide an understanding of the influence of society, and its impact on the destructive force that is domestic abuse.

Issues of Domestic Abuse

An examination of domestic abuse as it is defined and situated within society is a necessary prologue to the exploration of the theory related to causes. A brief explanation of domestic abuse follows and is then followed by an exploration of the psychological and sociological theories that provide a context for the meaning of this abuse within the individual and as a construct of society. Individual, psychiatric, behavioral and cognitive theories address the causes of behaviors within the abuser. The sociological theories that inform domestic abuse and that are addressed include social learning theory, gender role socialization theory, social exchange theory and feminist post-structuralist theory. A discussion of pro-feminism is also included.

Domestic abuse, defined in this study as “a continuum of behaviors ranging from degrading remarks to cruel jokes, economic exploitation, bodily injury, sexual abuse and other physical and psychological assaults that cause or place a person in reasonable apprehension of imminent serious injury to herself, himself or others” (Shepard & Pence, 1999, p. 39) is a phenomenon that defies full understanding. Nonetheless, it is a very real
phenomenon that causes physical and emotional harm to innumerable members of our society in the United States and throughout the world.

The history of domestic abuse is found within the context of abuse in general which is as old as history itself. There has always been an element of abuse within individuals and society. Kakar (1998) states that abuse has always been a part of humanity and that intimate abuse within the home and family was not considered to be a problem at all until quite recently. Most societies accepted elements of intimate and family abuse as normal until well into the twentieth century, and even today, many have trouble seeing intimate abuse as a crime to be addressed by society at large. Kakar (1998) poses an interesting perspective about the acceptance of intimate abuse or domestic abuse:

One of the general ways of avoiding responsibility for the pervasive abuse in families is to perceive it to be related to psycho- or socio-pathology. By so doing, people can expel it from their everyday normal family life and foist it off on to a minority of “insane” or “abnormal” people. Unfortunately, that is far from the truth. Abuse in families is a normal rather than abnormal part of many people’s lives (p. 20).

This tendency to isolate domestic abuse as an issue outside of the normal and commonplace serves the dual purposes of protecting the values and ideals that society places on the concepts of home and family (Gelles, 1993; Kakar, 1998) and acknowledging the wrongness of its practice. Yet, it still allows society to embrace the abuse in general as an acceptable presence that permeates many aspects of our lives.
The roots and causes of domestic abuse are far-reaching and theories abound within the social sciences. The abundance of viewpoints, nuanced within a variety of sociological and psychological theories is presented, in a manner that captures the depth of thought about the phenomenon of domestic abuse against women as perpetrated by men. It is important to this study to understand the evidence and beliefs concerning the causes of domestic abuse. An examination of the context within which domestic abuse is set will illustrate the complexity of the phenomenon and lend an awareness to the difficulties faced by men when they attempt to change.

Psychological Theories of Domestic Abuse

Mignon, Larson and Holmes (2002) present a typology of psychological theories of physical and sexual abuse that consists of three categories. These are psychiatric, behavioral, and cognitive types, with psychiatric the most prominent. These theories indicate the source of the abuse within the individual abuser. The presence of psychopathology and personality traits in abusive men has been acknowledge by many in the field (Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Kakar, 1998; Gondolf & Russell, 1986).

According to Mignon, et al. (2002) the psychiatric and psychoanalytic aspects of psychological theories describe abuse as caused by problematic childhood development leading to “deviant personality traits” (p. 110). These theories describe abuse that results from personality disorders, psychoses, and substance abuse disorders occurring as a result problematic or incomplete childhood developmental stages (Mignon, et al., 2002). Psychiatric and especially psychoanalytic theories are primarily based on the work of Freud through his view of human development in psychosexual stages, and his theory of personality development involving the id, ego and superego. Domestic abusers often
demonstrate poor control over elements of their personality. Psychiatric and psychoanalytic theories have been widely accepted as causes for domestic abuse in the past owing to the belief that abuse as a product of personal deficits rather than related to the social structure is more socially acceptable, as noted earlier by Kakar (1998).

Crowell and Burgess (1996) looked at a number of studies that found a high incidence of personality disorder and psychopathology among groups of abusers and sexual offenders that add to the validity of this area of research. However, they also concluded that abusers are a heterogeneous group that includes significant numbers of men who possess a range of pathological and non-pathological traits. In keeping with the finding of heterogeneity among abusers Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart (1994) suggest a typology of male abusers that includes three types; a) family-only abusers, who exhibit little if any psychopathology and constitute as much as 50% of abusers; b) dysphoric/borderline types, who generally exhibit moderate levels of abuse towards their families and possess a variety of personality disorders and schizoidal characteristics that may include problems with substance abuse; and c) violent/antisocial types, who exhibit extreme abuse toward family and society in general. These men generally exhibit marked personality disorder and other psychopathologies and are more likely to engage in substance abuse. The two latter groups may make up 50% of wife abusers. Saunders (1992) described a similar typology of family-only aggressors, generalized aggressors and emotionally volatile aggressors with the latter two types also displaying more psychopathology.

Behavioral and cognitive aspects of psychological theories indicate that abuse is used to gain behavioral, emotional or social rewards as a result of exploitation of the
victim, or images and fantasies are applied as a cognitive rehearsal for abusive behavior. Simoneti (2000) found that witnessed abuse by children in the family of origin, particularly abuse toward the mother, was connected to dissociative experiences and domestic abuse in men. This finding builds on Dutton’s (1992) work, which indicated that 10% of abusers experience dissociative psychic events during abusive episodes against their partners.

Maiuro, Cahn, Vitaliano, Wagner and Zegree (1988) hypothesized that abusive men would have higher levels of anger and hostility than non-abusive men as evidenced through psychometric measurement that indicate levels of anger, hostile attitudes and aggressive behaviors. They found significantly higher levels in both generally abusive and domestically abusive men than in non-abusive men indicating that the presence of hostility related problems might be generalized characteristics of personality rather than the result of socialized reactions to provocative situations or partners. Personality characteristics such as low self-esteem, anxiety and depression and high levels of frustration are common among abusers (Kakar, 2000). Psychological theories as a basis for domestic abuse generally indicate that the abuser is essentially a victim of his individual make-up and development, thus allowing for a lessening of responsibility for his behavior. This mode of thinking serves to relieve the abuser of blame and has been contested frequently in the literature. Gelles (1993) for example, suggests that only a small percentage of abuse incidents can be attributed to specifically mental illnesses and that viewing abusive behavior as “sick” or attributable to an identifiable cause within the individual ignores the family, community and other social factors related to domestic abuse. Additionally, Yllo (1993) warns that psychological reasons for domestic abuse as
applied to both perpetrators and victims can be misleading and can serve as excuses for the behavior. The use of personality profiles of typical victims and their judgment errors to explain the reasons for the occurrence of domestic abuse, she suggests, is a means of blaming the victim for the abuse.

The studies in the psychological field cannot be overlooked and offer credible evidence that aspects of personality development and individual experiences that affect personal functioning do play a role in the identification and understanding of the roots and causes of abusive behavior in men. However, the aspects of domestic abuse research that look to the influences of the social structure on the incidences and perpetuation of domestic abuse hold compelling evidence of their effect on this area. Weaknesses found in psychological theories are as previously stated that they ignore the place of larger social issues that affect gendered behavior and they place emphasis on the abuser as a victim. It is the result of these weaknesses that psychological theories are often negated within the literature in favor of sociological causes, particularly within the abundance of feminist research.

*Sociological Theories of Domestic Abuse*

Sociological theories focus on the external causes of domestic abuse and offer a more comprehensive framework for understanding the societal constructs that support and accept partner abuse. They acknowledge the presence of both psychological and sociological variables and the impact of social structures on behavior. A few sociological theories as suggested by Mignon, Larson and Holmes (2002) are presented here. They include social learning theory, gender role socialization theory, social exchange theory
and feminist post-structural theory. Additionally, a presentation of pro-feminism as a men’s movement is included.

*Social Learning Theory.* Social learning theory reflects the belief that all behavior is learned rather than inherited. Behavior may be influenced by genetics or other biological factors but the social context including, the situation and the people encountered play a primary role in directing behavior. In the case of domestic abuse, the theory supports the belief that what has been observed and experienced in the past directly affects the individual’s behavior. Children and adults who have been exposed to physical or psychological abuse will have learned this behavior and generally seek to reenact it in their future relationships. The theory as applied to men and women holds that generally men have been socialized through their family of origin and through cultural norms and values to becomes abusers and women, generally, have been socialized through the same constructs to become victims of abuse (Mignon, et al., 2002).

Social learning theory is primarily attributed to the work of Albert Bandura who has expanded it in a cognitive direction (1977). Bandura’s work is based on the earlier work of psychologist Julian Rotter (in Mearns, 2003) who developed the theory early in the twentieth century as a departure from the dominant perspective of Freud who believed that behavior was motivated by instinctual drives that are physiologically-based. Rotter held to a more behaviorally based catalyst where people are motivated through positive reinforcement and the avoidance of unpleasant stimulation. Rotter believed that personality is not an inherently internal structure but is developed in interaction with the environment. Behavior is directed by the personality as it responds to the environment through the lens of the person’s past history and learning experiences (Mearns, 2003).
This notion can be likened to the writings of Robinson (1992) when he refers to the social construction of moral judgment.

Morality is not on this account something one possesses within, but is a participatory action that gains its meaning only within the arena of cultural intelligibility. One participates in the cultural forms of action as in a game or a dance; ...A moral life, then, is not an issue of individual sentiment or rationality but of communal participation (p. 17).

Social learning theory supports the idea that the construction of a reality, be it of abuse of one’s intimate partner or non-abuse and respect for the same, is socially learned through the interaction of the individual and their environment through the construction of meaning that is shared. This leads to a participation in the cultural forms of action that make up the individual’s environment. In the case of domestic abuse an individual learns to be abusive through the situations and the people he encounters, particularly in the early years of his development.

*Gender Role Socialization Theory.* Gender role socialization theory as applied to the problem of domestic abuse refers to the learned behaviors of men to exhibit physical aggression and domination as an indication of appropriate masculinity. According to Mignon, et al. (2002) this theory relates to feminist theory in the belief that male and female roles are socially constructed and place men in the dominant role and women as passive nurturers. In an examination of the child development literature Witt (1997) concludes that parental influences play the strongest part in gender role development in children, followed by the effects of peers, school experiences and the mass media. Gender role socialization in relation to domestic abuse has been included as an aspect of
a multivariate model for explaining men’s abuse toward women (O’Neill & Harway, 1997). In constructing this model O’Neill and Harway (1997) developed the hypothesis that “men’s patterns of gender role conflict (i.e., power, control, competition, and restrictive emotionality) contribute to patterns of abuse toward women” (p. 193). Two patterns of gender role conflict were identified: 1) when the man’s ability to demonstrate his masculinity through success, power and competition are threatened by a partner some men may respond with abuse to defend their self-esteem. Additionally, 2) some men may not possess the ability to confront their own negative emotions due to their socialization toward restrictive emotionality, particularly in relating to women, and may communicate these negative emotions through “threats, verbal abuse, coercive behavior and assaultive behavior” (p. 193). It is the conflict present within some men related to rigid and restrictive gender roles that may contribute to this abuse.

Differences in socialized patterns of communication between men and women have also been hypothesized as a predisposing and triggering hypothesis for male abuse toward women. O’Neill and Harway (1997) state that women have been socialized traditionally to be expressive with their “feelings” (p. 194) and to use “self-disclosure, and covert power-control” (p. 94) in interpersonal processes. Men have been taught to use thought, reasoning, problem-solving and overt power-control instrumentally and to emphasize outcomes as opposed to interpersonal processes. Given this dichotomy in communication styles, some men may view abuse as “the only option to avoid emasculation and shame” (p. 94).

The importance of gender role socialization as a contributing factor to the perpetration of abuse by men against women is evident throughout the literature on
domestic abuse. Kakar (1998) speaks of the strong male role as a cultural theme taught to male children that is similarly restrictive in emotionality and may promote a desensitization to abuse. She also considers the abuse in the mass media as positively promoting abusive behavior as a “desirable means of communication, response and problem solving” (p. 73). Jasinski and Williams (1998) list the presence of “traditional gender roles in families” (p. 14) as a risk factor related to socio-cultural aspects of a theory of intimate abuse.

**Social Exchange Theory.** Social exchange theory is based on the concepts of rewards and punishments for behaviors. According to Mignon, et al. (2002) the use of social exchange theory in relation to domestic abuse explains the abuser’s behavior as related power and control. The abuser receives rewards for his behavior by maintaining power and control over his environment and the rewards outweigh the threat of punishment because the female, in general, is both physically and socially programmed to submit to the power of the abuser. The cost for the abuser (punishment) is lessened according to Gelles (1993) due to the societal constraints that value family privacy and the reluctance of social agencies to intervene in private family matters. Gelles (1993) feels that this reluctance holds true especially in the physical discipline of children and is based on a lack of cultural constraints for abuse in general. Issues of power and cultural constraints are addressed by Goodrum, Umberson and Anderson (2001) concerning the abuser’s view of self and others in relation to power and cultural constraints. They conclude:

The batterer’s ability to take the role of the other may differ by his personal power in a particular relationship; possible sources of power may be one’s gender,
employment status or legal authority…Our findings suggest that abusers have more respect for the police’s reaction to their abuse than for their intimate partners reaction to their abuse (p. 239).

This reference to the social constraint and power held by sources such as police that are outside of the intimate relationship supports the reward and punishment concepts held within social exchange theory. Male abuse can be lessened when the threat of punishment is higher than the reward that may be derived from the abusive behavior.

Feminist Post-structuralist Theory. Post-structural feminist theory infuses the positionality and agency of the female as socially constructed and related to the view a woman takes of herself as a result of the abuse of the male partner. The relationship between positionality and agency influences a woman’s sense of self, her creation of knowledge, and what she determines to be true (Tisdell, 1998). The social constructs held by the abused woman highlight the hierarchal tenets of male privilege, power and control that pervade a patriarchal society. However, post-structural feminist theory serves to deconstruct the factors that produce patriarchal mindsets based on gender, race and class through emphasizing the connections between seemingly opposing ideologies. It permits the breakdown of oppression through the exploration of commonality. In this way, it releases the control of unyielding tenets of femininity and masculinity, and creates an outlet for change.

Feminist post-structuralist theory offers a perspective on understanding the processes that construct social knowledge and personal identity for women. It examines the ways that power relationships inform the social construction of women, their experiences and their reality (Hersford & Kozol, 2001). The theory situates the
conceptions of domestic abuse, within the societal constructs of patriarchy and as exhibited in issues of power and control of women by men. Post structural feminism deconstructs the tenets of feminism as singular and integrated. Rather it points to the multiple realities that are inherent in women’s experiences. Differences in viewpoints related to class, gender and cultural background serve to portray a multifaceted feminine makeup that allows for multiple “truths” that are socially constructed through the interaction of women and the recognition and respect for difference that produce a rich tapestry experience and ideology. It is not inflexible but fluid encompassing, a myriad of feminist thought and action that represents the multiplicity of women (Kourany, Sterba & Tong, 1992; Tisdell, 2003).

Post-structural feminism provides a means of breaking down the overriding tenets of patriarchy by freeing both men and women from the static identities proscribed by it and placing the concepts of male and female in corresponding positions where the common ground in-between the two can be explored.

_Pro-feminism._ Pro-feminism, as defined by Hearn (1998) is a position held by men in support of the feminist perspective as it relates to the issues of power and control within patriarchal ideologies. This perspective views men and their position in society through a feminist lens as privileged within patriarchy, and sees the need for men to be active in changing men; themselves and others. Pro-feminism grew out of the feminist movement and defined itself during the 1960s and 1970s by tackling the issues of sexism including domestic abuse and pornography (Fox, 2004). Support for equality for women and a deconstruction of patriarchy as a means of the oppression of women is the focus of pro-feminism. Kimmel and Mosmiller (1992) in exploring the historical contributions of
pro-feminist men toward equality for women, clearly differentiate the constructs of pro-feminism for men from feminism as an ideology for women.

Stripped to its essentials, feminism involves the empirical observation that women and men are not equal in either the public or the private sphere and also the moral stance that such inequality is wrong and ought to be changed. Men may agree with this empirical assessment of women’s subordinate status and the moral imperative to work toward equality. In that sense, men believe in feminism. But to be a feminist, I believe, requires another ingredient: the felt experience of oppression. And this men cannot feel because men are not oppressed but privileged by sexism (p. 3).

This rationale for the use of the term, pro-feminism demonstrates the necessary semantic differences between feminism and pro-feminist men.

Pro-feminism, as an ideological construct, is found most predominately in the men’s literature emanating from Canada, Australia and Great Britain. Many anti-abuse and anti-violence organizations along with studies related to pro-feminist beliefs have originated in those countries. However, the ideals of pro-feminism are moving into other areas of the world, particularly the United States. There are a number of men’s organizations in the U.S. dedicated to pro-feminism and women’s equality issues. The World Wide Web has been a convenient avenue for the dissemination of information about these groups. Several sites include links to affiliated organizations and the information available on these sites is profoundly pro-feminist in tone. The National Organization for Men Against Sexism, NOMAS (2001) is the oldest pro-feminist men’s group in the United States. It was founded in 1975 and provides educational outreach,
counselor training curricula, and support for individual, political and social challenges to the hegemony of patriarchy. NOMAS adheres to the tenants of pro-feminism in its active support for women’s struggles to achieve equality. It upholds gay rights, is anti-racist, and promotes men’s transcending of the traditional male roles that are prevalent in patriarchy. The organization works closely with national women’s organizations and provides prevention programs to secondary schools and colleges that focus on the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault through promotion of non-violence (NOMAS Tenants, 2001).

Pro-feminism as a sociological construct clearly supports the ideals of feminism, particularly in the area of domestic abuse. It also views the problems of patriarchy as damaging to men despite the privilege men enjoy because of that social system. It is at once a men’s movement that supports women and a men’s movement in support of men. As Brod (1999) reflects on pro-feminism it is clear that both sexes suffer under the tenets of patriarchy and pro-feminist men support the tearing down of the societal restrictions that keep men and women captive in restrictive and oppressive roles.

Feminism has spawned other men’s movements that have taken divergent paths from that of pro-feminism. The men’s rights movement began as an answer to the women’s liberation movement and quickly adopted the ideology that men were equally oppressed if not more so than women. This oppression presented itself in the form of the lack of men’s rights in divorce and custody cases, and that social problems related to domestic abuse, and pornography oppressed men more than women (Fox, 2004). The practice of “male-bashing” as seen through the negative portrayals of men in the media is
targeted by men’s rights groups as extremely oppressive. Men’s rights groups affect an aggressive posture toward what they see as sexism toward men (Kammer, 1999).

The mythopoetic men’s movement, a form of self-help for men that encourages men to celebrate their masculinity and to initiate young boys and men into the rights of maleness is associated with the writings of Robert Bly. His belief is that men have become “soft” and must find their strong inner male to regain their sense of happiness and fulfillment (Fox, 2004). Bly, himself, states, “The male in the past twenty years has become more thoughtful, more gentle. But by this process he has not become more free.” While acknowledging the benefits to both men and women Bly believes that men must rekindle their inner masculinity or risk losing their identity (Bly, 1999)

Concerning domestic abuse a pro-feminist ideology supports the work of women within the shelter movement and situates the responsibility for changing men with men. A growing number of abuse intervention programs have adopted a pro-feminist perspective for addressing this damaging social problem.

Both psychological and sociological constructs of domestic abuse provide a rich and diverse context for explaining its causes. McKenry and Julian, (1995) in a presentation of biopsychosocial causes of domestic abuse acknowledge the effect of psychological elements in abusive men but present evidence that social variables dominate. In their attempt to develop a biopsychosocial model of domestic abuse that could guide strategies in treatment programs they concluded that … “biological and psychological factors on abuse probability estimates may be seen as secondary to and perhaps dependent on social context variables.” (McKenry, et al., 1995, p. 317).
This look at the psychological and sociological theories that attempt to explain the causes of domestic abuse suggests that, as numerous other studies have concluded, these causes emerge from a psychosocial perspective. The elements of the psychological makeup of abusers and their partners, in conjunction with the social milieu that they experience, provide a clearer if not a definitive picture of the reasons for male abusive behaviors (Dutton, 1992; Simoneti, 2000; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994; Malamuth & Sockolsk, 1991).

Abuse Intervention Programs

Interventions aimed at perpetrators of abuse have proliferated in the past thirty years when the problems of domestic abuse as a social concern rather than an issue of privacy were first acknowledged. As in the theoretical constructs offered for the roots and causes of domestic abuse there is a diversity of theoretical ideologies in use in abuse intervention. These ideologies parallel the social and psychological theories presented above.

Treatment intervention for domestic abuse has taken the form of individual psychotherapy, couples therapy, arrest and incarceration and a community based approach in the form of abuse intervention programs. Psychotherapy and couples treatment approaches emerge from psychological paradigm that includes concepts related to the belief that male abusers are often victims of abuse themselves and therefore must be empowered as men. Psychoanalytic and cognitive/behavioral approaches address abuse through therapies designed to improve the abuser’s self-image and subsequently his behavior. The use of these approaches has declined as the issues of domestic abuse
have become more of a concern in the public domain and more emphasis has been placed on the responsibility of the perpetrator for the abuse (Jasinski & Williams, 1998).

Some programs designed for abusive men do focus on more individual issues such as impulse control and anger management approaches to address domestic abuse. These programs tend to identify deficits within the male abuser and may concentrate on teaching assertive communication techniques, stress reduction and relaxation therapy (Jasinski & Williams, 1998). They are designed primarily to address the psychological theories of abuse. They may also make use of the themes of men as victims of abuse, poor socialization, excessive stress, and low self-esteem as a rationalization for abuse, and the empowerment of men as a treatment goal (Dankwort & Rausch, 2000).

However, Austin & Dankwort (1999) assert that without acknowledgement and acceptance of responsibility for the damage they cause, men exposed to this type of treatment often continue in the mind-set of the privileged male and continue to pose a danger to women. This way of thinking promotes the maintenance of hierarchical and patriarchal philosophies, and it negatively influences women’s rights’ issues and the pursuit of a more egalitarian society (Hearn, 1998; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). The sociological theories of domestic abuse are not addressed through these programs. The recognition of women’s rights through the women’s movement of the 1970’s has led to the development of a pro-feminist concept of abuse intervention that has now gained prominence in the field.

Since the 1970s, many abuse intervention programs have adopted an approach that focuses on the issues of power and control as the primary constructs responsible for domestic abuse against women. This philosophy is based on early models of treatment
programs such as RAVEN, Emerge and the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project.
RAVEN is an organization located in St. Louis, Missouri that provides educational programs to help men stop abuse and accept responsibility for their actions. Emerge originated in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1977 as the first abuser education program in the U.S. It is based on the belief that abuse is a learned behavior. These are group-counseling programs that focus on the issues of control and coercion as the underlying tenets of domestic abuse (Shepard & Pence, 1999).

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project – the Duluth Model is a program for treatment developed by Pence and Paymar (1982) in the early 1980s that expanded on these early programs and incorporated a community-based framework that provides a construct for victim safety, public awareness and prevention along with abuse intervention programs that emphasize responsibility and accountability. Group counseling sessions within these programs acknowledge the problems produced by a patriarchal society where male privilege is viewed as central to abusive behavior. The issues of domination and male control are challenged and men are confronted with the problems caused by their patriarchal belief systems (Shepard & Pence, 1999). This view correlates well with the pro-feminist ideology.

Pro-feminism holds that the inherent abuse of men toward women is derived through the structure and process of patriarchy-men's domination of society as a whole (Hearn, 1998). It is rooted in feminist theories for the causes of domestic abuse in men and recognizes the problem of male privilege in patriarchy, the dominant cultural system in our society and in the world. Mills (2000) suggests that, “Pro-feminist politics are … based upon the premise that it is men’s responsibility to tackle those issues which are the
source of their own privilege as well as those of other males. Violence against women has too long been an underlying issue in patriarchy” (p. 226).

Abuse intervention programs that embrace a psychological perspective toward the reasons for domestic abuse encourage the belief that men who are abusive need help to improve their self-esteem and to control their inappropriate behaviors. Programs that stem from a sociological stance support the belief that behavior is socially constructed and influenced by the interaction of the individual and his environment. These programs require the abuser to take responsibility for his actions and to work toward a more egalitarian view within his relationship with his partner. These sociological models assume an educational role that presents men with the realities of their behavior and its effects on their partner and on society in general. Men are given the opportunity to accept responsibility for their behavior and to choose to change that behavior. Research within the field of domestic abuse intervention has been insufficient in determining the best methods for promoting and maintaining change. The premise of this study is that programs based on the sociological foundations of domestic abuse as socially constructed and embedded in the constructs of male privilege provide a more effective approach to the problem.

Reasons for Change in Abusive Men – An Empirical Perspective

Eight studies that explored the concept of change in male abusers are discussed here. These studies employ theoretical models from the psychological and sociological literature and investigate the effects of various treatment modalities. Most involved the process of change related to group treatment programs and study participants were either
actively involved in treatment or had just recently completed it at the time of the studies. Only two employ a transformative learning approach to abuse intervention.

The psychological literature provides theoretical support for change within the realm of addictive behaviors that serves as a model for cessation of the use of abuse in abusers. The transtheoretical model of change, developed by Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross (1992) consists of five stages of change that include 1) precontemplation or essentially no intention to change; 2) contemplation, an awareness of a problem but no agreement to change; 3) preparation, an intent to change; 4) action, expending time and effort in changing; and 5) maintenance, guarding against a relapse into old behavior. This model describes a process for change that has been applied to change in men who have ceased their abusive behaviors. Stefanakis (1998) also found that the transtheoretical model of change was descriptive of the change process that occurred in his study in which formerly abusive men related their stories of identity transformation. These men described their stories which included a) identification of their abusive behavior as a problem, b) committing to stopping their abuse that was based upon a crises identified as necessary to promote the change and c) their description of incidents of relapse in their efforts to end their abuse.

These stages further correlated to factors identified by Stefanakis (1998) that promoted a change to non-abuse in his study participants. He identified two factors associated with a change to non-abuse as relevant. These include first, the presence of negative sanctions, both official sanctions such as arrest and incarceration; and social sanctions, such as the loss of relationships or public exposure of their abuse. Secondly, helping relationships were found to be important in encouraging responsibility.
Stefanakis (1998) emphasized that these helping relationships were not causal of change in themselves but in the ways in which these new relationship helped the men create new meanings and frames of reference in place of the old.

Stefanakis (1998) work supports the use of group intervention with abusive men where helping relationships can be formed and new meanings and frames of reference can be constructed that facilitate the change to non-abuse. The process of relationship formation that promotes change can be found within the theoretical constructs of learning particularly with the field of adult education.

Similarly, Pandya (2001) studied abusive men who had completed a group therapy program grounded in attachment theory. In this study she examined the Transtheoretical Model of Change as well as the Affective Change Processes model. She utilized a two-tiered research paradigm to determine change processes that included the construction of biographies of fourteen male abusers followed by theme analysis based on these two change process models. Affective Change Processes (ACP), which utilizes cognitive-behavior theory and the Transtheoretical Approach (TA) model were labeled as such.

Pandya identified three factors affecting the decision to make a change to non-abuse in a majority of her participants who completed the study. These included 1) a commitment to change, 2) a self-reevaluation that prepared them for change, 3) finding resources, support and information that were meaningful to the subject’s self-understanding of the need to change. Resources in the form of materials used within the group, mutual support by group members and facilitators and some form of support outside of the group were seen as very important to achieving change. However, her
attempt to identify either of the two change process models as substantively applicable to domestically abusive men was not successful.

Neither the Affective Change Process nor the Transtheoretical Approach could be effectively applied to her participants. Pandya expanded the stages and processes identified within the TA model and infused these with the emotional and feelings based stages of the ACP model to develop a new model for change based on her findings. The Integrated Model of Change Processes (IMCP) incorporates her findings into a model for change specific to the issues of domestically abusive men that may be of value in group therapeutic counseling (Pandya, 2001).

Interestingly, Pandya describes the approach to interaction within the group participants studied as utilizing adult education concepts that include choice of topic discussed and responsibility for self-learning. The study offers recommendations to therapists and counselors but supports the educational foundations inherent in the development and planning of abuse intervention programs. The stages and processes identified in her model correlate well with the phases of transformative learning as outlined by Mezirow and others. This study was confined to group intervention processes and the participants were active participants within the group treatment program at the time the research was conducted.

Another study by Wangsgaard (2000) looked at factors of batterer group treatment that facilitated change in abusive men and concluded that establishing a sense of safety and trust within the group setting among the participants and between the participants and the facilitators was key in promoting change. The study included 23 participants in four treatment groups who self-reported their responses to their abuse
intervention program. They were asked to identify what was both helpful and detrimental about the program content. Wangsgaard (2000) labeled the responses of the participants as “the establishment of the “Asylum,” through mutual respect and emotional connection, [as] the integral element in helping the men to change ” (p. 256). As with the other two studies, he described the support and acceptance from other group members and facilitators as very important to the change process.

A study conducted in London by Scott and Wolfe (2000) examined the stories of men who had successfully completed an advanced treatment program and had been non-abusive toward their partners for at least six months. Variables that contributed to the cessation of abuse were identified by these men through in-depth interviews and correlated to theories of development of abuse and theories of behavioral change. Four variables emerged as significant to more than 75 % of the men in the study. These variables were, 1) taking responsibility for past behaviors, 2) empathy, 3) communication and 4) reduced dependency. The analysis of the interviews was based on several psychologically based theories and responses were coded to correlate with categories constructed from these theories. Transformative learning theories offer additional categories that provide a greater understanding of the change experienced by those who forego abusive behaviors.

Margolin and Fernandez (1987) conducted case studies of three couples who experienced the cessation of abusive behavior by the male spouse. This study is significant in that no treatment program was employed and the abuse stopped solely through the efforts of the couples involved. In-depth interviews with both partners in relationships where the men had been non-abusive for as long as thirteen years, revealed
four factors that served as explanations for a change to non-abusive behavior according to the couples’ accounts.

The first was a change in attitude on the part of the wife. She adopted a belief that she had to take care of herself and would not accept the abuse any longer. Abusive retaliation by the wife in this case study offered punishment rather than reinforcement for battering and forced the man to alter his behavior. The researchers indicated that retaliatory abuse is not recommended particularly in light of potential escalation of increased injury to both parties. The adoption of negative consequences for abusive behavior that insures safety should be used and the cultivation of an attitude of self-respect and self-care is very beneficial. Second, the children’s awareness of the abuse and their actual interference to stop it was identified as a factor for one couple. The desire to promote the welfare of the children within the home was indicated as a motivating factor. Thirdly, the discontinuation of substance abuse habits was instrumental in stopping the abuse for one couple and lastly, the involvement of and knowledge of the abuse by someone outside the relationship caused the husband to cease his abuse. Specifically, the wife took a family member into her confidence. The secrecy of abuse is often one of the problems in is perpetuation.

The limited nature of these case studies do not provide adequate support for a broad application of the findings as reasons for change in abusive men but they do provide evidence that in some cases domestic abuse does cease without formal treatment or intervention.

Transformative learning theories offer an educational framework for considering the process of change. These theories describe the process of change in perspective and
meaning within the individual and between the individual in relation to society. They
describe a process that fosters change. Transformative learning theory has been utilized
in association with domestic abuse and change in men in two studies examined here.
Williams (1986) looked at Mezirow’s perspective transformation to explain and facilitate
change in male abusers. The research design included an educational intervention based
on Mezirow’s theory of perspective transformation. The 12-week abuse intervention
program was modified to include transformative concepts related to Mezirow’s phases of
transformation. Disorienting dilemmas that may have initiated treatment and the
examination of meaning schemes and perspectives that supported abuse were studied.
Critical reflection exercises were a central component of the program curriculum.
Williams concluded that perspective transformation was a viable theory for explaining
change in abusive men and in designing an abuse intervention program. Perspective
transformation was also significantly associated with change in physically abusive
behavior although it was not the most strongly associated variable. This study provided
direction to my research in developing interview questions related to transformative
concepts that may elicit related experiences in my study participants.

Godbersen (1999) applied Mezirow’s transformative learning theory to the
exploration of the experiences of male abusers in an abuse intervention program. She
used a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of men and to test the
viability of transformative learning theory as a means of explaining the change process.
Godbersen sought to study experiences of male abusers and to examine the reactions of
the victims to the changes reported by the men. This would serve as a more reliable
validation of change than that of participant self-reports.
Seven male participants were interviewed at the beginning, middle and end of their program and agreement was obtained to contact their partners at some time during the program. She concluded that change in abusers is a slow process and that long held perspectives regarding women and relationships require time to change. Critical reflection was seen as necessary in order for the abuser to make life-long changes to his perspectives. Godbersen concluded that perspective transformation did occur to varying degrees as a result of the abuse intervention program. She applied Mezirow’s ten phases of perspective transformative to the participant’s responses and delineated their progress based on the number of phases completed. All participants reached the first phase, the disorienting dilemma, according to Godberson because of their arrest and subsequent court-mandated attendance in the abuse intervention program. One participant completed all ten phases. The majority completed at least six. I disagree with the determination of the arrest and follow-up as the disorienting dilemma for these men. My opinion is that a disorienting dilemma would have occurred as a result of the realization that their meaning perspective was unacceptable – an internal dilemma that promotes a struggle between old long held perspectives and new oppositional ones.

The preceding studies represent a thorough review of the current research related to change in abusive men and to the use of transformative learning as a theoretical framework that can be used to explain that change. Movement beyond the work of Mezirow to include additional aspects of transformative learning theory is needed and provides a deeper understanding of the change process. The breadth of understanding and theory construction in transformative learning that is available provides a richer source of theoretical concepts that can form a basis for perspective change in abusive
men. The following discussion presents several areas of thought related to the transformative learning process.

**Transformative Learning**

The concept of transformation at its most foundational level indicates change—a movement from what is to something else. It seems logical that the forces that created the original form (what is) need to be identified and understood in order for the change to the new form (something else) to take place. It also follows logically that the process (movement) that carries the original form (what is) has to consist of steps and mechanisms that can support the change until it becomes the new form (something else). Ideological transformation then requires identification and understanding of the psychological and sociological forces that created the original ideology. What follows is an examination of a learning process—transformational learning, that can support a change in ideology for men who have been abusive toward their female partners.

Transformative learning as a construct of adult education is built around central themes of promoting change in meaning perspectives through the use of critical self-reflection and reflective discourse with others. The work of Jack Mezirow (1978) has been instrumental in furthering this process through his contribution toward the building of a framework of theoretical concepts that invites critique and expansion. Mezirow’s work and that of numerous others who have explored transformational learning concepts will be examined here. A description of transformative learning will begin with Mezirow’s (1978; 1991; 2000) view along with the work of Brookfield. Both see transformative learning as rational in nature and grounded in critical reflection.
Suggestions as to how these concepts might be applied to the promotion of ideological change in abusive men are included.

*Rational Perspectives on Transformative Learning*

Mezirow (1990) derives his ideas about perspective transformation in learning from the work of Freire and Habermas. Within Freire’s work, of primary importance to Mezirow is the concept of conscientization. Freire describes conscientization as a uniquely “human process” that is made possible by a person’s ability to reflect upon their own reality and to objectify that reality so as to perceive it in connection to the world. The human being, as opposed to animals “is capable of transforming of producing, of deciding, of creating, and of communicating…” (Freire, 1998, p. 499). These abilities allow the person to transcend their existence within the world and to reflect upon its meaning and purpose. Through the process of conscientization, the person becomes aware of the need for action to change and improve their individual and/or the collective world. This concept is clearly in evidence in Mezirow’s work through his description of meaning perspectives as interpretive of experiences, the use of critical reflection and discourse, and the intentional action based upon these processes.

Additionally, the work of Habermas, and his delineation of instrumental, communicative and emancipatory learning, greatly influences the direction of Mezirow’s work. Habermas traces his roots to The Frankfurt School’s development of Critical Theory, which is based prominently on the ideas of Marx and Freud. It is in the area of emancipatory learning as described by Habermas that Mezirow situates his theoretical foundation (Mezirow, 1990). The Habermasian structures of instrumental and communicative learning that provide a basis for Mezirow’s work incorporate the
objectivist or rational, and the interpretive or socially constructed paradigms of meaning that he sees as complementary within his theory.

Transformative learning describes the process of change that occurs in adults as a result of their becoming aware of the existence and origin of personal meaning schemes and meaning perspectives that have been learned previously and primarily in childhood and adolescence (Mezirow, 1981; 1991). These meaning schemes and perspectives are embedded within the individual’s familial and societal experiences.

Meaning schemes are seen as the components of meaning perspectives that, in themselves, do not constitute a frame of reference but rather a habit of mind that relates to the common expectations of cause and effect. Meaning schemes can be described as values, beliefs and understandings that affect our behavior and are based on our cultural experiences. (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 1998). Meaning schemes then can be viewed as components of meaning perspectives that change throughout an individual’s life as a result of their experiences but do not produce an alteration in the person’s meaning perspective. Changes to individual meaning schemes do not, according to Mezirow (1990; 1991; 2000) require a transformational learning experience.

Mezirow (1990) defines meaning perspectives as “the structure of assumptions that constitutes a frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of an experience” (p. xvi). Meaning perspectives are developmental and socially embedded and require a substantive, transformative process to be changed. Meaning perspectives or frames of reference are categorized as subjective, referring to the learner’s personal frames of reference, and objective, depicting the frames of reference or meaning perspectives held collectively by a society or culture. These internally and externally focused aspects of
ourselves determine who we are as depicted through our expressions of our values and a global view of what is appropriate within a society. They provide stability and direction in our lives.

New and differing perceptions that challenge or undermine our embedded meaning perspectives can cause disorientation, which can serve as a catalyst for transformative change. Mezirow (2000) states, “A more dependable frame of reference is one that is more inclusive, differentiating, permeable (open to other viewpoints) critically reflective of assumptions, emotionally capable of change, and integrative of experience” (p. 19). When we can open ourselves to the changes necessary to incorporate a personal worldview that is indicative of the above we are transformed.

Transformative learning is dependent on the person’s capacity for critical reflection of assumptions commonly held by their society and culture, and for critical self-reflection on personal assumptions acquired through verbal and emotional lessons learned through previous experiences. Mezirow, in his 1990 book *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*, speaks of critical self-reflection as key to the process of transformative learning (Mezirow & Assoc., 1990). In Mezirow’s (1985) model depicting levels of reflectivity he differentiates three reflective processes that constitute ‘critical consciousness’ as an essential aspect of transformation. These processes include *conceptual reflectivity* – self-reflection on the adequacy of the concepts used to appropriately perceive and form an opinion about an incident; *psychic reflectivity* – the recognition of our own proclivity to form opinions based on inadequate information and the limitations of our own perspectives; and *theoretical reflectivity* – awareness that the reasons why we inadequately form
opinions without the benefit of adequate information lie within our embedded “cultural and psychological assumptions (p. 13).

In transformative learning critical reflection represents the examination of the learner’s frames of reference and the learner’s interpretation of other’s frames of reference. This is achieved through rational and reflective discourse that encourages an open and free flow of beliefs and concepts held by the learner as true. Mezirow (1990, 1991, 2000) believes in a subjective view, where the learner evaluates personal and internalized meaning perspectives as critical self-reflection, and an objective view, where the learner reflects on societal perspectives as critical reflection.

Mezirow’s view of reflective discourse with the self and others is rationally based and is used to make meaning of disorienting dilemmas and critical incidents that occur in the individual’s life. Mezirow (1996) offers reasons for the necessity of interpersonal and social discourse. “It permits us to examine evidence and judge arguments in order to achieve a consensual best judgment concerning justifications presented in support of a belief” (p. 165). Through participation in critical and reflective discourse with ourselves and others we seek validation and gather motivation to carry through the changes proposed by our transformed perspective (Mezirow 2000).

Mezirow (1996) sees the rationality of his theory as required to achieve mutual understanding among the cultural and societal differences that constitute our diverse world. He explains the necessity of using rational discourse as a means of achieving “intersubjective communicative competence,” or the “emancipation from communication that is distorted by cultural constraints on full free participation in discourse” (p. 165). The need for rationality to foster a mutual understanding of the language and meanings
we must use to communicate our viewpoints allows us to speak with and understand others in a spirit of sincerity and truth.

Within Mezirow’s framework of transformative learning theory the social and cultural aspects of adult learning are given little attention, but the psychological and personal areas of the individual are emphasized. Through the use of critical self-reflection and the alteration of personal meaning schemes the individual changes perspectives from within. Yet, it is in this psychological sphere that the rational nature of the theory falls short. Critiques of Mezirow’s work (Boyd & Meyers, 1988; Clark, 1997; Cranton, 2000; Dirkx, 1997; Grabov, 1997; Scott, 1997) have consistently called for an inclusion of non-rational ways of perceiving and learning. Discernment that may lead to transformation, through the use of intuitive processes and/or other unconscious means of knowing, is important to the discussion of perspective change and offers additional components of the transformational process that may be of great significance to educators.

Mezirow’s (1981; 1990; 1991; 1998; 2000) theory of perspective transformation in adult education is situated firmly within the realm of the conscious mind and relies on a rational form of acquiring assessing and assimilating knowledge. He likens transformative theory to Siegal’s (1990) description of a liberated person as one who uses assessment to judge the reasons supporting beliefs. “To do so effectively, this involves becoming critically reflective of their assumptions, validating assertions through empirical test or discourse, and making a decision to action on one’s critical insight. …critical thinking is coextensive with rationality” ( Siegal, 1990 in Mezirow, 2000, p. 27).
In his 1998 article, *On Critical Reflection*, Mezirow distinctly ties this concept of critical reflection to rationality when he writes in terms of the ability of transformative theory to transcend local cultural meanings because it is based on the use of critical reflection of assumptions through rational discourse. Both of which are considered to be universal principles for reasoning and evaluation.

This rationality inherent in Mezirow’s theoretical stance has been a prime target of those who have engaged in critique of the theory. Taylor’s (1998) critical review of empirical studies emphasizes the variety of dissent present in adult education circles involving the narrow description of transformation as emerging exclusively from the “universal processes” of critical reflection of assumptions based on experiences and the rational discourse needed to make meaning of this reflective process.

This issue illustrates additional evidence of the need for a theory more open to the non-rational and extra-rational. Taylor (1998) points to studies that show this range of alternative perspectives. These include the important roles played by emotions, relationships, that include the building of trust, support and friendship, and other affective and intuitive ways of knowing. These dimensions of the individual have been shown to be of significance in the learning experiences of adults (Taylor, 1998). It is my belief that perspective transformation in the ideology of men, formerly abusive to their female partners, is possible and explainable through the theoretical contributions discussed here. To foster transformation in abusive men is the challenge that faces those who develop and implement abuse intervention programs.

Mezirow’s view of transformative learning holds much that is useful in the study of ideological change in formerly abusive men. However, the rationality of his work does
not capture the intense emotional and psychosocial aspects of the development and
deconstruction of meaning perspectives that allow for abuse toward an intimate partner.
There are issues of gender, and to a lesser extent, race and class, which affect
positionality and are embedded within our societal communication habits and standards.
I believe that “emancipation” from these issues is not possible nor is it desirable. Gender,
race and class must be a part of the discourse and not removed from it.

The use of critical reflection is also viewed as necessary to transformative learning
by Brookfield (1990; 2000). Brookfield (1990) writes of critical reflection as the
exploration of the assumptions that support thought and action through the study of their
accuracy and validity in relation to objective reality and the experiences of others. This
leads to the reconstruction of those assumptions in a more integrative manner.
Brookfield, (2000) however, is heavily invested in the concepts of ideology critique as
the primary use of critical reflection. He writes of two distinct purposes of critical
reflection; the understanding of how power supports frames of reference and distorts
adult educational processes, and the questioning of certain beliefs that appear to benefit
the learner but are clearly hegemonic. These purposes are very pertinent to the
examination of the ideologies of men who are abusive toward their partners.

The question of power in relationships, in a patriarchal sense, and the need to
examine the benefits received by the use of control tactics that maintain an uneven
balance of power through both physical and emotional abuse, is central to the critical
reflection needed by these men. Additionally, the social context of patriarchy that fosters
beliefs of inequality and male privilege are representative of Brookfield’s statement on
hegemonic beliefs.
Brookfield describes transformative learning in keeping with the tenets of Mezirow’s view but acknowledges the emotional upheaval that he believes is a part of the transformational process.

No matter how much it might be described as an incremental process transformative learning has for me connotations of an epiphanic, or apocalyptic, cognitive event—a shift in the tectonic plates of one’s assumptive clusters. I believe an act of learning can be called transformative only if it involves a fundamental questioning and reordering of how one thinks or acts. If something is transformed, it is different from what it was before at a very basic level (p. 139).

Brookfield’s expression of the profoundness of the change that takes place in transformative learning speaks to the significance of the change in ideology as necessary for abusive men to change their frames of reference; to allow, not merely a cessation of abuse toward their intimate partner, but an alteration of their basic beliefs of power and equality in relationships.

*Transformation for Survival*

Another contemporary of Mezirow has moved toward a more ecological and planetary view of transformative learning that seeks to promote the collective mindset toward realization of the need to protect and save the environment and instill a more congenial milieu for the continuance of life. O’Sullivan (2003) writes of a broader and more inclusive use of the concept of transformative learning. Lemisko (2003) in her review of O’Sullivan’s book *Transformative Learning*, portrays a concept that seeks to educate humanity toward environmental reform.
O’Sullivan’s grand narrative, then, encompasses a vision that not only includes all humans in all their wonderful diversity and uniqueness but also includes all of the natural world and universe. This is a compelling narrative because it is framed by ideas that enable us to honour and encourage both the individual and the collective, the human and not human (p. 304).

O’Sullivan points to the need to transform education as an imperative to ensure our very survival. He is adamant in his belief that a definitive shift away from the current ideologies and philosophies must take place if human life on this planet is to survive. These tenets include Eurocentric frames of reference embedded in Western culture that is now being exported to the entire world, the “saturation of consciousness,” inherent in the overload of information in the modern world, and the hierarchical powers of patriarchy and imperialism. He labels his definition of transformative learning as “integral transformative learning,” emphasizing the essential and connected, or integral, nature of this learning process.

The totality of the universe and interconnectedness on every level from interplanetary to individual human intimacy are contexts that are central to O’Sullivan’s “transformative vision” of education. He describes three modes of transformative learning in which the why, what and how of educational transformation are revealed. The first mode requires a critique of the dominant culture as formatively inappropriate, the second constructs a vision of a new or substitute form, and the third suggests plans and actions to change the present forms and create a new one that is more functionally appropriate.
O’Neill and O’Sullivan (2002) examine the “ecology of abuse,” manifested through the embeddedness of patriarchy as the dominant social context throughout the world, as in need of transformation within society. Describing this abuse he said:

[It is an] inversion of our natural affinity for conditions that enable us to trust in the basic goodness of life. Patriarchy is a system of domination not only because it is an institution of power. It also violates boundaries…Male abuse under conditions of patriarchy is an ecology of abuse. An ecology of abuse is a home in violation (p. 176).

Patriarchy is seen as an institutional structure that legitimizes male abuse, and it must be understood through an examination of dominance and subordination within the construct of gender. They suggest that most of us are raised in an “ecology of male-female dominance” that we must transform through recognition, description and an understanding of the underlying dynamics of domination that support intimate abuse. We must move beyond the cognitive means of dealing with this abuse and incorporate “the realms of the imagined and symbolic, the sensory and embodied” (p. 182) in efforts to transform the perpetrators and the victims of abuse.

In attending to the symbolic and sensory aspects of abuse within our culture, O’Neill and O’Sullivan (2002) urge us to recognize the importance and meaning of many outward demonstrations of abuse within our social structure. These include gendered abuse in entertainment, particularly television and music; humor that is gender biased and abusive in it description, and the ordinary occurrences in everyday life that unwittingly privilege men over women. These symbols, although not real in their abuse, nevertheless overlay a culture of abuse on society and serve to desensitize us to the pain and damage
that is inherent in abusive acts. Acceptance and use of the symbolic and sensory representations of abuse promote its acceptance. Given his views on abuse and gender, and despite the ecological nature of O’Sullivan’s view of transformation, the importance of his work to the purpose of understanding and promoting personal transformation in abusive men is evident.

Extra-rational Transformation

Critiques of Mezirow’s work have consistently called for an inclusion of non-rational ways of perceiving and learning. Cranton (2000) in developing a transformational spiral of individuation, transformation and authenticity, questions the rational, logical and analytical nature of Mezirow’s definition. She writes, “…emotions, sudden insights, and inexplicable intuitions often play an important role” [in transformative learning] (p. 300). Dirkx (1997) writes eloquently of the nurturance of the soul in adult learning through the need to acknowledge, respect and give voice to the aspects of the individual and the collective unconscious that serve as the source of “creativity, vitality, and wisdom within our lives…” (p.83). He states that transformative learning theory needs to recognize the role that extra-rational concepts such as imagination and fantasy play in the search for the self.

Clark (1997) infuses the basics of transformative learning theory with expressions of imagination as a merging of the conscious, preconscious and the unconscious. She clearly places the extra-rational as essential in fostering transformation. “The imagination is a place where our experiences (inner and outer, conscious and unconscious) are filtered. The imagination is where our actions are shaped based on the assumptions we hold” (p.18).
In addition, Clark (1997) speaks to the search for wholeness and the need for communion with others. She uses the work of R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* ([1938] 1958) to illustrate her belief in a shared consciousness and goes on to develop thoughts about her experiences with the work of Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1958 in Clark, 1997). “When we meet as “I-Thou,” we meet on the narrow ridge between I and Thou with our whole being at once: inner and outer, conscious and unconscious. At this place between we give and we receive. The hidden assumption becomes “both/and.” (Clark, 1997, p. 18) This space between speaks to the areas that can unite us or separate us in the collective sense among our social community, or personally through the separation of the conscious and unconscious mind or the rational and extra-rational aspects of our psyche (Clark, 1997).

This social construction of knowledge that takes place in the space between others, and ourselves serves as the basis for the meaning perspectives held by abusive men that are learned in childhood and adolescence. The ideal of transformation for these men lies within the dialogue that occurs among other abusive men within abuse intervention programs, in individual counseling sessions, and perhaps at some point between themselves and their partners.

Similarly, the work of Boyd and Meyers (1988) brings the sharpest contrast to Mezirow’s theory, and a prominent contribution toward addressing the extra-rational, through their depiction of the process of transformative education. From a psychological perspective Boyd and Meyers (1988) see Mezirow’s theory as situated within psychoanalytic theory in which the goal is to assist the individual ego [and thus the rational] to become aware of limiting personal and social constraints. They write:
Mezirow views the ego as the central psychic actor in carrying out one’s perspective transformation. It is the ego that becomes aware of internalized restraints and that confronts and develops resolutions to problems encountered in the individual’s relationships with the culture (p. 263).

Boyd and Meyers (1998) base their work on an analytical psychology that acknowledges psychic structures beyond the limitations of the ego and the conscious mind, which include unconscious structures seen, as critical to a personal transformation. They delineate the differences between Mezirow’s theory and their view through emphasizing the role of “other psychic structures,” in addition to the ego, that constitute the Self. This is in opposition to Mezirow’s rationality, which involves only the realm of the ego and conscious thought. The Self is defined as “the total psychic being of an individual, which has evolved, as have other aspects of our being, over aeons of human life on earth” (Boyd & Meyers, 1988, p. 265). They further explain the concept of the Self as made up of components – the ego being one – in both the conscious and unconscious realms.

A major divergence from Mezirow’s theory is Boyd and Meyers’ (1988) introduction of discernment as the method of transformation as opposed to the use of critical reflection by Mezirow. In critical reflection, the individual uses cognitive, conscious means to view and reinterpret the internal and external world. Discernment is the contemplation of internal forces in cooperation and rational thought that assists the individual to integrate the components of the Self in unity with the external world. Discernment sees the extra-rational that is expressed “through symbols images, and feelings” (p. 275) as equally important with the rational to achieve wholeness. An
example of the symbolic imagery and feeling that is inherent within discernment is an individual’s relationship with issues of power and authority.

As Boyd and Meyers (1988) illustrate through a group education scenario; an individual exhibits resentment toward a group leader that is not shared by other members of the group. Through the process of discernment, the individual is able to recognize and understand the childhood feelings of resentment held toward her father and symbolized by the position of the group leader. This process of discernment is comprised of three components or activities of mind that produce a “psycho-spiritual adjustment to loss.” These include receptivity, in which the person becomes open to the internal forces that are manifested in images, symbols, and the archetypes. This awareness allows the person to interact with other ways of thinking to promote transformation.

Recognition is the second component of discernment. It follows receptivity and considers the value and truth of the person’s experience. It leads to an acceptance of the experience as a part of the person’s reality. This recognition leads to the third component, grieving. It is here that transformation takes place in the gradual acknowledgment of the loss of previous meaning perspectives.

Life events that produce loss may result in a transformation that emerges through the grieving process. Scott (1997) also explores the concept of grieving as necessary to transformation. Her research into personal transformation through social action has investigated the work of Mezirow and Boyd, and includes aspects of Jungian analytical depth psychology. She sees grieving as integral to transformation in that a change involves loss of some kind. Whether the loss is externally grounded as in the loss of a loved one or internally grounded as in a change in meaning perspective the letting go of
what has been is a painful process that affects the internal and external being. In facilitating transformation through grieving from a rational perspective, the individual would engage in dialogue with others to describe and make meaning of their loss.

Transformation from an analytical depth perspective involves the individual in exploring the internal and subjective meaning of the loss, and moving deep into the Self to examine both the conscious or ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious. This work requires a letting go of the rational to allow the internal images to break through into consciousness to be examined (Scott, 1997). Grieving for what is lost may be a concept that is applicable to the process of change for men within abuse intervention programs. The loss of power and the comfort of the long held notions of privilege within a patriarchal society will be very difficult to acknowledge and transcend. Stefanakis (1998) found that his subject’s narratives of changes from abuse to non-abuse included a pattern of loss and consequences as a result of their desistence from abuse. Participants viewed the experience of coming to terms with their behaviors and the need to change as painful and the process of moving beyond their established patterns of behavior as difficult.

Scott (1997) brings to mind the connectedness of the conscious and unconscious states and the need for both rational and extra-rational awareness to grieve for what is lost and successfully traverse the transformative process. Grabov (1997) further illustrates this point in summarizing transformative learning by emphasizing the interplay of both the rational and the imaginative. “In seeming paradox, the value of the imagination and the power of emotion exist within the rational notion of transformation, and learners rely on analysis to make sense of their feelings, images and intuitive descriptions” (p. 95). She
points to the writings of Clark (1997) and Dirkx (1997) as having recognized the use of the imagination.

As presented previously, Clark (1997) in her search to rediscover her creative voice, employs the writings of Collingwood ([1938] 1958 in Clark, 1997) who posits that the imagination and expression are woven together so that the individual, through imagination, becomes one with their creative expression through words, music or any creative endeavor. Clark holds that transformative learning according to Mezirow gives meaning to the creative experience. Through critical reflection on these experiences change takes place and new meanings are created.

The emergence of additional ways of thinking and knowing through extra-rational processes that acknowledge and celebrate the unconscious aspects of human personality, increase the plausibility of true and successful transformation for many. The learner, who has experienced extra-rational means of learning and knowing as a process of familial and social development, may indeed become stuck in an entirely rational method of critical self-reflection. The reliance on the extra-rational concepts of intuition and other emotionally based ways of knowing, such as the ideas of Clark, Grabov, Scott, Dirkx (1997) Cranton (2000) and especially of Boyd and Meyers (1988) offer alternatives to the transformative process that provide a more holistic approach. This may assist the less rationally based learner to move successfully through the transformative process.

The motivations for the use of abuse by men against their intimate partners are fraught with non-rational elements that derive from a myriad of psychosocial roots and are often not amenable to rational solutions. Control and power issues based on societal pressures, fear of intimacy, anxiety over loss of control, and the extremes of rage are
difficult to rationalize (Jasinski & Williams, 1998). Within the context of domestic abuse extra-rational concepts such as those examined above, that promote transformational change may create a more viable framework for change through the recognition of affective aspects of awareness of the self and individual patterns of change. The context in which the individual learns and interacts with the surrounding environment influences the ways that facilitate change and the meanings of change.

*Spiritual Transformation*

Spirituality can serve as a contextual grounding for transformative learning and contains the intuitive meanings derived from extra-rational processes along with culture power and gender issues. The extra-rational practices that stem from emotions, feelings, spirituality and perhaps, the acknowledgement of the collective unconscious within the process of self-transcendence should be included in the portrayal of transformative learning. Tisdell (2003) describes a definition of spirituality as “elusive” and subject to the personal interpretation of the individual. She is clear, however, in stating that spirituality is not synonymous with religion and is influenced by and demonstrated within the constructs of culture.

Tisdell suggests that an awareness of spirituality in adult education settings offers the likelihood of encouraging personal and social transformation. She points to concepts of transformational learning through the lens of transpersonal psychology and transcendence as an area of study that reaches beyond the rational to include the spiritual. Tisdell grounds her beliefs in the use of spirituality within transformative learning in a critical and feminist perspective that emphasizes positionality and identity as “constantly
shifting and developing.” Spirituality, along with cultural relevance, serves as a means of creating greater authenticity and identity.

Additionally, Tisdell (2003) points to the work of Parker Palmer in connecting spirituality to education. Palmer (1993) too speaks of spirituality in terms of seeking the true self as one with the world through transcending the distortions produced by education in which the individual and the world are seen as separate and fragmented. Palmer states, “Such an education either turns out people who force their own inner distortions on the world, or it produces people who have succumbed to the world’s distortion of themselves (p. 12).” Palmer believes that individuals project their feelings on the world and thus create the social problems that are manifestations of inner turmoil. He writes:

Much of the world’s violence, for example, is an acting-out of the violence we find within ourselves, an effort to get rid of our inner demons by projecting them “out there.” We help create the outward enemy…to distract us from the inward enemy who always threatens to overcome us. More, subtly, the self creates the world by forcing it into the limits of our own capacity to know. If we can know only what is available to our senses and our logic, then reality is reduced to those narrow terms (p. 12).

Palmer envisions an education that transcends the self and the world to find truth and freedom through knowing and becoming known to each other in a “Spirit of love.”

Others have described transcendence as a means of transformation within adult learning. According to Wacks (1987) in writing specifically about learning based in the second half of life through evolution or life-changing critical incidents states that
individuals may strive “…to rise above, to evolve beyond, to see from a higher or broader perspective, and to experience existence and consciousness completely and fully. Wacks (1987) sees a lack of attention to the transcendent aspects of adult education as a “gap” that ignores significant parts of individuals and fails to address the learning capacities of the “whole person.” This aspect of the individual appears as a vast and largely untapped area of inquiry that should be addressed.

Transcendentalism, first described by Emerson in the nineteenth century and espoused by Jung and Maslow among others in the early 1960’s, has emerged in psychology as Transpersonal Psychology, a Fourth Force to complement the psychoanalytic, behavioral and humanistic forces long established in that field. Aspects of transcendence flow from natural intuitive personality traits that move the individual beyond the ego and a sense of individuality to a heightened sense of clarity, understanding and unity. The perception of space and time may be altered and the person may feel integration with the nature of the universe (Wacks, 1987).

Transpersonal psychology is an advancement in the study of the psyche that entails the spiritual, consciousness studies, and the mind-body connection. It is a recognized area of inquiry and theory in the field of psychology that is dedicated to rigorous examination and research. The term, ‘transpersonal’, was coined by Jung, and the work of Maslow, in the study of individuals’ self-actualization activities serves as a foundation for this field of inquiry.

As an advanced path, stemming from ways of extra-rational knowing, transcendence may offer a further explanation of the transformative effects of learning that are evident in the moments of clarity and heightened awareness experienced by
individuals as they become totally immersed in an area of knowledge. This can facilitate a complete engagement of the mind, body and soul. When a person is able to transcend to an understanding outside of themselves as a part of the collective whole of humanity that moment of self-transcendence is truly transformational.

Despite Wacks' (1987) call for the consideration of transcendence within the field of adult education nearly fifteen years ago there is little in the literature to substantiate its appropriateness as a viable aspect or goal in the literature on transformative learning. There is a need for greater exploration and attention to the next phase along the transformational learning continuum. The journey inward may well lead toward a rich and more holistic view of the world and the place and purpose of individuals within it.

The idea of transcendence or the use of elements of transpersonal psychology in adult learning holds the hope of moving beyond the boundaries of ourselves and toward a fuller integration of the whole, both personally as in the ultra awareness of the unconscious and conscious aspects of the individual, and communally through the recognition and understanding of the collective unconscious.

Abalos (1986) writes of a transformative process that recognizes the cultural richness of Latinos and the deeply rooted constructs of fear and power inequities that pervade their emergent experiences into the dominant Anglo culture. This theory is grounded in the “undiscovered self, an ontological sacred self” (p. 18) that bears similarity to the Self to which Boyd and Meyers (1988) refer, in its use of symbols and images that serve to represent the extra-rational aspects of the individual. This theory describes eight relationships or archetypes that represent modes of functioning within
relationships. The use of these archetypes is determined by the goals or “ways of life” (p. 18) sought by the individual. These three goals make use of archetypes:

1. for the sake of a new and fuller life, as in the ultimate service of transformation;
2. for the sake of destroying, because nothing makes sense to us anymore, and therefore we get what we can while the time is ripe, which is the way of life of incoherence;
3. in the way of life of emanation, to hang on to a web of life that is coming apart and that we consider at its best as having been a golden age in our personal and group life (p. 19).

Abalos’ (1986) view of the nature of transformation has particular significance to the experience of abusive men. The roles of men and women within the Latino culture have been oppressively dictated by tradition that places men in a position of domination over women who are expected to remain dependent throughout their lives on first their fathers, then husbands and finally sons. Transformation within the Latino culture requires movement away from the political and religious patriarchy of the past toward a more egalitarian connection between men and women. As Jasinski and Williams (1998) point out the roots of abuse by men are grounded within the social and psychological identities learned from past experiences. Abalos (1986) view of transformation offers an outlook that relates closely to the embedded nature of male power concepts.

As Abalos (1986) suggests personal fulfillment includes the coming together of opposite forces within the person. The integration of the male and female aspects of all individuals allows for wholeness. Within this context, Abalos offers the use of narrative and story telling, which has primarily been seen as a mechanism for women to explore voice and share their experiences, as one means of discernment and transformation in
men. Through the use of a primarily feminist mechanism men can begin to claim the feminine aspect of their lives to achieve a more balance and just perspective. Transformative learning requires the use of practices that promote reflection on and discernment of our meaning perspectives (Abalos, 1986).

Transformative learning theory, as it is and as it is evolving, encompasses the process and the reason for growth and change inherent in adult education. The theory is a dynamic blueprint that is capable of transforming itself as humanity moves continually toward transcendence.

Transformation through Narrative

The use of narrative within the process of transformation has been applied frequently to transformative learning. Narrative is a means of communication that provides a view of the connectedness of the life events of the individual with the motivations, purpose and actions of that impact these events. Polkinghorne (1988) describes the use of narrative:

We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions, anticipating the outcomes of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed. We explain our actions in terms of plots, and often no other form of explanation can produce sensible statements (p. 160).

Narrative utilizes the story as discourse to understand how individuals make sense of events in their lives through the relating of an incident that represents a life episode that looms large for that person. It allows the person to incorporate past experiences with present situations and future goals (Morey, 2000). Polkinghorne (1988) suggests, “The
purpose of narrative knowing is not to produce a representation of reality as it exists independent of the knower; rather, it is a display of a type of meaning that life events have for the experiences” (p. 82).

Narrative inquiry through the practice of story telling as a means of exploring and generating women’s voices that have been silenced is powerful in its ability to affect the cognitive, emotional and spiritual aspects of women’s lives. Brooks (2000) in her examination of the use of narrative in transformation points out that this practice need not be applied only by women but that men also may benefit from telling their story. Brooks suggests that few people know how to articulate those aspects of ourselves that have experienced subordination. “In that sense, all of us are victims of silence, regardless of our gender, race, or social class” (p. 153). The psychosocial experiences of the past in the lives of abusive men and the telling of their stories may serve as a catalyst for transformative change.

Fostering transformation

Creating opportunities for transformative learning to take place can be challenging to educators. Lennard, Thompson and Booth (2003) offer suggestions for use within a creative experience that may be helpful in encouraging transformation. These include the use of open-ended situations and encourage action and response, the questioning and assessment of meanings, presentation of the concept of multiple realities and new possibilities in thinking, clarification of one’s beliefs and assumptions and creating different circumstances that force the learner to consider alternative perspectives (2003). These tactics can be created within any learning environment where individuals
are engaged in an interactive atmosphere where there is acceptance of the person’s current beliefs and a willingness to embrace change.

Taylor (2000) raises several important questions about the process of encouraging or fostering transformative learning. In his investigation of empirical research that has explored the promotion of transformative learning practices Taylor finds that there is still a need to answer questions related to the methods that foster change, the roles of students and teachers in the process and the impact of transformative processes on learning outcomes. Through analysis of 23 studies related to transformative learning in practice, Taylor (2000) identified several themes that emerged as essential teaching priorities. The first is a sense of group ownership within the learning environment. This is applicable to my study population. Abusive men who engage in abuse intervention programs participate in group sessions where they confront their behaviors in collaboration with other members of the group. The facilitator encourages the participants to involve themselves in the narratives of their fellow group members and to challenge each other in regard to abusive ideological mindsets. Group involvement in abuse intervention is felt to be an asset to these programs and promotes compliance and improved behavior (Shepard and Pence, 1999). A second theme of experiential activities emerged as a teaching priority in Taylor’s study. Experiential learning as a means of promoting transformative change in abusive men is an aspect of the lived experiences of my participants that I plan to pursue. Support for this learning method, as stated in Taylor’s work, encourages my exploration of this process with my participants. Contextual awareness as a theme was found to be a teaching priority. It allows for deeper understanding of the learner’s needs related to the learning environment and history. Mindorff (2003) validates this theme in
her use of constructive classroom activities that examine and critique “unchecked biases” related to cultural awareness and difference. For my purposes, awareness of context in understanding the reasons for abusive behavior and the reasons for a cessation of that behavior is essential for the gathering of data that is useful to the development of abuse intervention programs.

Taylor (2000) identifies of the themes of affective learning and the presence of value-laden content as important to fostering transformation. These concepts are again supported by the work of Mindorff (2003). She utilized the creation of bio-poems with her adult students. This activity asks the students to reflect on important relations and values within their own lives through questions that result in the creation of poetry. Affective learning strategies that encourage reflection on relations and values is very applicable to the learning and change that must take place within and among abusive men who want to change their behavior. The emotional component of learning in the context of domestic abuse is of major importance and should be at the forefront of thought about program planning strategies.

Fostering transformation in men who are engaging in abusive acts toward an intimate partner will require the inclusion of the above learning priorities and will be dependent on their ability to become aware of the self as an individual capable of reflection on their past meaning perspectives and how they might be changed. Cranton (2000) states that a goal of adult education and educators is to “encourage them [students] to view experiences from alternative perspectives” (p. 196). This is precisely the goal I see for abuse intervention programs. Through transformative learning strategies abusive men can be taught to alter their meaning perspectives by practicing viewing themselves
and their problems and motivation from a changed perspective that does not promote abuse.

Summary

Transformative learning includes the processes of self-examination, self-reflection, and self-change along with the understanding that, because individuals do not exist in a vacuum, personal change will affect and be affected by the individual’s social environment. In relation to ideological change that may be exhibited by abusive men who move away from the power and control paradigm that supports domestic abuse, theoretical viewpoints, such as transformational learning, that highlight personal changes in an individual’s understanding and view of their intimate relationship are valuable tools that can lead to changes in perspective and changes in lives.

The concepts of transformative learning provide both an excellent blueprint for teaching and learning with abusive men and a possible explanation for how and why formerly abusive men change. However, the specific incidents that initiate the change process in men who do change have not been identified. Transformative learning is one possibility in developing an explanation for change in these men and one that can be applied to abuse intervention programs.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how formerly abusive men learned to become non-abusive, and what kind of ideological changes in their understanding of abuse, women, and the tenets of patriarchy have resulted in the cessation of their abusive behaviors. In striving to uncover the causes of the behavioral changes exhibited by these men, I have revealed some events, contexts and cognitive processes that led to a substantive change in attitudes and behaviors in abusive men. In turn, my desire to provide insight that could be helpful in curricular development of treatment programs for male abusers has been addressed.

Discovering how learning explains these behavioral changes was a worthwhile effort in that it allowed me, as the researcher, to explore an avenue of new knowledge that provided useful content for curriculum development in abuse intervention programs, and satisfied some questions arising from my professional and personal concerns. It also presented the participants with an opportunity to share their experiences with others who professed an interest in the psychological and emotional work necessary to achieve such a change. The methodological processes required to complete a qualitative research study and the specific elements of research methodology used with this study are presented here.

Research Methods

This study was a qualitative, interpretive undertaking that identified causes, through the use of critical incident reporting, that served to initiate an ideological and
behavioral change in formerly abusive men. I interviewed men who had experienced a transformation that allowed them to redefine the nature and substance of their intimate relationships. Qualitative research provided an excellent method for exploring the personal and individual journeys undertaken by those who have been successful in accomplishing a substantive behavioral and ideological change in their interactions with others. This section contains a brief description of qualitative research and the use of an open-inductive design for data collection. It also includes a brief description of myself as the researcher and includes my positionality within the research process.

*Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research is a method of gathering data that grew from the need for the social sciences to more clearly address the nature of inquiry essential to the study and understanding of the human experience. Sociologists were constrained by the rigors and conventions of strict quantitative methods borrowed from the physical sciences. These methods failed to reveal the true scope and meaning of human behavior. During the 1970s, a more naturalistic approach began to emerge within the social sciences that explored a direction beyond the positivist thinking of the quantitative approach to research. It moved toward a post-positivist method that evolved into a naturalistic style of viewing knowledge and knowing as fluid and subject to individual interpretation. (Deschler & Hagen, 1989).

The issues of domestic abuse are subjective in nature, and the essence of the topic is rooted in the psychological and sociological realms of knowledge and theory. It is, at once, personal and social in its context, and research efforts into this multifaceted area of
human behavior must proceed within the fluidity and naturalistic tendencies of personal knowledge that qualitative research was created to capture.

Patton (2002) issues a comprehensive account of the applications that are appropriate to qualitative studies including: the study of quality issues, diversity, outcomes evaluation processes, studies in participatory research and evaluation, acquiring and communicating stories, and generating new insight. Within the context of my research, I was able to illuminate the stories of men who have eschewed abuse toward their intimate partner, and who have gained new insights into the meaning and nature of their abuse. Through the conduction of an open, inductive research paradigm and analysis of these stories, including the insights of the participants, this study uncovered elements of change that can enhance the content of abuse intervention programs.

Open, Inductive Design

Inductive analysis of data is the hallmark of qualitative research. The researcher develops themes, patterns and categories of meaning from the methodologies used to collect the participant’s words. The data is coded and categorized to represent as closely as possible the thoughts and feelings of the study participants (Janesick, 1996). Patton (2002, p.453) uses the term “discovering” in describing the emergence of themes and patterns found within the raw data of qualitative research methods. He states:

Qualitative inquiry is particularly oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic. Inductive analysis begins with specific observations and builds toward general patterns. Categories or dimensions of analysis emerge from open-ended observations as the inquirer comes to understand patterns that exist in the phenomenon being investigated (p. 455).
Patton’s explanation of inductive analysis is definitive of the semi-structured interviews that were utilized in this study. A general theme and direction for the interview was established to position the dialog in the context of domestic abuse and male privilege as promoted by society-at-large. Questions concerning childhood histories of abuse, the nature of the participants’ former abusive behavior, the impact of that behavior on themselves and others, and the self-described elements that led to change provided the basic framework for the interview process. The participant’s were also asked to react to two scenarios that depicted incidents of reported physical abuse and elements of male privilege and control. A copy of the interview questions and the scenarios used in this study is included in Appendix A. Active listening and seeking clarification during the interviews helped to illuminate the meaning of the participants’ words and provided opportunities to obtain a richer, more in-depth story of abuse and change.

The use of face-to-face interviews and the gathering of copious oral and written information of a personal nature within this study required a clear and precise explanation of the ethical elements that must be maintained to provide assurance to the participants. Patton, (2002) outlines several ethical issues that may arise in the process of collecting qualitative data through interviews. Those issues applicable to this study included a thorough explanation of the purpose of the study. I explained personally to each participant that I was interested in examining the learning lens offered by formerly abusive men for changes in their behavior toward their partners. I also explained that I hoped to uncover the process of perspective transformation in the belief systems of these men through the exploration of incidents or experiences that they viewed as critical to
their ideological change. The underlying beliefs regarding power and control in relation to gender that were held by these men prior to their change to a non-abusive relationship were also examined.

_The Researcher_

It is my assertion that the space between the perspectives of the participants and the researcher is the area where meaning takes form. Therefore, as the researcher and an influential force on the data, I felt that I must reveal my positionality and motivation within the context of this study as a part of the analysis process.

I am a white, middle-class woman whose interest in the field of domestic abuse grew from an academic curiosity with the nuances of patriarchy. My view of marital relationships has been influenced primarily by my parents whose marriage is egalitarian despite its traditional structure. My views of gender have been influenced by my experiences in a girls’, Catholic, diocesan high school. Those years were spent in the midst of the tumultuous late 1960s and early 1970s in the company of an order of nuns that embraced the concepts of women’s rights vigorously. These brave women taught me the meaning of truly caring for those in need and to form a more feminist view of the world.

Despite my feminist awakening as a teenager, I was very much tied to traditional social roles that I rarely questioned and did not understand as destructive to women as a gender until much later. Within the fields of nursing and post-secondary education, the struggles of women became visible to me. A heightened consciousness of the issues of gender inequality and male privilege emerged as I worked within a community college
setting. My students were predominately female and most were non-traditional students struggling to juggle family and childcare responsibilities, a job and their education.

These women endured a plethora of difficulties, many of which were the result of attitudes and social systems rooted in the dictates of a lower and middle socioeconomic class that exhibited a primarily patriarchal mindset. This led to my decision to volunteer and later serve as a board member for a domestic abuse shelter. My work with this organization has forged my interest and desire to improve the experiences of women and to support and encourage recognition of the need to tear down the oppressive nature of patriarchy for women and men.

Toward that end, my interest in learning about men grew from a web-site search that revealed the term, pro-feminism. I sought to discover the origins and meanings of this ideology adopted by men that supports the tenets of feminism and acknowledges male privilege and its destructive effects on both women and men. The decision to study men within the milieu of domestic violence was an outgrowth of this interest in pro-feminism in that men, as the primary perpetrators of abuse, should be active in finding ways to change the dominant culture and to work for equality in relationships. I believe equality and understanding between the sexes is possible. With this in mind, I set out to discover men who have been able to change their behaviors.

Research Perspective

Frankel and Devers (2000a) explain the multiplicity of approaches within qualitative research that move toward a goal of “understanding lived experiences” and a “focus on the natural history of events or relationships” (p.114). An understanding of the lived experiences of these formerly abusive men brought the nature of their personal
reality and interpersonal relationships into focus in order to uncover the critical turning points that assisted them in moving away from abuse and toward a more egalitarian lifestyle. The relationships contained within the experiences of these men serve to explain and define the lives they led and the reasons and motivations for their behaviors both prior to their ideological change and after it. The relational aspects of their histories are important in that they reveal the growth of their knowledge of themselves and others; their understanding of the world in which they lived. The development or construction of their abusive behaviors and their ultimate deconstruction are products of the interaction between themselves and others, and between themselves and the environment. This social construction of knowledge serves as the theoretical grounding for this study.

The study utilized a social constructionist perspective. The social construction of knowledge as defined by Schwandt (2001) is divided into two broad strands of constructivist thought: radical constructivism and social constructionism. Radical constructivism, derived primarily from the writings of von Glasersfeld and ultimately Piaget, contends that knowledge is the result of interaction between the mind and its environment and is redefined constantly through a process of inner construction.

Social constructionism focuses on the social process. It seeks to understand how people recognize, produce and reproduce social actions and how they come to share an inter-subjective understanding. A radical constructivist paradigm is descriptive of the processes utilized by the study participants in the development of an internalized ideological perspective that has caused them to turn away from abuse.

The construction of the themes and patterns that emerged from the data derived from this study required both the participants’ and the researcher’s interaction to
construct meaning from the experiences presented. An inter-subjective understanding inherent in social constructionism was created. Thus, both strands of social constructivist thought can be applied to this study.

Potter (1996) in his view of the social construction of knowledge differentiates between fact and description noting that the former implies truth and real occurrence while the latter does not. He points to the inter-actional space between these two ideas as the place where the social construction of description as fact takes place. Longino (2002) concurs when she suggests that knowledge is partial, plural and provisional. “Knowledge produces the conditions of its own transformation. The growth of knowledge is not linear, but irregular, layered and patchy” (p.208). My belief is that the understanding that took place both psychologically, within the participants, in reference to how they perceived the reasons for their change; and socially, between the participants and others of importance to them was a product of a social construction of the meaning of specific incidents that provided a transformative learning experience.

The important others in the lives of these men included their partners, their children and supportive individuals within their abuse intervention programs. Additionally, the interaction between each participant and me, as the researcher served to construct new meaning and insight for both of us. My perspective as the researcher within the study must be acknowledged because the responses of the participants were impacted by my positionality and motivation as indicated previously. Both the collection of the data and its analysis were affected by my reactions within the interview process and by my internal interpretations of my experiences after the interviews were completed.
The fact that I am a woman surely influenced the tone of the interview. It is possible that the participants held back some of their thoughts and feelings that they may have more readily shared with a man. My impression is that this did not occur. I felt that the men were very open and truthful in their responses, but the possibility remains that my gender may have affected the quality of responses. My position as a professional educator and a doctoral student provided an element of power that also may have shaped the quality and content of the responses. The participants were respectful to me and with rare exception provided detailed comprehensive answers to the questions I asked. In each of the interviews, I explained that in addition to my educator role I was a professional nurse. I believe this offered an additional element of credibility to the interview process in that, as a nurse, I was experienced in discussing personal issues with individuals and perhaps was seen by the participants as adept at managing the discussion of difficult topics and emotions. Finally, the participants were aware that I am involved with a women’s shelter where I volunteer and am a member of the board of directors. This may have had an affect on the interviews but my impressions of my time spent with these men did not indicate that this had a significant influence.

My reactions to the interviews were varied. There were feelings of anger, concern, surprise, empathy, skepticism and guilt that were common after each session. I found that I needed to examine these impressions and feelings immediately afterwards to try to understand the impact of the words and descriptions of these men on me, and to recognize and delineate their described feelings in relation to mine. This was at times disturbing and left me with questions about my ability to discern the information and meanings presented to me with clarity and fairness. Each interview left me emotionally
exhausted and time was needed to allow me to mentally return to my own life and interests. Additionally, the process of analysis often proved emotionally wrenching in that the depth of pain that these men experienced and that they caused others was often complex and challenging. My overriding feeling, however, following each interview and during the analysis process was that of gratitude. I felt appreciative for the willingness of the participants to share intimate, painful and frequently shameful incidents of their lives with me. I admired the belief they all held that telling their story might be of help to others. My final interpretation of the processes of data collection and analysis within this study was that despite its difficulty it was ultimately rewarding for both the participant and for me as the researcher.

Sample Selection

A purposeful sampling selection process was used for this study. Participants were chosen through the use of an intensity-sampling regimen coupled with snowball sampling to achieve the desired number of participants. Patton (2002) states that an intensity sampling selects “information-rich” participants who intensely exhibit the topic to be studied. Snowball sampling provides a means of finding participants through contacts made with “well-situated” sources who provide information that leads to appropriate prospective participants. I interviewed ten men who were identified through a set of criteria that emphasized the key components of my research topic. Through snowball sampling, I made use of contacts within several county agencies in southeastern and central Pennsylvania and Delaware.

Patton (2002) suggests that purposive sampling requires determining the nature of the participant prior to the research interview process. Referral sources were asked to
identify potential participants that fit the criteria outlined below through questions that coincided with the purpose of the study. Additionally, referral sources offered suggestions about other programs and individuals that might be able to assist me in finding participants. The following processes guided sample selection:

1) Participants could be obtained through referrals from individuals, agencies or organizations involved with domestic abuse issues.

2) Participants could reside anywhere in the eastern United States. This criterion was determined to allow a broad geographic area to increase the chances of obtaining an adequate sample size.

3) Participants must be men who were formerly abusive to their intimate partner as evidenced by their own admission and as identified by the referral sources.

4) Participants needed to indicate that they had not engaged in abusive behaviors toward their intimate partners for at least one year.

5) Participants were to indicate that they had experienced an ideological change in their view of domestic abuse that could be verified by someone other than the participant such as the referral source and/or the intimate partner.

Issues of Risk to the Participant

Because this was a retrospective study that looked at the participants’ perceptions of their own past thoughts and behaviors, potential physical or psychological risks to the participants were few. However, it was thoroughly explained within the informed consent that the questions asked might lead to additional personal insights that might be emotionally uncomfortable or disturbing.
Confidentiality. I assured the participants that their identities would remain confidential and known only to me. Pseudonyms were used in place of the participants’ real names. Oral and written material obtained during the interview sessions, including audiotapes, were accessible only to me, to my dissertation advisor, and to my transcriber. Permission to include written materials provided to me by the participants in the study was given by the participants involved. Materials have been kept in a locked file cabinet in my home. Materials and data will be maintained for one year following completion of the research and then destroyed.

Informed Consent. All participants read and signed the informed consent document for this study. It was designed in accordance with the guidelines and requirements of the Institutional Review Board of The Pennsylvania State University and clearly included the information stated above. A copy of consent form is included in Appendix A.

Participant Selection

The process of finding participants for this study was problematic for several reasons. Because of the intimate nature of this phenomenon and the confidentiality issues that surround treatment and intervention programs for men who have been abusive, identifying potential participants was a challenge. It required the development of a referral network that consisted primarily of directors/counselors of intervention programs who were willing to assist me by contacting men who they believed met my criteria. This provided a visible means of locating potential participants who, for the most part, do not wish to be openly identified to the public as former abusers. Obtaining permission to contact the men directly or providing my contact information to them and requesting that
they contact me was an additional step. The volatile nature of the topic and the probability of attracting questionable participants through general advertising or other conventional means of soliciting participants would have been unproductive and potentially dangerous.

The search for participants necessitated extensive use of the Internet, email, regular mail and telephone calls to introduce the reason for my study and to request assistance in finding potential participants. Men’s intervention programs were contacted along the eastern coast of the United States from Maine to South Carolina. Approximately 100 letters were emailed or mailed to as many programs in attempts to obtain assistance. Only one participant was found through use of the regular mail or email solicitation although several potential referral sources contacted me and expressed interest in the study. Telephone calls to programs proved to be much more successful. Telephone numbers of intervention programs were obtained through the Internet and through snowballing from previous contacts. Responses from the referral sources included several who attempted to contact possible participants but were unsuccessful in finding clients who were willing to be interviewed.

The referral sources for this study included a board member for a domestic abuse shelter, a Catholic priest, and the directors of four men’s intervention programs. The participants were obtained from within several counties in southeastern and central Pennsylvania and in the state of Delaware. Nine of the men completed abuse intervention programs. Two programs each provided three participants. One program referred one participant and one program provided access to two participants. One participant did not
attend a formal program. He was identified through the combined efforts of the board member and the Catholic priest.

The referral sources also provided written information to the participants about the study including my contact information. When a potential participant was identified by a referral source, a letter describing the purpose and methods of the study was given to the subject via the referral source along with a consent form outlining the interview process and the rights of the participant (See Appendix A). The participants gave permission to the referral sources to give their telephone numbers to me. The participants then either contacted me or spoke to me over the telephone when I contacted them.

During the initial telephone conversations, I explained the purpose of the study and answered any questions. A time, date and location for an interview were then arranged and informed consent forms were sent by mail or email to the participant. I explained that the informed consent form was to be read and signed prior to the start of the interview. The participants brought the form with them to the interview where the participants and I signed their copy and an additional copy. We each then retained a copy of the form.

Data Collection Methods

The methods used for data collection and analysis included an interview process that provided the participants with adequate time and freedom to reflect and to tell their stories in a manner that was most meaningful to them. The participants were requested to share any writing or creative expressions they had produced related to domestic abuse. Field notes were used to record my observations and impressions of the interviews and
follow-up telephone interviews were conducted. Each of these areas is presented in this section.

*Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to allow the participants to tell their stories in a manner that was not rushed or regimented. These interviews were open-ended in their flexibility to explore individual areas of thought as they arose, and were guided by a list of interview questions that served to provide structure and direction to the interview process. This closely relates to Patton’s (2002) interview guide approach to interviewing. The use of a guide or outline of questions provides a systematic approach for consistency but allows the interview to remain conversational and flexible. The participants were told of the general topical areas before the start of the interview but were not given a list of the questions to be asked. The interview sessions were audio taped and I requested the participants bring with them any written or artistic work that they may have created that related to the topic of domestic abuse.

*The interview guide.* These interview questions (See Appendix A) provided a focus to the narratives of the participants and I asked additional questions throughout the interviews to clarify meanings and at times offer perceptions that encouraged additional comment. The questions included several types as identified by Patton (2002) that covered a broad range of feelings and experiences. These questions were designed to elicit information about the participants’ background, their past and present experiences and behaviors and their feelings about their abuse as both victim and perpetrator. They also explored the knowledge they possessed about abuse, the emotional and psychological effects of abuse, their opinions about the social structures of abuse, the
personal consequences to themselves and their families and finally, the values they hold as important. They encompassed a personal review of the participants’ social history including the nature of their relationships with parents, siblings and significant others in their childhood. They also explored experiences with abuse of any kind and the mores and attitudes toward gender that are inherent in their background. The participants were asked to tell their stories regarding their understanding of the meanings of abuse and the causes of their own use of abuse against their partners. This provided a naturalistic and open atmosphere in which the participants could offer a perspective about the origin and personal meaning of their abuse.

In addition to open-ended questions that encouraged the participants’ to elaborate on their past and present lives the interviews included the use of two scenarios that depicted abusive situations. The men read the scenarios and voiced their reactions to them. Patton (200) describes this type of interview technique as “projection” in which “critical incidents” are depicted in order to elicit the participant’s perspective of the incident. These proved helpful in assisting the men to elaborate on their beliefs about women, privilege and control issues, and intervention in abusive situations.

The setting. Interviews with the participants took place in a variety of settings that were determined by convenience and the preference of the subject. After an initial telephone conversation with the participants where it was established that they met the study criteria a date and location were chosen. Interviews were conducted in-person and lasted from one and one half to two and one half hours. The setting needed to be private enough to allow for personal conversation that would not be overheard and public in order to insure professional integrity and safety. This proved to be somewhat difficult in
some instances because many of the areas I visited to obtain the interviews were unfamiliar to me. I was able to make use of rooms within the offices of the abuse intervention program on several occasions but that was not always available. Other settings presented themselves based on the location of the participant. The interviews took place in the offices of a church, social services agencies that housed intervention programs, a picnic table on the grounds of an agency, two different campuses of Penn State University, poolside at a participant’s apartment complex, in a McDonald’s and a Country Buffet restaurant and in the home of one of the participants. In this last setting, the participant’s family was present in another area of the house. Most of the settings provided ideal conditions for interviewing in that they were quiet and private enough so that personal information could be shared easily. The restaurant setting provided an acceptable level of privacy in conversation but the noise levels were distracting at times to me as the researcher. The participants interviewed in those settings did not voice problems with them. The interview that took place in the participant’s home proved uncomfortable for me as the interviewer. My concern was that the participant’s children might overhear the interview. I voiced this concern to the participant and he felt that it was not a problem.

*Writings of the participants*

During the telephone conversation to set an appointment for the interviews the participants were asked to bring with them any written, photographic, literary or other materials they had produced or felt was important to their understanding of their change. I had asked that they share these with me to gain a better understanding of the significance of their change as depicted in non-verbal ways. The request was strictly
voluntary and unfortunately, only two of the participants did so. I sensed hesitancy in many of the men when asked to do this. Some stated that they did not possess such materials. One stated that he did not wish to share any writing he had done on the subject of abuse and cited copyright issues. Another alluded to a journal that he did not want to share. For two participants who did share their writings proved to be enlightening and added dimension to their interviews. One man shared letters from previous intimate partners, photographs, a speech delivered to a women’s group, a short story that he wrote and newspaper articles related to abuse. A few of these pieces are included in Appendix B. The other participant shared thought provoking reflections about himself and his process of change that included his understanding of the origins of his abuse and his motivations for change. He included several of the books he valued that had assisted him in his change. These are also included in Appendix B.

Field Notes

At the completion of an interview, I wrote down my initial impressions of the experience and spent time reflecting on my reactions to the story. Patton (2002) stresses the importance of writing field notes soon after the completion of an interview. These notes should include the researcher’s observations, feelings and reactions to the interview experiences as well as a beginning analysis of the content. I made a habit of stopping on my way home from the interview at a restaurant and spontaneously writing the immediate thoughts and feelings that resulted from my experience with the participant. I included initial impressions of both the interview process and the content of the men’s stories. This was very helpful in developing the themes and patterns of the findings that were to emerge from the interview data. In reading my observations later, I was able to recall
impressions and feelings I interpreted about the content of the transcripts. This lent richness to the meaning of the participants’ words.

Follow-up Interviews

After the interviews were completed and transcribed a biography of each participant was written to record a narrative of the participants’ lives. Their own interview transcripts, biography and a list of the preliminary themes developed from all of the transcripts were sent by mail and email to each participant for additional comments. The participants were then contacted by telephone. They were told they would be receiving the study materials and an appointment was set to ascertain their reactions to the materials they received. These telephone interviews lasted approximately 20-30 minutes and the participants were asked if they felt they had been portrayed accurately in the biography. They were also asked to comment on anything within the transcript that they felt needed additional explanation. I then clarified any misunderstandings regarding the transcripts that I had.

All of the participants felt that the biographies were an accurate depiction of their stories. They provided additional insights related to the transcripts and related information about the current state of their relationships. All felt that their participation in this study was a positive experience for them and some stated that they have had additional insights into their relationships since their interview.

Analysis of the Data

Analysis of the data collected within this study employed the use of interpretative analysis of the narratives. From this analysis categories, themes and patterns related to the narratives emerged and similarities and differences were found.
Narrative description and story telling were employed within my study. Through open-ended questions that provided ample time for participants to share the stories of their lives the data emerged. It related to the development and practice of previous abusive behaviors, and demonstrated their thoughts and ideas about the reasons and causes for their ideological change to non-abuse in their intimate relationships. This sections contains a description of interpretative analysis

*Interpretative Analysis*

Interpretation of the participants’ responses was performed from a hermeneutical perspective, which states that meaning is dependent on the cultural context of both the participant and the researcher. Interpretation then, was a practice in constructing reality based on the meaning as stated by the participant, and from the perspective of the researcher. It is never seen as absolute, but always as meaning made from a given perspective (Patton, 2002). Just as Gergen (1999) relates that all claims to ‘the real’ are traced to processes of relationship, and there is no extra-cultural means of ultimately privileging one construction of reality over another, the interpretation of the data gained within these interviews was constructed through my interactions with the participants. This was accomplished through listening and reacting to the personal histories and perspectives of each participant. As the interviews were completed analysis of individual narratives took place.

*Narrative analysis.* The use of narrative analysis to understand the stories that these men revealed within the interview process was helpful in discerning the themes of this study. These personal narratives shed light on the meanings of events and experiences that had served to construct and mold the participants as abusers. Patton
(2000) states that a clearer view of social and cultural meanings is produced through the analysis of stories and narratives. Patton writes, “The central idea of narrative analysis is that stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings” (p. 116). The narratives were analyzed for themes that highlighted similarities and differences among the stories. Themes and patterns that emerged from within the narrative content of each man’s story served to identify similarities of meanings that provided pertinent information about the lives of these men, the context of abuse to which they were exposed as victim and perpetrator and the incidents that were pivotal in their change.

The interview questions guided the direction of the interview but the participants led the way through their histories and experiences. As the researcher, I asked follow up questions to help expand my own understanding of the participants’ meaning and interjected questions from the list as they seemed pertinent to a point in the participants’ stories. As stated earlier, Potter’s (1996) assertion that fact implies truth and real occurrence while description does not, explains the inter-actional space between these two notions; the business of building up a description as fact in an effort to give voice to the knowledge and meaning of the data served as the milieu for the meanings derived from the study. The stories of the participants were accepted as fact, and within those stories, the descriptions of abuse and changed emerged.

The process of analysis included several complete readings of each transcript with notations made to identify meanings apparent within the dialog. As each of these meanings was identified it was color coded to indicate a general category. These categories changed and grew as additional dialog shed light on previous meanings. Ideas
and insights taken from my field notes provided additional information about the tone and meaning of the data. The transcripts were then compared with each other and lists of categories and themes were developed. Similarities were grouped together and differences were noted. As more transcripts were included the themes and categories were consolidated and condensed to form the prevalent thematic patterns that served as the framework for the findings. Further refinement of the themes and patterns was accomplished with the assistance of my advisor who helped clarify the significance of the data and to organize the framework.

Characteristics of general importance to qualitative research are reflected in the naturalistic quality of the inquiry, the interpretative analysis of the data and a multiple method approach to data gathering that allows for triangulation. The trustworthiness of the researcher also lends credibility to the conclusions of the research. Finally, a true respect for the people and the importance of the culture or phenomena that are the focus of the study are necessary. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 1998; Tutty, Rothery and Grinnell, 1996). The use of multiple methods of data collection and interpretative analysis of the data within this study has been achieved. I held a respect for the importance of the phenomena of domestic abuse and for the participants who agreed to share their stories with me as an overriding value throughout this study. The credibility of the research presented here, and myself as the researcher, are essential and a discussion of those issues follow.

Credibility

Establishing credibility in qualitative research is dependent on the trustworthiness of the researcher as the research instrument (Frankel & Devers, 2000b; Gerdes & Conn,
2001). Previously, I have presented my position within this research context and identified my beliefs and biases. Gerdes and Conn (2001) discuss several techniques that can be used to confirm the credibility of the researcher and therefore the data collected. Triangulation strategies that produce multiple views of the participants and the research data strengthen credibility. A discussion of the methods used to achieve triangulation follows along with descriptions of other measures of credibility.

**Triangulation**

Methodological triangulation is the use of different research methods such as interviewing, observation, and documentation to study different aspects of a single inquiry. Denzin (in Patton, 2002, p. 247) definitively states that methodological triangulation should be used in every investigation. Patton (2002) sees triangulation as adding strength to a study and as “ideal.”

*Multiple data sources.* Applying multiple methods of data gathering in qualitative studies enhances the depth of meaning that can be extracted. It allows for a multi-dimensional development of the information and can reveal causal factors that are incongruent (Patton, 2002). Multiple ways of extracting information would support construction of themes and patterns. This study utilized different methods of data gathering to achieve triangulation. a) Short interviews with the referral source for each participant served to ascertain the accuracy and trustworthiness of the participants’ statements. b) In-depth interviews, with the participants, where a semi-structured format that provided direction but allowed individual stories to emerge, revealed the personal reflections of the participants. Within the interviews, participants identified and described the critical incidents they experienced that served as catalysts for ideological
change. c) They were also asked to provide writing or other creative endeavors that reflected their process of change if that was available. d) Member checks were used to clarify the data and elicit reactions to emerging themes.

**Member checks.** A method of triangulation that increases the trustworthiness of the research data is member checking. The use of member checks is a means of providing clarification and explanation of the meaning of the data (Russell and Gregory, 2003). Gerdes and Conn (2001) indicate that member checks are a means to discover whether the findings “represent “truth” as it occurred for the participants and in their context.” Member checking was employed in this study. The participants were sent a copy of the transcripts from their interview along with the biography that was developed from the interview data and my observations during the interview. They were asked to read and provide feedback on the content of the transcripts and the biographies. I also included a draft outline of the themes that were emerging from the study and asked the participants to comment on their reactions to those themes. This strengthened the credibility of the findings and contributed to their analysis.

**Thick, Rich Description of the Findings**

Applicability or transferability of findings requires the use of detailed and thorough narratives that are descriptive of the context and the setting of the study (Frankel & Devers, 2000). Lincoln & Guba (1985) explain that the researcher must provide a ‘thick description’ of the data that may interest someone in replicating the study. Patton (2002) states that thick, rich description is foundational to qualitative study and allows the reader to experience the setting and to draw interpretations about the importance of the data. The findings of this study utilized the words of the participants to
bring vivid detail to the thematic framework used. As frequently as possible multiple examples of dialog were included to emphasize the emotional nature of the incidents described and the importance of these incidents to the participants. Merriam (2002) indicates that thick, rich descriptions of the participants stories presented in their own words increase the rigor or trustworthiness of the findings. The findings of this study present a striking an intense vision of the histories of these men and detail their journeys toward ideological change.

**Dependability**

Dependability and confirmability in qualitative research is best fulfilled through the development of an audit trail and further establishes the credibility of the research. This involves the performance of a ‘self-critical’ accounting of the research process (Searle, 1999). Merriam & Associates (2002) describe an audit trail as “dependent upon the researcher keeping a research journal or recording memos throughout the conduct of the study” (p. 27). Journal entries should include the researcher’s thoughts, questions and reflections about the data as it is obtained. Problems encountered, decisions made, and reasons for any changes to the original data collection method should also be included. This journaling should continue throughout the data collection and analysis processes (Merriam and Associates, 2002). I achieved an acceptable level of dependability and confirmability through the use of a detailed reflective journal as described above. It contained accounts of the people and places I contacted, pertinent identifying information about the participants, times and dates of interviews, telephone calls and meetings. It also included general thoughts and perceptions about the research process.
It was important to illustrate and clarify my own positionality within the research process as it progressed. Field notes and journaling provided a method of analysis of my thoughts and feelings as I went through the interview process. Detailed notes were written following each interview with the participants. These notes served as reminders of the tone atmosphere of the interviews and helped in depicting the character of the participants’ responses. Dependability was enhanced through eliciting participant comments after reading through the transcripts and biographies that were written. This provided a means of assuring accuracy and completeness of the meaning of their stories to them and to add additional thoughts if they choose to do so.

**Authenticity and Trustworthiness**

Authenticity and trustworthiness are characteristics of qualitative research that also strengthen the credibility of the study and of the conclusions drawn by the researcher. Patton (2002) describes trustworthiness and authenticity in relation to voice, perspective and reflexivity. Authentic analysis and reporting of data requires an awareness of the complexity of the data and openness to the direction taken by it. The researcher should honestly evaluate and analyze the data with any eye toward attaining a balance between objectivity and the inevitability that subjectivity will always affect the outcome of the research. An open, forthright attitude toward the researcher’s own position within the study paradigm and a willingness to allow the data to speak for itself without channeling toward a preconceived goal serves to lend a genuineness and increased credibility to the study. My goal for this study was to remain open to the stories of these men and to listen carefully for both the similarities and differences that became apparent through their narratives. Through the use of field notes and journaling I
was able to question the origin and meanings of their stories from their own perspectives and to recognize and attend to the effect that my own perspective may have had on the information. In order to maintain an authentic understanding of my positionality within this study, I included my personal data and an examination of my thoughts related to the area of domestic abuse. The final chapter of the study contains closing thoughts that explain my reactions and personal reflections to this intricate and emotional experience.

Additionally, the process of having referral sources identify potential participants proved helpful in providing a level of authenticity to my study in the form of verification that participants had indeed changed their perspectives about abuse and their views of women, from a source other than themselves.

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

This study was based on the assumption that change in abusive men is possible. Kauffman (2000) writes of the perspectives of pro-feminist men who have changed significantly in their ideology and have turned away from the belief that patriarchy is a fair or necessary social system. I believe that abuse can be abated through consciousness-raising efforts put forth by men and women. I made this clear to the participants within the interview sessions. Another assumption I held for this study was that change can takes place through a variety of rational and extra-rational processes that include critical reflection along with intuitive processes that can spring from emotional experiences and insights. Change can be enhanced by joining in communion with others in a learning environment. Finally, this study assumed that some men have been able to recognize and accept the inequality inherent in patriarchy and male privilege.
Limitations

Marshall and Rossman (1999) state that all research is limited in some manner. It is the researcher's responsibility to identify and discuss a study's limitations and the constraints placed upon any conclusions that are generated. The study should be clearly defined as to what it is capable of revealing and what it is not. A study is primarily limited by the conceptual framework and the design (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The design of this study included the use of a semi-structured interview process to determine the participant's experiences with abusive behavior, and a post interview review to ascertain the participant's thoughts and reactions to the interview process and the direction of the dialog. Patton, (2002) suggests that there are many possible limitations to data derived from interviews. These include "distorted responses due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, politics and simple lack of awareness…" (p. 306). The interviewee may also be affected by an error in recall, a positive or negative reaction to the interviewer and may employ self-serving responses to certain questions. Given the intimate and often secretive nature of domestic abuse, the occurrence of any of the above was possible. Ho

As the research instrument in this study, my ability as an interviewer affected the quality of the responses obtained. Additionally, my female gender, and experience in working with survivors of domestic abuse may have had an affect on the type and quality of responses. Patton (2002) states, "The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (p. 341). However, my experience in the professions of nursing and teaching has provided many opportunities to conduct in-depth interactions with people of all ages, lifestyles, socioeconomic classes and intellectual abilities. Much of the content has been intimate and problematic in nature.
However, as a female interviewer of men who have been abusive toward women, my gender may have limited the depth and accuracy of the information obtained. However, it is my belief that the men who participated in this study felt comfortable with my interview style and shared their stories honestly and thoughtfully.

The data generated by this study is rich and descriptive of the lives of the participants. It was limited by the willingness of the participants to speak truthfully about their process of change and by the bias that I as a female researcher who works to promote empowerment of women who have been abused bring to the process. With those limitations in mind I believe that the participants offered honest and heartfelt accounts of their stories and that I maintained an open and tolerant attitude toward the accounts of their abusive lives and their change.

This study was also limited by the lack of participation of the victims of the abuse described here. The female partners of these participants were not contacted. The design of the study was to elicit self-reporting of abuse and non-abuse. However, the partners’ voices would have lent a greater reliability to the truthfulness of the findings. A presentation of the findings obtained through the processes described here is presented in the next chapter.

Summary

In this chapter the methodology and research perspective used in this study were presented. Data collection and analysis methods were explained and the credibility of the researcher and the methodology were discussed. Limitations of the study were also presented.
This study was designed to illicit information about how men change their abusive behavior toward their partners and the meaning of that change to them as individuals and in relation to others. A qualitative research design that relied on a social construction perspective and utilized narrative analysis to produce themes and patterns related to the ideological change experienced by the participants was employed. The stories of these participants including thick, rich descriptions of their responses to questions about their abuse are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

Brief introductions of the participants are contained in this chapter. A presentation of the participant’s stories is necessary because domestic abuse is often embedded within the social structure of an individual’s family of origin and early experiences. An examination of the historical context of the lives of these individuals is helpful in attempting to understand their reasons and motivations for their abusive behaviors and serves as a meaningful foundation from which to explore their process of change.

The group of interviewees was diverse in age, educational level, profession, method of intervention and relationship status. Unfortunately, there was a total lack of racial diversity within the group. All the participants were White and of European descent. All were American by nationality. Differences in age ranged from 30 years to 63 years. The mean age of the participants was 45.6 years. The educational levels of the participants included two with master degrees, two with bachelor degrees, five high school graduates and one who recently obtained a GED and completed a practical nursing program. Professionally, the participants were equally diverse. The group included a journalist and ordained minister, an executive for a non-profit organization, several factory and maintenance workers, and an artist with a commercial studio. All but one of the participants were involved with an intervention program and six of those were ordered by the court to attend while three attended voluntarily. Currently, four of the men are continuing in their marriages with their victims with one recently remarrying his victim after a six-year divorce. One is divorced from his victim and married to a new
partner, four are separated from their victims – three awaiting divorce and the other unsure of the future status of his marriage. Two of the men awaiting divorce have new partners. Finally, one is divorced and lives alone.

**Telling Their Stories**

The findings of this study are based on the belief that the men I interviewed are telling the truth about the events, feelings and emotions they have experienced in their lives as viewed from their perspective. These men were all willing to tell their stories to me. They had the option to refuse to answer any question posed to them and to end the interview whenever they wished. With one exception, no one placed restrictions on topics or events that could be discussed. The open-ended nature of the questions I asked allowed the participants to decide what and how much information they wanted to share. The range of topics included in the questions was sufficient to touch on most aspects of their lives from their birth to the present day. In every interview, more information was offered than the questions asked. The men elaborated freely and many expressed concern about meeting my expectations concerning the quality of their answers. In all of the interviews, there was a genuine desire to provide thoughtful responses to the questions that were asked. If there were pertinent facts and events in their lives related to domestic abuse, that these men held back, it was not evident. One participant stated that he did not wish to elaborate on the subject of his multiple marital infidelities. That was the only refusal I encountered in the ten interviews.

In general, their demeanor was respectful to me as the researcher. Their interest in this study seemed genuine and many asked questions and offered opinions about the research process and aspects of domestic abuse. Several stated the willingness of their
spouses to speak with me to verify their stories and a few gave me personal writings that explained their thoughts and feelings related to their experiences. The personalities exhibited within the group were varied. There were men I would describe as gregarious, forceful, uncertain, passive, subdued, friendly, cautious and deliberate. When I contacted them for the second interview each asked about the study and how it was developing. Each also offered additional insight into categories that had been developed to present the data.

One disturbing aspect that I sensed in a few of the participants was the lack of statements expressing regret and concern about the affect of their abuse on their victims. Their descriptions of their abuse, which were often quite severe and explicit, were delivered in a dispassionate manner that I found unsettling. Four of the participants affected me that way, and two of those did show emotion when they spoke of the abuse they, themselves, suffered at the hands of their fathers. I did not doubt that all of the men acknowledged responsibility for their abuse but I questioned, in these four, their ability to empathize with their victims.

All but one of the men stated their willingness to allow the use of their real first names within the study. However, the names used here are pseudonyms and any other names mentioned by the men have been changed in the finished text.

The lives of the men interviewed for this study present a picture of abuse that is a dichotomy of cause and effect. There is much to lament in their histories and much to condemn. The questions of accountability and blame come to mind as the struggle between empathy for their suffering and outrage for their acts plays out. The majority of men in this study have been victims of abuse by those who were charged with loving and
nurturing them. Equally, they have been perpetrators of abuse that in some instances is
greater than what they suffered. Notably, they have struggled to change their lives for the
better and have been willing to share their experiences. The biographies are presented in
the order in which the participants were interviewed.

The Participants

Stephen

Stephen is 53 years old. He has a bachelor degree in health and physical
education, which he completed at age 42, and works in maintenance for an apartment
complex. He also coaches a boy’s soccer team for a private middle school. He has been
married once, divorced and has had his marriage annulled in the Catholic Church. He
has no children and lives alone.

Stephen is the second oldest in a family that originally consisted of six children,
three boys and three girls. After the death of his mother when the children were young,
Stephen’s father remarried a woman with three children to form a blended family. They
then had a daughter together. Stephen was twelve years old when his mother died of
cancer and he sees this event as one of the definitive points in his life.

His description of his emotional shutdown following the death of his mother and
his ultimate reawakening to his hurt and pain almost thirty years later speak to the depth
of fear and despair he experienced from the loss of this woman who loved him
completely.

Stephen had not visited his mother’s grave since the time of her funeral. While in
therapy at age 42, following an incident in which he was cited for drunk and
disorderly conduct, his therapist encouraged him to go to the cemetery in an effort
to acknowledge and face the feelings he had he had denied for years. He is
adamant in his belief that children who lose a parent need to be nurtured and encouraged to grieve for their loss. He identifies his years of emotional isolation as originating with this devastating event.

Stephen remembers his father, who died approximately ten years ago, as both physically and emotionally abusive to him as a child. He also recalls listening to his father physically and verbally abuse his mother when he was nine or ten years old, while he stood helpless to intervene. He feels that he received the worst of his father’s abuse toward the children but admits that his other siblings may not agree with him. He believes that his father may have been remorseful about his abusive behavior before his death, but it is only a belief and was not substantiated by an admission from his father. Stephen explains that he once, in the midst of dealing with his own abusive actions, asked his father why he had hit his wife and was told that it had never happened.

Stephen recalls his first romantic encounters with young women in high school and college as verbally abusive and controlling. He remembers hitting and slapping his high school girlfriend as well as the young woman he dated in college.

His marriage at the age of 27 was volatile and physically and emotionally abusive from the beginning with both partners exhibiting destructive behaviors. Stephen describes his wife as “cross-addicted to drugs and alcohol” and as “the hottest looking blonde I’ve ever seen in my life.” He was her second husband and he states that he “was going to save her, but then I was going to get her too.” The marriage lasted for four years but they separated after two. He never considered marrying again although he lived with two women on separate occasions after his marriage ended. One of these relationships lasted for ten years.
Stephen believes that his reluctance to remarry stemmed from his Catholic upbringing and he felt that, at some level, he was not free to remarry given the dictates of the Catholic Church. He has subsequently had his marriage annulled in the Church and is free to marry but continues to remain single by choice.

His description of his abusiveness within intimate relationships throughout his adult life is vivid and clearly reflects the nature of his negative and controlling behaviors. He sees his abusive history as reaching a peak within his marriage and then decreasing over the years until he stopped completely in a dramatic spiritual and religious experience that completely transformed his life. He describes this experience as “a milli-second in time” where he enters a “new life” that is dedicated to “…lead[ing] people to Jesus,” and to protecting unmarried women from becoming entangled in abusive relationships. His transformation took place during a conversation with a Christian fundamentalist who Stephen met through a professor who taught the last course he took to obtain his college degree.

This “milli-second in time” happened ten years ago and Stephen now lives a celibate life of quiet reflection and absolute devotion to Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church, and what he believes to be his calling to help women move away from abusive relationships. He has spoken at abuse information groups and has written an open letter to women from the viewpoint of an abusive man. In it he describes the escalating nature of a man’s need for control and abuse that leads to abuse (See Appendix B). He distributes this letter to women with whom he comes in contact in an effort to help them to avoid or leave an abusive relationship.
Stephen has spoken at a domestic abuse conference where he has read the speech he mentions above, and he teaches the young male athletes he coaches to honor and respect women. As he states, “No one leaves the [soccer] program without being taught that God created women holy, sacred, pure and innocent – almost untouchable.” In addition, to his religious beliefs and his dedication to helping women, he states that he reminds himself every day that, as a man, he is capable of abuse and abuse.

John

John is 55 years old and divorced for six years from his wife, who is his victim and the mother of his two grown children. He works in a manufacturing plant and has lived alone for the past seven years. John is a friendly and gregarious man who was very open and willing to discuss his history of abuse, which began in childhood and continued until his eventual arrest and incarceration followed by his wife's decision to divorce him.

John was the oldest son of four children. His father worked as a stockbroker and his mother was a homemaker. His description of his father's abuse both physical and emotional is stunning in its intensity. John portrays himself as the primary target of his father's abuse and he states that he would often take the blame for things he did not do to protect his other siblings.

John stated that his father physically abused his mother only on occasion, to his knowledge, but that his father would often aim cruel and demeaning remarks at her. He felt that he father’s physical abuse of her was in reaction to her attempting to intervene for the children but that, at times, she was the cause of a beating.

John's father's abusive acts were not limited to the physical. He often would demean and make snide comments about John in front of others. His father's anger was controlled in that he could interact with others at religious services, for example, where
he was seen as a model parishioner, and almost immediately after striking his children for a perceived infraction of desired behavior.

Despite the ongoing level of abuse that lasted until John left for the armed forces at age seventeen, he never retaliated against his treatment. He is able to speak of the good times that he experienced with his father and that he always wanted to make his father proud of him. He tells of learning how to fish from his father, and that he is a skilled angler who has won many contests. He credits his father for teaching him this sport. John described how, as a grown man, he felt compelled to visit often and to sit with his dying father and talk about the elder's accomplishments.

John states that he confronted his father about the abuse during that time and was disappointed to find that his father denied his abuse toward his children and told John that any difficulties he was having with his own wife and children were his problem. John spoke of physical and emotional abuse that he carried out against his own children as regrettable and that he has tried for the last several years to mend those relationships. He has a comfortable relationship with his son who lives nearby, but a strained one with his daughter.

John’s abuse of his wife began early in their marriage and continued to escalate with almost continual verbal and emotional abuse coupled with intermittent physical outbreaks. A change in the relationship began when his wife obtained a Protection from Abuse order (PFA). John’s reaction was shock and an overwhelming need to find his wife who had left their home. In describing this experience he expressed surprise that his wife had chosen this point in time to obtain a PFA when three months before this he had almost choked her to death, and she did not obtain an order then.
The turning point for John that helped to change his life came during a period of incarceration for his violation of the PFA order and a burglary charge for breaking into his home. His wife filed for divorce at that time and this, coupled with the prospect of serving jail time, prompted John to attempt suicide. He sees this period as the low point in his life. John was sentenced to three months in prison. During that time, John went to a Bible study group where he met someone who he credits as helping him to see inside himself.

After serving his sentence and an additional three months for again violating his PFA, he began attending a abuse intervention program where he learned to understand his behavior and to find ways to change it. He has now been divorced from his wife Anne, for six years. During that time, he has remained in contact with her and his children. John states that he has learned to deal with his anger and to understand that he had to change his beliefs and behaviors, not just for his wife and family, but also for himself.

He and Anne began dating a few years after the divorce and have recently remarried. He has continued to be involved with the intervention program he attended and volunteers there as a peer counselor to help others.

Art

Art is 60 years old and works as an executive for a major, non-profit organization. He is divorced from his wife of 21 years and with whom he had two children who are now grown. He is also married to his second wife, for the past 14 years, whom he credits as the catalyst for his change to non-abusive behaviors. He is an only child of parents who both came from large families. His father had a 4th grade education and worked in many jobs until settling into a plant manager’s position with a fuel company. His mother
was college educated and worked as a schoolteacher. Art describes his father as “… an alcoholic, but an alcoholic that didn’t miss a day’s work, he was one of those guys.” His mother taught elementary school for over 30 years.

Experiences with physical abuse as a child were related to his mother who “used to break yardsticks over my back when I was a kid.” His father was not abusive physically but Art stated that, “he had a vicious, vicious temper and an ugly glare, he didn’t need to use any physical abuse, you just wanted to stay away from him.” In a further description of his father’s personality Art said, “He was a very intimidating dark, somber, morbid kind of guy…” He was not fully involved in his son’s life.

Art describes his adult relationship with his parents as, “I wouldn’t say we were close.” His father died over 20 years ago and in contrast to his description, his mother now lives nearby and he sees her almost daily, checking in to see if she needs anything.

The physical abuse he endured at the hands of his mother did not have the same impact as his father’s non-physical abusive behaviors. He stated that he understood on some level that the abusive and controlling ways in which he, himself, interacted with his children and his wives were related to his upbringing -- the effects of his experiences with his father, and the social culture he grew up in. He said he felt entitled to treat his family in the same manner.

Art married his first wife while he was in graduate school and had two children. The marriage was punctuated by frequent moves throughout the country in pursuit of better employment opportunities. Additionally, Art’s wife was devoutly religious whereas he had what he called a “love-hate relationship with the Church.” The couple became involved with a priest through a program within the Catholic Church dedicated to
improving marriages and promoting family life. This priest was responsible for the
development of a retreat center for families in a rural setting. The priest needed assistance
in the administration and management of the center. Art and his family moved to the
center and worked there for three years. He viewed this experience as positive in many
ways but also a strain on his marriage. It was during this period that he and his wife grew
further apart. His wife served as an education coordinator for the center during their time
there and decided to pursue a master’s degree in pastoral counseling. The family decided
it was time to leave and they moved to a different location in the same State where Art
found a position with his current employer and his wife pursued her studies. Throughout
this time his abusive nature was still an issue.

When the opportunity for a promotion for Art presented itself, it involved
another move and his wife said that she was not willing to follow him. It was the end of
the marriage although they did not divorce for two more years. Art’s children were in
high school at the time and he worked hard to remain involved in their lives.

Art met his second wife at a support group for adult children of alcoholics. He
began to attend meetings as a means of discovering his role in the demise of his first
marriage. Difficulties in his second marriage surfaced because both he and his second
wife struggled with volatile tempers. They both attended counseling and Art believes
maturity and hard work on the part of both has allowed them to achieve a sense of
harmony in their relationship. However, he credits his wife for having the strength to
force the issues of change that needed to take place within their marriage. She heard
about the men’s intervention program that Art attends and insisted that he become
involved in the group.
Art has continued to attend the program sessions regularly for the past four years. He states that he has learned much from the members of the group as well as from the director for whom he holds a deep respect. He believes that he is able to communicate openly with his wife and that they resolve issues immediately rather than letting them escalate. He recognizes that he still has some issues with control and continues to work on them. When asked if he felt that he would have been interested in changing his beliefs and actions without her encouragement, he said that he is not sure he would have; but is adamant that, had he known how good he would feel, he would have wanted to do it for himself.

*Ken*

Ken is 51 years old and currently separated from his wife of twenty-three years. She is his victim. He holds a master degree in journalism and writes for an international news service. Additionally, he is an ordained minister who has asked to be released from his ministerial vows as an outcome of his current situation, which involves his abusive relationship with his wife and an adulterous liaison that has prompted his marital separation. Ken is articulate and introspective as he relates his story. He begins with his childhood as the oldest child of an intact family where his father was a dominant and repressive figure who reigned terror on his wife and two sons. Ken’s father was an immigrant who worked hard to become prosperous and was successful in doing so. Ken relates that his father was extremely intelligent and was fluent in five languages. He was a driven executive who had a “Type A” personality. His father worked incessantly to achieve professional success moving the family frequently throughout the U.S. and to Europe in search of suitable promotions. Ken recalls that through the majority of his
school years he moved almost yearly. He sees this as partially responsible for his lack of close friends and his tendency to distance himself, even from his family.

Ken’s mother was born and raised in Texas. She grew up poor but completed a college degree with the help of a scholarship. She was very religious and Ken believes the attraction she felt toward his father was the result of a rebellious phase and the desire to save this agnostic and teach him the true way. Clashes about religion between his parents were a frequent part of a relationship that Ken believes was not close or supportive. Ken’s mother did not try to protect her sons from their father’s abuse but would often serve as an emotional rescuer afterward. She also provided the impetus for their abuse at times by telling their father about their bad behaviors for which they would feel their father’s wrath. Ken views himself as needing to be rescued by women and sees this aspect of his personality as a result of his relationship with his mother.

He describes himself as reacting differently to the dynamics of his family than his brother who was “more real, more human” than he sees himself. His brother dealt with his abuse issues through drugs and alcohol and died at age 34 from an overdose. Ken isolated himself from his feelings and emotions as a child as a means of dealing with his father’s demeaning verbal and physical abuse.

His relationship with his brother was not a close one. He describes himself as a “mean big brother.” As an adult he recognized his brother as more open in his nature but felt unable to match it with generosity of his own. He felt devastated by his brother’s death and the lost opportunity to really connect with him. He still feels this loss acutely and continues to bear the responsibility for the lack of closeness with his only sibling.
Ken’s anger at his father manifested itself many times in his adult life and resulted in blistering rages aimed at his parents. He describes episodes of his vengeful anger.

Yeah, I also was pretty aggressive in later years to my dad. I trashed a few Christmas holidays intentionally in public outbursts that humiliated everybody…

Sure, give the son of a bitch a little fraction of what he did to me. There’s nothing like trashing a $300-400 dollar dinner…It just is a temptation that I didn’t resist about three or 4 times in a row.

After he married his relationship with his father did improve although he believes that his father never really forgave him for his outbursts stating that, “I really warmed up to my dad… I don’t know if he warmed up to me, but I warmed up to him.”

Ken views himself as “not a likeable guy” who causes problem for others. He recognizes that his estimation of himself is linked to the messages he received from his father as he was growing up but is unable at this point to change his estimation of himself. He is a very intelligent man with a vast knowledge of history, literature and world events. He is also very self-deprecating and charming. He freely admits that he needs caring and attention from women and frequently chastises himself for his weaknesses.

In describing his early relationships with women he spoke, about a high school relationship that was sexual but not abusive, with regret because he knew that the girl had deeper feelings for him than he had for her. “I thought about her liking me and it kind of bugged me.” There was also a brief relationship in college that was enjoyable and mutually affectionate. He remembers this young woman fondly.
Ken met his wife in graduate school and they dated for approximately two years before marrying. His wife had a 2-year old child from a previous marriage. He states that although the relationship was initially positive that upon reflection it was a mistake from the start. He feels that guilt related to premarital sex, his wife’s child and his perceived expectation that he should settle down at the age of 28 played a role in his decision to marry. Ken states his abuse of his wife and the affair that was the impetus for this current separation are related to his childhood family experiences in that he feels that his wife is similar to his father in personality.

Ken relates that he was physically abusive to his wife early in their marriage. He is clear in his acceptance of responsibility for his abuse, and that he voluntarily attended a domestic abuse intervention program about 15 years ago and has not been physically abusive since that time. He has however continued to use verbal and psychological abuse in the form of belittling and degrading words and behaviors. His wife eventually sought counseling from a domestic abuse center. She asked about programs to help men and was given the name of the program that Ken now attends. He feels that he has made good progress in understanding his abusive nature and the state of his relationship with his wife but believes that his wife is not happy with the outcome of his attending this program because it has not produced her hoped for outcome of an ideal husband. Rather, he has begun to examine his life and marriage in earnest.

Ken’s story is complicated and reaches beyond the issues of abuse. The concerns related to his feelings of incompatibility with his wife, and the continuing problems caused by an affair with a married woman that he simultaneously wants to break off and longs to continue, serve to create a multi-faceted environment for his struggle to change
and grow. Ken is aware of his need to make decisions about his future that will not cause emotional pain to those around him. He feels at sea in the spectrum of relationships in which he is involved, and is finding that his conservative religious beliefs have not provided the help and comfort he seeks in dealing with his abusive behaviors. He also feels at odds with the progressive secular community that he is currently embracing as a result of help he is receiving through the men’s program he attends and through private psychotherapy. This tension has brought him to the deep examination of his beliefs and the state of indecision about the future direction of his life in which he now finds himself.

Matthew

Matthew is 42 years old. He is married for the past eight years and has one six-year old son. He grew up in a family of four children as the youngest by more than 10 years. His family lived in California during his early childhood where there were many members of his father’s extended family who played significant roles within the family dynamics. In particular, his paternal grandfather was a large and important figure. His grandfather was Harvard educated and a minister of some repute who was at times loving to his son but could become very punitive and punishing if provoked. There is a long family history extending back to the 1600’s on both sides of Matthew’s family. He has been privy to many stories about his relatives and has been able to glean the tenor and substance of his ancestry and how it relates to issues in his own life.

Matthew recalls two main events of significance from his childhood. The first is the death of his grandfather when he was six and the other was a move to Virginia about three years later. His grandfather’s death was difficult for Matthew’s father whose relationship with the elder seemed to be a blend of awe and resentment. His father often
confided in Matthew, as a young child, and would tell him stories about his own childhood and relationship with his father.

Matthew’s two older brothers, who experienced affection and support from their grandparents, more so than their parents, began to abuse alcohol and possibly drugs. With the backdrop of the late 1960s counter-culture movement that took root in California at that time, his older brothers, then in their late teens, were viewed by their father as a potential negative influence on the younger son. His father decided to remove him from this negative environment and abruptly moved the family, including Matthew, his father, mother, sister and grandmother to Virginia.

For Matthew, life in Virginia was filled with a vague sense of loss and he states that he as well as his sister never felt comfortable or accepted in this new location. He lived there until he went away to college at eighteen. Matthew studied art in college and is a commercial artist, working with iron. He creates artwork for sale to galleries and through his own studio.

Matthew recalls, as a young child, that his father was prone to emotional outbursts that were somewhat unpredictable. He remembers being hit and spanked out of anger by his father but believes as the youngest sibling by a number of years he was spared the serious abuse that his brothers received at his father’s hands.

His mother neither approved nor intervened in the actions of his father toward the children. Matthew described her role in the family as one of “acquiescence” and attributes the family’s tendency toward maintaining secrecy to his mother. He stated that, “My mother might say, we feel this way but I don’t want you to go out and tell
Matthew has a comfortable relationship with his mother in the present day, but he is aware of her influence on his feelings toward women.

Matthew had two relationships prior to meeting his wife. There was a brief connection with a woman while he was in college and another after college with a woman who was five years older than he was. Neither relationship was physically abusive but he believes that they were emotionally abusive in that he broke off contact with the first without any explanation, and hid his feelings from the second until the point when he broke off the relationship in an angry outburst.

Matthew met his wife after finishing college. He states there was no verbal or emotional abuse for the first year of their relationship. During a trip to Europe there were several times when Matthew spoke to his then girlfriend in a condescending and, as he now describes, “paternalistic” manner. He knew that he had hurt her but felt entitled to his resentment of her, and what he saw as an intrusion on his personal life from someone that was not capable of appreciating the world in the manner that he could. He now sees the error in his thinking and has found a respect and esteem for his wife’s strengths and talents.

Since their marriage, Matthew describes episodes of anger and frustration. He would shout and throw things, which upset his wife. He would also show “contempt” for her verbally. After the birth of their son, Matthew left his job and opened a shop/studio where he designs and creates iron pieces. He was able to care for their child while his wife worked. There were additional stresses placed on the marriage through this arrangement. Matthew saw his ‘stay at home’ status as a “humbling experience” and “humiliating at times.” He would become extremely frustrated and vent his anger on
inanimate objects that he would destroy. His wife expressed concern about his behaviors but he contended that it was something he could control. The escalation of abuse against his wife culminated one night in overt abuse where he became enraged by her verbal and then physical attempts to force him to communicate, and he hit her in the face. Her nose bled and both eyes were bruised. He realized at that point that he was unable to control his anger alone and that he needed help in changing his behavior. He began to attend an intervention program for men. He has been a part of the program for almost 4 years and continues to attend on a weekly basis. Matthew relates that he has also used physical abuse with his young son by slapping him on the head and face. He has worked to understand why he becomes so frustrated and how to help both himself and his son to control their angry outbursts.

Matthew credits the program he attends with helping him to deal with his problematic feelings, particularly to understand the distinction between guilt and shame. He feels accepted by this group, which has had a positive effect on his self-esteem. He has also made use of the writings of Thomas Moore, Eric Erickson and Lao Tzu to reveal aspects of his spiritual self and move toward self-acceptance. He has written some thoughts and ideas about the process of transition and about the narcissism that was a part his family makeup, particularly that of his father and himself (See Appendix B). He believes that he is able to deal with his anger and frustration 90% of the time now and continues to work to improve his relationship with his wife and son.

Brian

Brian is 41 years old and works in a large manufacturing plant. He is separated from his wife who is his victim and is awaiting a divorce. He has two young sons who
live with his wife and her new partner. Brian sees his sons regularly, usually once during the week and every other weekend. He and his wife were married for nine years and have been separated for the past three. Brian hopes that the financial issues that are holding up the divorce will be completed soon.

Brian is the oldest of four boys. He describes his early life as “rough” and he remembers periods of abuse between his mother and father when he was younger. He believes their relationship improved after a time but that they continued to use physical abuse with Brian and his next oldest brother more so than their younger two boys.

Brian recalls that his parents continued their abuse toward him into his high school years. His parents divorced when his was 21 years old. He describes this event as being “hard on all of us.” Both parents are alive and remarried. Brian has never discussed his abuse as a child with his parents stating that. “If it’s in the past, keep it in the past.” He has good relationships with them now and they have been supportive of him through his divorce process.

Brian remembers five or six relationships with women in the past twenty years including his marriage. He states that none were abusive with the exception of his marriage. There were two incidents of overt abuse within the marriage that Brian recalls. The first occurred after he returned home from a ball game with his son. His wife did not seek any help after this first incident. The next episode of physical abuse occurred a few months later. This time his wife called the police. Brian was told to leave the home and a Protection from Abuse order (PFA) was filed against him. He was court-ordered to attend a abuse intervention program.
They were legally separated for six-months after this incident followed by a six-month period of reconciliation. During this time they purchased a computer at his wife’s request. Both he and his wife participated in Internet chat rooms and his wife began a relationship with someone she met through the Internet. Brian sees the computer, and subsequently this infidelity, as playing a large and important role in the demise of his marriage. His wife’s desire to own a computer and her participation in Internet chat rooms led to her relationship with the man with whom she currently lives. Brian believes that if they had not bought a computer they might still be married.

We actually had a very good marriage going. I mean we were making things work. I mean if there was ever a problem, we were always talking it out. And no matter what she says today and no matter what other people …would say, it all fell apart after we got the computer.

Again, during this period of reconciliation, Brian relates that he and his wife had a volatile argument over money where his wife assaulted him. He called the police and she was made to leave the home for the night. The next day his wife filed for divorce. An additional verbal attack by Brian prompted his wife to file for another PFA. Brian left the home at that point and has not returned. His wife now lives in the home with her new partner. After a period of time the PFA was altered to allow Brian to see his children and the terms of the PFA have now expired.

Brian believes that relationships between men and women should be equal partnerships where there is honesty and fairness present. He is anxious to have his divorce declared final and he hopes to eventually enter into another relationship with a woman. For now, his is concentrating on taking care of himself. When asked about
forgiveness for his wife and himself he stated that he believes that he has changed significantly and does not need to “resort to abuse to get what I want.” As for forgiving his wife he feels that he will not be able to do that for a long time, if ever. “It’s going to be a long time before I can say I forgive you to her. Because she has done me wrong so much, so many times… I’ll probably be on my deathbed when I say that to her.”

Brian attends meetings at his intervention program at least monthly. He sees the program as an outlet for his frustrations and concerns. He respects the co-directors of the program and believes that they have been instrumental in assisting him to improve his life and to diffuse his anger. He hopes that he can help other men to find ways to change themselves. He handles feelings of anger now by stopping to consider the consequences before lashing out at someone. He has been successful in avoiding incidents and has not been abusive to anyone since the last incident with his wife.

Larry

Larry is 48 years old and is separated from his wife and victim. He is awaiting a final divorce decree and currently lives with a new partner. He grew up in a family of six children. His father was married several times. Larry’s mother was his third wife but they were married for twenty years until his mother sought a divorce. The family was extremely dysfunctional with harsh and oppressive physical and verbal abuse that was ongoing throughout his childhood.

Larry described his father as a “functioning alcoholic” who was consistently abusive to his wife and children. Larry believes that physical abuse and abuse fueled by alcohol was frequently a part of the community culture in which he lived as a child.
Larry’s experiences in elementary school were punctuated by behavioral problems including fights with other children and an assault on a teacher that ended in his expulsion from school in the fourth grade. Psychological evaluations were inconclusive and no real intervention was offered. He began a life on the streets at the age of thirteen. Although he would return to his home from time to time for short periods after that, his chaotic lifestyle consisted of various arrests, for burglary, assault and alcohol and drug offenses. His parents were alternately supportive, in that his father would defend him to parole officers and in court, and overtly abusive in their use of abuse and neglect.

Larry’s story reveals multiple layers of abuse and neglect, criminal behaviors, betrayal by family members, addictions and poor social adaptation that span at least two generations – his parents and his own. Despite the depth and intensity of the abuse Larry experienced during his childhood he is rather philosophical about what has happened to him. He believes he has a better understanding of the reasons for his parent’s abuse and feels that he has forgiven them.

Larry’s use of abuse has been pervasive throughout his life. He has been jailed several times starting at the age of thirteen until age thirty-eight. During that time he has lived a life filled with drinking, drug use, unemployment or underemployment, and numerous run-ins with the police. He was surrounded by a culture of abuse and hard living individuals. He treated women as objects and used force and abuse to get what he wanted from both men and women. He was married to his wife for twenty years and had four children during this time.

In February of 2000, Larry became aware of an affair that his wife began with a man who was married to her friend. Larry threatened and assaulted his wife and the neighbors
called police. He was arrested and a temporary PFA was granted. His wife, went to court shortly afterward and asked to have the PFA removed stating that she needed Larry to work and support the family. The assault charges were not dropped and Larry hired a lawyer to represent him. He was forced to sell his Harley-Davidson motorcycle to pay for the costs incurred. The charges were decreased to harassment and he was not incarcerated. He states that this incident was his last involvement with the law and that both he and his wife stopped drinking following this incident. Larry has not had any alcohol or illegal drugs in the past ten years.

His wife’s affair and subsequent departure from their marriage were extremely difficult for Larry. He sees this time as the impetus for what he feels is a major change in his life.

Following psychiatric evaluation and treatment for depression Larry began a 26-week abuse intervention program on a voluntary basis. He completed the program over 4 years ago and continues to participate on a regular basis. He has developed a close therapeutic relationship with a counselor in the program. His wife continues to live with her new partner. Initially Larry began the program with the hope that he would be able to reconcile with his wife. As he states, “I was in love with my wife. Just because I was abusive doesn’t mean that I don’t love her…I wanted a reconciliation.” As he advanced through the program he came to realize that his marriage was over. He harbored anger for his wife’s new partner for a number of years but has not acted on it and feels that many of those angry feels have dissipated completely within the last year.

Larry has recently entered a new relationship. He is awaiting a final divorce decree. He has high hopes for the success of this relationship with a woman he met in
nursing school. He feels that at the present time he is more committed than she is but he is hoping that they will grow closer. Nonetheless, he is dedicated to treating this new love with respect and paying attention to her needs as much as possible. He sees his children regularly and has just graduated from a practical nursing program. He hopes to find employment in nursing in the near future.

Chris

Chris is 30 years old and is a supervisor in a large manufacturing company. He is the oldest of four sons born to parents who have been deaf since birth. Chris’s youngest brother was born the same week that another brother died. There have always been three boys in the family. Chris describes his life with his parents as isolating. He feels that he missed having a mother presence in his life. He describes his father as outgoing and involved but his mother was unable to give him the nurturing that he needed. Chris understands his parents, especially his mother’s difficulty with a sense of community and personal closeness. He describes her childhood as very detached. She attended a school for the deaf and rarely went home to visit her family.

The accepted philosophy about deafness at the time his parent’s grew up was that they needed to lip read and to be involved in the hearing community. Sign language, except among the deaf themselves, was to be discouraged. His mother’s parents never learned to sign and so communication with their daughter was kept necessarily to a minimum. As changes in the deaf community emerged and American Sign Language became the preferred method of communication life improved for many deaf people and their families. However for Chris’s mother the damage had been done.
The lost sense of family for her was transferred to her children. Chris describes his relationship with his parents as comfortable today, although he spent much of his young life attempting to distance himself from them. As an adolescent, he believes that he grew up quickly in order to disconnect himself from his family. He spends time with his father often, and his mother is somewhat more involved with her grandchildren, who are learning to sign, than she had been with her own children.

Chris does not recall witnessing severe abuse between his parents as a child. He describes his father as being “aggressive” with his mother and frustrated at times in his attempts to control her or to stop her from hurting herself. Chris does describe abuse by his father toward others. One was his female property owner. He was cited for this incident but not arrested.

He also said that his father was controlling in that he made the decisions about money and life style, although he felt that his mother was not averse to his manner of control. Chris believes that his mother’s lack of connection with her own parents and what he sees as a basic lack of intelligence necessitated her husband’s controlling manner. Chris does not feel that he was excessively controlled by his father and he does not see himself as a victim of abuse. He explains that he distanced himself from his family as much as possible while he was growing up. He believes he did that because of the lack of nurturing present in the home and because he was somewhat embarrassed by their life of relative poverty in an area where others in the community had more.

Chris described three intimate relationships of importance in his life. The first he describes as not physically abusive. It was however, emotionally abusive as Chris states he was addicted to gambling at the time as well as being a heavy drinker. He was also
what he describes as “overbearing” in that he tried to do too much to further the relationship. He agreed that the word “smothering” was the best description of his behavior. “I wanted to make everything perfect and sugar coat it and red roses and the whole 10 yards.” Chris does describe an incident of physical abuse toward the person with whom his girlfriend cheated. The relationship ended at that point. Chris was nineteen years old.

His second important relationship was with his wife who is ten years older than Chris is. She had two school-aged daughters. They dated for four years before marrying and there was no physical abuse prior to the marriage although Chris describes some mutual mental abuse in that, “she wasn’t caring enough. She wasn’t considerate towards me…” Chris’s mental abuse consisted of lying to her about having quit smoking when he really hadn’t. After they were married things went well at first, but Chris has some skepticism about being married that he did not share with his wife. “I didn’t feel like I could share that with her…She was so co-dependent and I was probably codependent or something…” Episodes of physical abuse began amidst arguments that started when Chris began having an affair.

Problems related to Chris’s ongoing affair escalated. Chris was lying frequently to his wife and she was especially sensitive to this behavior because her first husband had also cheated on her. During a two-year period his wife sought and obtained two PFA orders against him. He continued his relationship with the other woman who became pregnant with his child. He lived alternatively with his parents, his wife and his girlfriend during that period. During a time of reconciliation with his wife he still remained involved with his girlfriend under the premise that he wanted to be involved in his
newborn son’s life. He had frequent contact with the child and often brought him home where his wife assisted with the baby’s care. Chris continued to lie to his wife about the other relationship leading her to believe that his only contact with the other women was about the child. In fact he was continuing an intimate relationship with her. Chris was attending marriage counseling sessions with his wife when the suggestion was made that both he and his wife contact the local abuse intervention program. They did so and as Chris began his program he soon came to realize that he needed to leave his wife and legitimize his relationship with his girlfriend and their son. The incident that resulted in his arrest occurred as he was leaving his wife and moving in permanently with his girlfriend.

When asked about a turning point that led to his acknowledgment of his abuse. He states that his incarceration after his arrest served as the catalyst for his decision to change his ways. Chris then began his abuse intervention program in earnest. He came to understand that he had begun to justify his abuse. He credits the program with helping him to fully understand what he has done and to accept the fact that he needed to stop lying to himself and others, and especially to be honest with his wife. He believes he began the program with a willingness to accept what was being taught within the program but that it took 3-4 months for him to realize that he needed to accept responsibility for his actions and to communicate truthfully with his wife.

During the program, he was placed on probation for assault charges against his wife related to the above incident. His girlfriend became pregnant with his second child and he finally told his wife the complete truth. His relationship with his wife now is cooperative as they complete divorce proceedings. He is happy living with his girlfriend.
and his children. He describes his present relationship as mutually supportive. He tries hard to talk with his partner about the interactions between them and to take responsibility for his thoughts and behaviors. He believes that he should not spank his children and works to find ways to diffuse situations when he realizes he is becoming angry.

Chris continues to attend sessions at the intervention program and often offers insight to newer members of the group. He hopes to someday become more involved as a counselor to abusive men. A primary goal of his is to be a loving and supportive father to his children.

Brandon

Brandon is 33 years old. He has four daughters and has been married to his wife for 11 years. This has been his only intimate relationship. It began at the age of 17 and the couple married when Brandon was 19. Brandon is a friendly and articulate man with a high school education. He is very personable and worked for a number of years in a family owned car dealership where he assumed many roles from detailing cars to sales and customer service. He was unusually successful in sales and worked long hours for more than ten years before deciding that he needed to find work that would be less stressful and time consuming. He now works in assembly for a Harley-Davidson manufacturing plant and is much happier.

Brandon’s family of origin was “a pretty bad family.” He is the youngest, with three older sisters. His parents divorced when he was ten but he witnessed physical abuse between his parents before that. He also describes all the members of his family as “controlling.” As an example of this Brandon relates that his sister and her husband who
own the car dealership where he worked and have not spoken to him since he decided to leave two years ago.

After the divorce he lived with his mother for a short time and then with his father as a young adolescent. He recalls mentally and emotionally abusive behavior, as well as physical abuse, from his father and new wife toward him during that time. His relationship with his father at present is “touch and go.” Brandon’s recollection of his early childhood and the abuse that he recalls is punctuated with phrases that indicate he has difficulty with the emotions it evokes. He states several times when speaking about his father’s abuse toward his mother and the abuse he suffered as a child that “…a lot of that is blocked out. I don’t want to dwell on it.” He did recall receiving beatings and other forms of abuse during his childhood at the hands of his father but states that the more hurtful abuse was psychological. Brandon recalls a situation living with his dad and step-mom.

An additional description of what Brandon perceived as his father’s punitive behavior toward his son was a requirement to pay $100 per month for rent during his high school years. The requirement was not due to need but to his father’s belief that he needed to learn responsibility.

Brandon has never directly confronted his father about his abuse. He states that his sisters have approached their father about the abuse they suffered but “…they were shunned.” He believes that his father was physically abusive to his mother and isolated her from her family throughout their marriage. He states that he never knew his grandparents or aunts and uncles from his mother’s family. He also believes that his father has been abusive to his second wife but he did not witness this abuse.
According to Brandon his father hasn’t recognized his behavior as abusive and so he continues to interact in this familiar manner. He believes that it would be fruitless and a little exasperating to speak with his father about his childhood or try to discuss the feelings that were a part of his growing years because it would not produce a change. Brandon believes that he has moved beyond the hurt inflicted by his father for the most part. His father’s manipulative and controlling nature is the reason Brandon maintains a superficial relationship with him.

Recalling his early relationship with his wife Brandon describes it as abusive although he never hit her. He said that he was very jealous and possessive which he attributes to his insecurity in the relationship. He would vent his anger and frustration on inanimate objects for example, pounding on his car. His belief was that as long as he wasn’t hitting her it wasn’t abusive. He held that belief for years until he became involved with the domestic abuse intervention program that he still attends. Brandon describes an emotionally wrenching situation for himself and his then girlfriend where he believes his abusive behavior was very destructive to her. He attributes his father’s manipulative actions concerning this situation as the catalyst for his abuse, which occurred as a result of a teenage pregnancy. Brandon’s father urged him to push his girlfriend to have an abortion. He believes that the pressure he put on his girlfriend in response to his father’s coercive remarks was the cause of a miscarriage.

Brandon’s wife became pregnant again the next year and they married. He states that he was “very controlling about pretty much everything” from the beginning of their marriage. He would belittle his wife and frequently lose his temper at shout at her and the
children. However he was never physically abusive until an incident of severe abuse that occurred when he confronted his wife with his suspicion that she wanted to leave him.

It was after this incident that he began an abuse intervention program. At the start of the program, a video was shown that depicted the actions of a typical abuser. Brandon recognized his own actions in the behaviors depicted on the screen and feels that watching the video marked the beginning of his realization that he was responsible for his own abuse and needed to change.

Brandon completed the program and his marriage is much better. He and his wife communicate frequently and share feeling and concerns. He has asked his wife to explain to him how she felt when he was abusive to her in the past and has acknowledged responsibility for his past abuse. He continues to try to understand how his behavior affects others. Brandon volunteers as a peer counselor at the intervention program he attended on a weekly basis. He is enthusiastic about helping other men to stop their abusive behaviors. He also recognizes the hard work that is required to do so and understands that many of the men he works with are not for change.

Greg

Greg is 43 years old and is married to his victim for eighteen years. They have three children together. Greg works at a dairy manufacturing plant. He is a high school graduate and had plans to attend college after high school but his applications were never completed and he did not pursue it further. He said that he regrets that now. However, he feels that he has been able to provide a good life financially for his family with the help of his wife who also works. Greg is a quiet but friendly man who was willing to openly share the events of his life.
Greg states that his parents were not abusive to him and that he felt relatively comfortable during his childhood. His parents divorced when he was young and he lived primarily with his mother and spent summers with his father although there was a period of a few years when he stayed with his grandparents. Both parents are remarried and his mother is divorced for a second time. Some physical abuse and punitive actions on the part of his stepmother marked the summers he spent with his father. He felt that she did not like him but he doesn’t see this as particularly troublesome. “She’d chase me around the yard with a switch. I don’t think she liked me much.” Despite this treatment, he stated that his father would take him to work a lot where he played with the boss’s son. Greg does not see the lack of affection from his stepmother as particularly troublesome in his early life.

After graduation from high school Greg’s mother and her husband moved to California and he remained behind. He lived with his grandparents for a while then began a relationship with an older woman with whom he lived for approximately two years. The relationship was problematic due to the age difference. Greg would occasionally spend time with friends his own age and at times would become involved with younger women. The woman with whom he lived, unless there was evidence that these casual relationships were becoming more serious, usually accepted this. There would then be arguments where she would threaten to end the relationship with Greg. At those times, Greg related that he would become abusive as a result of his fear that she would leave him. The physical abuse included shoving, slapping and hair pulling.

Toward the end of this relationship, Greg met his future wife. He left the relationship and returned to his grandparents to live. He and his wife dated for four years
before they were married. That period was punctuated by three or four incidents of physical abuse. Greg describes an incident where an argument began over his wife’s relating the circumstances of her prior romantic relationships. At one point Greg pressed her for more information about a particular person in her past and she would offer nothing further. This angered him and he pulled the car into her parent’s driveway and dragged her from the car by her hair. He was extremely remorseful for that incident but he relates that he did not always apologize for other incidents of abuse. Nevertheless, the abuse did diminish for the remainder of their courtship.

He states that their marriage was happy much of the time during the first years. He became more demanding and controlling as the pressures of difficulties at his job and raising three small children began to take its toll. Greg felt that his wife was not giving him the comfort and attention that he needed. The situation became every serious when after discussions with co-workers his wife learned that most of the married women she spoke to were not having sexual intercourse with their husbands on a daily basis as had always been the habit of she and Greg. She began to feel Greg was taking advantage of her and started to resist the practice of daily sex. Greg reacted very negatively to this change and began forcing this issue. He states that, “I raped her two or three times.”

The relationship continued to deteriorate and his wife began staying out late after she finished work. She would often come home at 3 am after leaving work at 11pm. Greg suspected an affair but she denied it. There was an incident of severe abuse one night, and his wife called the police Greg was forced to leave the home and a PFA order was activated. It was during this time that Greg was given a book to read about domestic abuse. His brother-in-law who had dealt with his own abuse in the past gave it to him.
Greg read the book and saw himself within the descriptions of the abusive behaviors and the cycle of abuse.

He was initially devastated by this knowledge and wanted to find a way to change his behaviors. He began a court ordered intervention program and started to deal with his own abuse. The state of his marriage was unclear and his wife finally admitted that she was having an affair. The couple eventually reconciled and Greg has continued his affiliation with his intervention group. He now serves as a peer counselor and attends meetings, usually every two weeks.

There was one incident of child abuse that occurred after the marriage was reconciled. Greg describes this incident as accidental but Children and his daughter’s school contacted Youth Services and he was forced to leave the home for one week. He was urged to complete the entire abuse intervention program again and he did so, reluctantly at first. He states now that he understands the need for him to do this. He is much more aware of his actions with his children and strives to provide appropriate guidance and discipline.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine how abusive men learned to become non-abusive toward their intimate female partners, and to identify the kinds of changes in their understanding of abuse, women, and society that have caused them to stop their abusive behaviors. In-depth interviews were conducted over a six-month period with ten men. These men self-identified as having experienced an ideological change in their beliefs about abuse as well as having ceased their abusive behaviors. The truth of their claims was verified by the referral sources. They were primarily involved as counselors or directors of abuse intervention programs for men. The referral sources identified present or former clients who they believed met my criteria.

The findings are presented through direct quotations from the interview transcripts. This type of data reporting allows the reader to hear the voices of the participants as they describe the incidents, ideas and feelings that depict their lives of abuse and the changes that have led to cessation of abusive behaviors.

The findings produced by this study are organized into two primary categories of information as self-reported by the ten study participants. These are, 1) Abuse as an Ideology, which includes the abuse experienced as victims and perpetrated as abusers; and 2) An Ideological Change from Abuse, which examines the context, provocation and mechanism for ideological change. Within these categories several sub-categories exist that provide a complex depiction of abuse, both experienced and committed, in the lives of the participants and the motive and process of ideological change that allowed these
men to end their abusive behaviors. It is important to acknowledge the abuse experienced and committed by the participants in this study, as a means of situating them within the context of abuse. It was apparent that in their minds a decisive element of their ability to change their behaviors was the need to take ownership of their past. The reader then also has the opportunity to fully appreciate the profound effort required to move from a history of abuse to a present and future committed to healthier behaviors. The following outline summarizes the findings of the study.
OUTLINE OF FINDINGS

I. Abuse as an Ideology
   A. Bruises of the Body and Soul
      1. All about the fathers
      2. Silent and silenced mothers
      3. Feelings of isolation and isolation of feelings
   B. Abusive Lessons Learned
      1. All about me
      2. Suffering spouses/ sad children

II. Ideological Change from Abuse
   A. Context for Change
      1. Deteriorating relationships
      2. Emotional shifts
   B. Critical Incidents and Feeling the Need to Change
      1. Intensely violent episodes
      2. Confronted with their abuse
      3. Partners finding their voices
   C. A Mechanism for Change
      1. Engaging in reflection
      2. Working in the program
      3. Discovering an advocate for change
      4. Encountering the spiritual
   D. Acting on New Beliefs
      1. Respect replaces abuse
      2. Relationships should be equal partnerships
      3. Open and honest communication is essential
      4. Assisting others is necessary
Abuse as an Ideology

This section explores the social and emotional dynamics in the family of origin for each of the participants. The family makeup, the marital relationships of the parents and the interaction between parents and children within the family is significant particularly in the frequency and level of abuse experienced. It is here within the family of origin that beliefs about gender roles, issues of power and behaviors in relationships are modeled and assimilated. For the majority of the men, the ideologies of abuse held and exhibited by them toward their partners and children began within these first family experiences. These ideologies, apparent in the learned and witnessed behaviors of their parents, included a) the use of physical and emotional abuse; b) abuse by the male against the female partner and the children as a means of venting anger or frustration and control; c) a mentality of entitlement that the male has the right to control his wife and children in any manner he feels is necessary; and d) the expectation that the female and through her, the children, will endure this behavior as an acceptable reality of the prevailing social culture. These ideologies served as the blueprint for the participant’s relationships with their own families.

With the notable exception of Larry, the families of all of these men could be considered “normal” in the sense of the outward appearances of a socially acceptable family life. These were intact families with both parents present. The majority would be considered middle-class and most seemed to function appropriately. The fathers were employed steadily and provided for the family. The mothers were present and performed the duties of caring for the children. They possessed the basic finances needed to successfully manage their lives and a few could be considered wealthy. Yet, these
families were both physically and emotionally abusive. The types of abuse committed against the participants and their perceptions of it, as well as other aspects of family life that they felt were significant are discussed.

The data presented here is divided into two sections, 1) Bruises of the Body and Soul and 2) Abusive Lessons Learned. These sections provide a rich description of the abuse witnessed and experienced by the participants as children followed by the abuse perpetrated by them against their partners and their own children.

Bruises of the Body and Soul

The majority of the abuse suffered by the men in this study was at the hands of their fathers. In most cases, the abuse continued and escalated throughout their childhood with little or no intervention from the mothers. This is significant when viewing the family as an entity where behaviors are learned and practiced by the children through witnessing and then imitating the actions of their parents. Moreover, the majority of these men described feelings of being cut off from their own feelings and an inability to understand the feelings of others. Essentially, they felt isolated and emotionally disconnected for much of their lives. If we agree that parents are the first and primary teachers of their children, these parents presented a definition of family as hurtful and frightening to the point that their children became emotionally destitute. Through the examples of abuse offered below a portrayal of the fathers’ abuse, the mothers’ relative silence toward that abuse and the effects experienced by their children emerges. The data concerning abuse of the participants as children is divided into three sub-sections. These include 1) All about the fathers; 2) Silent and silenced mothers; and 3) Feelings of
isolation and isolation of feelings. This data describes the principal issues of importance in the lives of these men as they described them.

All about the fathers. The childhood experiences of these participants were similar in that all but one stated that they witnessed or were victims of physical and/or emotional abuse, committed primarily by their fathers. The role of the father in the lives of these men was incredibly significant and for the great majority, exceptionally negative.

This witnessed and actual abuse took the form of physical beatings and demeaning remarks aimed at their mother, other siblings and themselves, but several of the men stated that they believed they were the primary target of their father’s abuse. These incidents depict, as much as possible, the participants’ interpretations of the mindset of the father in relation to his abuse of his son.

There are many examples of the abuse that these men experienced as children. With the exception of Greg, each began their story with a statement that their childhood was less than pleasant. Some of the statements used by the men to introduce the story of their childhood are very telling. John said, “I didn’t have a very normal childhood.” Ken stated, “It was a really yucky family life.” Brandon said, “It was a rough upbringing.” Similarly, Brian said, “It was pretty rough when I was growing up.” The levels of physical abuse ranged from severe and brutal to minimal, and the emotional abuse that often had more profound and lasting effects could be obvious and oppressive or subtle and deceptive. The findings that follow depict a sampling of the incidents of both physical and emotional abuse that the participants recalled from their childhood.

John described a typical event in his family that often included him being hit by his father. He stated:
Sittin’ at the dinner table was like a nightmare because you never knew what was gonna happen…and I don’t know why, at suppertime I always sat next to my dad. And it was okay, if my mom was telling my dad what was going on during that day, it was okay for him to just punch me in the face.

Whereas John spoke of the certainty that his father would surely hit him for almost anything; another participant, Larry, described frequent abuse by emphasizing the randomness of it. He often saw it as unrelated to some perceived offense he had committed and more a matter of whim on the part of his father. Larry stated:

Originally I used to sit next to my dad. Well, my mom got tired of him hitting me so she took my seat and put it down the other end of the table. Every time he used to walk in the kitchen and I’d be sitting in the chair he’d go, whack, right on the side of my head. My mom just said I was his favorite punching bag.

John recalls a young life of routine beatings that could be triggered by the smallest of infractions. He explained that in his home, “You had to do everything the way dad wanted to.” As the oldest child he believes he received the worst of his father’s abuse and from a young age was cognizant of the unfairness and the unjust nature of it. He stated:

I remember being in second grade, and my mom had to go to school and tell them, tell the teachers, that I wouldn’t be in for a while because I fell down the steps – I fell down the stairs! My dad beat me! And I just thought it was normal, I grew up with it – as soon as he’d come home…

John, also, was clear in his belief that he could not retaliate against his father even when he was physically able to do so. He said, “I used to tell my mom, I said, ‘Mom, dad
knows he’s gonna get me cornered and beat me, and I’m not going to do anything about it.” When I asked John if he had ever fought back when his father hit him he simply said, “No… He was my father; he was my dad, y’know.”

Brandon characterized this same power that these fathers had over their sons in relation to meting out physical abuse even as the participants grew older and stronger. He explained:

My father did what he wanted physically. Even when I was getting into my teenage years, I remember a time where he smacked me and I flew across my bed, broke my glasses. I, myself hit the wall and I was out. Blacked out.

The darkness of the nature of this abuse of fathers to sons is evident in the above examples and most participants related their descriptions of the abuse they suffered with a sense of gravity that revealed the serious effects of the acts they had endured. Ken was expressive in his depiction of his father’s abuse and spoke to the damage it had done. He stated:

He could be pretty abusive. He was pretty abusive with me and my brother… And degrading…not when we were so much out of the house, but when we were growing up…. He was real physically rough and he was very articulate and he knew how to really humiliate people.

Matthew described the unpredictability of abuse when he spoke of his father’s inability to control his temper and the resulting abuse that he would receive. He said:

From the standpoint of abuse…my father would give in to emotional outbursts, which were unpredictable…He would just fly into, I guess I would call it anxiety with anger. You know, he couldn’t get control of his own anxiety and I did get hit
on the back of the head sometimes or pushed or spanked out of anger. My two older brothers got it worse than I did.

The perception of unfairness is seen in Stephen’s stories of incidents of serious abuse from his father at a young age when guidance and fair discipline could have been the solution. Stephen expressed anger at his father’s behavior when he said:

And I remember getting beat up because I said to my father, ‘She’s a bitch, I could kill her [his mother].’ Well, he beat me up for that. I probably wasn’t seven years old when I said that. Where did I learn it? I have no idea where I learned it. Was it the right things to say? No. Should I get beat up for it? No.

The use of abuse as discipline again was evident in Brian’s description of his father’s reaction to an incident in his early teens.

I think the worst came when I got kicked off the swim team when I was in 9th grade. I mean, that night I’ll never forget. I had a run in with the coach…. They [parents] yelled and screamed at me and I remember my dad picking me up and throwing me onto the floor. All that, just for getting kicked off the swimming team.

Physical abuse at the hands of their fathers was always accompanied by emotional abuse and for many of the men this was the more damaging. Feelings of anger, shame and humiliation were evident in many of the stories. John’s father hurt his son emotionally by embarrassing him with comments meant to disparage and poke fun at him. He related how his father would chastise him for spending time with his friend. John explained:
My dad said, ‘I never seen you two with girls; you guys must be gay!’ You know, I didn’t want to bring any girls over to my house. Oh, my gosh, that’s great; oh yeah, because Mickey and I hung out a lot together, we were gay!

Ken related that his father was very eloquent and could cut deeply with words. He used this weapon against his wife and his sons, as well as other individuals such as waitresses, when the spirit moved him to do so. Ken stated that his father was an “articulate bully” who embarrassed and humiliated his sons. He believes that his father’s words still affect him deeply today. He explained, “I guess I am, yeah [hard on myself]. There’s probably some contempt and self-loathing there…I recognize that I’m, at least cognitively, that I’m still doing to myself what my old man did… ‘You jerk’.”

Brandon believes that his father’s manipulative and controlling nature was a source of fear for him as a child and affected him throughout his younger and teenage years. It was difficult for him to relate instances of either physical or emotional abuse by his father and he was choked by emotions as he spoke. He describes his father’s manipulation and control in a situation involving Brandon’s future wife. He said:

She got pregnant…And this is a part of my father’s control. He actually made me believe that he was going to sue her parents for her getting pregnant because she wasn’t allowed in my bedroom… I said, ‘hey, she’s pregnant, we’re going to keep it, we’re going to get married, we’re going to make it work. He said, ‘it’s too hard, tell her to get rid of the baby.’…And you know he just badgered and badgered me and I caved and started putting a lot of pressure on …my partner, you know.
A finding of interest was the lack of alcohol abuse among the fathers of the participants. Art and Larry were the only participants to point to alcohol use by their fathers as a factor in their early lives. Art saw his father’s hard drinking habits as a part of the culture in which he grew up and although it could be a factor in his father’s overall moods that gave rise to his temper and his “intimidating, dark, somber, morbid” behavior, it was not the prevailing factor. Art described his father’s drinking as “a cultural thing where I grew up.” He went on to say that his father drank as much as any other man in the community. He stated, “For as long as I can remember, all of my uncles and relatives and everybody in this little coal mine town were heavy drinkers and, it was part of the culture.” Art felt that his father’s abusiveness was not related to alcohol but more to his personality. He said:

When he was drinking you never knew. Sometimes he was just morose and quiet and stayed away from everybody and other times he could get kind of malicious, but he didn’t have to be drinking to get angry pretty quick.

Larry did see alcohol as a factor in the abuse perpetrated by his father but also connected these behaviors to the community culture in which he lived.

He was… I guess what you call a functioning alcoholic. He drank a quart to two quarts of beer every night. When he went out drinking and stuff like that on weekends, he would get in fights or he’d end up beating on my mom.

In both instances where alcohol was an issue, even though the cultural context in which the overuse of alcohol was an expectation that could and often did lead to abuse, there was the clear understanding that other factors in their father’s character existed as causes of the abuse.
The majority of the accounts describe the father’s place as front and center in the family and in the lives of the participants. Images of the father as the supreme provider, decision-maker and disciplinarian were evident in all but one story. There was a clear understanding that the father’s influence for good or evil overshadowed all others within the family.

Despite the abuse committed by the fathers within these families and the significance placed on the descriptions of these events several of the men were also able to speak of their fathers in a somewhat positive light. These positive comments, however, did not compete with the abundance of negative examples of abuse that the men offered.

As John told his story he offered this comment as a means of tempering his father’s image. He said:

I grew up in New York [City] and I think we were the only boys on the block to go fishin’ and huntin’. My dad taught us all that stuff. He made a lot of good experiences… But, then ten minutes later, we’d get a beatin’. He had no problem with it at all… If you took away all the abuse; my dad was a great guy. Of course you can’t take it away.

Matthew said that, despite the times his father hit and slapped him in anger he felt close with his dad, although not in the manner of father to son, but more as a confidant. He spoke of his father’s difficulties measuring up to the looming presence and success of his grandfather, who was a Harvard educated minister with a wide following. Matthew’s father had a Ph.D. in agriculture. He explained:
My father made me feel special. Sometimes he treated me like way more of an adult than I actually was. He did confide in me about his childhood experiences with his dad. He led me to believe that he felt like he didn’t measure up.

Several of the men displayed a level of compassion for their fathers in that they realized that their father had suffered abuse from his own parents when he was a child. They felt a certain level of empathy for him. Also, for several of the men the loss of their father as an adult had an emotional impact on them. They were able to both accept the damage that had been done to them and to mourn the passing of this central figure in their lives. Larry’s words provide a good summation of the feeling of many of these men toward their fathers. He said, “This is an old person tryin’ to get into heaven. This is not the person who kicked my ass every day. And that’s basically what you’ve got to look at.”

Given both the negative and positive thoughts and emotions that their father’s inspired, it is clear that the most remarkable aspect in the stories of the early lives of these men is the importance of the role that their father played. This importance is not matched by their descriptions of the role of their mothers. For the majority of the participants the mother’s role was seen as part victim, part instigator of abuse and part silent observer of the mistreatment experienced by their children.

_Silent and silenced mothers._ The mothers of the men in this study generally followed a pattern of acquiescence toward the abuse they suffered and especially toward the abuse experienced by their children. Occasionally, the men mentioned that their mothers had tried to intervene and been hit or berated by their husbands, but for the most part their depiction of their mothers is of passiveness. None of the men described their
mother as a strong or influential figure for good in their lives. A few spoke with affectionate regard, one described the indefinable pain of the loss of his mother, but the majority offered neither uncompromising love nor adamant dislike for this person who is widely believed, within the general society, to hold tremendous power over her children.

Stephen, whose mother died when he was twelve, felt the pain of his loss for thirty years until he was finally able to be “with her” again in spirit when he visited her grave at age forty-two. He had little memory of her and his interactions with her while he was growing up. He attributed this lack of memories to his emotional shut down at the time of her death. Stephen gave me a picture of himself as a toddler sitting on his mother’s lap. It is the only picture he has of her and he received it only recently from his sister. As an explanation of the significance of this picture to him he wrote, “It [photo] answered two life-long questions: ‘Did she hold me? Did she love me?’” It is difficult to determine what Stephen’s mother may or may not have done to protect her children from their father’s abuse while she was alive, but the other participants in the study showed less affinity toward their mother than he did. One described an emotionally distorted connection with his mother and a few related portrayals of a relationship that was distant or indifferent. Additionally, a few men spoke of their mother’s role in initiating their father’s abuse. The mothers were seen as “instigating” punishments for their children by telling their husbands about misbehaviors that happened when he wasn’t there. John’s experience with his mother is indicative of this. He explained:

My mom just went along with whatever my dad said, and if she tried to interfere then she would get abused, either physically-not so much physically, but it was always what my dad wanted. My mom went along with it. She was also kind of
like an instigator…, she would call my dad at work, and she would tell him about
us. Because he would have all this time to plan what he was goin’ to do, and we
had all this time to think of what he was goin' to do.

Ken told of his mother’s mixed messages that she would convey to her son in the
form of serving as his nurturer after abuse by his father and alternating this nurturing with
her instigation of abuse. He stated:

She would meet my needs and I guess I would meet hers and [it was] sort of mom
and Ken against dad, and she was a rescuer…It was kind of sick. If my dad had
traveled a lot, if we were naughty when he was gone, she would say, ‘I’m going
to tell your father about this.’ And so if she did, he would come in and say, ‘Come
here, you little shit.’ And…Well, then she would sort of be a rescuer later. But
she would trigger him wailing on us and he did.

Matthew saw her lack of affection for him when he was a child as a significant
factor in the development of his personality. He reflected on his mother’s influence in his
life by saying:

I think some of my contempt for women in general comes from my experiencing
my mother when I was growing up and feeling distant. Feeling incredibly distant
and angry and resentful about that, but I also suppressed that anger…There was a
kind of a deadening experience with my mother. There were two times I could
remember my mother hugged me and comforted me when I was really upset.
Other than that there was really no physical affection from my mother at all.
Chris’s view of his mother was the most negative in its portrayal of her and her affect on his childhood. When he spoke about the relationship he had with his mother Chris described a distance due to his mother’s disability. Chris explained:

I didn’t have, as I felt, a mother presence. My mother has always been there, my mom and dad never got divorced or nothing, but my mom was very isolated. She was a, she just wasn’t there as a mother. She was a mother because she gave birth to us and that was about it.

A number of the participants whose mothers are still alive expressed concern for them and a small number described a comfortable relationship with them in the present. They didn’t hold their mothers responsible for the nature of their family environment and for the most part didn’t blame her for her lack of influence over their father’s actions. None expressed continuing anger or resentment toward their mother for her role in the abusive family life they experienced. None either described incidents or situations where their mothers exerted any power or authority that would have lessened the abuse perpetrated by their fathers.

The lack of loving relationships between the parents of the participants is evident in the comments made by each of these men. All stated that the relationship between their parents was not a close or loving one. Stephen stated succinctly, “I never saw him hug her, never saw him kiss her.” Chris whose parents are alive and still married said, “I don’t think it was too loving, not that I’ve seen.” Ken summed up his parent’s marriage by saying, “She and he had a pretty bad relationship for a very long time…” Overwhelmingly, the mothers of these participants were passive partners to their husband’s abuse toward their children and to themselves. They chose to or had no choice
but to stay in these marriages that were clearly not healthy. The social stigma of divorce, especially for the older participants in this study did not occur in the majority of these families. Of the ten participants, only two, Brandon and Greg, witnessed a parental divorce, both around the age of twelve. Two others, Larry and Brian, related that their parents divorced when they were in their twenties. The parents of the remainder stayed together until one or both died with the exception of Chris whose parents are both alive.

Divorce, when it did occur did not improve the situation for one participant. Brandon relates that he was very negatively influenced by this event for several years. He said:

> Our parents got divorced when I was, I guess ten or eleven. Actually it started on a Christmas Day. My sister, Kim, heard my dad talking to his girlfriend on the telephone and told my mom and she proceeded to throw him out of the house. It was never explained what was going on. And so a lot of that is blocked out. I don’t want to dwell on it. I don’t think about it a lot. But for a long time I didn’t really care about Christmas.

The consequence of this divorce for Brandon was that he lived with his abusive father and step-mother for his teenage years.

> Although most of the families remained intact the lack of soundness in the parental relationships and the ongoing abuse of the children paint the picture of an unhappy and difficult childhood where they were often singled out as the targets of abuse. They confirmed this through the descriptions of the feelings of loneliness and isolation that a number of them felt.
Feelings of isolation and isolation of feelings. The men in this study have all experienced abuse in some form in their family of origin. They have all been involved in numerous relationships with their parents, siblings, spouses, and children. Yet, a majority of them speak of the isolation or aloneness they have lived with most of their lives. Beginning in childhood, these feelings of separateness, lack of connection to others and distance are apparent in most of the histories. John and Greg were the only participants who did not mention some form of feeling isolated or apart from their family of origin. There are also frequent descriptions of a disconnection from their own feelings. Many of the men related an inability to develop or maintain a close, meaningful relationship that met their need to be nurtured. Stephen’s story is the most descriptive of his disconnection from his feelings and emotions after the death of his mother. He explains:

So, for decades there’s no sensitivity, no real feelings, the way the rest of the world has them… There are many times that I [would] go to funerals and my partners, my girlfriends, they would always ask me a question, ‘I can’t believe that you show no emotion. Don’t you have any feelings at all?’ And my response would always be the same… ‘My mother died when I was twelve, what is worse than that? What kind of emotion am I going to have for your uncle, you know, or whatever?’

Stephen’s lack of feeling for others is similar to comments made by other participants regarding their difficulties with relationships. Brandon mentioned his need to “block out” feelings and memories of the abuse that happened to him as a child. This coping mechanism he still uses today allows him to avoid feelings about difficult past events despite his increased understanding of the effect his childhood experiences have
had on his relationships. Several times in his interview, he stated, “…A lot of that is blocked out…I don’t want to dwell on it…I don’t think about it a lot.” When I asked Brandon to describe his first encounter with abuse between a man and a woman he prefaced his account of witnessing his father hitting his mother by saying, “I try to block a lot of that out, like I said before.” In describing his father’s abuse toward him as more psychologically hurtful despite overt physical abuse he said, “…I blocked a lot of it out and I don’t know if that was my saving grace or not.

Ken looks back on his childhood and understands the ways in which he handled the “weird inputs” that he perceived in his family of origin. He is able to articulate that he isolated himself from the emotional difficulties as a protective mechanism. He describes how he later realized on some level that the abuse he received from his father and the mixed messages that came from his mother were “sick” and that “not everybody’s like this.”

I responded by just sealing myself off…My brother dealt with everything by, in middle school becoming a drug addict. In fact, he started using narcotics at a pretty young age. When he was 34, he died of an overdose, so he stayed, he dealt with all these things by just, you know, medicating himself. I did by just trying to zone out the inputs that were weird. As a result, I became pretty, not emotional, not able to deal with any of those things.

Six of the men spoke directly about their feelings of isolation in some way. Additionally, four spoke directly of detaching themselves from their feelings as a mechanism used to deal with the difficulties of the relationships within their family. It was evident in two other participants as they spoke that they were unable to clearly
describe the feelings they experienced growing up and had developed a habit of not consciously dwelling on them. These feelings of isolation, along with the witnessed abuse of their fathers against their mothers, their siblings and themselves served as powerful tools in teaching these participants how to interact within their adult relationships with their own spouses and children. The childhood experiences depicting the father as a predominately negative force within the home and the wife and mother as the silent or silenced observer of her family’s misfortunes, set the stage for the abusive behaviors that these men wrought on their relationships with their own wives and children.

*Abusive Lessons Learned*

The findings reported here describe examples of the relationships and abusive behaviors committed by the participants against their intimate partners and their families. They are divided into two sub-categories, 1) All about me and 2) Suffering spouses/sad children. The early histories of these men have been both disturbing and worthy of compassion. All have experienced abuse in some form, most have been victims and witnesses to serious incidents of physical and emotional abuse. Their stories elicit a sense of shock and loathing for the injustices they have endured. However, the following findings provide a description of the abuse rendered upon others by these same participants. They, at once, provide a balance to the sympathetic portrayal of the early lives of these men and a suggestion of the cycle of succession that occurs as abuse is passed down from generation to generation.

*AAll about me.* All of the men in the study were able to comment on their abusive behaviors as an outcome of a mindset that allowed them to treat their partners with varied
measures of contempt and arrogance. For many this was not necessarily an element of their overall personality but a belief that, as men, they were privileged to expect certain behaviors from their partners and to punish them if these behaviors were not forthcoming. These beliefs reflect their early experiences, including parental conduct witnessed by these men and other influences that they perceived as important.

Art describes his beliefs and behavior during his first marriage as a product of the role models he had growing up. He said, “My first marriage, it was more subservient; having more definite roles. You do this and take care of the kids…and I’ll take care of money things.” When I asked him where he thought those ideas might have originated he said, “Probably the role models that I grew up with. [My] background was very much, males do this, and females do that.”

Matthew describes feelings of irritation and anger aimed at his wife that he feels resulted from his upbringing. He recalls:

I’d say I felt very entitled. It was not very sharing. I was, what’s the word, paternalistic to her on one notable occasion and angry, openly angry. I looked at her and I said, ‘You know, I just don’t think you are sophisticated enough for me.’ And it was a really rotten thing to say and it really crushed her.

Matthew adds that, “I think I felt contempt and condescension toward her for many years before I really just began to wake up and see her as the kind of person that she was.”

John described his feelings of entitlement and privilege very clearly while alluding to his father’s abuse toward him. He said, “I just needed to control her because she was my wife; she was my property, and she was gonna do what I told her to do…I guess I just wanted to control her because somebody controlled me.”
Larry recalls his feelings of control and entitlement over his wife and spoke of the escalation of this type of behavior. In speaking about the first time he punched his wife and knocked her out after she had hit him during an argument he said:

It got easier and easier to be physically abusive. A lot of it was verbal, you know, I’d call her a name like fat bitch. I was in control. I controlled all the money… I wasn’t a very nice person.

He recalls growing up in an atmosphere of abuse both in his own home and in the surrounding community. After explaining the frequency of his father’s abuse toward his mother he went on to say, “My neighborhood was like that. It wasn’t a surprise to walk down my neighborhood back in the early 60’s and see one of the other men chasing his wife down the street.” He also spoke of his early adult years in the company of “bikers,” who he feels influenced him in the development of his beliefs that he had a right to abuse women. He explained, “I’ve slapped women… because the environment I was with were bikers and stuff. That’s the way they treated the women. Go over and get me a beer, that kind of stuff.” Later in the interview, Larry dramatically summed up his way of thinking of himself as privileged during his life prior to changing his beliefs. He stated, “Oh… there was no thinking about it, I was the sun, I was the moon, I was ahead of the sun.”

Greg, who was the only participant who perceived himself as not growing up in an abusive household, nonetheless spoke of his use of abuse to control his partner and of his perceived right to do so. He saw that as a man he was entitled to expect his partner to meet his needs. He believes that he did not learn this from his family but rather through watching television. Greg stated, “I thought I had the right to be abusive sort of, when
certain situations arose. Now I know that was wrong.” When I asked Greg how he thought he developed those ideas he said

I think a lot of it was seeing shows on TV. When you would see a guy slapping a woman if she did something disrespectful…And my parents weren’t like that; my grandparents weren’t like that. So, I think it must have been TV.

Stephen offered his explanation of the underlying cause of abuse by men as a deep-seated anger rather than a social learning or gender identity philosophy. He states:

Anger is what it’s all about…If you really want to deep study men you gotta go to anger and resentment and you have to go to a really, really young age because that’s what its really all about…Usually it’s at parents. It’s how I’m treated by my father or my mother…You find a way to act out on it.

Stephen is explicit in his description of abuse committed by men against women. He describes the psychological profile of an abusive male written and delivered as a speech to a women’s domestic abuse conference. His purpose in writing this speech was to offer a warning to women. It is a powerful testimony to the destructive nature of domestic abuse against women and to the feelings of power and privilege that many men believe is their right. However, it emphasizes abuse as a psychological construct of personality rather than social dilemma. Nevertheless, a truly personal and egocentric portrait emerges. Stephen wrote this speech as a monologue addressed to a woman who has been asked on a date by an abusive man. It is presented in its entirety in Appendix B. The following are excerpts from that speech that depict the self-centeredness of the abuser.

…You’re still around in a relationship where I set the terms; I’m suspicious and stifling. I’m surprised you can even breathe. RUN. Since I am in control, let me
exert some. Remember when I saw you talking to that other guy and I told you to stay away from him because he was a jerk? I needed that control over who you talk to because I am very jealous. When you see this sign we are getting close to disaster…. When you are separated from me by a distance, yet close enough to get a negative message from my eyes, it is time to run…If I start blaming you for my failures, it is time to run…

Stephen clearly states that he was intimately familiar with the beliefs and actions contained in his speech and for years felt entitled to inflict his inner conflict and pain on the women in his life.

The beliefs held previously by all of the men indicate a disturbing mix of learned behaviors and negative influences. These served to create attitudes that allowed them to use their partners and children as objects upon which they could unleash their wrath. The distorted expectations carried by these men manifested themselves in verbal, emotional and physical abuse against the people they purported to care for. The following section describes examples of the abuse committed by the participants.

*Suffering spouses/sad children.* The incidences of abuse described by the participants were primarily aimed at their spouses and partners. This stands in contrast to the childhood stories of abuse committed by their fathers against them as children. However, despite the propensity of partner abuse described here a number of children have been affected by the participants’ actions. Of the ten participants, six related at least one incident of physical abuse toward their children. The effects on the children are unclear. All of the men, with the exception of John who is partially estranged from his daughter, report good relationships with their children today.
The following are examples of abuse committed by the participants against their wives and children. These descriptions highlight the ideology of abuse of power and feelings of entitlement displayed by the participants.

Stephen began his abuse of women as a teenager with his first girlfriend in high school. He describes this abuse by saying, “We’re talking about, kicking and pushing.” He continued to physically abuse his college girlfriend and the culmination of the use of physical abuse occurred with his wife. In speaking about the girl he dated in college he states, “There’s the push, I don’t know if I ever hit her with a closed fist, but there’s an open hand hard enough to put bruises on her face. I know she had bruises.” Within his marriage, which he describes as “short but very, very volatile” Stephen tells of a troubling relationship with his wife when he said, “Monica was cross-addicted to drugs and alcohol and I was going to save her…But Monica did things that made me want to kill her.”

His physical abuse of women ended with his marriage but the relationships after that were punctuated by psychological and emotional abuse and control. He describes, “squeezing someone’s hand too tightly to communicate a point…words, cutting words and all that.”

John’s abusive actions toward his wife began shortly after their marriage and were an ongoing component of the relationship. John is vivid in his description of his abuse against his wife and relates his efforts to understand the reasons why he committed these offenses against her.

I remember the first time I ever hit Anne, about 3 months after we got married. And I offered her some M&Ms, but she wouldn't take 'em…And then I offered
her some M&Ms again and she wouldn't eat 'em. So finally I just got tired of it, and I hit her. That's when she should have left--the first time…But whenever we would get into an argument, she'd give me some stuff and I'd put her down--and not always physical. There was mental--calling her stupid, calling names--trashy, no-good.

In addition to the level of physical abuse, which was intermittent, John’s mental abuse or emotional abuse was more frequent. According to John, “That was probably every day.” When I asked about his wife’s reaction to this abuse John said, “A lot of crying, she would just take it and take it, and take it. Two years after we got married, she left and she filed for divorce but she came back.” In response to my question about any retaliatory abuse by his wife, John spoke of her efforts to do so and then offered a particularly mean-spirited example of his emotional abuse toward her.

She tried. She tried. I would just come back harder. I’m a lot bigger than she is and a lot meaner. I always say that my dad wrote the book on meanness and I took it to another level. And I mean, there are things that I’ve done to her that--when she was 11 years old, she was paralyzed in the face—what do they call it, Bell’s Palsy? And her face was twisted and crooked…When I first met her, I didn’t even notice it…And, but yet, over time I would use that, you know, ‘I feel sorry for you… nobody else would ever have you… I had to come from New York to get married to you… twisted face.’ Those things built, because you can say you’re sorry, but you can’t take the words back. But I would use anything to gain control of her. And that’s all it was, basically.
Art stated he was physically abusive to his wife only once when he “slapped her across the face.” He acknowledges, however, a “quick temper and controlling nature” that has been the source of psychological and emotional abuse during both his marriages. Art said that he can be “very volatile” and would “blow up” quickly when angered. He spoke about his tendency to be aggressive with inanimate objects and to vent his rage by destroying things. In addition to his aggressive behavior Art’s need for control was problematic especially in his first marriage.

I used to get very protective about my wife going out with friends or choosing to spend time doing something other than with me. If she had to make a decision as to whether she was going to do this or go somewhere with me, if she chose this, I would say, well, what’s the matter? Why don’t you want to do this with me?

The level of abuse that Larry has endured and perpetrated is overwhelming. He has been physically and emotionally abusive in many of his relationships. The abuse has been intense and degrading. His abuse has been impulsive and swift. Larry’s marriage was happy and relatively non-abusive in the beginning, but he explains that things slowly began to change and his reaction was to use abuse to handle these changes.

Well, things happen. One time I caught her trying to go to bed, almost going to bed with someone else... That's when it really changed. That’s when I started getting mean. We’d argue. One time she punched me when we were arguing and I punched her back and knocked her out... that’s the first time I punched her.

Chris’s abusiveness with his partners began with behaviors he described as overbearing or trying to do too much for his partner. He describes his addiction to gambling and excessive drinking in his late teens and early twenties as an additional
source of abuse to the women he was involved with. His marriage to a woman ten years his senior was loving for a short time, but Chris began having an affair and lying to his wife. Chris describes the kinds of physical abuse he used against his wife. “Pushing, grabbing, restraining, holding, pulling hair, spitting. I never punched her or slapped her, but shoving her, pushing her, pulling hair.” The abuse escalated over the next few months. He said, “She would get black and blues and stuff… I started to justify things in my head.”

Greg’s abuse of his wife was intense physically and started early in their relationship. It continued and escalated as they continued dating. He explains:

I remember being in a car talking about something and we started arguing…I didn’t like the way it was going. So, I told her to get out of the car. We were at her house in the driveway. She wanted to keep on talking about it. I just wanted her out of the car now…I went around and dragged her out of the car by her hair…That one was really bad. She told her friends about that. They said, ‘You have to get rid of this guy. Why are you still with him?’ Somehow we stayed together.

Greg said that there was only one additional incident of physical abuse while they were dating and that otherwise, they got along very well. He believed that they did this by avoiding topics that might trigger his anger, like her past relationships.

The abusive behaviors recounted by the participants against their wives are numerous and disturbing. They depict the capability of these men to inflict serious harm on their partners. To a lesser extent they also describe abusive incidents involving their children. Nine of the ten participants in this study have children. They range in ages
from thirty-six to less than one year. Six participants admit to hitting their children in ways that they see as abusive.

John’s children, a son and a daughter are young adults who live independently of their parents. John has spoken to his children about the abuse he has suffered and the abusiveness that he directed toward them and their mother. He realizes that his relationships with his children have been affected negatively by his actions and hopes to provide assistance to them in dealing with the issues of their childhood. When I asked how he had treated his children when they were growing up John answered honestly.

About the way my dad treated me. I didn’t abuse them to the extent that my parents did, but when they did something wrong I would be on top of it. And if it meant punching them that’s what I did. If it meant yelling and cursing at them that’s what I did. Everything that my dad did to me I did to my kids. And, I would take my son fishing. We would be having a nice time, but if he messed up, I would hit him. That’s what my dad did to me.

Matthew has one son who is six years old. He admits to hitting his son in anger and he believes that it has affected him but not to any large extent. He accepted responsibility for his actions but did not show signs of remorse as he described his behavior.

There were a couple of times when he was very young, like 2 or 3 when I just screamed at him for I would say thirty seconds to a minute because I just felt like I wanted to stop him in his tracks from what he was doing. And there’s been several times when I have spanked him out of anger. Once I swatted him, I don’t
think it was all that hard, but I know he felt it across the back of the head. And once when I slapped him across the face.

Brian spoke of physically abusive behavior to one of his sons as a catalyst for change. He recognized the impression that his behavior had on his son, who was seven at the time of the abuse and is now ten years old. He expressed an understanding that the effect on his son was more than physical discomfort.

Well, the one thing that really made me stop [physical abuse] was the fact that, what I did to James that one December. When I got upset with him and, because I told him if he ever got, he had a passion for getting up early, like 4 or 5 o’clock in the morning. And that particular night, I wanted to sleep in, I said to James, if you get up early, please go downstairs, don’t wake your brother up, watch TV, play on the computer, don’t wake your brother and don’t make any noise. But he did the exact opposite, got his brother up and they were making a lot of noise and I got mad. I ran into the room, I picked him up, I threw him into his bed. His face hit the side of the bed and he ended up with a shiner, a little bit of a shiner. And I had Children and Youth Services call me because of that…I always assumed somebody at school, like the principal called them.

Brian firmly believes now that physical punishment for children is wrong in all circumstances. He states that he has not hit his sons for any reason since the above incident.

For one participant, Ken, who denies physically abusing his children, the issue of the appropriateness of spanking was an important one. He made the distinction between controlled physical consequences, which are tailored to the age and ability of the child to
understand the need for safe, socially acceptable behavior, and punitive abuse delivered in the midst of uncontrolled anger. He stated, “I did not abuse my kids.”

The abuse committed by the participants against their partners and children is chilling. It clearly demonstrates the belief system in which these men operated for much of their lives. Each was able convey what they believed to be a valid reason for their abuse. Primarily the reasoning spoke to the idea that their partner or their child deserved the abuse for something they did and/or the men had the right to impose their will and could use whatever means necessary to do so.

Recounting the abusive behaviors used against these men and the abuse they used against their families provides a meaning and a context to their lives and demonstrates the perspective held by them prior to the initiation of their process of change. Clearly, these men felt entitled to repeat the beliefs and behaviors learned as children or to use their wives and children as targets for their anger and rage at the treatment they received. It establishes their exposure to abuse, their experiences as both victim and perpetrator and firmly situates them in a position that cries out for change.

Ideological Change from Abuse

All of the men reported a change in their ideology regarding abuse and all were able to identify their previous beliefs as wrong. Reporting the processes of moving away from abusive behavior as described by the participants include four segments. These are 1) A context for change, which consists of events that provide an attendant condition for change; 2) critical incidents, which describe events that occurred in the lives of the participants that identified the need to change; 3) a mechanism for change, which examines the method of change; finally, 4) acting on new beliefs, which identifies beliefs
and ideologies that were established through the change process. These men were able to recognize their abuse and the damage that it caused. All but one developed an ability to empathize with their partners in acknowledging the effects of their past behaviors. These changes in beliefs led to substantive changes in their relationships and their lives. The following findings present the process of change experienced by the participants. Additionally, the findings from sections A, B, and C as listed in the Outline of Findings are displayed in a table in Appendix C.

Context for Change

A decision to change one’s beliefs and the actions generated by them is difficult work and usually requires a process that can be recognized, often in hindsight, after the change has occurred. Events and conditions that set the stage for the process of change to take place often precede the change itself. Often, the beginning of the process is a disorienting problem or situation that contributes to the development of a climate for change in which the person is thrown a bit off balance and is vulnerable to new thoughts and ideas. In telling the stories of their ideological change these participants each described a time in their lives, often a number of months prior to an actual critical event, when their relationships, and in some cases, other important aspects of their lives were out of balance.

This next section presents descriptions of these disorienting dilemmas in two sub-categories. They are 1) Deteriorating relationships and 2) Emotional shifts. All of these men were experiencing difficulties in relationships both with their family of origin and within their intimate relationships with a female partner or partners. These difficulties gave rise to feelings and emotions that left the men unsettled.
Deteriorating relationships. These men all described their relationships with their partners as problematic from their own perspective. Most saw the source of these problems as their partners’ behavior. Additionally, a few of the men also spoke of relationships with their parents and or siblings as difficult and frustrating. These difficulties contributed to a growing sense of disorientation. None of them were able to foresee these situations as precipitous at the time, but in retrospect, each began their tales of their change process with descriptions of the troubling atmosphere within their relationships. Examples of these situations that produced a climate or context for change follow:

After several years of marriage and the birth of their three children, Greg’s relationship with his wife was becoming strained. He stated that he was having trouble at work. His wife, who also worked and served as primary caregiver for their children did not provide him with the comfort he felt she should. Greg explains how her change in attitude toward him precipitated a dramatic increase in his ongoing level of abuse toward her. Greg states:

We were having sex probably every day for a number of years… She would tell people she worked with about what was going on and that we weren’t getting along very well… They started talking about how often people have sex and it came up that some people have sex once or twice a week or two times a month and she started feeling like she was the oddball or something. She wanted to cut back and I started demanding it. Actually, I raped her twice… We didn’t get along for a long time after. She started spending more time and going out after work. I suspected she was seeing somebody and she kept denying it.
Greg’s increasing aggression with his wife and his suspicion of his wife’s cheating created an atmosphere that led to an episode of extreme abuse where Greg realized the need to change.

Chris’s extremely complex web of lies to his wife about an ongoing affair and his wife’s involvement in assisting him to care for his son from that affair, led to an atmosphere of increasing distrust and anger that became impossible to continue. As Chris struggled to maintain his deceptions, his abusive behavior toward his wife increased. Chris explains:

It was a lot of arguing, mostly about how much time I spent at her [mistress] house picking him [son] up every day…Going there 2 times a day, 5 days a week. I’m was very active in seeing him and a lot of arguments were about how much time I spent out of the house. I was there still strongly attached because she [mistress] made me feel good…We [he and his wife] were going to marriage counseling, but that wasn’t helping because I was still engaged in lying…It was somewhere in that vicinity that it really started to get physical.

Chris’s recognition of the need to change came after an episode of abuse against his wife and subsequent arrest shortly after this time.

Ken’s relationship with his wife had been problematic for a number of years. His physical abuse stopped after he completed an abuse intervention program but he continued to be verbally and emotionally abusive until he entered a second program where he has finally come to grips with the emotional aspects of his past life and his marriage. He relates that the atmosphere in his home before he began his present program was particularly bad. He said:
The relationship with my wife just continued to deteriorate and rather than be aggressive and controlling, I became more and more withdrawn. Things in the house were just awful. There was so much tension. The kids couldn’t wait to get out. And most times when I didn’t leave, I could be really obnoxious verbally.

Stephen describes the end of his relationship with the majority of his family following the death of his father and the damaging way he was treated by his stepmother during the funeral proceedings. His father’s death and this mistreatment by his stepmother hurt him deeply and his views of his himself, his relationships and his life in general turned very pessimistic. Stephen explains:

It’s a quarter to nine in the morning and my father’s second wife walks in and says to me, ‘I don’t like the way you and your brothers acted at the funeral parlor last night…Because of the way you acted last night none of you are to touch your father’s casket. You are to sit at the back of the family section and your six sisters want absolutely nothing to do with you.’…The thing that’s very, very sad about this is; my father’s second wife…has two girls and a boy. The three [biological] sons had to watch her son and five other people be pallbearers for our father…I am very upset with the knowledge that …when she buried the old man she buried the three sons with him.

Stephen maintains ties with his two brothers but has no connection to his stepmother and rarely speaks to any of his biological sisters.

The deterioration of relationships in the lives of these men provided a milieu for confusion, humiliation, anger and sadness. Additionally, the fear of loss of control fueled
the disorientation that many of them felt. The participants’ descriptions of some of the emotions that were brought forth are described in this next sub-category.

*Emotional shifts.* Several of the men spoke about a period of time or events that occurred prior to a critical incident that prompted recognition of the need for change. Issues of employment and childcare affected Matthew’s relationship with his wife adversely. He left his job and opened a studio to create his art. His son was very young and rather than utilize a daycare facility while his wife returned to work it was decided that Matthew would care for his son at home. This arrangement was not to his liking and he became increasingly aggressive with inanimate objects as a means of venting his frustration. Matthew explains how he felt within this new situation that challenged his beliefs about his male role within the relationship. He states:

> I think that was a very humbling experience for me being a stay at home dad and it felt humiliating at times pushing a stroller around the sidewalk. I don’t think I was well adapted to the job…there were times when I blew up too. The thing that came to a head…when I just really got upset with a CD player that was not working and I came down on top of it and basically broke it and took it outside and smashed it up and put it in the trash can. Seth [son] saw me from inside and got very upset and told Sara when she got home from work…She told me that she felt that I really needed some help and I told her I could get things in better control on my own.

As the child care situation continued Matthew’s relationship with his wife deteriorated. He became increasingly aggressive with his wife over what he perceived as her poor
communication skills. This culminated in an episode of abuse against his wife a few months later.

John spoke of an incident that occurred approximately three months before his arrest and incarceration for domestic abuse. He recalls the incident and states that he was confused and frightened by his abuse and that he and his wife had discussed his seeking help to curb his abusive actions toward her. John states:

I almost killed her. I almost choked the life right out of her… I had a pillow over her face and it started out as a joke. I was just playing, but it ended up with me losing my temper, and it just got serious… How I stopped, why I stopped, I don’t even know. I only know I stopped and it was a good thing because I would have killed her. We talked about it and she was gonna stay and I was gonna get help. John did not seek help at that time. Three months later he was shocked when his wife sought a Protection from Abuse order (PFA) against him. Surprisingly, she did not give an account of the above event in her description of his abuse against her.

Art’s relationship with his second wife carried the same issues of control and an inability to rein in his temper. He spoke of the emotions that he feels triggered his outbursts of temper and possessiveness. Additionally, he spoke about an increase in his drinking habits that began to be problematic. In answer to my question about what he was feeling inside when he was acting that way Art said:

I guess, losing control or… either that or maybe that they wouldn’t come back emotionally or they wouldn’t be there as much or something. I’m not sure exactly, but it has something to do with control obviously. I guess I’d feel hurt or rejected that they wouldn’t do what I wanted to do or when I wanted them to do it.
He stated that an increase in this kind of behavior prompted his wife, a psychotherapist, to inquire about a group program that would address his volatility and control issues.

Stephen, who was not married but in an intimate relationship at the time of his change, had been aware for sometime that his behavior and emotional instability was adversely affecting his own life. His feelings were related to his sense that his father and stepmother had no interest in assisting him with the pain and confusion he has suffered with most of his life. His attempts, as a middle-aged man, to reach out to them for help had been rebuffed, and his father had denied his abuse of Stephen as a child when Stephen had confronted him. This sense of loss and yearning for affection and understanding left him searching for the love and belonging that had alluded him. Finding no satisfaction from his attempts to enlist his parent’s assistance, he continued to search for meaning in his life. He stated, “I didn’t get what I wanted [from parents] and I was very upset…so I’m still looking.”

The participants all related an atmosphere of increased difficulties in their relationships that led to anxiety, frustration and fear. A climate for change was created in which pressures were building that would need to be relieved at some point. Within this context for change the ideological beliefs of male power and privilege held by these men were intensely apparent. The control these men had over their lives and their relationships was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain and the fear produced by that knowledge left them in an environment that was ripe for change. The following pages explore the elements of the stories that the participants identified as critical incidents in which they recognized themselves as abusive and of the need to change their beliefs, their behaviors and their lives.
Critical Incidents and Feeling the Need to Change

This section presents a description of the incidents and situations that were identified by the participants as important events in their recognition of a need for change, and in helping them make the decision to embark on a process that would decrease their use of abusive behavior within their intimate and family relationships. These incidents forced them to begin to assess their behavior and led to a level of introspection that was not possible previously. Incidents that initiated a change and precipitated an understanding of that change were present in the stories of all of the participants. For most, the actual change did not happen at that point but the awareness of the need became evident. Most of the men experienced more than one definitive incident that foreshadowed the need for change. When I asked them to describe the moment that they became aware that they needed to change their lives some mentioned very specific incidents. Others saw it more as a process that they experienced over time. All were able to name important occurrences that were memorable to them as signs indicating the need for change. The data is organized into three sub-categories. These include 1) Intensely violent episodes, 2) Confronted with their abuse, 3) Partners finding their voices. These incidents placed the men in a frame of mind that was ready for change.

Intensely violent episodes. Four men identified a violent episode as a critical incident that precipitated change. For some of them this incident ended in arrest for others it did not. Nevertheless, it was seen as extremely important to the men. They were able to identify this particular episode of physical abuse that served as a turning point for their abusive behaviors. These men were able to describe a moment of recognition within the abuse, which planted the seed of change. Each realized that they needed to do
something to alter their present course. For example, Matthew described one incident of serious physical abuse against his wife. His description is intense. He states:

It was bedtime…and she started asking me questions about what I thought she was doing that was wrong. And, as was my trend at the time, I gave her a whole litany of things. She responded by saying that she felt that was unfair and I could just feel my anger starting to boil up. And I got up and I said, ‘I’m gonna sleep somewhere else. I’m getting angry.’ She grabbed me from behind by the arms and she pinned me down on the bed and she said, ‘You’re not walking away from me.’ At this point, I really felt enraged and I struggled and got free and then I just lashed out like this, and my wrist got her right across the nose. She got a nosebleed and her eyes got very dark…I realized that this was something I promised I would never do, I would never hit her. And I felt a total lack of credibility and there was nothing I could say, really that was going to mend the situation.

After the abuse with his wife, Matthew immediately began attending an abuse intervention group for men and completed the program. He is very introspective about his behavior and emotions and recognizes that he must continue to work to avoid the intense feelings that set his anger in motion. He explains what he believes is the origin of these feelings when he said:

I think I had a long-held…belief or just an acceptance that emotional intensity is what brings meaning to life. And I’m trying to ratchet myself away from that. It’s definitely a family cultural thing, particularly with my father and my sister.
Emotional outbursts, anxiety, bring the great color to the family life. I don’t want to be that way.

An incident of extreme abuse that was the culmination of Chris’s abuse toward his wife led him to the realization that he was out of control and had to find a way to change his life. He explains:

I started to justify things in my head… We engaged in physical altercations…We were arguing and arguing…She had a lot of bruises on her from pushing and shoving between us and she threatened to throw the wedding rings down the sink. So I grabbed her and pulled the rings out of her hand and it just got really, really ugly. It was unbelievable…When I was arrested I was locked up for nineteen hours and I was very, very loud… Powerful…but it was ugly. It wasn’t me. It wasn’t who I was. Anger got the best of me. I vowed never to be that angry.

Fear was the overriding emotion that Chris experienced when he was arrested after this incident. He stated that he was not angry with his wife for having him arrested or with the officers for arresting him.

At that time I was a little upset maybe, but I wasn’t angry. The only person I was upset with was myself. Because I sat back and I thought, oh, my gosh, I could have killed her. That scared me to death, that I could have killed her, not trying to, but doing so.

This point of realization for Chris led him to begin his intervention program and to end his relationship with his wife.
Arrest for an abusive incident was a turning point too, for John, who was charged
with multiple counts of contempt of court, breaking a Protection from Abuse order (PFA)
and assault. He describes the incident that led to his arrest:

When I got the PFA I went down the house one day and wanted to see her [wife]
and she wouldn’t let me in. At the back of the house there is a sliding glass door.
I took the door, shook it …, and forced my way into the house. I twisted the door
off the track and twisted the wheels. I had this big door in my hands and I started
walking into the house. And they got me for breaking into my house.

He was looking at the possibility of twelve years in jail for this incident. He had an
unsuccessful suicide attempt before turning himself in to the police. He received a three-
month prison sentence and describes his time in prison as the beginning of his process of
change. He said:

It wasn’t ‘til I got into the [prison] population that it hit me. I have no place to go,
and you can’t get any lower than this. How did I end up here? I was 47 at the
time. Never, no matter how wild I was growing up, I never had trouble like
this…I got away with it for so long, the abuse, but if finally all caught up with me.

Greg’s explicit use of abuse toward his wife led to the last serious incident of
physical abuse, and brought him to the realization that he needed to change. This
occurred at the time his wife began an affair with someone at work, although he didn’t
know about the affair at the time. He describes this disturbing incident:

At first she was asking for a separation then after that I went to talk to her. I think
I was telling her she had to do some stuff, to make some changes. She was telling
me I needed to make some changes…This went on and on but basically I wanted
to get even for the separation. She went into the kitchen and I came after her. I grabbed her by the ankles and I spread my arms out as far apart as I could and she’s going ‘you’re hurting me, you’re hurting me! And that’s when it really hit me. I had to clear out.

Feelings of fear of what would become of them, remorse for the harm they had done to their victim and to themselves, and for some, an as yet unformed understanding that a line had been crossed were mentioned frequently by the men who changed their ideas about abuse because of a violent episode.

*Confronted with their abuse.* Several of the participants spoke of the recognition of the effects of their abusive behavior on others and on themselves in a moment of clarity when they were confronted about their abuse in some way. These incidents marked a turning point for the men that was clearly identifiable by them. They answered immediately when asked if there was a specific point in time when they became aware that they were responsible for the abuse they had committed against their wives and children. For some a visual cue sparked the acknowledgement of their own behaviors. For others hearing about their own abuse or that of others was the impetus that precipitated a change. The examples below present the power of these cues in promoting a change in the beliefs of these men about their own behaviors and about the nature of their relationships with their partners and children.

Brian was moved by his young son’s asking if he would ever hurt him again as he had done in the past. His son was remembering an incident almost three years earlier where Brian had thrown him onto his bed; he hit the wall and suffered a black eye. Brian mentioned his son’s question immediately when asked to identify the reason that he
ceased his physical abuse. Brian comments and responses throughout his interview were terse and somewhat superficial. He rarely elaborated about the underlying feelings that may have accompanied his statements. Consequently, his responses often fail to include his thoughts related to the events that he describes. Despite this lack of depth he clearly saw this incident as significant in accounting for his ability to change his behavior. He recounts his conversation with his son:

I think it was sometime last year he actually said, ‘Daddy, would you ever do that to me again?’ No. I said to him, ‘James, no, I won’t. And I want you to do me a favor, don’t ever let me forget about that. That way I know I won’t do it again.’

Brian said he realized that, “If you could remember stuff that happened to you when you were a little kid, then your children will remember it too, and it surprised me that he did.”

Brandon said that he really started to understand how abusive he was by watching a video that was shown in one of the first sessions of his intervention program. He had begun this program with the idea that he would be able to use what he learned to prove to his wife that the problems in their marriage were her fault and not his. He said that he saw himself in the actions of the abuser in the video and was struck by the similarity. He related:

The guy in the video was me…trashing his house at Christmas time, blowing up at every little thing. I thought, wow, that’s me. That’s scary you know. That guy’s a real a—hole…wait a minute. If I’m like him and I don’t like how he is, that means I’m not good…I don’t want to be that. Who wants to go on and be like that?
Ken too, saw himself in the descriptions of abuse that he heard when he began attending an intervention program. As he learned about the cyclic nature of domestic abuse he recognized his own behavior patterns. He explained:

I sort of got it and I quit hitting and grabbing and shoving and that sort of thing. I think morally I knew all along it was a disgusting thing that I had done. But it was more seeing myself in their description of the batterer or the abuser.

Similarly, Greg first realized that he was abusive when he read a book about domestic abuse that had been given to him by a family member. He was unable to remember the title of the book. He was living at his grandparents after his arrest for domestic abuse against his wife. He said:

Somehow I got this book. It had stuff about being abusive. All of a sudden it comes to me in a bolt of lightening that I was abusive, and that a lot of this was my fault…I read that book a couple of times…That was the lowest point in my life.

Experiencing a direct confrontation of their behaviors in the form of dramatized events such as those in a video, learning of the concepts of abuse through reading or listening to the stories of others requires an ability to recognize the connection between one’s own behavior and those presented. It also suggests an ability to critically reflect on those similarities. These men were capable of such reflection and used it to determine their path that would lead to change.

For some of the men mentioned above and for others in the study there were additional incidents that brought to light their need to find ways to change their
behaviors. These incidents were actions taken by their partners. Findings related to these actions are presented in the next section.

Partners finding their voices. The wives of the majority of the participants took actions that were forceful and focused. They did not persist in the passivity that was the hallmark of the participant’s mothers. Many accepted the abuse for varying lengths of time but most stood up to their husbands and took definite steps that had profound effects on the decisions made by the participants related to changing their behaviors. These women truly acted as catalysts in promoting a change in the men and in improving their own lives and the lives of their children. Whether they ended the marriage or stayed the incidents they initiated were effective in provoking change. The actions of the wives of these men are clearly identified as significant and pivotal in their decisions to find ways to change their beliefs and conduct.

Many of the participants spoke of some overt action by their partner that provided an awakening. Art, Brandon and Larry indicated that definitive positions taken by their wives that showed that they would no longer accept the abuse, directly led to their voluntary participation in an intervention program for domestic abuse. Art had been grappling with the knowledge of his abusive behaviors for a number of years. The loss of his first marriage was an indication to him that his behaviors were problematic and gave him an awareness on a superficial level that his temper and need for control were troublesome aspects of his personality. He recognized too, that his childhood experiences probably had some effect on his behaviors. He met his second wife through his attendance at an Adult Children of Alcoholics group, which he joined to try to understand the problems that had destroyed his first marriage. Despite this superficial recognition,
his behavioral problems continued to a point where his second wife definitively stated that he must change. Art stated:

My second wife, after several years, said, ‘Now if you continue to act this way,’ and it wasn’t all the time, but when I blew up and stuff like that, she says, ‘if you continue to do this, I just can’t live with you.’ She said, ‘We gotta do this differently.’ So, that’s how I ended up going to Mark (director, intervention program).

Brandon’s story of his recognition that he needed to change began after an incident of abuse that prompted his wife to make a decision to leave him and to begin making plans to do so. At her urging, he agreed to contact a men’s intervention program. “I’m like, all right, I’ll call, I’ll go. I’m thinking, I really felt like our marriage was done and I wanted to try to save it. That’s why I went.” However, he admits that his attitude was somewhat less than open-minded. “You know, I also thought when I get there they’ll tell me that she was wrong and I was right. I was still looking for that justification.” This was true of many of the men in the study. All but one recognized through some means that there was a need to change but the comprehension that the responsibility for the abuse was theirs had not yet fully developed. Acceptance of responsibility came later for almost all of the participants as they learned about the issues of domestic abuse through participation in an intervention program.

John’s wife left him after obtaining a Protection from Abuse order (PFA). This action on her part led to additional charges for attempting to break into their home, for breaking the PFA order and assault. While incarcerated he became aware of his need to change and his initial goal was to save his marriage. He said, “I really didn’t think much
about nothing except Anne was getting a divorce, and I didn’t want to think about any abuse or anything.” His primary goal when he began his court-ordered abuse intervention program was to save his marriage. He explained his feelings at that time:

When I first started this I was doing everything I could to get Anne back. I didn’t realize it until later on – I didn’t really care so much if I changed for me or not. I just wanted Anne back and I was willing to do anything to get her back.

Greg’s wife began an affair and stated that she wanted a separation from Greg after years of ongoing and escalating physical and emotional abuse. A discussion about the desired separation set off Greg’s last abuse of his wife and led to his arrest. Greg’s desire to save his marriage was the defining factor in his decision to find a way to change after realizing that he had been abusive. Greg relates, “I went [to an abuse intervention program] because she wanted me to. She would call me to see how I was…and we talked to a pastor about her affair and my problems. I knew I didn’t want a divorce.”

In each of these cases a decisive action on the part of the spouse gave these men a reason to change. The understanding that the future of their marriage was on the line motivated them. It was clear to each that an action must be taken by them if they wished to continue in their marriages. They also experienced tremendous fear over the potential loss of their families and of their sense of control over their partners and children that they had felt entitled to for all of their lives. John spoke about his feelings of loss as he sat in prison. He stated:

I had no place to go. I had lost everything. Lost my house, lost my wife, my kids – everything I cared about was gone, and I had nobody to blame but me. So that’s
when I started to look at my life – I had to change. How? I didn’t know how, but I knew I was going to have to change.

Larry became clinically depressed as a result of the knowledge of his wife’s affair and her leaving the marriage for a new partner. It was a harrowing experience for Larry that left him feeling completely alone. He recognized that he was responsible for the desperate situation he found himself in. “I lost everything, my world was coming to an end. Why? Because I was being a abusive person… I didn’t want to be that person anymore.” This recognition of his wife’s leaving the marriage and the dissolution of his family was the impetus for Larry to find a way to change his behavior. He received treatment for his depression and his therapist suggested that he attend an intervention program for domestic abuse.

The losses experienced by the participants have been significant and powerful in their ability to motivate these men to change. Larry’s comments best sum up the gravity of the losses felt by many of these men. He said that he realized he needed to change in response to the loss of his wife. “That was my motivation, sure, the whole family split up. I walked into my house and I was all alone. I dropped to my knees – and I wasn’t praying.”

A Mechanism for Change

The purpose of this section is to reveal the methods used by the participants to change their abusive behaviors and subsequently their lives and the lives of their partners and families. All but one of the participants in this study attended and completed an abuse intervention program for men and identified this program as a means of accomplishing their change. Four different programs are represented among the group. These programs
are all based on the underlying principles of acknowledgement of their abusive behaviors and accountability for their actions. Each program emphasizes that the client’s behavior must be dealt with as individual conscious acts that are not justified by the behavior of the victim. This is the most difficult concept for most men in abuse intervention programs to deal with. There is widespread belief among participants in these programs that the victim is to blame for provoking incidents of abuse and/or displaying abusive behaviors themselves. The findings presented here offer explanations about why these men were able to gain more from their experiences in an abuse intervention program than the majority of those who attend. Four areas of interest are presented. They include 1) Engaging in reflection; a presentation of the participant’s recognition of their behaviors and the need to change. 2) Working in the program; exploring the effects of the abuse intervention program including the concepts learned there. 3) Discovering an advocate for change; a description of the individuals who provided guidance, insight and support for the participants as they struggled to make changes in their lives. 4) Encountering the spiritual; occurrences specific to one of the participants who made remarkable changes through an intense religious experience.

Engaging in reflection. These men demonstrated the ability to reflect on the events of their lives in varying degrees of intensity and depth. For some, the process of telling their story to me elicited a number of sensitive observations about themselves and their families. All of them were able to acknowledge responsibility and accountability for the harm they had caused. All too were able to describe the events of their childhood and to see the connection between those events and the abuse that they committed against their partners and their children. They were also able to understand the need for change
and the benefits to themselves and others. All but one of the participants were empathetic toward their partner or former partner and again expressed that empathy in varying degrees of awareness.

Matthew, by far, was the most reflective of his life as a child and his personality strengths and flaws that have formed and led him to his current place in life. He provided many of his thoughts about his life in writing and included information about the books he has read to help him to understand himself. He spoke eloquently of his regard for his favorite authors and books including Thomas Moore’s *Care of the Soul* and *Original Self*. He has also read *Identity of the Life Cycle* by Eric Ericson. His reflection on the sources of his anxiety and his responses to that anxiety produced the feelings and emotions that he relates to his transition. He reveals a deep searching into the elements of the Self through his writing as he searches for reasons and insights into his change process.

Matthew also expressed a concern about his own narcissism and acknowledged that he now needs to turn his gaze more toward his wife and child as he leaves this process of self-analysis. His writings are included in Appendix B. He stated in my second interview with him that he is, “ready to let go of probing and striving for an ideal self.” He plans to work harder to listen to his wife and son and to continue to work toward a better relationship with his wife. Matthew’s statement in my initial interview with him about what he considers a good relationship is indicative of his ability to reflect not only on himself but to improve his relationships with others. He said:

I think there has to be a lot of sharing and not just sharing of ideas or affections. I think I as the man, I have to be willing to give up some of my autonomy and power and control, which has not been an easy thing for me to learn.
Brandon learned of his need to empathize with his wife by asking her to tell him how she felt about the mean and demeaning things he had said to her in the past. This process of hearing and reflecting on his wife’s perspective has helped him to make changes in his behavior toward her. Brandon explained:

I’d just sit…and listen to what she had to say. It was brutal. I’d have to ask, ‘How would you feel if I did this or when I did this?’ I needed to know how she felt when…I did that to her…I’d be like, ‘Let’s talk. When I called you a bitch, what did that make you feel? How did that affect you?’ She was like, ‘When you did it over and over again, I started to believe that you really don’t care about me.’ …That kind of stuff that I never thought was abusive, she would always say; ‘If you cared about me you wouldn’t say those things.’ So then I learned, yeah, she’s right. I’m wrong.

John spoke about when he really started to understand that what he had done was wrong and that he needed to change. He spoke about his ability to reflect on his behaviors and the nature of the changes he needed to make while he was in prison. He said:

You sit in prison for three months and then again for another three months, you have a lot of time to think. You have a lot of time to understand. I know if I didn’t stop, I was going to kill somebody. How I was going to stop; I just didn’t know. When I first started this [program]…I didn’t really care so much if I changed for me or not… But then as we got into it, I could see the hate. I needed to change for me. For nobody else, but for me. And that was the biggest tool I think I have.
Several others expressed a deep sense of consideration and thought regarding the causes and effects of the abuse they had been subjected to and the abuse they committed. For most of the men in this study the process of reflection played a considerable role in their ability to make sense of their lives and to discern the meaning of their past. The examination of what they did and what was done to them has provided them with a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and has indicated to them the tools they need to employ to continue to improve their relationships and their lives.

Only Brian gave no indication that his abusive behaviors affected his former partner adversely. He does not believe that he was justified in his actions but has a strong sense of injustice in that he feels his wife is equally to blame. He is very committed to non-abuse, especially with his children but he harbors intense anger for his spouse and in particular for her present partner. Brian’s mechanism for dealing with his feelings about this is, “I try not to think about it.” His answers to questions concerning the reasons why things happened in his early life with his parent’s or with his family as an adult were often punctuated with “I don’t remember or I don’t know. He would then state some fact related to the questions but was dismissive of any deeper meaning attached to events. At times he seemed a little impatient with my questions but answered everything in a factual manner and often offered additional information.

Working in a program. Of the nine men who completed an abuse intervention program for men only four were court-ordered to do so. The rest sought the experience on a voluntary basis, or through the urging of their partners. All of these men credit the educational content of the program and perhaps more importantly the directors and counselors who teach in the program, with helping them to change and to improve their
lives. All of these men remain in contact with program counselors in varying ways. John, Brandon, Chris and Greg serve as peer counselors and attend sessions at least every two weeks to assist with the running of the program and to serve as a motivation to other men. The other men visit at least monthly to speak with a counselor or to drop in on a session to refresh their commitment to a non-abusive lifestyle. They expressed a feeling of acceptance and comfort that they enjoy from this continued contact. Three of the men attend advanced peer groups that meet weekly and discuss general issues, including abusive behaviors. Ken describes his comfort level and feelings of safety within his group by stating, “I feel like there’s nothing I can’t say at [his program].”

The abuse intervention programs attended by these men were similar in their approach to confronting the problems of domestic abuse. The philosophy statements of these program focus on the concepts that all abuse is wrong, that abuse is a learned behavior, that domestic abuse is primarily about power and control and that the safety of the victim is central to the treatment process.

Two of the four programs also offer counseling and support to the partners of their clients, and will hold couples counseling for those men who have completed the initial 26-week program. One program also offers an abuse intervention for women. Chris and his wife were both involved with the organization and began receiving individual counseling when the abusive episode occurred between them that proved to be the end of their marriage. Chris credits the program as helping him to see his behaviors realistically. When I asked him how he began to realize that he was an abuser he said:
It was the class here. If it wasn’t for this class, I wouldn’t be a better person today. I wouldn’t be. I know after I got arrested what I did was wrong…but to fully understand it, that I will be an abuser, doesn’t set in ‘til you come to class.

Brian often returns to his program to offer support to other men or to discuss events going on in his life with one of the directors. He stated that he finished the initial program as a court ordered client then had to return for second round of sessions. He explained:

I kind of discharged myself and then I had a little incident a little while later and went back into it for another three months. I basically told Edward [director] not to let me go until they were sure that I was ready.

Larry too, has developed a good relationship with another director at the same program and often returns to speak with her about his current situation. He describes why he voluntarily entered the program after his psychotherapist recommended it:

He [director] told me what they were about, how they were a women’s advocacy, they believe in working with the family as opposed to women in crisis who just put the man in jail and away forever. This appealed to me because it’s what I wanted.

Brandon spoke of an important aspect of his decision to change that he learned while attending his program. He stated:

I went in starting out, I wanted to save my marriage…it transformed from wanting to save my marriage…to, if my marriage is over I need to do it for me…I didn’t want to be like this with my kids and I didn’t want to be like this to other people.
All of the nine men who attended an intervention program are adamant about the positive effect it has had on them, yet many acknowledge that the majority of men who attend these programs, specifically those who are court ordered, do not change their beliefs or their behaviors. Chris expressed an opinion that was similar to many of the participants about the success rates for intervention programs. He said:

A very small percentage of people who come to class ever rehabilitate to become better people. A lot of people will be in here, just sitting in classes. You can look at people and know they’re going to be back again…who just doesn’t get it. A lot of people think it’s a racket…it’s a punishment.

Brandon echoed Chris’s thoughts on many of the men who attend intervention programs but expressed a little more hope that change is possible. He stated:

It’s like pulling teeth. You get a couple guys every now and then that are just born again and they get it…Most guys, I really think get it more than they let on, because they don’t want to let anybody know that they’re going to change or that they have changed. There’s some guys that are just not going to and I don’t know how to get to them yet.

The success that these men experienced within an abuse intervention program seems to be a relatively rare occurrence. An aspect of the experiences that they all shared was that they showed a willingness to listen and engage themselves in the concepts presented. They overcame the negativity that is common among abusers in intervention programs.

*Discovering an advocate for change.* One element that they had in common was that each of them indicated that they formed a positive and therapeutic relationship with
someone within the program that provided a support for change. This source of support and encouragement for change was mentioned by most of the participants including Stephen who did not attend a program. The presence of another individual who can provide motivation and encouragement appears to be an invaluable component of success for these men. The importance of developing a therapeutic relationship is presented in the findings contained in this section.

Several men identified a single person as very significant in helping them to transform their beliefs and their lives. The men described an amazing sense of gratitude toward these people who, for some, were almost chance encounters. The importance of a personal connection to another person who provided understanding, support and guidance seemed to be particularly important.

Art believes that Mark, the director of his intervention program was a real catalyst for change that challenged and supported him in his search for more appropriate ways of relating to the people in his life. Art states:

Mark’s group makes a world of difference. I mean this guy’s great. If you were willing to work, but you have to work at it. I mean, it takes hard work…I think that’s part of what helped me change is the fact that I respect Mark so much. I think he’s totally honest and he doesn’t have any pretenses or any kind of intellectual stuff that isn’t real. It’s just real hard work.

John believes that an encounter with an inmate in prison was a very significant event in his process of change. He met this man in a Bible study class held by the inmates and felt a connection with this person who offered understanding and support. John relates:
I met a couple of guys there [Bible study], especially this one guy. He stayed up with me into the wee hours of the morning. He gave me good advice, and we talked about everything, about what I did, my dad, and during one of the sessions it finally came out that I hated my dad. I didn’t hate my dad, but I hated my dad’s doing what he did to me and how it affected my life. And once I got that out, then I could start seeing what I had to get to…If it wasn’t for him I never would have gotten a different attitude.

Chris also was very clear in his feeling that there is a need for a personal connection with someone who can assist in the change process. He believes that he would not have been successful if it had not been for the connection he made with one of the directors at the program he attended. Chris says:

I think the really biggest thing for any class is finding someone that works for you…If it wasn’t for Brenda I don’t know if I would have got as much out of it as I did…She really knows what she’s doing. To me, it’s about knowing the person you’re talking to, listening to what they’re saying and applying that to what you’re trying to teach that person, and it works.

Ken spoke of his ability to be open with the director of his program along with the men in his group with whom he meets weekly. He relates that he tried to develop close relationships in the past but they did not work out. He states that he has few friends outside of the intervention group. He feels comfortable with these men and sees them on a social basis occasionally. Ken credits his comfort level that he feels with the director and the men in his program with helping him to become a better person. He explains,
“I’ve see Mark a few times alone …I don’t think there’s anything I’ve not told guys at [program name].

Larry, who has been through psychotherapy and medication to relieve depression after his wife left him, credits a co-director of his intervention program for helping him maintain his stability and resolve to change. He returns to his program regularly for her support and advice. Larry said:

I went through the program and when my twenty-six weeks were up I was going to leave and Brenda said, ‘No, you ain’t going nowhere.’ And then one day I said well, I can’t afford it. And she said, you just keep coming. I said well how long do I have to come? Brenda looked at me and said, ‘I’ll tell you when to stop.’ She hasn’t told me to stop yet. That’s why I go now. If I have something on my chest, I just leave it off my chest [there]. Brenda will give me two minutes so I have time to talk

Stephen is the only participant who did not attend an abuse intervention program. He credits his recognition of his abusive behaviors and ability to change his life to a breathtakingly spiritual occurrence that was precipitated by his conversation with a golf partner who he had met once previously. This man was a religious fundamentalist and Stephen sees him as a messenger from God. Stephen was raised in the Catholic faith and since his transformation has intensified his ties to the Catholic Church. Stephen’s description of his encounter with Michael is dramatic and fascinating. Stephen states:

We’re just sitting in a golf cart together and he says to me, ‘Stephen, what’s wrong?’ And I say, ‘What do you mean what’s wrong? There’s nothing wrong.’…He goes, ‘Well, I played golf with you yesterday and I just want to
I said, ‘Look, there’s nothing wrong with me, man.’ He says, ‘Look, I’m not teeing off until you tell me.’ So, I said, ‘Okay, fine, I’ll tell you. I have absolutely everything I ever wanted in life and I have absolutely nothing.’ He said, What are you looking for?’ I said, ‘I can’t find it.’ He said, ‘What is it?’ I said, ‘A bullet.’ He said, ‘You won’t find it…because Jesus sent me in its place.’ I went, whoa, inside myself, I went, I’m dead meat, I am crucified. Done, I was done right there. He continues on and he says, ‘Stephen, look at me, you’re sliding, you’re going right down into the pit.’…So, he grabs me by the arm and says, ‘Take a chance if you want. I might be the last one to tell you.’ Well I was done, just totally done.

Immediately after his encounter with Michael, Stephen began to change his life. He broke off his ten-year relationship with his girlfriend, an act that proved to be mutually agreeable to both of them.

The importance of connecting with someone who is supportive and trustworthy made a difference for the majority of these men. Even for those men who did not name a specific person the belief that they were accepted and supported within their intervention programs was very significant to them.

**Encountering the spiritual.** Changes in ideology often require a reflective process that may deal with aspects of the unconscious and non-rational Self. Within this realm of the non-rational, spirituality provides an impetus for change. Issues of spirituality or religious beliefs were not a part of the questions I prepared for the interviews. Questions about religious beliefs in relation to domestic abuse can be problematic in that there are so many interpretations of spirituality and an espousal of a certain brand of belief or of
non-belief may have altered the responses of the participants. Additionally, the tenets of patriarchy, which are a cornerstone of many established faiths, are often viewed as perpetuating the problems of male privilege and control within the family. However, the topic of religion and spirituality was introduced by the participants in many of the interviews, and provided a source for change and sustenance in a few of them. For one, an intense spiritual transformation occurred that was immediate and its effects have been lasting.

Stephen views his transformation as a “milli-second in time” that was given to him by God through the form of Michael, an acquaintance whom he met to play golf. This event occurred then years ago and he has continued to grow in his faith and his belief about abuse. The nature of his change and its effect on him are moving and grand in their scope of effect. He made immediate life changes and continues a devotion to his faith and to “bringing souls to Christ,” especially those of young women who may become the victims of domestic abuse. Stephen described himself as a “cradle Catholic although non-practicing” until his encounter with Michael. He explains what happened as “a Christ incident in my life” and spoke of his actions following this milli-second in time. Stephen stated:

I knew exactly what I had to do. I had to go to confession. I had to get what was inside me onto that cross. Now I say that with a clear understanding of what goes on in the sacrament of Reconciliation, ten years later. But, at the time I just knew that, oh, my God, I mean I could die right now and I’d go to Hell! That was the thought, and I can still remember the first time back at confession and the priest, I
held nothing back. If I did it I said it and, forget the civil law, we’re talking about God’s law and I received a great deal of healing in a very short period of time.

Stephen continued a casual relationship with Michael for a time but has not contacted him for a number of years. He plans to reconnect with him soon to commemorate the 10th anniversary of his transformation.

To a lesser extent, several other men mentioned a spiritual influence. For example, John grew up in what he describes as “a family that – they were supposed to have been Christians, and my house was real strict…not only religion, but in their beliefs.” John’s father’s abuse stood in stark contrast to his religious beliefs according to John. “He was a Christian, and he would go to church on Sunday, and on Wednesday night. He would even stand out on the corners and in the middle of the street and preach.” John doesn’t belong to any established religion but still has a deep faith in God despite his early experiences with his father. He spoke of his faith as playing a part in his change:

If God wants your attention, He’s gonna get your attention. And I believe He saw what was going on, that night I almost killed Anne. And He put me in a place [jail] where I had no choice but to listen to Him, because on the street I wasn’t listen to Him.

Ken, as a protestant minister, who is soon to be defrocked, is introspective and disconcerted about religion especially the type of conservative faith he has practiced all his life. Simultaneously, he clings to his conservative religious beliefs as he is struggling to acknowledge the fact that his needs for spiritual support and assistance in his current situation are not being met by his religion. Ken eloquently describes this dilemma:
I’ve learned that I’m not irreducibly religious, that [his program] is a secular program. It’s a progressively oriented institution. In fact, as you know better than I, the entire endeavor to confront and so on, battering, male partner abuse, well, I guess even female partner abuse now, is a product of the progressive community. It’s not a product of the Catholic Church or the Evangelical Christian Church…So, I’ve come to grips with the fact that the faith community I’m from has done nothing for me and I had to go to the leftists and the feminists to make any progress…I’m really struggling to understand [that].

With the exception of Ken who is struggling to rectify conservative and liberal religious beliefs, the sense of spirituality for a number of men within this group was a source of strength and comfort. Their belief that a Higher Power acted in some way to assist them in their time of need is powerful and provided hope and encouragement to them.

The means of change discussed in this section were employed by the men in this study to accomplish a change in the nature of their beliefs about the worth and dignity of their partners, the value of their relationships with their partners and children, and the nature of the abusive behaviors to which they previously believed they were entitled. Their new beliefs and the actions that accompany them are presented in the next section.

*Acting on New Beliefs*

The process of ideological change for the participants was based on their ability to reflect on previously held beliefs and to understand that there was a need to change those beliefs. It also included taking action based on new beliefs to change their lives and the lives of their partners and children. The participants in this study have been able to
articulate their old ideologies and to recognize the need for change. They have also indicated that they have changed the way they think about their partners and themselves.

The following sub-sections present examples of ideological changes as stated by the participants and include how those beliefs are revealed in the behavioral changes that are derived from them.

Changes in ideologies that were expressed by participants have been organized into four categories. They include 1) Respect replaces abuse. 2) Relationships should be equal partnerships. 3) Open and honest communication is essential. In addition 4) Assisting others is necessary.

*Respect replaces abuse.* All of the men voiced the understanding that abuse is wrong. They spoke of this in general tones and specifically toward their partners and children. They spoke of the need to respect their partners and in turn were able to respect themselves. There are methods that they apply to their actions and behaviors to keep their commitment to maintain respect for their partners and for others. For most this is a continual process that they practice daily. Several were able to articulate the thoughts and actions they utilize in preventing abusive behavior. Brandon explains the internal dialog he uses to deal with frustration and expectations within his relationship. He states:

> I’m trying to change the internal dialog that goes on in myself. Instead of, if I’m noticing that its, you are [doing something], you aren’t [doing something], and [I’m] complaining. I start to try to [say], okay, why don’t I take a step back and go ‘What am I doing?’ Try to change it to me. And then I also try to identify what my feelings are. If it’s inadequacy - I feel like I do have a lot of inadequacies.
Chris described how he remembers his abuse and uses it to act differently toward his partner and children. He said:

It scares me to know that I’ve been there. It scared me a lot in the past year to know that I was there and the emotions are still fresh. I don’t think I will be abusive again because I make better choices, healthier choices. I’m honest, up front, I walk away.

Stephen also stated the belief that he needs to remember what he has done to his partners so that he will never be tempted to do it again. Stephen expressed this by saying I get the [newspaper] every day. I look at the headlines and I say, Lord, a man did that, a man did that, a man did that. I go to the second page; you pick the worst case scenario. A man did that. And then I say, Lord, I am a man…I am capable of doing that, that, that, except for using Your Grace.

Other participants spoke of “taking time” or “stepping back” from situations that they feel could become problematic.

In respecting women and marital relationships as gifts, John related his feelings about the worth of his soon to be wife and his marriage. John said:

I’ve come to realize that a woman that-especially a husband and wife that are on the same wave length and both want the same thing out of life-you’re a gift to each other… Instead of cherishing and looking at her [wife] as a gift that God gave me-when someone gives you a gift, what do you do with it? You don’t throw it around; you don’t kick it; you don’t abuse it. You take care of the gift.

Stephen also expressed respect for women eloquently in a phrase he adopted as a mantra that he uses frequently and teaches to the young boys that he coaches. He states, “
God created women holy, sacred, pure and innocent – almost untouchable.” In speaking directly to women Stephen states, “Jesus wants to protect you from or remove you from all relationships that are unhealthy.”

Dealing with past feelings of anger and revenge and learning to respect women and refrain from abusive behaviors was difficult for some of the participants. Brian still holds anger toward his wife and her new partner. Brian said, “It’s going to be a long time before I can say, ‘I forgive you’ to her because she has done me wrong so much, so many times… I’ll probably be on my deathbed when I say that to her.” Although he has been unable to forgive his wife and still holds feelings of anger toward her he clearly believes he will not use physical abuse against anyone again. He said, “I’ve demonstrated that I don’t need to resort to abuse to get what I want or resort to abuse to satisfy myself.”

Larry had come to grips with abusive behaviors that were a central part of his life. The loss of his wife has been difficult and for a long time he harbored feelings of extreme anger toward her and her new partner. In the past year, he states that he has been able to let go of those feelings and to move past his desire for revenge. He now is able to treat his soon-to-be-ex-wife respectfully and he works hard to provide the respect and caring that he feels his new partner deserves. Larry said:

I’d have dreams like where I figure out every intimate detail about how to go up to [city]… sneak in the back door, walk over there, shoot him up with a little bit of dope, knock him out, drop a cigarette on the floor conveniently into a basket of torn up newspaper. I used to think of this stuff all the time… I don’t think like that no more.
Larry also offered evidence that he has really changed his ideas and beliefs about using abuse as a means to solve problems. His previous belief system had supported his feelings of entitlement and allowed him to use abusive actions to deal with his feelings. When he related a comment his son made to him concerning his reaction to his wife’s leaving he offered evidence that he had changed the way he deals with hurt and disappointment. Previously this news would have precipitated anger and destruction rather than acceptance. He said:

‘How do I know if I’ve changed?’…My son stood there in the middle of my living room and said, ‘The TV is not outside on the front pavement, there are no holes punched in the wall, you’re not screaming and hollering at anybody, you’re not hitting anybody. Dad, you’ve changed.’

The concept of abuse as wrong, particularly within an intimate relationship, was inherent in the interviews with all of the participants. They all offered a clear understanding that what they had done was wrong and that abuse is unacceptable in any relationship.

They also spoke of the benefits to themselves they received through changing from an abusive mindset. Art best related how the changes in his beliefs and actions in his relationship with his wife and his use of abuse in general have had a positive effect on him. He stated, “I feel so much better about myself now and so much more relaxed and more capable of feeling for things and knowing myself better.”

Another firmly held belief by the majority of the men concerned their role as fathers and passing on the beliefs concerning respect for others and the elimination of abuse that they now hold. Although Brian still feels anger toward his wife and her partner
he is adamant about not using physical abuse against anyone again particularly his children. About the children he said,

I mean sometimes they’ll really, especially the oldest, there are times he does get under my skin to the point where I feel that he deserves a spanking, but I don’t…I might have been for it a couple years ago, but now I’m totally against it. Because I guess the fact that being a father really changed me, because every time I hear about a kid, no matter how young they are, they’ve been abused in some way, I’ll feel bad.

Matthew spoke of his need to become less self-centered and to focus his efforts on providing a good family life for his son by working together with his wife. He said, “It has to be done. We have a son to raise in the right way. And he’s going to watch what we are doing and he’s going to have his own blueprint to walk away with.”

Chris stressed the importance of family and being a good father when he said, “I want to be a normal person. I want to be a loving father… I don’t want to be rich. It’s not my goal in life. I’m quite content making enough money to survive and enjoying my family.” He added a statement about teaching his sons to avoid abuse. Chris relates:

The other day in daycare, some kid hit him for a second time and he turned around and took the toy and whacked him upside the head. And then, the kid’s people said, well, he deserved it. I’m like, that’s beside the point. As a parent two years ago, before this class I would have thought, ‘way to go, son.’ But now I don’t think that way.

Practicing and modeling respect for intimate partners, children and other people in general constitutes the major aspect of the changes to the belief systems of the
participants. They clearly articulated this central point in describing the character of their change and pointed to the actions they now exhibit based on their new ideology.

*Relationships should be equal partnerships.* All of the men in some way voiced the idea of an equal partnership between men and women. It was evident that the men felt strongly about this as it was the most commonly expressed belief, and it was usually the first thought that came to mind when they were asked about their belief changes. Art said, “I really see a relationship as a partnership, the rules are always just to be a companion, and a partner, and a co-traveler. We share the responsibilities, everything.”

Matthew conveyed his changing beliefs about women and his spouse in particular, in a way that indicates his keen ability to look inward and see the reasons for his behavior. He says:

I think there has to be a lot of sharing and not just sharing of ideas or affections. I think as a man, I have to be able to give up some of my autonomy and share how we’re in control, which has not been an easy thing for me to learn. But I think its fundamental. I think there has to be careful listening and a lot of patience because listening doesn’t always happen.

Brandon explained his belief that there is not a single definition of an ideal relationship or a woman’s ideal role within a relationship. Brandon says:

I really don’t think that there is much of a role, like a standard cookie cut kind of role for a woman in a relationship. I think it’s something that now has to be decided upon between both…as an equal partnership. Are you going to be the one that’s going to work? Am I going to be the one that’s working? Both working? Are we sharing equal responsibility with the kids?… If I had to say
there was a role it would just be to be honest in the relationship… I think you need to support each other and truly care about the other person.

Chris expressed his thoughts about what an ideal relationship between men and women should be. He said, “[It’s] a 50-50 partnership…it’s very strong in my opinion, sharing, being there for each other…you have a good understanding and you don’t control the other person.”

Greg described his difficulties with understanding a good relationship between a man and a woman before he ended his abusive ways when he said, “That’s something I really had trouble with because I had the traditional ideas. After I went to [program] I learned that it should be more of a partnership.”

John believes that men and women in relationships should compromise with each other to bring about mutual happiness in a relationship. He describes a situation where they need to work together. John explains:

I believe they should make compromises, where they learn to negotiate…and learn how to speak to each other without raising their voices. Just showing each other genuine love without any strings attached…When we are together, we really don’t argue. We have discussions.

All of the men gave similar responses in speaking about an ideal relationship. They did not hesitate to explain their understanding of the need for a fair and equal partnership between a man and a woman.

The statements made by the participants point to obvious change in their attitudes and beliefs about their relationships with their partners. It was clear in the way they expressed themselves that they understood the importance of this change.
their relationships with their families and have a greater understanding of the beauty of connection with another person.

*Open and honest communication is essential.* All of the men spoke in some way of the importance they place on frequent and effective communication that is necessary between two people in an intimate relationship. They mentioned the belief that it is essential to communicate their feelings and ideas to their partner and to listen to her thoughts and feelings. Art explained the difference in the way he communicates with his wife since he as come to value his relationship with her differently. He said, “It’s much more reasoned and it’s not as me oriented and it’s not as controlling oriented and I think it’s much more level headed.”

Larry also spoke of the way he has changed how he communicates with his new partner and with other people. He said, “I don’t react the same way to people as I did before. I try to think a lot more.”

Brian discussed communication and partnership when he spoke of the important belief changes he had made. He said, “Communication for one thing [is essential], I mean you got to communicate on finances, whatever makes a relationship stronger. It should be more of a partnership. There should be mutual agreements on everything. Trust and honesty.”

Chris expressed his feelings clearly about the need for frequent communication with his new partner. He feels that they are both very aware of the importance of talking to each other about their relationship and their feelings. Chris states:

The most important thing is we communicate…You sort of go through that process together… How we should raise our kids, how we should discipline them,
how we should talk to each other. Do we have ground rules in place, do we understand each other, and if someone needs to go for a walk [take a time out], just take a walk and come back to it.

John crystallized this idea of honest communication and the right of a woman to speak her mind when he said:

I guess I just mainly want to live by – its okay for a woman to speak up, to feel at ease and say what she wants to say. I believe that it’s okay for a woman to speak up and not be put down for it…She could be right even if it makes you wrong.

He summarized his beliefs by saying, “If I only live by one principle, as far as the household goes, it is; I’m going to let you speak up without fearing that you’re going to be abused for it.”

Effective and fair communication techniques were very important to the participants. They saw these techniques as the outward manifestation of their new and more egalitarian belief system.

_Assisting others is necessary._ Several of the participants spoke of the importance of helping other men to understand the causes and nature of domestic abuse and to help them find ways to stop their behaviors. Brandon provided a good example of the way those men who assist other men to change their abusive ways feel about their commitment. He spoke about the spiritual nature of his beliefs concerning his volunteering as a peer counselor at his intervention program. He believes that everything has a purpose and that there are connections between seemingly unrelated events if you are open to observing them. He explains:
It’s funny because I believe in destiny and divine intervention and things and I can really look back on choices over my life and think, maybe the abuse that I suffered as a kid and maybe what I put my wife through is [for] a good reason. Twelve years of our marriage before I got help maybe it was really so that I could help other guys. It’s not an excuse to make that all go away, but that if I wouldn’t have came through that, I wouldn’t be able to help some guys.

Brian too, stated that he returns often to his intervention program to provide motivation to the men who are going through the program. He states:

Yeah, I still keep in touch. [with his program]. They ask me to come back once a month. You know like offer advice, to give the other men a sense of hope that you can lead a productive life if you learn to control yourself.

John has been volunteering with his intervention program for several years and enjoys sharing the things that he learned there with others. He explains:

I think the biggest thing that I’ve taken from there and I try to pass it on to the other guys was …a river of anger. It’s two lines with branches and streams going off. The middle is anger, and the lines are behavior, sensations, feelings and thoughts. And it is used to help you become aware of what happens when you get angry.

Chris explained the reasons that he continues to volunteer his time at his intervention program. He said:

It interests me, it does…I sit in the class and I have stuff to offer because I’ve been through the class. For me, it’s two reasons; I do it because to me it’s extra therapy. It’s always good to reinforce what you know. And also I do it because I
feel like I have something to offer…This may be my calling somewhere down the road.

Art emphasized the importance of maintaining a connection between himself and the other people in his intervention group as a means of mutual self help. He said:

[I can] see that together, we could help each other. Probably none of us on our own can make it and stay as healthy as we want to stay. But if we’re willing to work together, and these guys who would probably choose to stay as far away from us as they possible could if we weren’t in similar situations. We have become so close. You know them better than you know anyone else on the planet.

The need to help other men to stop their abusive behaviors and the desire to help themselves through providing support for others was evident in the majority of the participants’ statements.

Other ideological statements that resist categorization were offered by one participant and are included here because of the depth of meaning and importance to him. His beliefs stated here reflect the framework for his new life. As state previously, the process of change for Stephen was miraculous in nature and included a reawakening and rededication to firm religious beliefs. He believes he has been transformed in the most spiritual/religious sense of the word and every moment of his life is dedicated to his working in unobtrusive ways to protect women from abuse and to bring souls to God. Stephen holds some very specific tenets about marriage and sexual intercourse that reflect his belief in the view of the Catholic Church on marriage as a sacrament that joins a man and a woman in the presence of God to be a gift emotionally, spiritually and physically to
one another. He clearly explains this relationship when he explains the reasons why sex outside of marriage is wrong:

[Sex], it’s a gift from God for a relationship of a man and a woman called together for the purpose of marriage. They know their calling. They make it public to the world by having the ceremony and then the fact that they are called to marriage indicates the marital embrace. That’s the only, there is no other reason for that.

This belief is the reason for Stephen’s choice of a celibate life unless and until he meets someone who he believes he can join with in a marriage of this kind. Stephen spoke about a reverence and respect for women that he embraces and practices. Additionally, he strives to teach the young men he coaches and to make women aware of their value when he uses this phrase often in speaking with both. Stephen says, “God created women, holy, sacred, pure and innocent – almost untouchable.” In a letter Stephen wrote on this topic he added these words, “He [God] wishes all men to see them and treat them in that manner each and every day of their life.”

The other participants, although they did not express themselves in purely religious tones as Stephen did, spoke of the need to respect women.

The descriptions of new beliefs and actions indicated by all of the participants reveal changes in their views of women, relationships, responsibility within relationships and their use of abuse. These men related the changes that have occurred in their lives as a result of the changes they made to their belief systems. These changes are associated with their ideas about the roles of women, the abuse of power and the necessity for men to challenge the social tenets of society that support male privilege. Each of these men in
some way have made changes that have improved their lives and the lives of their families. At the end of his interview, Larry offered an explanation of his new outlook that could be applied to the other applicants in the study and that succinctly states the substance of the ideological shifts experienced by these men. He said, “I know I’m not in charge, and that’s basically the way I live now.”

Summary

The findings that have been reported here are the result of in-depth interviews with ten men who have been abusive toward their spouses and children in the past. Some of the discoveries of information found have been disturbing. They invoke feelings of both empathy and aversion as they reveal the experiences of men who treated their loved ones with anger, rage, meanness and extreme disrespect. The findings show that they believed they had the right to do this in large part because, as men, it was an expectation of their role and for most, because it had been done to them. The majority did not view their behaviors as wrong until an incident or series of incidents forced them to see that they could not continue to behave in their accustomed way. These incidents were often painful and costly to themselves and also to their victims. Most have paid deeply for the actions they have taken against their partners and children but this does not compare to the pain they inflicted. In varying degrees, these men have shown that they understand the pain they have caused and are working hard to amend the damage that has resulted to the lives of their loved ones.

Some of the reasons for abusive behaviors in these men have been identified through their histories. Their process of change has included; the development of a climate for change, a recognition of the need to change, some mechanism they used to
accomplish that change, and the differences in their beliefs and actions that have results as a consequence of that change.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how formerly abusive men learned to stop their abuse toward their partners, and what kind of ideological changes in their understanding of abuse, women, and society resulted in the cessation of their abusive behaviors. The meaning of that change to them as individuals and in relation to others along with the critical elements that precipitated and facilitated that change have been explored. In addition, there is an analysis of the change process experienced by the participants that examines the similarities and differences found within their stories.

The questions posed by this study were a) What are the similarities or differences in the experiences and views of abuse held by these men? b) What are the similarities or differences in the reasons offered for their change? c) Do the experiences of abusive men who are able to change contain instances or clues that are related to their ability to learn to change? d) Can transformative learning adequately account for the changes experienced by these men, and if so, how does transformative learning intersect with these changes? And e) how will their experiences bring additional clarity to the process of transformation through lives and learned experiences? These questions provide a guide for the analysis. Within the topical headings that follow, they will be addressed.

This chapter presents the major points produced by the findings of the study for discussion and analysis in relation to the existing research in the area of domestic abuse and change. The conclusions drawn from the findings are examined in light of their association to transformative learning theories and in their meaning to the field of
domestic abuse. Finally, this chapter offers recommendations for future research in this area.

This discussion is organized into the following topical headings: 1) The History is the Context, 2) Critical Incidents are the Catalyst, 3) Personal Support is Essential for Change, 4) Changes in Beliefs Bring Changes in Actions and 5) The Process is Transformative. What follows is a discussion designed to bring substance and texture to these findings in relation to previous research in this area and to theories of adult education.

The History is the Context

In interviewing the participants in this study, I felt it was necessary to include questions about their history, particularly their experiences within their family of origin. It is essential to understand the beliefs and ideologies held by these men prior to their process of change. This provides the prior context in which the ideologies that supported abusive behaviors were developed and from which the change can be distinguished.

There is extensive evidence in the literature that men who abuse their spouses were exposed to abuse as children (Buttell, 2001; Crowell & Burgess, 1996; Dutton, 1995; Gelles, 1993; Hearn, 1998; McKenry & Julian, 1995; Mignon, et al., 2002). Social learning theory as advanced by Bandura (1977) and based on the work of Julian Rotter in the early twentieth century, states that all behavior is learned and socially constructed through interaction with the environment. This theory as it applies to domestic abuse supports the view that experiencing and witnessing abuse in childhood adversely affects the behavior of the individual as an adult. Physical and emotional abuse of long duration was present in all but one of the families of the men in this study. This abuse was
committed by their fathers and overlooked or sometimes instigated by their mothers. It was also evident that the fathers were never held accountable for their actions and never took responsibility for them even when confronted by their children as adults.

Gender Role Socialization theory endorses the belief that men learn that aggression and domination are synonymous with masculinity. This places men in a dominant role and assigns a passive role to women (Mignon, Larson & Holmes, 2002). This learned aggression and dominance as attributes of the prescribed gender role for men and passiveness for women can be related to the behaviors exhibited by parents as the strongest influence on gender role development in children (Witt, 1997).

Interestingly, one participant (Greg) who stated he did not experience abuse from his father or mother related that he felt he learned his behaviors from watching television. Kakar (1998) and to a lesser extent Witt (1997) emphasize the acceptance of the role of the mass media in portraying abusive behaviors as acceptable and even “desirable’ responses to problems that arise, especially by men, as having a powerful and negative impact on behavior. This participant could think of no other reason for his abusiveness.

These findings of the histories of abuse evident in the families of these men answers the questions posed – What are there similarities or differences in the experiences and views of abuse held by these men? It is clear that for this group of participants physical and emotional abuse was commonly practiced in their families of origin. Additionally, they all stated the male and female roles exhibited in their home were what they called “traditional” in that they presented a portrait of male dominance and female passiveness.
The participants often stated that they viewed their original beliefs about the roles of men and women in relationships as very “traditional” and that they developed those beliefs through their family of origin. These traditional roles as stated by Mignon, et, al., (2002) serve to legitimize the behaviors of the fathers of these men and offer an understanding of the passive role of the mothers. This social construction of dominance and passiveness in these families highlights the issues of male privilege, power and control. In a similar manner, the lack of divorce in the majority of these clearly emotionally unsatisfying parental marriages was not surprising given the social and cultural mores of the times in which these men grew up.

Among the older participants who were raised in the 1940s and 50s the rejection of divorce as socially permissible and the acceptance of marital abuse as a right of the husband, especially if the abuse was primarily emotional, was common. It was remarkable to hear these men voice, through the description of their childhood experiences as victims and witnesses of abuse, and of their own adult abusive behaviors, affirmation of the harm perpetuated by the patriarchal structure still prominent in our society. This view of masculinity and femininity constrained within the constructs of patriarchy was evident in the majority of the stories. When perceived through a feminist post-structuralist lens these concepts begin to broaden in meaning and to more clearly contrast with the changes in the participants’ ideological views of women and relationships.

In applying post-structural feminist theory to the concept of masculinity the possibility of multiple masculine views becomes apparent. This provides an opportunity to explore the concepts of “male” and “female” as multifaceted and offers a context for
change in men. If it can be acknowledged that femininity can encompass multiple perspectives, including those historically seen as masculine, as presented within the feminist post-structuralist paradigm, then it is possible that masculinity can do the same. The area between the singular notions of masculine and feminine then becomes the place where new ideologies that allow for a more inclusive way of being can form. Imms (2000) writes:

Discussions of gender have…begun to explore multiple masculinities, both differences among men and the ways in which ideas of masculinity change according to time, the event, and the perspectives of those involved. Such analyses have encouraged some feminists and pro-feminists to…recognize that no definitive sets of male and female values exist (p. 159).

With this in mind the findings of this study indicate that the participants have experienced ideological changes, exhibited by moving away from the beliefs ingrained in them through their families of origin, which are transformative and can be explained through the application of feminist post-structuralist theory.

An element of change identified in these men is their engagement in helping others through continued connections with their intervention programs or assisting women in to recognize abuse. These actions can be related to the use of power within the post-structural feminist view of constantly shifting identities. These men have shifted their focus of power toward acceptable outlets in their desire to help others, and in pursuing the improvement of others; they in turn continue to help themselves. This use of power can then be understood as a positive force that enriches rather than diminishes and portrays an admirable face for the concept of power in masculinity.
Another interesting finding that emerged was the perceived lack of physical abuse directed toward the mothers of these participants. Although it was clear that some of the men indicated their mothers were beaten physically it was not the majority, and although most did indicate that their mothers were abused verbally, there was a considerable lack of empathy expressed for their mothers. Possibly, the mothers in the majority of these cases were not overtly abused. Conversely, it may be that, as children, these participants did not have the ability to recognize or comprehend the extent of abuse directed toward their mothers or that dealing with the issues of their own abuse consumed their powers of observation and precluded the development of an empathetic view toward the experiences of their mothers. The literature reveals the lack of empathy inherent in domestically abusive men toward their victims (Goodrum, et al., 2001). This could be an explanation for or a result of learned dissociation from the feelings of others, specifically their mothers, in childhood.

The findings of this study suggest similarity in the participants’ lack of empathy toward others, particularly females that may indicate a reason for their difficulties in recognizing their abusive behaviors toward their partners. However, this would not explain why they were able to develop this empathetic manner when they experienced their ideological change. Although they lacked empathy toward women and others throughout a large segment of their lives these men were able to find these feelings through the experiences they have described within this study. It may be possible that although they did not develop empathy in childhood and often did not receive empathy, with the exception of one participant, they were all exposed to relatively stable living situations in an external sense. The lack of divorce and the general social acceptability
of their families of origin may have presented other role models within their community that provided positive images that they could eventually emulate.

Another important aspect of the findings related to history were the frequently expressed feelings of emotional isolation. Most of the men spoke of feeling alone as children in some way or of cutting themselves off emotionally from their families or from their own feelings in order to survive the perceived discomfort in their lives. Several spoke of somehow “blocking out” painful events in their lives and preferring not to dwell on or talk about incidents in their childhood that were abusive. Even into adulthood most of the participants described themselves or their living situations in ways that brought to mind the sense of a lack of connection. In observation of the men during the interviews they displayed a range of personalities from loud and boisterous to quiet and calm, yet each described a childhood that in some way lacked a sense of closeness with parents, siblings and friends. These findings are consistent with the literature on causes of domestic abuse perpetrated by men related to dissociation of feelings and low levels of self-esteem (Stith & Farley, 1993; Simoneti, 2000) both of which could effect the ability to interact effectively in social relationships.

Findings from this study indicate that the histories of experienced abuse, as implied by the participants, played a significant role in the development of their abusive treatment of their spouses. This supports much of the published research related to gender role development and social learning theories indicated above. Additionally, feelings of fear and isolation along with a lack of awareness of the effects of their actions on others were evident in the stories of these men. This is significant in that their inability to empathize with their partner prior to their change from abuse possibly
stemmed from this isolation and feeling of being shut up inside oneself. This is consistent with existing literature (Scott & Wolfe, 1997) regarding the need for empathy as a mechanism for change. However, the causes of their prior inability to empathize as resulting from their childhood environment are more clearly identified within the findings of this study.

Critical Incidences are the Catalysts for Change

The participants identified several critical incidents that initiated change for them. This provides an answer to the study question – What are there similarities or differences in the reasons offered for their change? There were three categories of critical incidents that emerged from the findings. These were, a) intensely violent episodes, b) confronted by their abuse, and c) partners find their voices. Several of the participants described incidents they felt were important to their recognition of the need to change within each category. These categories represent clear similarities among the responses offered. The men described these incidents as specific moments or turning points in their understanding that they needed to do something to change the direction of their lives. This correlates with the findings of Stefanakis (1998) in which abusive men described their process of change and identified a notable crisis they saw as significant. For many this was the first recognition that what they were doing was wrong and that they had gone beyond a boundary that they had not crossed previously.

*Intensely Violent Episodes*

Especially for those men who indicated a particularly violent episode as the catalyst for change this sense of going too far was crucial. A fear of punishment and
recognition that their own lives would be adversely affected were also important in realizing the need to make a change.

Recent research into the moral development of abusers shows that moral reasoning in men evaluated before entering a standard court-ordered abuse intervention program scored two standard deviations lower than that of the general adult population. This level of moral reasoning did not change after completing the program (Buttell, 2001). Buttell’s study shows the importance of moral reasoning as significant in decreasing abusive behaviors and suggests that concepts and learning exercises to improve levels of moral reasoning be included in abuse intervention programs. In relation to the participants in this study, it can be argued that their recognition of having gone too far in their abuse of their partners through a particularly violent episode indicates a level of moral reasoning that is higher than the majority of men who enter abuse intervention programs. Whether motivated by fear or regret, the participants indicated a distinct recognition of having exceeded a limit in their abuse. The findings of this study would then support the previous research in indicating that higher levels of moral reasoning are effective in decreasing abuse and that educational efforts to increase concepts of moral reasoning within intervention programs would be helpful.

Confronted by Their Abuse

Recognition of their abusiveness through observation of the behavior of another abuser or direct verbal confrontation with someone who challenged their abuse was seen as a critical incident by some of the men. The work of Goodrum, Umberson & Anderson (2001) indicates that abusive men often deny their responsibility for their actions as a consistent method of preserving their self-image. The recognition of their abuse implied
by the men in my study contrasts with Goodrum’s and her associates’ findings and highlights a difference between these men and those studied by Goodrum, et al. (2001). This finding suggests that the ability to recognize the self as abusive when confronted by words, images, or the feelings of others indicate a lower level of dissociation from their behaviors than the those men studied by Goodrum, et al. (2001) and points to a capacity for empathy. The increased ability to empathize can again be seen as an element in determining the capacity to change.

Of interest is the indication, in my study, by Brian, that the critical incident that triggered change for him was the questioning from his son when he asked if Brian would ever abuse him again. This finding is consistent with the Margolin and Fernandez (1987) study where it was found that children’s awareness of the use of abuse and their efforts to stop it was a powerful influence for change. In this particular participant the ability to recognize his own abusive behavior and to empathize with his child was very significant given his continued anger at his wife. He was able to recognize his behavior as wrong related to the use of violence against both his wife and child while still maintaining his anger toward his wife for having left him for another partner.

This finding appears to be inconsistent and can be explained by the nature of this participant to isolate the feelings that he has toward his former partner and her new partner. He believes he is able to maintain a non-abusive ideology while holding onto his anger. It is not possible to support or deny the validity of this claim within the parameters of this study. However, this finding supports the lack of reflection previously indicated within this participant. This lack of reflection allows him to maintain an incongruent
philosophy of viewing himself as non-abusive while harboring ill will toward his former partner and victim.

*Partners Finding Their Voices*

Critical incidents facilitated by the actions of a partner were particularly significant to several of the participants. For those affected critically by an action taken by their spouse the recognition of the need to change that they described appeared motivated first by the fear of loss. This fear was expressed directly by the men who were arrested as a result of their abuse. These men recognized that they stood to lose their families and their sense of control over the one person in their lives who they had previously both controlled and on whom they depended. Without their spouse the sense of entitlement to their rights as men to control others was gone. They were left with the knowledge that their power was diminished. For many this situation served as their reason to capitulate to their wives demands that they seek help, yet they still clung to the idea that they would do this in an effort to show that it was their wives who were really to blame. Some felt that by being compliant they would demonstrate their willingness to change and this gesture of good faith would highlight the faults of their spouses. Many of the men who sought change after a critical incident indicated that they did so with the belief that it was their wives who would be found to be unreasonable and wrong in the final analysis. Nevertheless, the ability of these women to affect the patterns of behavior evident in the participants and to play a significant role in their decisions to change their beliefs and actions is very powerful, and stands in stark contrast to the lack of influence that the participant’s mothers had over their fathers.
This result supports the findings of Margolin and Fernandez (1987) which state that actions on the part of the spouse that serve to demonstrate an intolerance for continued abuse is a strong factor in facilitating change. This study indicates that spousal action does influence the abuser’s behavior and can affect change. This is not an indication of the spouse’s need to take responsibility for changing the abuser rather it implies that a strong action, such as leaving or the threat to leave, does affect the behavior of the abuser. The importance of providing for the spouse’s safety at the time these actions are taken cannot be overemphasized. Although these men can reflect in hindsight on the persuasiveness of their wives actions and the role they played in convincing them to change, these same actions also brought on episodes of abuse, and in some cases, police intervention including arrest followed. These findings indicate the ultimate positive impact of the actions of the spouse but it is clear that safety must be the primary issue for women and children in the face of domestic abuse.

To summarize the discussion of critical incidents as a catalyst for change, a distinct aspect of this study is that it focused on men’s self-reported perceptions of the critical incidents that initiated their individual change. It asked men to identify what was the most meaningful element in their experiences that precipitated and caused a change in their ideology to occur. This study has found that critical incidents in the lives of these men were clearly identified as initiating the change process. All of the men could identify moments of recognition that a change needed to be made. These incidents were preceded in all cases by some alteration in their social and emotional environment that created a climate for change.
Personal Support is Essential for Change

The men in this study described their process of change from abusiveness to fair and egalitarian relationships with their spouses, children, and others in similar ways regarding the mechanisms used to affect change. All but one credit their participation in an abuse intervention program as the means through which change became possible. This discussion answers the question; do the prior and present experiences of abusive men who are able to change contain instances or clues that are related to their ability to learn to change? The mechanism of change for all but one of the men was the abuse intervention program they attended. The similarities in their experiences related to the guidance and support they found in these programs are significant to their ability to change.

These programs employed different formats in terms of group size and learning exercises employed, but were similar in the critical aspects of holding the abuser accountable for his abuse and promoting understanding and acceptance of an egalitarian view of relationships. The programs all sought to expose the problems brought on by the feelings of entitlement and male privilege that is still inherent in society. They align with the tenets of domestic abuse intervention promoted in the literature and in practice (Austin & Dankwort, 1999; Jasinski & Williams, 1998; Pence & Paymar, 1987) These include requiring participants to be accountable for their actions and to view domestic abuse as a social construct related to male power and privilege in patriarchy. Additionally, all provided a sense of support and safety that was identified by the participants as critical.
Another aspect of importance to all of the program participants and the one man who did not attend a program is that each identified the engagement and support of an individual with whom they were able to connect on an emotional and intellectual level. A few of the men had attended other programs in the past that produced little in the way of ideological change in them. They pointed to the fact that in those programs there was no real connection made between themselves and someone involved in the program with whom they were able to identify. True therapeutic relationships with staff involved in the program, or another caring individual, were seen as paramount to change for the all of these men.

This result relates to the findings of Wangsgaard (2000) who state that men in intervention programs requested more opportunities to meet with staff members individually to develop a more personal rapport. Additionally, the great majority of the participants in the study described their relationships with other men they met through their intervention programs as very important and alluded to their lack of male companionship prior to that experience. Many have become friends with other men they have met through the program.

A number of the participants pointed to the lessons learned through interaction with men who continued to exhibit a lack of understanding of their abusiveness. Participants described obtaining a deeper understanding of their own abuse by observing and listening to others in their program as they exhibited denial of their actions and continued to blame their victims for causing their behaviors. They also learned through the positive experiences and stories of men who have accepted responsibility for their behaviors. In all instances the participants related a feeling of gratitude at having found a
setting where they felt accepted and safe. Many spoke of their experience in the program as the first time that they were able to express their true feelings about themselves and their actions. They achieved an element of emotional freedom they had not known before.

This finding again supports the work of Wangsgaard (2000) who wrote about the need for safety and acceptance found by men within abuse intervention programs. When what Wangsgaard named “the asylum” or a feeling for comfort and safety, was present within the environment of the group program a sense of community developed and the men felt that they were able to open themselves to others and reflect on the effects of their behavior in a supportive atmosphere. The participants in my study overwhelmingly mentioned this idea of comfort and acceptance as a reason why they were able to recognize their responsibility for their abuse, to embrace a new set of beliefs and to stop their behaviors.

The results of this study indicated that abuse intervention programs must provide more than information and confrontation to be successful. Abusers must be confronted with the offenses they have committed and they must recognize that the responsibility for those offenses is entirely with them. They must also be given the emotional support necessary to promote the critical reflection of the erroneous and hurtful beliefs they have held and to develop and accept new perspectives. There must be a connection with someone who supports and cares about the man throughout this process of developing new meanings and actions. The literature suggests that this need for human connection and support for the abuser on an emotional level is lacking within the current constructs of abuse intervention programs (Mignon, et al., 2002; Wileman, 2000). The general
tendency is often to treat the perpetrator of abuse punitively without regard to their social and emotional needs. While it is imperative to hold the abuser completely responsible for the harm he causes there is an equally important need for support and guidance to encourage real change. Mignon, et.al. (2002) warns, “Punishment and isolation are needed to protect the innocent; but unless they lead to positive and sympathetic treatment efforts, they may provoke the very problem they are intended to prevent” (p. 275).

The findings of this study show the clear benefit of promoting a sense of community, safety and support for men within abuse intervention programs. This was accomplished through a personal connection with another who offered support, guidance and encouragement to them as they embarked on the difficult process of identifying themselves as responsible for the damage they had caused to themselves and others. They needed this support to confront the abuse they had been subject to in their past lives and to the abuse they had committed against their partners and children. This was identified by the participants as the most important factor in their process of change and is the strongest finding to emerge from this study.

Changes in Ideology Bring Changes in Actions

Changes made by the participants in this study to their beliefs about their use of abuse as a means of controlling others, their relationships with their wives, the role of men and women in relationships, and the need to help other men to change are hopeful. These ideological changes were evident in the descriptions of their current lives and in answers to specific questions designed to elicit information about their mode of thinking in regard to the use of abuse and what they saw as an ideal intimate relationship. Several of the men used the term ‘equal partnership’ when explaining an ideal relationship and
some described their partners as a ‘gift’ and ‘she’s wonderful’ as an indication of their regard for her.

All of the men had a grasp on the issues of control and the problems that arose from their need to control their partners. Despite the fact that four different abuse intervention programs were represented within this study and one participant did not receive any formal intervention, the thoughts and responses offered by the men in relation to their need to give up the controlling behaviors that had been a mainstay of their relationship with their victims was clearly evident. Through their work within the programs the men were able to articulate their need to let go of the demands they had made previously and to acknowledge the autonomy of their partners. Several spoke quite eloquently about the desire to recognize and value their partners as equal participants in their relationship. They also clearly voiced the favorable outcomes derived from this new belief in regard to a richer and more beneficial relationship for both partners.

An issue related to control that was mentioned by only two of the men was the conviction that they needed to remind themselves every day that they had been abusive and were capable of abuse. They used this reminder as a means of grounding themselves in their own history of abuse to guard against repeating this behavior. In maintaining this daily watch against abusiveness in themselves the issues of control again became apparent and transferred to their own behaviors. This aspect of behavior in some of the participants supports the work of Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross (1992) and correlates to their maintenance stage of change. However, this kind of thought process can be problematic if allowed to occupy a large part of the individual daily mindset. It can be seen in two ways.
The first is that it can be compared to the philosophies espoused in 12-step programs for addictions, where the person is said to be continually in recovery from the addiction and must view their new lives as lived one addiction free day at a time. They must constantly remain on guard lest they “fall off the wagon” and begin their behaviors again. This attitude can be viewed as problematic from the standpoint of domestic abuse because the threat of harm to the partner remains “one day” or one decision away.

The second view of these attitudes is more sinister in that for many of these men their change is about controlling their behaviors. They see themselves as needing to scrupulously monitor their actions as a means of controlling their propensities to lash out rather than believing that they no longer have the need to cause harm to their partner in the form of abuse. If the desire to abuse is still there and they are controlling it, is this simply another form of control that they have transferred to themselves and their own behavior rather than their partner? While self-control can be seen as a positive approach and is the hallmark of anger management concepts taught in most abuse prevention programs, it may not illustrate a change in ideology but only a change in behavior.

The continued use of extreme control tactics with the self as object rather than the partner may function to keep the perpetrator abuse free in a relatively stable environment. However, if that environment becomes unstable through an unanticipated life event or some change on the part of the partner, will the control tactics be strong enough to hold off renewed abuse? And, does this signify a continued need to exercise total control over something? This is a concern identified in the analysis of the interview data that was not presented to the participants for clarification and require furthers study to obtain an answer.
Ideological changes related to their relationships with their partners were clearly articulated by most of the candidates. They viewed these relationships, whether new or continuing as valued elements of their lives that required a continued effort to maintain and enhance. The men were able to recognize the pain and discomfort that permeated their relationships prior to their change and viewed their new relationships either with their previous partner or a new one as much more satisfying. They emphasized the importance of effective and frequent communication with their partners about all of the aspects of their relationship and their family life. For those in continuing relationships with their victims the importance of listening to and accepting the feelings of the partner about past abuse was a part of the communication process. It was difficult for many of these men to listen to the effects of their abuse and they admitted that they struggled with that aspect of their renewed relationship with their partner. It was evident that, however difficult they found this to be, it served to enhance the trust and intimacy within the relationship.

Many of the participants indicated that they are now able to communicate in a more effective and positive manner with their partners than they had been able to in the past. Increasing the frequency and effectiveness of communication as a means of improving the quality of the intimate relationship is addressed in the literature by O’Neill and Harway (1997). It is hypothesized that due to gender role patterns males often have difficulty in communicating effectively and resort to abusive behaviors as a means of denying this difficulty. The importance placed by the participants in this study on improving communication skills, and the difficulty they related in attaining them supports this hypothesis. The findings of this study emphasize the need for learning experiences
that enhance communication and listening skills particularly related to understanding and acceptance of the thoughts and feelings of the partner.

Even for those men whose relationships with their victims ended in divorce the importance of communication and their previous lack of good communication skills was acknowledged. The great majority of the participants were able to verbalize a sense of accountability for what they had done which they discussed with their victims. They also described an ability to empathize with their victims for the hurt they had inflicted and an understanding that their changes needed to be made independent of perceived problems or responsibilities of the victim.

In a similar fashion the men were able to communicate their beliefs about intimate relationships in general. They described “good” relationships as equal partnerships where trust, honesty, respect and openness were apparent. All of the men sensed that there was a need to change the negative stereotypes inherent in our society that privilege men in relationships and that continue to support a culture of silence and acceptance about domestic abuse. Each indicated that as individuals and collectively it is important and necessary to confront abuse and the abuser when these situations present themselves. All indicated they would and have intervened in observed abuse seen in public or in their neighborhood. Many of them have experienced instances that occurred on the street where they have spoken up in defense of a women being abused and/or called police when necessary. This indicates a willingness not only to change their own meaning perspective related to abuse and women but to promote a change in their communities.

This willingness to extend themselves outward and beyond the parameters of their own relationships is demonstrated in the active and continued participation of four of the
men as peer counselors for the abuse intervention program they completed. One other participant is very dedicated to assisting women to recognize and avoid abusive relationships. These men spoke with a sense of accomplishment and pride in their ability to help other men to learn to change their perspectives and their behaviors. They revealed a commitment to this work through their continued connection with the programs. A few have maintained their ties for several years and it was clear that they derived satisfaction from doing meaningful work to affect change in the lives of men who are abusive and women affected by domestic abuse.

This is a significant finding that was not found previously in the literature. The sense of a need to assist others to improve their relationships and their lives was surprising and moving. It is clear from the findings that these men who were successful in changing their lives developed not only a sense of personal responsibility but of community responsibility.

In summary, the ideological changes experienced by these men resulted in a clear articulation of beliefs about gender equality and respect for women, about the quality of relationships as equal partnerships, about the acceptance of themselves as abusers, and the recognition of the emotional, psychological and physical aspects of abuse. The participants experienced the satisfaction of seeing themselves as better people than they had been before. Additionally, there was improved communication in their relationships, better connections with their children, and several became active in working with their intervention programs and within their communities to help other men and women.

This study indicates that ideological changes did occur in the abusive men who participated in this study as evidenced through their changes in stated beliefs and the
actions that accompany them. It appears that these belief changes are positive and lasting forces for improvement in their lives, in the lives of their partners, and for others. The nature of these changes as truly and lastingly ideological can only be determined through ongoing examination of the behaviors and actions of these men toward their partners and children. Many of these men have continued to display healthier and non-abusive behaviors for several years. Some have withstood the test of time longer than others. Some have not yet been placed in situations where continued abuse may reemerge. It can be stated that all of the men assert a strong commitment to non-abusive behaviors.

The Process is Transformative

Articulating an educationally based theoretical construct for the process of the change evidenced within this study is important to those involved in the development of abuse intervention programs. It provides grounding in theories that support ideological transformation and suggests strategies that can be implemented to promote change in ideologies held by abusive men.

This section examines the elements of transformative learning present in the findings of this study. The section is organized in three subsections. They are, a) critical incidents and disorientation, b) reflection, discernment and transformative learning and c) social construction as transformative. In working within the framework produced by the findings it becomes evident that transformative learning theories can be applied to the learning processes experienced by these men.

Critical Incidents and Disorientation

The instances of change included the development of a climate for change in which critical incidents occurred. This initiated an understanding of the need to change.
These instances of understanding served as powerful indicators for the men in this study of the need for change and were the culmination of a period of disorientation that resulted from deteriorating relationships with their spouses and children or from other emotional factors and life incidents. This climate for change left the men at a point where they were unbalanced and open to the effects of a critical incident.

Both Williams (1986) and Godberson (1999) discuss the occurrence of disorienting dilemmas that resulted from critical incidents in the lives of abusive men. These occasions, where old ways of behaving and viewing the elements of their existence were uprooted, served as initiatives for change. These incidents, when they occur, trigger a dilemma in that the individual finds it impossible to make sense of the incident within the framework of their current perspective. In attempting to find some meaning the person’s perspective begins to shift and the person becomes open to new meanings and perspectives that are broader and more inclusive. These new meaning perspectives allow the person to understand and incorporate the dilemma into their reality (Mezirow, 1991).

The results of my study support the findings of these previous studies in relation to the importance of these key factors in the change process. The participants were all faced with incidents that required a shifting of embedded perspectives. The fear, confusion and disorientation that resulted from these incidents led to an emotional and difficult journey toward a new meaning and method of being in relationship with their partners and families. The participants were prompted to change and create new meanings for long held beliefs that no longer sustained them. The nature of the change exhibited by the majority of the participants in this study was found to be highly emotional and less cognitive in that their reaction to this disorienting atmosphere was
emotional rather than rational. The findings of this study move beyond the rational perspective of both of these previous studies to encompass the use of extra-rational elements of transformative learning theories.

The critical incidents that were identified were seen by the participants as culminating points where the need for change became clear. In this way the work of Mezirow (1996; 2000) is helpful in defining these points of recognition of the need for change.

Reflection, Discernment and Transformative Learning

As the process of change formed and emerged in the majority of these men they turned toward attempting to understand the meanings and experiences of their earlier lives and to rectify the losses that resulted from their beliefs and behaviors (e.g. for some, the loss of their marriages, their power and privilege, the loss of their belief in themselves as being right). They did so through an emotional searching that moved beyond critical and rational reflection to the inclusion of feelings of fear, despair and desolation. They worked through these problematic feelings alone and with the help of others. These processes that culminated in ideological change for these men align themselves more definitively with the work of Boyd and Meyers (1988) and others (Clark, Dirkx, Grabov, Scott, 1997; Cranton, 2000) who write in support of a less rational approach to transformation. This includes the emotional catalysts of change like emotional upheavals that do not necessarily depend on reflective or rational processes.

Dealing with the losses stated above is indicative of the transformative elements of grieving identified by Boyd and Meyers (1998) and confirmed by O’Sullivan (1999). Scott (1997) too, explained the process of grieving for the loss of familiar and
comfortable beliefs as part of transformation from an analytical depth perspective rather than a rational conscious perspective. This form of transformation from an analytical depth perspective involves the individual in exploring the internal and subjective meaning of loss within the Self to examine both the conscious and the unconscious meaning. The internal images resulting from the loss break through into consciousness to be examined (Scott, 1997). This process of grieving was applicable to the change process for the majority of the participants in this study. The loss of the power and comfort of the long held notions of privilege, and for some, the loss of their partner and families was very difficult. Many of the participants began an inward journey that resulted in a period of internal struggle and for some depression.

Transformative learning, as a theoretical concept, involves the deconstruction of meaning perspectives that have been previously constructed in conjunction with familial and societal influences and the construction of new meaning perspectives that are created through a critically reflective process within the individual and/or between the individual and entities outside the self (Mezirow, 2000). The process of discernment, described previously, is used as a method of transforming perspectives rather than the critical reflection of assumptions. Through discernment, which employs both the conscious and unconscious Self, hidden beliefs and feelings from the past, especially childhood, can emerge and be recognized.

A number of the men in this study, namely Brandon, Ken, Greg, and Stephen, described incidents related to their recognition of the need to change and of their ability to finally examine long hidden events of their childhood that manifested through words, images and symbolism. For example, Stephen was intensely descriptive of being given a
sense of freedom and peace following a visit to his mother’s grave where he experienced, “this explosion of gold colored light[that] just came out of me from the center where that little boy [Stephen] was hiding crying and it was like he was free.”

Social Construction as Transformative

The construction of new meaning perspectives is the primary goal of all transformative learning processes and this construction requires interaction between the individual and the environment in all instances. Both the concepts of radical constructivism, which is by nature personal and psychological with construction taking place within the individual; and social constructionism, where construction develops in the space between individuals and/or the environment, serve to define the transformative learning processes taking place. As individuals we meet, discern, reflect and make meaning within this space between ourselves, each other, our culture, our world and the universe. This is the significance of the social construction of meaning and of transformative learning. Potter (1996) in his view of the social construction of knowledge, differentiates between fact and description noting that the former implies truth and real occurrence while the latter does not. He points to the inter-actional space between these two ideas as the place where the social construction of description as fact takes place. Potter (1996) states that knowledge is created through the construction of thought and ideas in the space between two entities, be they differing points of view, cultural biases, ideological beliefs or meaning perspectives.

The men in this study constructed new meaning perspectives through the processes of both critical reflection and discernment. For a few critical reflection served them well in that their innate ability to analyze their thoughts and behaviors was an
integral part of their personality. For others the process of constructing new meaning was much more emotional and dependent on external forces that caused them to react.

Change in the meaning perspectives of the men in this study required both the personal, psychological processes inherent in a radical constructivist paradigm and the social interactions involved in social constructionism. Radical constructivism is descriptive of the development of an ideological perspective that caused them to turn away from abuse. The disorientation present in their lives prior to the occurrence of a critical incident and the period of reflection and emotional discernment that followed led to a perspective transformation. The participants’ recognition of these events took place through a radical constructivist process.

The construction of new knowledge through the participants’ interaction with other abusive men and supportive counselors within the structure of an abuse intervention program involved the building of new meaning through interaction with other individuals and the social constraints against abusive behavior. An inter-subjective understanding that is inherent in social constructionism was then created. Thus, both strands of social constructivist thought were at work in the transformative learning processes of the participants in this study.

In summary, the participants in this study exhibited evidence of change in their ideological perspectives about abuse and their view of their partners that occurred through private and often painful personal revelations and through interaction and dialog with supportive individuals and among other abusers. Through these avenues of change the men in this study made connections in the spaces between themselves and others and between themselves and their environment. This environment is defined as their families,
their intimate relationships, their communities, and in at least one instance, religious experiences. Transformative learning theory as applied to the social constructions that support and promote the privilege and power of the man as abusive to his partner also reveal the ideologies of a patriarchal society as socially constructed and accepted by the individual as reality. Conversely, men who have ceased their abuse and have experienced an ideological change in their attitudes toward their partners and toward the concept of abuse as a means of control, have socially constructed a new reality for themselves that is the result of experiences and interactions with some aspect of their environment that has influenced this change. The identification of the personal and environmental aspects that facilitated this new social construction of non-abuse can be likened to the critical incidents inherent in the theoretical constructs of transformative learning.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice within the fields of domestic abuse and adult education will be presented in this section. The practice of adult education is a field that encompasses the learning spectrum from formal learning to informal and incidental learning situations. Adult learning theories are situated within a broad spectrum of thought that can effectively inform the practice of providing intervention strategies for deconstructing precepts of domestic abuse.

Adult Education

Transformative learning is the prevailing theoretical construct in adult education today. Adult learning as a matter of necessity moves beyond initial perspectives learned in childhood to incorporate new experiences and new relationships with different worldviews that serve to expand the perspective of the learner. However, the effects of
pervious cultural, socioeconomic, and psychological experiences that are embedded within the individual in the formative years always shadow learning in adulthood. The adult, in light of their previous perspective formations must therefore transform from past-learned perspectives to the adoption of new ones rather than forming new ones as a means of primary learning.

This study contributes to the field of adult education in furthering the perspectives of transformative learning theory. This is accomplished through the identification of transformative elements of change in the stories of the study participants who are engaged in the process of creating ideological changes in their perspectives related to abuse. The findings of this study have demonstrated that the application of transformative learning theory in the field of domestic abuse was expanded beyond its use previously (Godberson, 1999; Williams, 1986) to include and support a broader view of transformative learning theory that includes extra-rational ways of knowing and creating meaning.

The process of transformation experienced by the participants in this study was non-linear and primarily extra-rational in contrast to both prior studies where the instrumental elements of transformative learning and the prescribed format for transformation as described by Mezirow (1981) were strictly applied. The process of change in the present study was accomplished on a personal and inter-actional level for these participants. The element of critical reflection was clearly evident in a few of the men but far more prevalent was the use of discernment, which includes the activities of receptivity, recognition and grieving, and portrays a psycho-spiritual adjustment to loss.
This study offers insight into the process of transformation that takes place in both formal and non-formal settings. For many of the participants the abuse intervention program was instrumental in assisting them in their change process but it was not the only and may not have been the primary means of change. The elements of transformative learning occurred both within and outside of the formal setting. It is clear that the change in meaning perspectives for these men was accomplished through the use of personal reflection and discernment of the psychological and emotional meanings of past events along with the social interaction and challenge of discourse and dialog with others. The change they experienced was clearly transformational in nature because long-held meaning perspectives were rejected and new ways of relating to the self and others were embraced. These changes were articulated by the participants as profound and life altering.

The histories and life stories of these participants were a part of this study that affected the transformative learning process. The importance of life history review was evident in the clear manner in which these men shared their stories. They were eager to contribute thoughts and reflections about their past lives and the large majority showed evidence that reflection on the past had been an integral part of their process of change. These men had taken a sustained look backward in their journey to examine and understand the overall environment of their childhood and young life that fostered their abusive behaviors and ideology. They searched the emotional and psychological effects of their families of origin and were very aware of the damage caused within those formative years. Furthermore, they used this knowledge and new understanding to release themselves from the old and destructive beliefs they held. Thus, they embarked on a
transformative journey of change by going back to the beginning of their lives. This is an area of thought that has not been previously addressed in the literature on transformative learning and one that clarifies it in a new way. This research indicates that the review of past history, especially of the ideas and beliefs gained in childhood is an important element of transformative learning processes.

As individuals we meet, discern, reflect and make meaning within the space between each other, our culture, our world, the universe and ourselves. This is the significance of the social construction of meaning and of transformative learning. My belief is that the understanding that may take place both psychologically, in reference to how the abuser perceives the reasons for his change; and socially, within the context of the interaction between himself and other male abusers; is a product of a social construction of the meanings of specific incidents that provide a transformative learning experience for the abusive man.

Transformative learning theory, as it is and as it is evolving, encompasses the process and the reason for growth and change inherent in adult education. Within the confines of domestic abuse, I believe that the social construction of knowledge accounts for the individual and societal paradigms that hold people within bonds of inequity and injustice based on gender. Transformative learning theories address this socially constructed knowledge through the use of critical reflection and intuitive, emotional discernment. It facilitates the construction of new knowledge that is inclusive and socially just.
Domestic Abuse Intervention

The implications here will offer information that is pertinent to the field of domestic abuse and particularly to the development of abuse intervention programs. The findings of this study are quite significant in that clear similarities among the participants were found in the incidents that precipitated change, the behavioral changes that occurred and the beliefs system changes that were identified. These striking agreements among participants constitute several areas that may be addressed by abuse intervention programs. These include, first, promoting recognition of emotions and feelings that are carried from childhood and relate to experiences as victims and witnesses of abuse. The psychological approaches to the treatment of abusers have been deemphasized in favor of the sociologically based and cognitively driven concepts that place the problems of a patriarchal society at the center of the causes of domestic abuse. This is a necessary component of intervention and establishes the priority of responsibility and accountability of actions along with the recognition of male privilege and the oppression of women. My desire is not to remove these relevant aspects of abuse intervention but to complement them with attendance to the role that history plays in the lives of abusive men.

There is a need to call attention to views within the field of domestic abuse that are distinct from the criminal elements of the phenomenon. While this criminal aspect should not be ignored it should be tempered with the desire to provide a viable means for real ideological change to occur. In recognizing the formative experiences that have contributed to the development of abusive behaviors we can provide the support and acceptance that was perceived as so necessary by the participants in this study.
Secondly, it is clear from the continued involvement of all of the participants who attended abuse intervention programs, that providing programs with the option of long-term participation is helpful for many abusive men. The majority of abuse intervention programs do provide 26-week sessions which men are required to attend. The development of more long-term ongoing advanced groups that could offer continued support and would be open to those who have completed the basic program would afford the abusive man who is implementing changes in his beliefs and his actions toward his partner and family the opportunity to continue his growth toward healthy, egalitarian relationships. Many programs do offer extended options for continued treatment and support but this is not the standard.

Lastly, an opportunity for men to connect on a deep level with another person where a trusting relationship can develop is a key factor in producing lasting ideological change. The desire of these men to help others change is further indication of the importance of this needed connection to another in a supportive relationship. The literature is beginning to reflect the recognition that providing no allowance for mitigating circumstances and offering little if any support for the emotional trauma experienced is ineffective in producing change and may contribute to recidivism (Mignon, et al. 2002).

There are calls for more diverse and creative models for abuse intervention that provide for the support and encouragement needed to affect real change (Wileman, 2000). The men in this study experienced programs that held them totally accountable for their actions and did not permit any blaming of the victim. However, they also provided a supportive atmosphere in which the men were able to establish a connection with another
person who helped them to explore and understand their responsibility for what they did and to acknowledge the problems created in their childhood and past experiences that are rooted in parental abuse. With this support, they were able to accept themselves and this fostered the desire to change. Counselors who work with abusers in intervention programs should be comfortable and familiar with the standards of abuse intervention currently in place throughout the United States and they should possess the desire and personal attributes that will allow them to build therapeutic relationships and function in a supportive and affirming manner when interacting with abusive men.

Recommendations for Future Research

Qualitative research studies that offer insight into the means and methods of change are extremely helpful in providing a rich context for the complex issues of abuse. My recommendations for future research in the areas of educational constructs for the cessation of domestic abuse are in the area of qualitative inquiry.

This study involved a small number of participants who were referred primarily by directors of abuse intervention programs and who self identified as having stopped their abusive behaviors and experiencing a change in their beliefs about abuse. Due to the problematic nature of abuse and the secrecy that is desirable in these situations finding participants for future studies similar to this can be difficult. However, in-depth research of individuals constrained by issues of domestic abuse provides needed insight into the inner lives of men and women involved with this destructive social problem. I suggest a study involving the use of a small number of cases of couples who have undergone changes similar to the participants in this study. Case studies that look at individual couples who have successfully navigated abusive relationships could be
conducted with an emphasis toward discovering the partner’s perspective of the abuser’s change.

A study of abuse intervention programs to ascertain the use of the suggestions offered for domestic abuse intervention in this study would provide valuable information about the availability of these types of intervention programs. It would be helpful to examine the content of abuse intervention programs to look for advanced group opportunities that encourage the abuser to remain active in the program for prolonged periods, opportunities to form therapeutic relationships with counselors, and attention to the histories of abuse that stem from the past lives and especially the childhood experiences of abusers. An in-depth review of the content of abuse intervention programs to look for the opportunity to make personal connections and develop therapeutic relationship would reveal the presence or lack of these types of elements.

A replication of this study that targets specific types of abuse intervention programs where opportunities for personal connection, advanced group opportunities and exploration of past abuse is a part of the program content. It would be interesting to design a qualitative study that compared the quality and substance of change in men exposed to these program elements with those who complete a standard 26-week program.

A study that explores the differences in men who are able to develop empathy for their victims compared to those men who do not would be helpful in further discerning the reasons for change in some abusive men as opposed to those who do not change.

Finally, A qualitative study that explored in-depth the experiences of the partners of men who had made an ideological change would broaden the understanding of the
phenomenon of change in relations marked by abuse. This would provide the needed balance of experience and insight into abusive relationship and present a more descriptive and comprehensive picture of intimate partner abuse.
Closing Thoughts

This research project began with a question about the nature and direction of treatment and intervention initiatives for domestic abuse. For years, I noticed the posters and information cards in restrooms that depicted women’s suffering at the hands of intimate partners and the offer of help. I listened as women were counseled in self-help classes about safety issues for themselves and their children. I advised as my students told me how they had to quit their educational program because their husband did not want them to continue. I observed as women spoke volumes with their silence as they sat in an emergency room with a broken arm or a bruised and bleeding face. I heard the common question that often comes from strangers’ lips. Why does she stay?

My question then developed from the feeling that something was missing from the prevailing public discourse concerning domestic abuse. There seemed to be numerous (though not sufficient) advocates and agencies that offered support, information and advice about finding ways to end this festering social wound. Yet, these efforts concentrated predominately on teaching women what they needed to do, and most of the programs designed for abusive men were court-ordered training sessions with poor success rates. My curiosity, that later turned to concern and indignation, led me to ask, “Why is this crime that is committed by men, addressed by teaching the victims to keep themselves safe? Why aren’t we as a society teaching men to stop? Why isn’t the emphasis on changing men’s behavior rather than women’s?

As I embarked on this journey toward understanding the problems and frustrations inherent in the complex issues of domestic abuse, some of the answers began to emerge. I found a small but growing movement called pro-feminism that addresses the
issues of men’s power and privilege within our patriarchal society and offers direction for men to change themselves. This may prove to be a powerful tool in teaching all men that they have an obligation to address the societal traditions that diminish women.

As this study developed and progressed, my grasp of the issues of domestic abuse from both a male and female perspective has grown and changed. I have gained powerful insight into the lives of men who are abusive. I have learned that there is great complexity and confusion on all sides of this issue and there is much work to do. I have developed a great respect for the people who work in the field of domestic violence and for the diversity of opinions about the causes of domestic abuse and the best ways to tackle the work of eliminating it from our society. This study offers a small contribution to this field that deals heroically with an age-old issue that affects us all.
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW MATERIALS

Study Letter
Informed Consent
Interview Questions
Dear Potential Research Participant:

I am a doctoral student in Adult Education at Penn State University – Harrisburg and I am conducting a research study that explores the reasons why men who have been violent toward their intimate female partners stop their violent behaviors. The term violence in this study is defined as any physical, emotional or psychological act that causes harm to your partner. I hope to discover information that will aid in the development and improvement of domestic abuse prevention education programs for men. This study will serve as my dissertation for the completion of my degree.

This letter is meant to inform you about the study and to ask for your participation in it. I am looking for men who have stopped being violent toward their female partners and who believe that they have changed their ways of thinking about violence towards women. I am interested in study participants who believe that violence and abusive behavior are not options to be used in an intimate relationship.

During the study you would be asked to participate in two interviews about your decision to stop your violent behavior and your reasons for doing so. The interviews would take place between you, as the participant, and me, as the researcher. They will be audio taped. The first interview will be approximately 1-2 hours in length. The second will be shorter and will be used to clarify any unclear information. It can take place in person, on the telephone or through e-mail. You will also be given the opportunity to review the information obtained in the interview to insure accuracy.

Your identifying information will be known only to me. All of the information related to the study will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home for the duration of the study and destroyed afterward. I will not use any identifying information in my dissertation. The content of your interviews will be accessible to my study advisor, who is a faculty member at Penn State, and myself. You will be asked to sign a consent form (attached) before beginning your participation and you may refuse to answer any questions asked within our initial conversations and in the interviews. You may also discontinue your participation in the study at any time.

In order to participate in this study you must meet the following criteria:

Participants must
- be 18 years of age or older.
- reside in the United States or Canada.
- admit to having been violent toward your intimate female partner.
- have not engaged in any violence toward your partner for at least 2 years.
- believe you have experienced a change in your ideas about violence toward your partner and now see that violence as wrong.
Additionally, if you decide to contact me, I will ask a few questions related to your current thoughts and feeling about domestic violence as a means of choosing participants.

**Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated.** If you would like to volunteer to be interviewed or if you have any questions about participating please contact me. I can answer any questions you have about the study before you sign the consent form. However, you will need to sign the consent form and return one copy to me before the start of your participation in the study.

You can contact me by telephone or e-mail at:
610-344-7474 or mde131@psu.edu

Please send or fax a signed copy of the informed consent form to:
**Marian Edmiston**
1056 Kerwood Road
West Chester, PA 19382
Fax: 610-344-7373

I hope you will consider participating in this study. The interviews will be conducted at a location and time that is convenient for you.

Thank you for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

Marian Edmiston
Penn State – Harrisburg
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Learning to change: Identifying elements of transformation in formerly abusive men

Principal Investigator: Marian D. Edmiston, MSN, RN  mde131@psu.edu
1056 Kerwood Road  610-344-7474 (H)
West Chester, PA  19382  610-724-5455 (cell)

Advisor: Edward Taylor, D.Ed.
The Pennsylvania State University – Harrisburg
777 W. Harrisburg Pike
Middletown, PA  17057-48998
ewt1@psu.edu
717-948-6364

1. Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this research is to examine how abusive men learn to become non-abusive toward their intimate female partners, and what kind of changes in their understanding of abuse, women, and society have caused them to stop their abusive behaviors.

2. Procedures to be followed:
Participation in this research will include an interview with the principal investigator, which will be audio taped. A second shorter interview may be held to clarify any unclear issues. You will also be asked to read the analysis of the information obtained in the interviews to verify its accuracy of meaning. The interview questions will explore behaviors, values, ideas and thoughts related to domestic abuse in general terms and specifically related to your past and present experiences.

3. Discomforts and Risks:
There are no specific risks associated with participation in this study. The personal and emotional nature of the topic may cause some discomfort.

4. Benefits:
a. The benefits to participants include the possibility that you might learn more about yourself, your relationships and the reasons why you have changed your behavior.

b. The benefits to society include assistance to the field of domestic violence, particularly to domestic violence prevention education programs. It is hoped that the information discovered through this study will provide meaningful additions to the concepts currently included within these programs.

5. Duration/Time:
The first interview will be 1-2 hours in length. The second interview may take approximately 30-45 minutes if needed. Approximately 1-2 hours may be needed to read the analysis of the interview and comment by telephone or e-mail.

6. Statement of Confidentiality:
Only the person conducting the interview, the principal investigator, will know your identity. If this research is published no information that would identify you will be written. All data received from the interviews including audiotapes and any written materials will be number coded. Audiotapes, transcripts and other written materials will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator’s home during the study and for one year after the completion of the study. They will then be destroyed.

The advisor for this study will have access to the audiotapes, transcripts and other written materials provided by you to the principle investigator. However, the advisor will not know your name or other identifying information. He will only see your assigned number code when reviewing the data.
If you are involved in illegal activities, including domestic abuse, at the time of the interviews, and these activities come to the attention of the principal investigator, this statement of confidentiality will be suspended and the activities will be reported to local law enforcement authorities.

In regard to e-mail correspondence, which could include answering questions about the nature of the study, informed consent forms, and clarification of meaning of statements from interviews or any other communication between the principal investigator and yourself, your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties. **If you prefer not to use e-mail technology for any correspondence during this study, all communication can be conducted via landline telephone service or regular mail. You are encouraged to use a landline telephone rather than a cell telephone when contacting me.**

7. **Right to Ask Questions:**
Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. Marian D. Edmiston will answer your questions. You may contact her at 610-344-7474 or mde131@psu.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

8. **Compensation:**
There will be no compensation paid for participation in this research study.

9. **Voluntary Participation:**
Participation is voluntary. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time by notifying Marian D. Edmiston. Participants can decline to answer any of the interview questions.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

If this consent form is sent to you via e-mail please print two copies. Sign the first and send it to the principle investigator via regular mail or give it to her at the time of the first interview. Please keep the second copy for your records.

**Please check one of the following:**

- I consent to the use of e-mail technology to conduct correspondence between the principal investigator and myself. _____
- I prefer to have all correspondence between the principal investigator and myself take place via landline telephone service and/or regular mail. _____

______________________________________  _____________________
Participant Signature      Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

______________________________________  _____________________
Investigator Signature     Date

**ORP USE ONLY:**
The Pennsylvania State University
Office for Research Protections
Approval Date: 5/7/04 – J. Mathieu
Expiration Date: 4/14/05 – J. Mathieu
Social Science Institutional Review Board
**Interview Questions**

1. **Tell me a little about yourself.**
   i. Your age, family makeup, siblings, number of relationships, children?
   ii. How would you describe your personality?
   iii. Can you name a principle or two that you value or live by?

2. **Tell me how you feel about women.**
   i. What is a women’s role in a relationship?
   ii. What kinds of behavior do you think women should display toward their partners?
   iii. What does a “good” relationship between a man and a woman look like to you?

3. **Tell me about your first experiences with abuse.**
   i. When did you first encounter abuse between a man and a woman?
   ii. Had you ever been the victim of abuse as a child?
      1. Tell me how it felt to be in that situation?
   iii. Did you witness abuse toward your mother or another female as a child?
      1. If so, what was it like for you to have witnessed that abuse?

4. **I would like you to listen to/read the following scenarios then tell me what you think about them.**
   i. You are attending a football game with several male friends. One friend begins a conversation about the team cheerleaders. He says that he knows that a couple of them are married with kids. He goes on to say, “I would never let that happen. No wife of mine would be out there strutting her stuff. That is my territory and nobody gets to see that but me.”

      What is your reaction to his comments?

   ii. Your next door neighbors are a very private couple. They say hello but don’t engage in conversation or friendship with any of the neighbors. Often, at night you can hear loud voices and sounds of fighting. One day your wife tells you that the woman next door spoke briefly about her husband’s emotional and sometimes physical abuse. She is afraid to leave and doesn’t know where to turn. Your wife wants to help and says she will call the police the next time she hears sounds of fighting.

      How would you react to this situation?
5. Describe how you have changed your abusive behavior toward your partner.
   i. What prompted your decision to stop being abusive toward your partner?
   ii. Was there a specific incident or series of incidents that caused you to change your behavior? Describe them for me.

6. How are you different now than when you were being abusive toward your partner?
   i. Have your beliefs about yourself changed? How?
   ii. Have your beliefs about your partner changed? How?
   iii. Are the principles that you value different now than when you were being abusive?

7. Do you still think about being abusive toward your partner?
   i. How do you handle those feelings?
   ii. Why do you handle them in that way?

8. The philosophy of domestic abuse initiatives for women is that every woman has the ability and the right to control her own life. There is a commitment to empower women through support services that affirm a woman’s competence to make decisions. How do you feel about that statement?
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT WRITINGS

Stephen’s Letter to Women

Matthew’s Reflections
Stephen’s Letter to Women

So, I just asked you to go out with me. Stop everything. Before you say yes, I am going to let you into my mind so that I can change your yes to no. I will tell you something that I should have told others before you. Are you ready? Now, listen.

Dear Lover,

It is about time I told you the truth about myself. You see, I am like a time bomb ticking and someday I will explode. So, I have decided to freeze-frame our relationship and give you this short message. When you see or recognize any of the following signs, RUN. RUN as fast as you can and never come back because I am saving you from a life of pain and suffering or possibly death if you decide to stay. I am similar to the total effect of AIDS and all its ramifications to your mental state and the state of your family and friends, and I am sure you would not date me if I was carrying that virus. But remember, you can’t even tell if the person next to you is infected unless he or she tells you the truth.

We probably met quite innocently like any other couple. It was not very long before we both said, “I love you.” But what were the terms of our relationship? Were the terms yours, ours, or mine? You see, I know they were mine because I am actually a very selfish person.

You may have missed that one by thinking that I do so much for you. You see, I am actually very cleverly suspicious of everything you do. Remember when you used to have that time to yourself that was important to you and now it always seems to be filled with me sitting next to you? If you missed that one you should know that I am very stifling.
You’re still around in a relationship where I set the terms, I’m suspicious and stifling. I’m surprised you can even breathe. RUN.

Since I am in control, let me exert some. Remember when I saw you talking to that other guy and I told you to stay away from him because he was a jerk. I needed that control over who you talk to because I am very jealous. When you see this sign we are getting close to disaster. Even as I write I can feel how potentially dangerous this sign is to your well-being. Please RUN. PLEASE RUN FASTER.

Ok, so you didn’t. And I’m ticking. I better tell you about one of my closest friends. His name is alcohol. When I start to feel angry, he is a great sedative. He disguises all the signs you have seen so far. In fact, all your friends think I am such a nice guy when we are all partying. I’m probably drunk by the time we leave but the evening isn’t over. I desperately need to be intimate and whatever level is acceptable to you will not be enough for me. I’m getting pushy. Did you hear me? I said, “pushy.” RUN, RUN, RUN.

If you are still around, the sex life gets rough. I explain to you that there is great pleasure in sexual pain. Because I have you in such a naked and exposed situation, our relationship is at a point where you won't even have the nerve to tell your best friend what a predicament you have found yourself in.

It is about this point where you start to do downhill. You see, I need you at my level to survive. Your self-esteem drops and we have more in common. You see, I am filled with low self-esteem. RUN, RUN, RUN.
If you are still around I have given you a few major implicit signs to recognize, but apparently you need more. So here are some explicit signs to fear. And at this point let me say to you, if you feel fear, it is real! RUN.

When you are separated from me by a distance, yet close enough to get a negative message from my eyes, it is time to run.

If you’re close enough to be holding my hand and I communicate by squeezing it just a little too tightly to get my message across to you, it is time to run.

If I start cursing at you (which is total disrespect) it is time to run.

If I start blaming you for my failures, it is time to run.

If you are still here, it only gets worse. You see, I am a coward, not the strong man you wanted in your life. I have run through every stop sign the laws of love have put up and nothing will stop me now.

Have I manipulated you into changing your style of clothing to suit me, which has stripped you of your own identity? RUN

Have you noticed that when we are alone and I am in a bad mood how quickly that mood can change when other people enter the room? Or maybe it is when the telephone rings and I answer it? Or when you answer it, do I have to know every single detail of the conversation that you just had? RUN.

When other people silently tell you about my negative behavior, do you make excuses for me? RUN

Have you found me searching through your purse without your permission? RUN

I’ll spare you the details of the hard-core abuse that follows in an effort to force you to RUN at this point.
But let me recall my friend alcohol. You see, he is no longer a sedative. He will now give me the permission to do the things I don’t want to do or is it really that he gives me permission to do the things I really do want to do? Because the truth of the matter is that the inflicting of pain is pleasurable. Remember the rough sex? You see, that wasn’t enough. RUN.

You are still here. I have just beat you up and I am crying-telling you how sorry I am and how it will never happen again. You show such pity as I wipe your tears and comfort you. Within an hour, we are making love and forgiving each other. RUN.

Let’s talk about marriage where this will all go away and we will live happily ever after. RUN.

If you marry me, will you not have trouble with your spiritual father-in-law? RUN.

How can you say “I love you” when I don’t believe you? I think it is a lie because I am not capable of feeling love. But be careful of saying “I hate you” because that is exactly what I want to hear. RUN.

The truth of it all is that I hate myself. You see, I am sick, I am ticking and I will explode. I just don’t know when.

So, back to the beginning. Do you have a few questions you want to ask me before you say “yes” to a date with me?
Matthew’s Reflections

Moment of Transition
Sources of Anxiety:
- Expectations of others (real or imagined)
- Void of preparedness
- Transition itself – Switching gears
- Anticipation of Consequences and energy required
- Doubt
- Shame (at unreadiness, inaction, impression of others)
- Resistance from others
- Choosing between Approaches – see below

Response: Freeze
- Inaction (remaining at threshold)
- Waiting for feelings of “rightness” and “readiness”
- Waiting to snap into inspired “zone”
- Needing to build or borrow energy to overcome inertia:
  - Examples: Relying on others for motivation
  - Building anxiety (energy by waiting until last minute
- Escaping (daydreaming)
- Gorging, Hoarding (eating, collecting objects)
- Sleepiness, Depression

Approaches: Superego vs. Rebel vs. Observant Ego

Superego: OLD: Rigid, stern, hard. Imitates voices of Authority figures:
- Father, teachers, bosses, etc., to build and maintain authority and autonomy. Overprotective of autonomy.
- Fall back to traditional approach to design, putting customer ahead of self, losing self. Easily giving authority to new people.
- Passive self. Negative response to resistance from others (son). Often judgmental, but not necessarily gauging others well. Critical and susceptible to criticism. Easily shamed. Rigidity and lashing out based on shame.
- Sage, easily deflated. Seeks permission to cross barriers.

Observant Ego: Adult. Self-calming and soothing. Self-directing. Active with patience. Positive, assesses risks and moves through barriers with skill. Self-assured, self-motivating. Builds undoes avoidance. Stays focused, or at least can recover focus. In possession of a genuine and substantive sense of humor. Moving toward Taoist approach to life in respect to humility, finding a place for himself (myself) in the world, caring for others regardless of their behavior, etc…

Lessened or tempered need to feel special, because of awareness, because of willingness to share.

Able to let go of autonomy and share life and control with others.

Favorite References:

1. Care of the Soul – Thomas Moore
2. Original Self – Thomas Moore
3. Identity and the Life Cycle – Eric Erickson
4. Tao Te Ching – Lao Tzu, translated by Gia Fu Feng w/ illustrations by Jane English
Questions About Narcissism and How I Incorporate It

x) What is Narcissism?

1) Is narcissist behavior a: game, pattern, web, gestalt, mosaic, spiral, or is it layers?

2) How did I first encounter it?

3) How did I become enlisted in my father’s narcissism? *Made me feel special.*

4) How and why do I avoid being enlisted in the narcissism of others? *To avoid being manipulated. Losing autonomy; to avoid my own values.*

5) What do I feel when I suspect I am being subjected to, or am subjecting myself to, other people’s narcissist behavior? *Slimy, wary, ashamed*.

6) What are some of the elements of my narcissist (attitudes, assumptions, emotions)?
   *A need to feel elevated and very special*

7) How do I enlist people in my game, and how do I choose them? How do I “play” people? For instance, what purpose does it serve me to make people wait?
   *I make special things, unusual and well-made ironwork, to attract affection and draw praise.*

8) How do I categorize people?

9) What brings me close to people, and what turns me away? (How do I lose contact?)

10) How do I create and fill my living space?

11) What role does my superego play? How well developed is my ego, compared to my superego?

12) What is the purpose and direction of my narcissism? How do these compare with those of other family members? How does anxiety fit into the mix?

14) What is the overall effect of my narcissist behavior on my life and the life of my loved ones?

15) What are some of the comments made to me by group members, which have appealed to me, and how have I responded to them?

16) What are some statements I have made in group which reflect my narcissism?

   *Intense or probing feedback to attempt to change people, or to draw attention to my perceptive observations and careful thinking to get the depth of my feelings and thoughts confirmed.*
APPENDIX C

TABLES

Table 1 Framework for Findings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of Participants</th>
<th>Context for Change</th>
<th>Critical Incidents Leading to Change</th>
<th>Mechanism of Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>New awareness of feeling, emotions, loss of father, dissatisfaction with his life</td>
<td>Confronted by friend; Intense spiritual experience</td>
<td>Devotion to teaching of the Catholic Church; Wrote speech to women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Escalating abuse toward wife; Wife’s fear and discontent</td>
<td>Violent episode; Arrest; Wife left him, Sense of loss of wife-family-home</td>
<td>Inmate, Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Recognized increased in drinking, Wife decreased her angry outbursts</td>
<td>Wife threatened to leave</td>
<td>Program Director, Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>Deteriorating relationship with wife; Became more withdrawn. Tension in home increased</td>
<td>Recognized himself in cycle of abuse; Wife urged him to go to program</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Left job; Became the primary caregiver for son</td>
<td>Violent episode</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Deteriorating relationship with wife; Separation followed by unsuccessful reconciliation</td>
<td>Recognized son’s fear, Arrest</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larry</td>
<td>Deteriorating relationship with wife; Arrest that led to decision to stop drinking</td>
<td>Wife’s affair-left him, Sense of loss of wife-family-home</td>
<td>Psychotherapy, Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Affair and child with mistress; Deteriorating relationship with wife; Escalating abuse toward wife</td>
<td>Violent episode, Arrest</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>Deteriorating relationship with wife; Recognized need to curb anger with children</td>
<td>Wife’s Intent to Leave, Recognized himself in video</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>Deteriorating relationship with wife; Escalating abuse with wife</td>
<td>Violent Episode, Recognized himself in book, Wife’s affair</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Present  

1983  
MS - Nursing, specialty: Geriatric/Gerontological Nursing  
University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware

1976  
BS - Nursing, Widener University, Chester, PA

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY (selected)

9/92 to Present  
Professor/Coordinator Allied Health Programs  
Delaware County Community College, Media, PA

9/84 to 6/90  
Instructor of Nursing  
West Chester University, West Chester, PA

12/86 to 1/88  
Health Educator  
Loudon Healthcare, Inc. - Leesburg, Virginia

3/83 to 5/84  
Geriatric Clinical Specialist  
Community Nursing Services of Chester and Vicinity, Chester, PA

PRESENTATIONS/PRODUCTIONS (selected)

November 2004  
“Learning to change: Identifying elements of transformation in formerly abusive men” Presented at the International Conference on Social Science Research. Sponsored by the Center for Policy and Practice – New Orleans

November 2004  
“Transformative learning in abusive men” Presented at the American Association of Adult & Continuing Education Annual Conference – Louisville

2002 to Present  
Speakers Bureau - Delaware County Community College  
Offers presentations to professional and community groups on health care and on domestic abuse issues.

October, 2001  
“Domestic Violence: Pro-feminist approaches to educating men”  
American Association of Adult Education Practitioners Conference – Baltimore

May 1995  
Medical Assistant Video Series - Bergwall Productions, Philadelphia, PA - Author and Production Consultant

May 1994  
Nursing Assistant Video Series - Bergwall Production, Chadds Ford, PA - Author and Production Consultant

HONORS/AWARDS

Outstanding Student in Adult Education Award - 2002
Gould Award (for excellence in teaching at DCCC) - nominated - 1994, 1996, 1998
American Journal of Nursing Video Award - 1995 - Nursing Assistant Video Series

MEMBERSHIPS/COMMUNITY SERVICE

Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing - Xi Delta
Domestic Violence Center of Chester County - VP Board of Directors, ‘02-04, Sec. - ’04 - present
Delaware County Health Care Employer Initiative Group
American Nurses Association
Site Surveyor for National Program Accreditation – Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs