FACTORS OF ISOLATION: RURAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN AN UNDERSERVED TEXAS COUNTY

A Dissertation

by

JACKIE CAROL REVUELTO

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2002

Major Subject: Educational Human Resource Development

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ABSTRACT

Factors of Isolation: Rural Domestic Violence in an

Underserved Texas County. (August 2002)

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the phenomenon of domestic violence in an underserved rural Texas county with emphasis on the experiences and perceptions of selected residents. The chosen county of 25,000 residents had no providers of social services for victims of domestic violence. An examination of the characteristics of rural culture and the experiences and perceptions of participants revealed six major factors which contributed to the increasing isolation of the victims of domestic violence while at the same time increasing the power and control of the abusive partners. Experiences of participants were presented through the personal stories of 7 survivors of domestic violence and 11 individuals from the Anglo, Black, and Hispanic communities who had special knowledge of domestic violence.

Factors contributing to isolation were social control, gossip, law enforcement, the church, community attitudes, and community resources. Social control characteristics of the rural culture were embodied in residents' attitudes of noninvolvement, tacit condonation, and acceptance of male dominance. Gossip and the fear of public attention emerged as an important factor in separating victims from support. This fear prevented women from seeking or accepting help, while abusers found that manipulation of gossip

was an effective weapon of control and isolation of their partners. Inadequate police response and protection deterred many victims from seeking help. A reluctance to follow required protocols resulted in women's lack of confidence in law enforcement agencies. An examination of the church's position in the community found a disinterest in becoming involved in the problem of domestic violence. Non-controversial missions were preferred by many of the larger churches, whereas clergy of a few small churches were seen to be actively involved in offering service to women in abusive relationships. Attitudes of the community toward domestic violence included conservative views toward marriage, reluctance to help victims until they helped themselves, victim blaming, and a fear of gossip by association. Although the county lacked organized domestic violence service providers, the data revealed networks of helping individuals, such as school counselors, a nurse, and formerly battered women, who felt called to offer service to people in crisis.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my husband, Gerry, without whose support and encouragement—both emotional and financial—it could not have been attempted, much less completed.

It is also dedicated to my daughters, Lesley and Kelley. My family never wavered in their belief that I would achieve my goal.

Thanks, guys.

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The people of Oak Tree County who shared their stories with me: the survivors of domestic violence and those who know them, and those who were willing to acknowledge the presence of violence in their communities.

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INTRODUCTION

Prologue

My first drive to Oak Tree County was on a warm and damp spring morning in April. Just across the bridge, I could see a green vista, softened and rounded in the mist that lay beyond the fog of the riverbanks. There were myriads of greens—the chartreuse green of new feathery leaves on vines and bushes, the apple green of fully developed leaves on oaks and pecan trees, the dark, piney green of the evergreens—all glistening in the morning's drizzle. Brown and white-faced cows lay lumped in the green pastures like mottled boulders arranged haphazardly. Ranch roads were framed by wrought iron gates fashioned with silhouettes of bucking horses, cattle, cowboys with hats raised high. Huge rolls of aged and weathered hay were scattered like so many giant Tootsie Rolls in the fields. Bordering the shoulders of the highway and clumping up against the barbed wire fences were mounds of spring bloomers: bluebonnets, red and orange Indian paintbrushes, wild nasturtiums spilling down a bank, yellow coreopsis, pink evening primrose—all providing a colorful frame for the green, hummocky pastures. It was idyllic, rustic and serene—this first view of the countryside which surrounded the two communities which I would visit many times in the future months. As the seasons rolled into the heat and humidity of summer and fall, with the miles of heat-shimmered roadway, dusty lanes, dry and parched fields, and cattle huddling under the shade of

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This dissertation follows the style and format of *Adult Education Quarterly*.

huge live oaks, this first view of Oak Tree County dimmed in my memory; because as the weeks and months passed, and as I learned more and more about the lives of the people in the communities, I discovered that the idyllic promise of that spring morning was an illusion which hid the realities of violence and turmoil in the homes of many of its residents.

Domestic violence, family violence, partner abuse, wife battering—these are terms that have become familiar in the last 30 years from their use in the media during coverage of the sensationalized trials of celebrities charged with assault against their wives or girl friends. People today are aware of domestic violence as never before, not only that which is present in the United States but also the abuse against women that occurs worldwide. In fact, people may know more about female abuse in Hollywood or Afghanistan than in their own neighborhoods or families. It is the crime that happens to other people, in other families, in the big cities, in the ghettos, in the barrios, in the trailer parks, on the other side of the tracks or the other side of the world.

In our own nation, however, it is estimated that between four and six million U.S. women suffer abuse from their intimate partners each year in the United States (Berry, 1998, p. 6) and that 50% of all women will be battering victims at some time in their life (Berry, 1998, p. 7; Walker, 1979, p. 19). Approximately four U.S. women die each day as a result of violence from their intimate partners (Berry, 1998, p. 6). Wiehe (1998) said, "In the United States, a woman is more likely to be assaulted, injured, raped, or killed by a male partner than by any other type of assailant. Between 15% and 25% of pregnant women are battered" (p. 82). It is only in the last three decades that research

attention has been focused on the problem. In the early 1970s, a number of researchers began looking at abuse in the home. Soon researchers in the areas of social science, law, medicine, and public policy added to the body of knowledge concerning physical and sexual abuse within families (Van Hightower, Gorton, & DeMoss, 2000, p. 137).

The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 is dedicated to collecting data that indicate the prevalence of domestic violence, providing grant assistance to programs of intervention, and supporting community efforts at training, education, and advocacy (Barnett, Miller-Perrin, & Perrin, 1997, p. 8). Through these efforts, it is seen that family violence has an impact on children, health and social services, and the justice system. Children who witness violence in their homes are seen to have problem behaviors, high anxiety levels, and depressive symptoms, which may lead to psychosocial problems (Wiehe, 1998, p. 95). Additionally, children who are victims of parental violence are "quite likely—as much as 1,000 times more likely than a child raised in a non-violent home—to grow up and use violence against a child or spouse" (Gelles, 1979, p. 142). Battered women are disproportionately represented among the homeless, suicide victims, women seeking medical treatment for injuries, women suffering miscarriages and stillbirths, and those who are uninsured (National Organization of Women, 2000, p. 1).

According to the Texas Department of Public Safety, in 1999 there were 192,202 reported victims of family violence, an increase over the preceding year of 0.5% (Uniform Crime Reporting Records Service, 2000, p. 5). The Texas Council on Family Violence (2000) reported "104 women were killed by their intimate male partners in Texas (p. 1). According to Wiehe and others, it is generally understood that "the number

of reported incidents represents only a portion of the actual number of assaults occurring between partners, for abuse occurs in families of all socioeconomic, racial, and religious backgrounds" (1998, p. 82), and many in these groups do not report incidents. "Middle- and upper-income women have financial resources available to them, thus making it unnecessary to have to turn to public agencies. Also, they may be more protective of the family's status in the community" (Wiehe, 1998, p. 83). They are able to seek private help or use private divorce attorneys to end the marriage.

What is known about the prevalence of domestic violence typically comes from police reports, social service agencies, women's shelters and advocacy organizations, and health organizations such as hospital emergency departments and public health clinics. It is through these agencies and services, common in most cities nowadays, that the voice of the urban domestic violence victim is heard. However, the experiences and victimizations of women who live in rural areas are not well documented, for several reasons, a main one being the shortage of those services in rural areas. Of the 254 Texas counties, 196 counties are considered rural. Only 20 of those rural counties have shelters that attempt to provide some outreach services to their surrounding counties as well as try to document abusive incidents (Texas Center for Social Work Research, 1998, p. 2). Moreover, little research has been done in the rural community on attitudes, perceptions, or beliefs of residents toward the problem of domestic violence.

Statement of the Problem

There has been little research in the area of rural domestic violence, especially in Texas. What we know comes from the organizations, such as shelters, that deal with

victims of domestic violence in urban, metropolitan areas. However, rural reporting agencies such as local law enforcement groups are less than diligent in tracking and recording incidences of family violence calls. The experiences of abused women living in rural areas are largely unexplored. It is not well known how residents in rural areas deal with domestic violence and the lack of resources in small towns. The rural community's response to and perceptions of family violence are areas that have been neglected.

Purpose of the Study

In rural areas there is a shortage of social services and reporting agencies, and little is known about rural domestic violence. It is not well known what are the unique characteristics of the rural community that are factors in rural domestic violence, or what effect these characteristics have on partner abuse or on the battered woman's efforts to receive help from the community. The aims of this research are to explore the phenomenon of domestic violence in two small towns in an underserved rural Texas county with special emphasis on the experiences and perceptions of selected residents.

Research Questions

1. From the perspectives of victims and other residents, what are the major social factors of the rural culture that affect the victims of domestic violence?
2. What are the experiences and perceptions of the rural community toward domestic violence?
3. From whom do battered women seek help in a community that has no domestic violence service providers?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is its addition to the limited body of research on rural domestic violence. The results can provide a better understanding of the way the rural context shapes and impacts rural partner abuse. It can contribute to an increased awareness of rural domestic violence. With additional information and increased understanding about the unique characteristics of rural family violence and the needs of victims in rural areas, communities can work to develop programs which target those needs instead of copying urban programs. The information learned from this study can be used in training certain constituent groups to serve as advocates of victims and to contribute to community awareness and education of the problem of family violence.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will be operative:

Domestic violence. Also referred to as partner abuse, intimate partner abuse, domestic assault, wife battering, and spouse abuse, domestic violence is "the abuse of a wife by her husband or the abuse of a woman by a male companion with whom she is cohabiting" (Wiehe, 1998, p. 75). It includes non-physical attacks such as verbal abuse and psychological abuse, intimidation, isolation, economic deprivation, and stalking and physical attacks such as beatings, marital rape, and homicide, referred to as "femicide" (Wiehe, 1998, p. 83). The Texas Council on Family Violence (2000) adds that the "abuse occurs between two people in an intimate relationship irrespective of the legal status of their relationship" (p. 1). For the purposes of this study, domestic violence does not include male victimization or abuse of children.

Battered women. "Female recipients of all forms of physical force by their intimate partners who intend to hurt them. The full range of severity is included, from slaps to beatings to the use of weapons (Saunders, 1990, p. 94). The term is frequently used as a general term to describe women who have experienced relationship abuse. Walker (1979) listed the common characteristics of the battered woman. She "has low self-esteem, believes all the myths about battering relationships, is a traditionalist about the home and strongly believes in family unity and the prescribed feminine sex-role stereotype, accepts responsibility for the batterer's actions, suffers from guilt yet denies her feelings of terror and anger, presents a passive face to the world but has the strength to manipulate her environment enough to prevent further violence and being killed, has severe stress reactions with psychophysiological complaints, uses sex as a way to establish intimacy, and believes that no one will be able to help her resolve her predicament except herself" (p. 31).

Economic abuse. A form of control that causes the financial dependence of the victim. It is preventing her from getting or keeping a job, making her ask for money, taking her money, and not letting her know about or have access to family income.

Isolation. Acts that cause the victim to be removed from potential avenues of support. It is exerting control over what she does, whom she sees and talks to, what she reads, and where she goes; limiting her outside involvement, using jealousy to justify actions (Wiehe, 1998, p. 88).

Participants. Interviewees, victim and non-victims, who are also identified as informants. All are residents of the research county.

Physical abuse. Violence inflicted on the body. Examples are hitting, slapping, kicking, biting, choking, punching, grabbing, shoving, hitting with an object, and burning (Johnson, 1998, pp. 35-36).

Rural/nonmetropolitan. The term rural is commonly understood to refer to the countryside or small towns as opposed to cities. In the terminology of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nonmetropolitan counties are outside the boundaries of metro areas and have no cities with as many as 50,000 residents. The communities of the county, incorporated or unincorporated, will not have a population of more than 10,000. The population of the county will be less than 30,000.

Sexual abuse. Unwanted intimacy. It includes coercive sex (with or without use of physical force) and sexual oppression up to and including marital rape (Websdale, 1998, p.12). It includes intimate contact, oral sex, anal sex, intercourse, or any other unwanted or forced sexual activity. Included in this definition are sexually degrading practices that a perpetrator wants to engage in against his partner's wishes, such as inserting objects in the rectum or vagina (Wiehe, 1998, p. 76).

Verbal, emotional, psychological abuse. Violent behavior that does not cause physical harm but does damage the psyche of the victim. This type of abuse includes threats, intimidation, name-calling, put-downs, playing mind games, treating her like a servant, smashing things, destroying her property, abusing pets, displaying weapons; threatening to leave her and/or to commit suicide, or to report her to welfare or Children's Protective Services; making her drop charges, making her do illegal things (Gelles & Straus, 1988, p. 67: Wiehe, 1998, p. 88).

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, it was assumed that:

- Women who have experienced partner abuse in the rural community are willing to tell their stories of those experiences.
- Women who have experienced partner abuse are capable of articulating their experiences.
- All participants, victims and non-victims, are willing to describe their experiences and perceptions of family violence or domestic violence in their community.
- All participants, victims and non-victims, are willing to describe their observations and perceptions of community life as it relates to domestic violence.
- All participants, victims and non-victims, will be honest in the narration of their experiences and perceptions.
- All participants will have some understanding of the definitions and types of abuse generally identified with domestic violence.

Summary

People today are aware of domestic violence as never before, largely through the efforts of the women's movements of the 1970s. However, that awareness does not extend to the rural areas of the United States, which have not received the research attention that urban areas have in the last 30 years. Experiences of victims who live in rural areas and the sociocultural factors that affect their victimization form the basis of this research which takes place in an underserved rural county of Texas.

Research questions focused on these issues and definitions of terms were covered in this chapter.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Five areas of literature are covered in this chapter. First, a brief historical overview describes some of the early attitudes toward domestic violence and includes the contributions of early research in the 1970s and 1980s. The women's movement is seen as the impetus for increased attention to the problem of abuse found in millions of homes. Next, individual factors related to domestic violence are described. Some researchers have theorized that characteristics of the individual person cause violence. The first of these theoretical constructs are micro-theories, attempts to explain domestic violence at the individual level, such as psychological factors, alcoholism, and social learning. Macro-theories, those that seek to explain domestic violence at the societal level, are described in the third section. Some researchers have thought that the factors that characterize the family system might be factors that contribute to violent family relationships. Social exchange theory, social control theory, and other social factors are also discussed. The victim's perspective is presented in a description of Walker's (1979) battered woman syndrome and cycle theory of violence. Next is presented the feminist view, which holds that unequal and oppressive power relations between the sexes form the basis for wife abuse. The last description is of the cultural belief system known as patriarchy, the social view that deems that men have the right to dominate women. The reader will notice that the preponderance of literature derives from the study of male abusers of wives or female partner. Victimization of males and children were not the focus of this study.

A Brief History of Domestic Violence Research

Worldwide, the most common form of violence against women is abuse by their husbands or other intimate male partners. "In nearly 50 population-based surveys from around the world, 10% to 50% of women report being hit or otherwise physically harmed by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives" (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller, 1999). In western society, for centuries, wife abuse was accepted as a normal part of an intimate relationship. It was commonly held that a woman's legal identity was suspended during marriage and that she and her possessions became property of her husband (Dobash & Dobash, 1998b, p.144). As such, the husband had legal sanction to discipline his wife. The phrase, "rule of thumb," is traced from 19th-century British common law that decreed that a man is allowed to strike his wife with a switch, or rod, provided the stick was no larger than his thumb (Dutton, 1995, p. 21; Gelles, 1979, p. 91; Walker, 1979, p. 12; Wiehe, 1998, p. 86). "Although this rule was intended to protect women from severe beatings, it in essence gave men license to beat their wives" (Wiehe, 1998, p. 86).

Social and legal attitudes that favored the use of violence continued to prevail through the next one hundred years, as seen in the following newspaper article from the Portsmouth *Herald*, September 13, 1977:

> Concord, N.H. (AP) The New Hampshire Commission on the Status of Women has rejected a plan to help battered wives, saying that wife-beating is caused by the rise of feminism.
> "Those women libbers irritate the hell out of their husbands," said Commissioner Gloria Belzil of Nashua.
> At a meeting Monday, commission members, appointed by Gov. Meldrim Thomson, said any program to help battered wives would be "an invasion of privacy." (Straus, 1980b, p. 24)

Most of the public would have agreed with the commissioners. Straus described the marriage license as a" hitting license" (Gelles, 1979, p.92; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 31; Straus, 1980b, p. 39). "The husband's use of physical force against his wife...was widely accepted as appropriate to the husband's superior position" (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, p.10). Many Americans felt it was acceptable for a husband to hit his wife under certain conditions. "In fact, some form of physical violence in the life cycle of family members is so likely that it can be said to be almost universal" (Straus & Hotaling, 1980, p. 4). In addition, the belief in personal privacy and the rejection of outside intervention in family "business" enabled the continuation of the abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, p.7).

Since 1975, however, increasingly, attention has been focused on the problem of "wife battering" (Gelles, 1979, p. 91). Cases such as that of the Michigan housewife portrayed in the movie, *The Burning Bed*, helped to arouse the interest of the public and generated much discussion (Gelles, 1979, p. 92; Gelles & Straus, 1988, 134). The 1987 case of Hedda Nusbaum in New York and the 1994 case of O.J.Simpson in California kept the issue on the front pages and in television broadcasts. When Joel Steinberg, criminal lawyer, and his wife, Hedda Nusbaum, a former editor of children's books, were charged with the murder of their adopted daughter, six-year-old Elizabeth, the story became a media event. First, this was a child who was white and lived with white parents in an upper class apartment in New York City and may not have been adopted legally. Second, when Hedda was arrested, she had to be treated for a broken eardrum, fractured jaw and ribs, and blackened eyes, the results of her husband's battering (Gelles

& Straus, 1988, pp. 37-38; McKenzie, 1995, p. 7). O. J. Simpson, noted former football athlete and television network sports commentator, was arrested and later found not guilty of the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole, who had repeatedly called the police about Simpson's abuse of her (Smolowe, 1994; Thomas, 1994). According to McKenzie (1995, p. 6), "the shocking revelations of spousal battery by [Simpson] ignited mass outrage at the brutality of family violence."

The battered women's movement emerged in the United States in the mid-1970s, following the development of social movements of the 1960s, and being closely linked to the anti-rape movement (Schechter, 1990, p. 301). What had been seen as "individual aberrations or pathologies," now became regarded as "a pattern of family relations in millions of American homes" (Gelles, 1979, p.11), and attracted the attention of "researchers, clinicians, and educators [who] identified wife abuse as a significant problem and...attempted to define, explain, and treat and prevent it" (Horton & Johnson, 1993, p. 481).

Individual Factors Related to Domestic Violence

Three areas were considered of importance to early researchers (Gelles, 1979, p. 12). Just how widespread was the problem of domestic violence? What were the patterns of family violence? What causes people to be violent? Early investigations of the 1960s and 1970s centered on identifying the personality traits and character disorders that seemed to be associated with physical abuse in families, while several investigators felt answers might lie within the family itself.

In trying to understand the human behavior that leads to relationship abuse, researchers avoid use of the word *cause*, and, instead, "talk about factors *related* to or *associated* with the problem" (Wiehe, 1998, p. ix). Individual behaviors have been examined in the search for an explanation for why men perpetrate violence against their female partners. According to Gelles & Straus (1988) public perceptions of domestic violence are "often more conventional wisdoms and myths than facts or truth. The creation and perpetuation of these myths often serve a valuable social function" (p. 39). When violence can be explained by these myths, society will not be required to address the real causes of family violence which are rooted in the very structure of society and the family. Many theorists have focused on psychological perspectives of the individual to explain male to female abuse. They have attributed wife assault to factors such as alcoholism, pathology in the male, social learning theory, inherited dispositions to aggression, and patriarchal norms (Dutton, 1995, p. 62).

Psychological Factors

Dutton and Golant (1995) theorized that coming from an abusive childhood home does more than provide an opportunity to model actions. It influences "a sense of self and an entire set of perceptions and expectations that are manifested in intimate relationships" (Dutton, 1995, p. x). His thesis is that the male child will develop two personalities, one public and one private. Batterers are often described as having Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personalities. They "show their violent side only to the woman, further reinforcing her thoughts that no one would believe he could do such things" (Walker, 1984, p. 23).

Anger and Aggression

Several theories of anger and aggression have been discussed in the literature. These theories state that anger and aggression are innate and instinctual and the expression of aggression is destruction, retaliation, and hurting others. Male batterers are often mandated by the courts to attend anger management programs, although modern researchers feel that wife abuse is not really about anger but is about power and control. The manifestation of anger is a mechanism that the abuser has found to be useful in intimidating and maintaining control over his wife, girlfriend, and children. (Loue, 2001, pp. 127-127). Others say that conflicted past relationships with uncaring and emotionally unresponsive caregivers are manifested in the adult as feelings of abandonment, or loss, which cause rage (Jukes, 1999, p. 32). Loss, whether through death, divorce, control, or physical functions, is known to cause feelings of aggression (Jukes, 1999, p. 35). Most abusive men hold the emotions resulting from these losses in contempt, devaluing, dismissing, or running from them (Dutton, 1995, p. 105). Attachment theory, which refers to the bond a child develops (or doesn't develop) with the caretaker, is sometimes used to explain the causes and consequences of physically and sexually abusive behavior (Mignon, Larson, & Holmes, 2002, p. 126).

Psychopathology

Individual characteristics, such as personality traits, internal defense systems, and the presence of mental illness or psychopathology are examined by psychologists in order to understand wife abuse (Bograd, 1990, p. 16). This focus implies that the violence results from abnormal behavior. Feminists feel that the question of power is

ignored in these theories. While not denying that some individual psychoses may be present in partner abuse, feminists "seek to connect our psychological analyses with understandings of the patriarchal social context, of the unequal distribution of power, and of the socially structured and culturally maintained patterns of male/female relations" (Bograd, 1990, p. 17).

Dutton (1995) suggested three elements contribute to the psychological profile of the batterer. "This personality has its origins in early development, in the vagaries of early attachment and a father's shaming and violent behavior" (p. xi). When a boy is subjected to being ridiculed, publicly humiliated, and shamed by his father, when he has an insecure attachment to his mother (who may be a victim of marital violence), and when he is directly abused in the home, these factors are powerful and instrumental in the development of the potential for violence in adult relationships (Dutton, 1995, p. 76). On the other hand, Jukes (1999) feels that partner abuse arises from the man's attempt to maintain a position of dominance, and violence is used to ensure that he remains "on top of a subordinated and oppressed femininity" (p. 61).

> It does not take early childhood experience of a dominating father, or even the presence of a father, to engender such perceptions. It can just as easily develop when the child thinks the mother is too much in control of the father and the most surprising events can trigger the conclusion that "I will never let a woman do that to me." (Jukes, 1999, p. 60)

Contrary to the stereotype, according to Jukes (1999), abusers are generally mild mannered. "Naturally, we know of one such exception, and that is in relation to their partners. In fact, according to self reports, the majority has great difficulty in being angry or assertive in any situation other than in their homes" (p. 50). This helps to explain why

outsiders sometimes find it difficult to credit reports of violence by their pastors, their community leaders, or their lodge brothers. The wife must be doing something to cause it, they say; the husband is such a nice guy. It can be seen that theorists consider numerous factors associated with male violence in the home and have difficulty agreeing with each other.

Alcoholism

Frequently, battering occurs when the partner is inebriated, and the abuser and the victim often blame the alcohol for the violence. Gelles & Straus (1988) were told by police chiefs in their study that alcohol is the cause of domestic violence (p. 44). Indeed, because alcohol and spouse abuse are associated, many victims believe that if the batterers would just stop drinking, the violence would stop. Dutton (1995) also found a high incidence of alcohol use in assaultive men who use alcohol as a means to suppress feelings of depression and anger. However, as is often stated, alcohol does not cause men to batter their wives (Loue, 2001, p. 30). A lot of people get drunk and do not punch out their wives or anyone else (Dutton, 1995, p. 54). Alcohol provides a post facto explanation and justification for their abusiveness. It is the "most commonly used form of denial of responsibility," as well as placing the blame on the provocation of the victim. The perpetrator pleads he lost control when she provoked him when he was drunk and could not help himself (Jukes, 1999, pp. 63, 67). "Individuals learn that they will not be held responsible for their drunken behavior" (Gelles & Straus, 1988, p. 45). All forms of substance abuse can be seen to have some relationship to domestic violence. The use of the family's income to support addictive habits may add to the stress

already present in dysfunctional families (Gelles, 1979, p. 141). Alcoholism was included as a factor in this review of literature because it was found to be present in several stories by women victims in Oak Tree County.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory "helps explain why physical and sexual abuse tends to represent behavior of multiple members within a family. The theory does less well in explaining why siblings growing up in the same abusive environment may turn out very differently behaviorally" (Mignon, Larson, & Holmes, 2002, p. 117). Bandura developed a theory of aggression that asserted that aggressive responses are shaped through the individual's learning history (Bandura, 1977; Dutton, 1995, p. 71; Dutton & Golant, 1995, p. 72). "Social learning theory views biological factors, observational learning, and reinforced performance as the main origins of aggressive behavior" (Dutton & Golant, 1995, p. 71). By observing modeled behavior, an individual incorporates that behavior into his response system. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980, p. 122) found that children of violent couples tend to follow the pattern of their parents, thus explaining the intergenerational transmission of abuse. They found that males who had observed their parents attack each other were three times more likely to have hit their wives than were those who had not witnessed such attacks (p. 100). Also, "the scale of violence towards spouses seems to rise fairly steadily with the violence these people observed as children between their own parents" (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 101; see also, Loue, 2001, p. 32). Dutton and Golant (1995) suggested that an "alternative view is that early abuse victimization affects personality

development and increases the risk for a variety of adult pathologies, including violence" (p. 73).

Social learning theory does not assume that any behavior observed will be practiced. The behavior needs to have appropriate inducements, functional value, and be rewarded (or not punished). A wife batterer might be induced by the belief that his wife is challenging his authority. The functional value would be that his power is restored by beating her. The reward would be that she ceased her insubordination. Punishments could range from the wife leaving, to his own feelings of guilt and shame, to the police being called to intervene. On the other hand, his wife may not leave or call the police. If he gains more than he loses, the behavior is more likely to be repeated and become entrenched (Bandura, 1977, p. 28-29; Dutton, 1995, p. 74-75).

Social Organizations of the Family

Sociological theories provide a lens through which to look at domestic violence. This wider explanatory framework is complex and includes many factors that overlap.

Family Systems Theory

The decade of the 70's brought inquiries into the social psychological nature of the family. Gelles and Straus tried to identify the "unique characteristics of the family as a social group which contributed to making the family a violent-prone interaction setting" (Gelles, 1979, p. 13). Hotaling and Straus (1980), writing in their chapter entitled "Culture, Social Organization, and Irony in the Study of Family Violence," noted the irony found in the structural properties of the family and society (p. 14). These characteristics, or norms, are necessary to maintain the family group at the same time

that they enhance the likelihood that violence will become a regular feature of family life (Gelles, 1979, pp. 12-14). Hotaling and Straus (1980) discussed the following11 factors, or characteristics:

1. Time at Risk. So many hours of the day are spent in interacting with other family members.
2. Range of Activities and Interests. More events take place over which a dispute or a failure to meet expectations can occur.
3. Intensity of Involvement. The degree of injury felt is likely to be greater than if the same issue were to arise outside of the family.
4. Infringing activities. Many family interactions are inherently conflict-structured, such as what to watch on TV to what car to buy. There will be winners and losers in these decisions. Also important is the infringing of one's personal space or self-image by the life-style of others in the family.
5. Right to Influence. Membership in a family carries with it an implicit right to influence the values, attitudes, and behaviors of others.
6. Age and Sex Differences. There is the potential for battle between the generations and/or sexes.
7. Ascribed Roles. Compounding the problem of age and sex differences, family statuses and roles are assigned based on age and sex rather than interests or competence.
8. Privacy. The modern family is a private institution, insulated from the eyes, ears, and often rules of the wider society.
9. Involuntary Membership. Being in a family involves personal, social, material, and legal commitment and entrapment. Birth relationships are involuntary and cannot be terminated. The social expectation that marriage is a lifelong commitment may rule out leaving as an option to escape conflict.
10. High Level of Stress. Families are prone to stress. There are continual changes in structure: birth of children, maturation of children, aging, retirement, unemployment, illness, even children's bad grades in school.
11. Extensive Knowledge of Social Biographies. The members of marital relationships have at their disposal information that can be used to support and enhance each other's identities or that can be used to damage the identity of either partner. Each knows the vulnerabilities and weaknesses of the other. (Hotaling & Straus, 1980, p. 15-18)

Gelles (1979) pointed out that these characteristics do not of themselves "supply necessary or sufficient conditions for violence. The fact that the social organization of the family exists within a cultural context where violence is tolerated, accepted, and even

mandated provides the key link between family organization and violent behavior" (p. 15). The socially accepted use of physical punishment to raise children creates a "training ground to teach children that it is acceptable" to use violence on loved ones, that "powerful people can hit less powerful people, that hitting works to achieve some end or goal, and hitting is an end in itself. To put it simply, people hit family members because they can" (Gelles, 1979, p. 15; Gelles & Straus, 1988, p. 20). This societal acceptance of parental violence has implications for the generational phenomenon of abuse. Gelles (1979) found "that children who grow up in violent homes go on to use violence on their own spouses and children" (p. 20).

The first comprehensive national study of violence was The National Survey of Violence in the American Family, which sampled 2,143 families in 1976 (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p.25). It was followed by a second study by the research team in 1985. The Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) were designed to measure physical assault in families. One section asked about "the means used to resolve conflicts of interest among family members" (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 26). Other sections attempted to distinguish between acts of violence that required medical attention and police intervention and those acts that were not serious enough to produce injury (Dutton, 1995, p. 6).

Among other questions, the Physical Violence Index of the Conflict Tactics Scales explored the following items:

K. Throwing things at the spouse
L. Pushing, shoving, or grabbing
M. Slapping
N. Kicking, biting, or hitting with the fist

O. Hit or tried to hit with something
P. Beat up
Q. Threatened with a knife or gun
R. Used a knife or gun
(Straus, 1980b, p. 25)

Respondents to the survey were aged 18 to 70, one member of a male-female couple. Applying an incidence rate of 3.8% for the 12 months preceding the survey, Straus (1980b) found that approximately 1.8 millions wives were beaten by their husband in any one year (p. 27). Most violent incidents were not isolated incidents. The typical pattern was over two assaults a year, with 28% experiencing at least one violent incident (Straus, 1980, p. 29). However, even one violent incident may be all that is needed to establish and maintain control in the relationship:

> In some of these cases, it was a single slap or a single beating. However, there are several reasons why even a single beating is important. First, in my values, even one such event is intrinsically a debasement of human life. Second, physical danger is involved. Third, many, if not most, such beatings are part of a family power struggle. Often only one or two slaps fix the balance of power in a family for many years—or perhaps for a lifetime. (Straus, 1980b, p. 29)

Straus discussed the accuracy of the estimates. He was "reasonably confident" that the sample was representative of the 46 million American families in the United States in 1976, but he did have concern about underreporting. He felt that some of his respondents had reason to withhold some data because of shame, guilt, or that some acts of violence were felt to be such a normal part of life that they were not considered worthy of reporting (Straus, 1980b, p. 30).

Gelles (1979) found that "much of what passes for knowledge is actually stereotypic thinking" (p. 141). For example, "conventional wisdom" says that domestic violence occurs across all socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial groups. While it is true that

no one group is free from marital violence, it is also true that "the violence is not equally distributed—some families were more likely to be violent than others" (p. 141).

> Our examination of marital violence found that families living in large urban areas, minority racial groups, individuals with no religious affiliation, people with some high school education, families with low incomes, blue-collar workers, people under 30, and families where the husband was unemployed had the highest rates of marital violence. (Gelles, 1979, p. 141)

In addition, families with four or more children and families experiencing great stress between couples had the highest rates of violence. Gelles also found that 25% of victims were pregnant when hit (1979, p. 142-142).

Caution in interpretation of the list should be exercised, because, for example, high rates among minority racial groups are probably due to economic rather than racial factors (Gelles, 1979, p. 141). In addition, middle class families are able to access private medical treatment or legal agencies for help and are less likely to call the police, thereby not being counted in official statistics (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 124).

Straus proposed that the "causes of wife-beating are to be found in the structure of American society and its family system" (Straus, 1980b, p. 33). Seven of the main factors were listed: (1) the high level of conflict characteristics of families; (2) the high level of violence in society; (3) the normalization of violence in the family which results in an association of violence with love, with teaching obedience to children, and "that when something is really important, it justifies the use of physical force;" (4) "early experiences with physical punishment that lay the groundwork for the normative legitimacy of all types of... intrafamily violence;" (5) our culture that supports the use of

violence between family members; (6) inequality of the sexes; (7) and the dearth of coping resources of women. Straus concluded, "Violence is truly woven into the fabric of American society, and into the personality, beliefs, values, and behavioral scripts of most of our population" (Straus, 1980b, p. 36).

One concept that Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) emphasized from their nationwide studies was that "each generation learns to be violent by being a participant in a violent family" (p. 121). Tracing this learning process through three generations, the researchers concluded that "when a child grows up in a home where parents use lots of physical punishment and also hit each other, the chances of becoming a violent husband, wife, or parent are greatest of all" (p. 122).

These early studies reflected a family violence perspective rather than focusing on the individual male's violence within families. The focus was on family norms that sanctioned violence and the structure of the family that lay at the root of violence in families (Websdale, 1998, p. 70). Walker (1990) agreed, "The work of Gelles, Straus, and Steinmetz forms the social-science framework on family violence." (p. 87).

Social Exchange, Social Control, Social Factors

"The proposition that people hit family members because they can is based on the principles of social exchange theory, which assumes that human interaction is guided by the pursuit of rewards and the avoidance of punishments and costs" (Gelles & Straus, 1988, p. 22; see also Mignon, Larson, & Holmes, 2002, p. 118). "The principles of exchange theory suggest that people would only use violence toward family members when there are rewards for violent behavior and when the costs of violence do not

outweigh the rewards" (Gelles & Straus, 1988, p. 23). A general cultural approval of violence and a reluctance to condemn family violence increases the rewards for an abusive partner. If a local law enforcement agency seldom makes arrests and if the community prefers not to address family violence ("It's a private family matter"), then it is likely the violent behavior will continue. Many women choose to stay in an abusive relationship because it is too difficult to leave the relationship. There are economic, religious, and social rewards that could, in the opinion of the battered woman, justify her choosing to stay (Gelles & Straus, 1988, p. 23).

Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz (1980, pp. 237-243) listed other social values and attitudes which they believe contribute to domestic violence. The first was the normalization of violence for problem-solving, from corporal punishment of children to violence in the media to the death penalty. Second was violence-provoking stressors created by society, such as high unemployment, poverty, and inadequate medical care for many families. Third was social isolation and alienation which enables violence in the home to flourish. "People tend to avoid association with couples who are violent to each other or to their children" (p. 240). In addition, abusers tend to create the isolation which allows them to maintain control through secrecy and the community's beliefs in the privacy of the family. The fifth social value was sexual inequality in the home and in society. The last contributor to domestic violence was the generational cycle of violence.

One of the underlying assumptions of social control theory is the existence of a single set of beliefs in society, which constitute the conventional moral order (Hirschi, 1969, p. 5). Behavior is considered deviant when it does not conform to the norms of the

society. In many communities man's control (even if violent) over his wife and family is supported by the community's beliefs in the sanctity and inviolability of marriage as well as belief in the woman's submissive role in that relationship. "Cultural norms may legitimize violence between family members. This system may be reinforced through the sexist organization of society and its family system" (Loue, 2001, pp. 28), reflected in "the presumption that the husband is the head of the household, the identification of masculinity with violence, the socialization of women for subordinate roles" (Loue, 2001, p. 29). Additional barriers to women leaving violent relationships are "the stigmatization of divorce, the belief that family members may hit each other in anger or to discipline another, and norms maintaining family privacy" (Loue, 2001, p. 29).

Control theory also assumes the existence of two types of control mechanisms: external mechanisms such as community and inner mechanisms such as conscience (Edgerton, 1976, p. 6). External control mechanisms are the rules, laws, and expectations that a society develops and maintains or enforces. "People everywhere regulate their behavior in terms of many shared understandings, conscious or unconscious, about what is expected, proper, lawful, reasonable and the like" (Edgerton, 1976, p. 104). According to Edgerton (1976), some of these rules are clear and unequivocal, but many are unclear and open to misinterpretation. When rules are contradictory or ambiguous, they lend themselves "to argument, manipulation, and negotiation" (p. 107). It can be seen in many communities that the enforcement of rules (laws) against domestic violence are frequently the source of creative interpretation, according to who is doing the interpreting—an under trained police officer, a judge who is related to the offender, or a

firebrand young county attorney. "From a constructivist point of view, intimate violence should be seen as a socially constructed emotional expression anchored in a set of cultural rules" (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 2000, p. 4). Components of cultural rules that tolerate family violence are "inequality among men and women, unequal power distribution, differential rights, cultural norms based on discrimination, status discrepancies, and unequal access to resources" (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 2000, p. 4). Gelles and Straus (1988, p. 25) presented three basic propositions to support the belief that people hit family members because they can: when the costs of being violent are less than the rewards, when the absence of effective social controls decreases the costs of a family member's violence toward another, and when certain social and family structures act to reduce costs and increase the rewards of being violent.

Societies attempt to control their members without force, socializing them by using reward, fear, shame, and guilt. These are generally considered powerful inducements to internalization of the community's values, along with an assumed desire for approval. However, "no society has been able to exist without recourse to external controls. Therefore, societies also employ gossip, witchcraft, ridicule, fines, and various threats of physical coercion" (Edgerton, 1976, p. 109).

Edgerton's (1976) theory of human nature and Gelles' exchange theory of partner violence "each assumes specified acts will be committed if the opportunity to do so is present and if those acts result in an immediate benefit" (Loue, 2001, p. 77). Isolation of an abusive family and the absence of external censorship encourage the use of violence in the family (Loue, 2001, p. 77).

The stress of living in a society or community where a couple does not meet the social norms may be a factor in the manifestation of violence in a relationship. It has been hypothesized that couples who live at an economic level considerably below the average income of the area find greater stress when experiencing negative life events. They have fewer resources to mitigate the impact of these events (Loue, 2001, p. 30; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 123).

A connection between race and family violence has been discussed. Straus, et al. (1980) found very little difference between Blacks and Whites in terms of their reported acts of physical violence toward their children, but they did find that Black males had the highest rates of wife abuse. In addition, other minority men, such as Spanish-speaking men, also have a high rate of abuse that may likely be the result of the cultural phenomenon of *machismo*:

> Our finding that minority racial groups tend to have the highest rates of violence leads us to propose that the stress, discrimination, and frustration that minorities encounter, and the fact that minorities are still disenfranchised from many advantages which majority group members enjoy, can lead to higher rates of violence. (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 135)

Another approach to looking at domestic violence is to view it in the light of society's response to the behavior. Orcutt (1983) suggested that society can view violence as behavior that deviates from the norm of the community ("normative perspective") or that certain behaviors are defined as deviant by the social audiences viewing them ("relativistic perspective"). There are many questions about the definitions of deviance, norms, and who defines them (Loue, 2001). Each community becomes unique in its definitions. If a behavior such as marital rape is not viewed as a problem,

then it is nonexistent and does not need to be addressed. Labeling people and behaviors as outside the cultural and social norms of a community serves to exclude them from various activities and services, such as police protection, health care, housing, and welfare. Therefore, members of an abusive family or relationship may attempt to hide the deviance from others (Loue, 2001). A woman may explain that her bruises are the result of her own clumsiness, or she may wear clothing and makeup that conceal the effects of battering, and thus avoid negative attention and labeling from others in her community. Gelles and Straus (1988) reported that "the sociologist Kai Erikson once said that our systems of preventing deviance operate so poorly that one has to wonder if the systems are organized to encourage and maintain deviance rather than to control and prevent it" (p. 188). The recent practice of limiting and restricting access to government resources and enacting legislation that takes away funds or fails to enact legislation such as gun control encourages instead of prevents family violence.

The Victim's Perspective: The Battered Woman Syndrome

Some explanations suggest that the characteristics of the victim are somehow the motivating factor for the abuse and that she is in some way responsible for what happens to her, that she must have a masochistic need to be hurt and punished. People ask, "Why doesn't she just leave?" People assume that most normal women would not stay in an abusive relationship and that she must like the abuse since she does stay. Walker's (1979) work led to the identification of psychological and sociological factors that make up what she called the battered woman syndrome. Her work helped to establish the cycle

theory of battering and the theory of learned helplessness to explain why some women do not leave their abusive relationships.

The battered woman syndrome, a list of symptoms that includes post-traumatic stress disorder, was developed by Walker (1979). She included a combination of aspects of "physical, sexual, and 'social' battering with 'economic abuse'" (Walker, 1990, p. 89), as well as " low self-esteem, self-blame, fatalism, relative passivity, and an unwillingness to seek or accept help (learned helplessness)" (Stark, 1992, p. 279).

The Walker Cycle Theory of Violence is a mainstay in women's shelters, support groups, and self-help books written for the abused woman. "There are three phases in battering relationships which occur in a cycle" (Walker, 1984, p. 101). The first phase is the tension-building phase and is described by many women victims as increasing moodiness and irritability in their partners. It can last from days to weeks. The second phase is the acute battering stage when physical abuse can result in minor to severe injury. It can last from a few minutes to hours to days. Phase three is the loving contrition stage, commonly referred to as the "honeymoon" stage. The man is apologetic, remorseful, and makes many promises. He may buy her flowers and presents, which help the woman to overlook the violence and to forgive her abuser; or he may not refer to the abuse at all but continue in non-violent behavior until the tension starts to build again. This phase is still reinforcing for the victim. She wants to believe that it will never happen again. Walker asserted, that over time, the "first phase of tension building becomes more common, and the third phase of loving contrition declines" (1984, p. 101).

Repeated batterings and other abuses are thought to contribute to a condition of learned helplessness. Based on social learning theory, learned helplessness suggests "that if the abused victim *feels* [italics in original] there is nothing she can do about her battering, that the situation is hopeless, or that she may even deserve what is happening to her she will *do nothing* [italics in original] about the abusive relationship" (Wiehe, 1998, p. 101). This condition is characterized by "negative, pessimistic beliefs about the efficacy of their actions" (Walker, 1984, p. 86). Learned helplessness relies for its theory on experiments with animals who became passive after exposure to repeated shock and/or physical deprivation (Stark, 1992, p. 278-279). When the animals were repeatedly shocked in an unpredictable pattern, they became unable to escape from the pain, even when escape was available and readily apparent to animals that had not undergone helplessness. Women who are repeatedly battered and abused develop a depression and a passivity which render them incapable of making the decision to leave the abusive relationship. Walker (1984) interpreted this "behavior as a basic coping mechanism, much like Seligman's dogs, who used passivity as their way to stay alive" (p. 33).

While these formulations by Walker add to the framework of family violence, they are, obviously, descriptions of the *results* of wife battering, not the causes. Sociologists see the causes in the "larger context of family dynamics, cultural norms, and societal values that condone violence in a variety of forms" (Walker, 1990, p 78-79). Psychodynamic formulations reduce the violence to a symptom or manifestation of male pathology such as paranoia, uncontrollable male aggression, or alcohol addiction. Others see the relationship itself as pathological, or sick, a relationship that provides rewards for

each deviant or aberrant partner. Feminists, however, "see such violence as a reflection of unequal and oppressive power relations between the sexes, and this as not just a matter of tradition or cultural values but as integral to the unequal social structure of society as a whole" (Walker, 1990, p. 85).

The Feminist View of Woman Battering

Not all feminists agree with all feminist theory, but the focus of their inquiries centers around the primary question, "Why do men direct their violence toward their wives?" Feminists also seek to understand male violence "at the social or group level, instead of at the particular man who beats his particular wife" (Bograd, 1990, p. 13). However, the basic tenets or commonalities of the feminist view of woman battering include the power differential based on gender which permeates society's structures—the family, politics, government, educational institutions, the medical profession, the economy, and world affairs. "Feminists contend that violence is a form of social control perpetuated by social institutions and cultural beliefs which promote and support men's use of physical force against women" (Gagne, 1992, p. 388; see also Bograd, 1990, p. 12). Feminists see male-to-female violence as "a reflection of unequal and oppressive power relations between the sexes, and this as not just a matter of tradition or cultural values but as integral to the unequal social structure of society as a whole" (Walker, 1990, p. 85). Walker (1984) asserted, "In truth, the most effective response to changing violent relationships is to change the structure of society" (p. 118). Kurz (1992) also argued that to consider the problem as one of "family violence" is to direct "attention

away from women as the victims of domestic violence and [instead] encourages 'family solutions' to problems" (p. 22).

Because of an unequal division of power, individually and collectively, men resort to violence in order to maintain that power. The argument is that men abuse women, the world over, in order to ensure the provision of services from them, to guarantee continued caretaking. Abuse is the instrument that men use to gain control of the woman so that she will obey him and do as he wants when he wants her to do it (Dobash & Dobash, 1998a, 1998b). Schur (1983), using labeling theory, argues that women are victimized more and the victimization is not taken as seriously because of our cultural devaluation of women.

A Conceptual Framework for Wife-Beating was introduced at a 1980 advisory council meeting of a Toronto group, Support Services for Assaulted Women, and is largely accepted by feminists working in the area of violence against women (Walker, 1990, p. 48). The six concepts were as follows:

1. Wife-beating is an assault, not an interaction gone wrong. When it's defined as an argument gotten out of hand, the victim gets blamed for provoking the violence, and the offender is tacitly given permission to use violence as way of winning an argument.
2. It's violence against women, not family violence. The term "family violence" leads to a focus on the interaction which leads, in turn to blaming the victim.
3. It's not a sickness; it's a crime. Women should not have to accept responsibility for nursing a man through a so-called sickness. To call it a sickness means saying that a man is not responsible for his violent behavior.
4. Freedom from assault is every person's basic right. A woman should not have to earn the right to freedom from assault by being submissive, going to counseling or whatever.
5. Men beat their wives because they're permitted to. It is an extension of the social permission given a husband to exercise authority over his wife.
6. Wife-beating should no longer be defined as a woman's private dilemma. It is a public and community issue. (Walker, 1990, p. 48)

Bograd (1990, pp. 14-15) identifies four elements common to the numerous variants of feminist theory:

1. As the dominant class, men have differential access to material and symbolic resources and women are devalued as secondary and inferior.
2. Intimate partner abuse is a predictable and common dimension of normal family life.
3. Women's experiences are often defined as inferior, distorted, or are rendered invisible because male domination influences all aspects of life.
4. The feminist perspective is dedicated to advocacy for women.

Walker (1990) told about a seminar instructor who proposed a framework that examined women's economic dependence on men's wages to support the family:

> She postulated the "presence of an implied social contract in which, in return for such support, women would supply a range of domestic and sexual services. This implicit contract, she suggested, leads to a situation where men can demand that their needs be met and punish women to enforce their authority in the process." (p. 33)

Feminists view wife abuse as "a power struggle, something involving the quest for dominance and control on one side and equality and self-respect on the other" (Mignon, Larson, & Holmes, 2002, p. 163). They examine wife abuse as a phenomenon of the social and cultural context. Dobash and Dobash (1998a) have stated that "an understanding of the specific context(s) in which violence occurs is essential if we are to have some purchase on explaining the violence and on developing meaningful responses to victims and to perpetrators (p. 10).

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is defined as a cultural belief system, dating from the earliest Roman times, that allows men to hold greater power and privilege than women on a social hierarchy. In its extreme form, it literally gives men the right to dominate and control

women and children (Barnett, Miller-Perrin, & Perrin, 1997; Dobash & Dobash, 1979, p. 76). "The ideology of patriarchy holds that male supremacy is natural and that control of women and strong reactions to their insubordination is vital" (Dutton, 1995, p. 52).

Male power and control permeates life not only at the societal level, but also in the corporate world, in government, and in religious organizations (Wiehe, 1998, p. 9). However, although the "legal right to beat his wife is no longer explicitly recognized in most western countries, the legacy of the patriarchy continues to generate the conditions and relationships that lead to a husband's use of force against his wife"(Dobash & Dobash, 1979, p. ix). And, although, it is only a minority of men who beat their wives, the attitude of male entitlement prevails at the foundation of our social institutions. In fact, according to Bograd (1990), "Even if individual men refrain from employing physical force against their partners, men as a class benefit from how women's lives are restricted and limited because of their fear of violence by husbands and lovers as well as by strangers" (p. 14).

Feminists feel that sociologists overlook the importance of the dimensions of male domination and power that are critical to feminist analyses:

> When sociologists examine the family as a social institution, wife battering is often attributed to the breakdown of family functioning, resulting from external stresses or changing cultural norms. In contrast, feminists suggest that stresses are not simply external impositions on the family, but are built into the very nature of contemporary family life because of the way heterosexual intimate relations are structured along lines of gender and power.
>
> For example, given that a man is under extreme stress, why does he choose to deal with it in certain ways, and to direct his unhappiness against his wife? From a variety of feminist perspectives, sociologists replicate the same errors at the social level that psychologists make at the individual level: Violence is abstracted from a sociohistorical analysis and attributed to deviant structures that cannot

> adequately account for the empirical reality that it is women as wives who disproportionately are the targets of physical abuse and coercion. (Bograd, 1990, p. 19)

Summary

Domestic violence, or male-to-female abuse, is a complex phenomenon. No one theory or explanation or factor or association can be singled out and postulated as the only factor that can provide an understanding of the phenomenon. Those involved in the field of research and those involved in the practical world of providing help to victims of domestic violence may see that a combination of all these theories is needed as they attempt to make sense of domestic violence and to treat and advocate for its victims. This chapter presented an overview of the historical development of domestic violence research and looked at a selection of theories surrounding the individual, such as perpetrator psychopathology, social learning, and alcoholism. Also described were theories that looked at the social and cultural context, such as family systems, social exchange, social control, and feminism. The next chapter will describe the methodology used in this study of domestic violence in rural settings.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose and Design

The goal of this study was to increase the knowledge of rural domestic violence by interviewing residents, a selection of victims and non-victims from a rural Texas county, about their experiences with domestic violence: what kind of abuse victims had endured, how victims coped with their partners' violence, and to whom did victims go for help. I also wanted to discover the perceptions and attitudes of the community toward partner abuse. Another goal was to explore the social factors that are significant in the dynamics of domestic violence in a rural community. Given these goals, a qualitative design was judged appropriate because this method lends itself to "research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied" (Merriam, 1998, p. 1). Patton (1985) explained that qualitative research

> is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting—and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. (p. 1)

Other characteristics of qualitative research are that the researcher usually has to physically go to the setting, the researcher employs an inductive strategy, and the research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding (Merriam, 1998, pp. 7-8). As I sought to understand the experiences of the participants and others who lived in the rural communities of the study area, I found that my experiences and education as a counselor

to crime victims enhanced my role as the instrument of data collection and analysis, a characteristic of all forms of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). I was able to connect to my participants, especially victims, in ways that seemed to make them comfortable enough to share intimate, personal details of their lives.

This chapter presents the description of my efforts as I worked through the process of a qualitative approach.

Selection of Participants

A purposive sample of women survivors and non-victim residents of the rural county who were knowledgeable about domestic violence was interviewed for this study. All participants were residents of Oak Tree County in Texas, which was identified by the Texas Council on Family Violence as a county that was not served by any domestic violence social service agencies. Pseudonyms were used for all participants and place names to protect the confidentiality of those who were involved in any way with this study. There were 18 participants: 10 Caucasians, 2 Hispanics, and 6 African Americans. Seven women were survivors of abusive relationships. Ages ranged from 29 to 52. Occupations of the participants were varied: school counselor, nurse, clergy person, health provider, licensed professional counselor, housewife, church staff, law enforcement officer, and security officer.

Setting

Texas has 254 counties that range from urban, such as Harris, Dallas, and Tarrant; to suburban, such as Montgomery, Fort Bend, and Waxahachie; to rural, such as Oak Tree County (pseudonym), which is one of 196 rural counties. Oak Tree was

identified by the Texas Council on Family Violence as a county that was not served by any domestic violence social service agencies and did not have a shelter for battered women. Oak Tree County has a population of around 25,000. Participants were drawn from the two towns: one being the county seat (Akern), the other the home of a large industrial plant (Parkstone), and both having a population of about 5,000. They are located 17 miles apart. (The county is described in more detail in Chapter IV.)

Data Collection

Gaining access to a community as an outsider is difficult for the qualitative researcher. In addition, as Straus pointed out, the researcher "who attempts to examine a sensitive topic of long-standing taboos...confronts three major hurdles" (Straus, Gelles, Steinmetz, 1980, p. 23). First, one must find the people involved in the behavior; second, one must be able to get them to talk about the taboo topic; and third, "the investigator needs to satisfy himself and the consumers of the research that the truth was told" (Straus, et al, 1980, p. 23). It is useful to have some acquaintances in a community who will refer participants to the researcher. When that is not the case, the researcher must be imaginative in creating opportunities to establish contacts in the rural community. Websdale (1998) served on the advisory board of a local spouse abuse center and rode with police officers, among other roles, in order to gain access to participants in shelters in a statewide study of domestic violence and the criminal justice system in Kentucky. Oak Tree County did not have a shelter, and I felt that to be seen working in any capacity with the local law enforcement agencies could be a

disadvantage in gaining the trust of participants. Therefore, I had to create opportunities to make contact with potential informants in the two towns in Oak Tree County.

First I formulated an interview guide that not only would cover my research questions but would also leave open opportunities to extend the topics when interviewees indicated they had more to say. I listed community positions and places where potential participants might be identified. These included members of the clergy and their staffs, school counselors and nurses, the crime victims' assistance coordinator in the district attorney's office, heads of the law enforcement agencies, medical practitioners, and others who have contact with the public, such as the librarian, newspaper reporters, museum staff, bartenders and restaurant personnel, hairdressers and determined barbers, and neighborhood shops. (Appendix A.)

I also thought about and listed the other ways I might recruit participants. These ideas included distribution of flyers and referral cards, sending letters to ministers and doctors, speaking to women's church groups or school organizations, and being interviewed for the local newspaper. I also needed to be able to promise confidentiality for my informants, and I decided to ask ministers or school counselors for use of an office or room. I also decided to get a toll-free phone number for participants to use when calling me and had it printed on the flyers and referral cards. Money to finance the travel expenses, printing of cards and flyers, purchase of tapes and batteries, the telephone service, and other incidental expenses had to be obtained. I was also determined to have a professional typist to do the transcriptions of the tapes.

(Appendices B and C) I applied for and received funds through the Texas A&M Women's Studies program that covered most of my needs.

I used some of the techniques described by Gelles (1979) that included snowballing, which allows the researcher to begin with one or two contacts and branch out to a wider sample; interviews with family members who discussed friends and relatives; professionals who shared the stories of their clients; and an examination of police and prosecution records (pp. 152-154).

There is a lot to be said for being in the right place at the right time (luck) and talking about one's research topic to anybody with ears. I met my first interviewee in another county. Through my work with Dr. Nikki Van Hightower and her Program for the Reduction of Rural Family Violence, I was helping to train volunteer domestic violence advocates in a county adjacent to Oak Tree County. One of the attendees disclosed her abuse during a discussion, and she gladly volunteered to be my first (and youngest) participant. Later on, she referred me to my oldest participant. An encounter with a former public health nurse from Oak Tree County resulted in a good list of names and phone numbers of community leaders.

During the course of data collection, which ran from April, 2001, to February, 2002, I made many phone calls, talking to strangers, establishing my credentials, and explaining the expected benefits of my research. Everybody I met and talked to was very courteous, expressed great interest in my research, and promised to talk to friend, neighbor, hairdresser, cousin, or sister-in-law's daughter; however, in most cases, I did not hear from them again. During the ten months I had the toll-free number, there were

no calls from potential participants, but several contacts used the number to contact me. I distributed about 100 flyers and almost 400 referral cards to people I met. Only one victim contacted me directly, and that was through an email. There were successful pleas, of course. One woman drove an hour to meet me at a Starbuck's just to "check me out" and ended up being a very good contact and friend. She invited me to address her group in Parkstone, and I got one participant from them; moreover, my presentation was so well received that several women signed up for the volunteer advocacy training that was later offered. I attended a community luau and distributed my cards and flyers. I visited the former jail, now a museum, and poured my heart out to an 87-year-old board member who gave me a tour and whom I just knew could refer me to others. She didn't.

I did manage to make my way into the communities via contacts with interested residents, mostly those who were in helping positions and who were quite willing to share their knowledge of community problems, domestic violence being one of the problems they saw in their community. I soon realized that the information they were giving me had value and should be included in my study. Therefore, when it looked as though I would not have very many battered women to interview, I decided that the next best thing would be to interview those who knew the battered women or knew about them. Although this use of an intermediate participant removed me a step from the intended participants, it afforded me another kind of insider's view. Because battered women frequently have parenting problems and their children have school problems, I discovered that the school counselor and school nurse were knowledgeable sources. Not only were they very willing to share stories of family violence, they were also

knowledgeable about community attitudes. The stories and experiences shared by these intermediaries, as well as those of victims, added a depth to my understanding of the community.

Interviews were conducted in various places of the participant's choosing. Several took place at the participants' place of work, two in the participant's homes, and one, the focus group, at a church. The two residences were small houses located on dirt and sand roads just a few blocks from the main highways that went through the towns. Prior to each interview, participants were informed of their rights, told the purpose of the research and were given a consent form to read and sign. (Appendix D) I read the form to one participant who was illiterate and explained the contents. In addition, her sister-in-law, who referred her to me, also had explained my project to her in Spanish before we met for the interview.

Audio taped interview sessions of one hour to almost two hours were conducted with 12 individuals and one focus group of five women. The tapes were transcribed by a professional typist in another state. *The Ethnograph v5.0* computer program was used to format and to facilitate the coding of the interviews (www.QualisResearch.com).

Two interview guides were used, one which asked survivors about their experiences and one which asked non-victims' their perceptions of domestic violence in their communities. (Appendices E and F) A fluid approach to questioning was employed where changes were made during and between interviews. This allowed for the collection of rich data as the rapport between researcher and participant developed, and the participant became more comfortable in revealing personal experiences and opinions.

An unexpected source of data was casual conversations with numerous people who were just interested in my research topic. Everybody seemed to have a story to tell about a relative, a neighbor, or an acquaintance or wanted to describe their rural community.

Data Analysis

Glaser and Strauss (1967) described a constant comparative method that was utilized in this study. Analysis was ongoing through an inductive analysis to sort the data into categories of patterns, relationships, and themes (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Spradley, 1979). Data were analyzed after each interview and clustered into meaningful chunks of information. Beginning with the first transcribed survivor interview, I looked for broad categories such as the following: (1) stories of abuse, (2) kinds and severity of abuse suffered, (3) various sources of help sought, (4) the success or failure of coping strategies, (5) characteristics of the rural community which seemed to be a factor in the abuse. Non-victim participants' interviews were also mined for broad categories such as (1) their awareness and perceptions of the extent of domestic violence in the community, (2) characteristics of their communities which are significant as factors for abuse, and (3) knowledge of community resources and sources for help for victims. Subsequently, I then sorted the data according to emerging categories of themes, such as sources of help, the role of the church, community attitudes, the impact of gossip, the response of law enforcement, and characteristics of the rural community that seemed pertinent to domestic violence.

Limitations

The manifestation of domestic violence differs among rural regions, just as it does among urban areas. However, an effort was made to describe the context of the county and subunits as in an ethnographic study in order to allow the reader to discern the comparability of the material to other similar rural counties.

Limitation 1: Member checks were problematic. Survivors of domestic violence frequently find the disclosure and discussion of their abuse to be so distressful that they are reluctant to continue contact with the researcher. However, one survivor in this study did initiate contact via email in order to give additional material. Towards the end of each interview, depending on how much time was available, effort was made to share with the informant my understanding and interpretation of their stories and to get their feedback.

Limitation 2: A second limitation concerned the number of informants who participated in the study. No effort was made to obtain a representative sample of the residents of Oak Tree County. Rather, attention was placed toward enlisting residents who, by virtue of their roles in the community, had experiences and/or knowledge of domestic abuse in their town and the county. All participants were English-speaking.

Limitation 3: The fact that I am an outsider to the community may have had an impact on how the participants responded. However, as was pointed out several times by the participants themselves, there are advantages to being an outsider. As Merriam and Muhamad (2000, p. 35) said, "...the outsider advantage lies in curiosity with the unfamiliar, the ability to ask taboo questions, and being seen as non-aligned with

subgroups thus often getting more information." Not being part of the gossip circuitry, I was judged safer to trust with intimate details. My outsider-ness was an advantage for obtaining data and, in a strange way, encouraged the increase in our connectedness. We shared her secrets; therefore I became more of an insider to the survivor than some of her best friends. Several times the topics of race and ethnicity were initiated by the participants themselves, indicating a high level of trust and rapport between the researcher and the informants.

The Researcher as Activist

Van Hightower and Dorsey (2000) stated, "Research can be a powerful tool for social action and social change (p. 1). I did not intend to be a tool for social action, and, in fact, I resisted becoming involved in Oak Tree County for eight months.

I met my first interviewee when she came to an adjacent county where I was assisting in the training of volunteer domestic violence advocates through the Program for the Reduction of Rural Family Violence, developed and directed by Dr. Nikki Van Hightower, a professor of political science at Texas A&M University.

Catherine, the participant, thought there might be something she could do in her home county. When I discovered she lived in Oak Tree County, I asked her to be a participant and she agreed. During the interview, she told me about a group of citizens who had tried to develop a project to transport victims to one of several shelters in adjoining counties. The project fell through when the church sold the van that was to be used. However, she felt there were residents who were still interested in organizing in some way to address the problem of domestic violence.

As I continued my interviews with the residents of Oak Tree County, I explained my interest in domestic violence and what my activities were in other counties: training advocates to make early contact with victims and to offer the victims information which increased their power to make choices and changes in their lives. More and more people heard about the training project and eventually persuaded me to conduct advocacy training in Akern.

First, I saw a need for a task force, a group that could bring together various members of the community, such as the police and the sheriff, clergy, school personnel, healthcare providers, and other interested residents and community leaders. The support of law enforcement officials is essential to the success of an advocacy program. We needed a central meeting place, so Catherine arranged for me to present our project to the board of ministries at the Methodist church where Catherine was church secretary. They denied my request for sponsorship, but eventually agreed to allow the group to meet at the church without charge. Catherine compiled a list of names and we sent letters to invite people to our first meeting. I also wrote press releases about our project that the local newspapers printed. Sixteen people showed up, representing all the groups we had targeted.

The task force now meets every two months, alternating sites with Parkstone, and includes many members of the judiciary, clergy, medical profession, educational system, emergency medical services, the assistant county attorney, and representatives from the police departments and the sheriff.

Dr. Van Hightower and I conducted advocacy training in March of 2001—at the Methodist Church. There are now seven advocates who are trained and certified (a justice of the peace volunteered to swear them into service), and they use a pager system to receive calls from police dispatchers whenever a peace officer makes a domestic violence call. This kind of program takes some time to become institutionalized, especially with law enforcement personnel. Officers are used to doing things as they have always done them, and attitudes and habits resist change.

The task force is working on several projects. A committee is exploring shelter possibilities and sources of funding for emergency shelter for victims and their children. Another group contacted churches and received agreements from the ministers to offer support groups for domestic violence victims. A mentoring program in the schools is being developed for children who are identified as living in domestic violence. They want to stop the generational cycle of abuse by providing appropriate role models who meet with children after school, ostensibly to help them with their homework, but also to provide a sympathetic and encouraging listener.

This experience, for me, has been extremely gratifying. I began research in a county chosen for its lack of organized resources for domestic violence victims. I finished my data gathering in the same county that now has some resources and is creating even more. In addition, there are people who have stepped up to assume leadership positions, something one participant told me would not happen. I am encouraged that the service projects and programs will become self-sustaining.

I feel I got to know the community and its people in many ways that would not have been possible if I had remained "just" a researcher. For example, through e-mail, I am now on one of the "gossip circuits." I am kept up to date on pregnancies and new houses. In a small way I feel a part of the communities of Akern and Parkstone, and I hope to continue my research in the county.

Summary

This chapter detailed my experiences in developing the methodology of this research project. I described the plans I formulated and told what worked and what did not. I shared the problems of gaining entrée to the communities and recruiting participants. These difficulties extended the length of the project, but that is probably typical of this type of study. This chapter may help others who intend to conduct research in other rural communities. I also described how I became involved in helping to bring some changes to the communities of Oak Tree County.

CHAPTER IV

THE RURAL CONTEXT

First, this chapter presents the characteristics of rural areas that are significant in the study of battered women. Next will be a description of Oak Tree County that includes the perspectives of some of the study's participants. It is not my intention to imply that all rural areas are alike. However, research has provided us with a number of common characteristics that we may expect to find in rural areas. They are included in the first section of this chapter.

Characteristics of Rural Domestic Violence

The myth of the idyllic countryside, tranquil and non-violent, leads to the common assumption that there is little intimate partner violence. However, "domestic violence is as prevalent in rural areas as it is in urban areas" (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 131). The characteristics of rural life, the rural health care system, and the cultural traditions of rural residents have contributed to a lack of attention to rural battered women" (Fishwick, 1998, p. 285). Women in rural areas experience abuse in ways similar to women in urban areas. There is physical and non-physical abuse, including sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse. However, battered women in rural villages and towns seldom have access to resources which can help them escape from their abusive partners. Moreover, serious obstacles present barriers to rural women seeking and receiving assistance, such as isolation, lack of transportation, attitudes of other residents and members of the law enforcement and judicial systems, lack of privacy and fear of gossip, lack of information, lack of services, limited housing, and

restrictive employment (Murty & Schechter, 1999; Websdale, 1998). "Rural people tend not to report domestic violence incidents to the police because family and friends are policemen" (quoted in Leitenberg, 1999, p. 1). Limited funds are available to rural areas for development of social services because of the lack of attention to rural needs. Urban and suburban areas obviously are first in line for funding programs, because "many people view domestic violence as a mostly urban problem" (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 131).

Rural shelters in sparsely populated areas must serve women from a large geographic area, and many women are unable to get to those shelters because they lack transportation. Outreach services are also affected by the distances that shelter personnel have to travel. Websdale (1998) noted that "shelters themselves tend to serve those rural women who live nearby rather than in neighboring counties. Leaving may be even more troublesome if women have deep social roots in the community and a wide circle of family who are dear to them" (p.199).

Sparsely populated areas may be attractive to many people who want to live away from the crowds, noise, and hustle of the cities, but that remoteness may serve to isolate battered women. "Battered women everywhere experience some form of isolation as controlled by their partners, but for rural battered women the isolation becomes magnified by geographical isolation" (Women's Rural Advocacy Program, 2000, p. 1). Women in isolated areas may not have access to newspapers, television, telephones, or childcare (Murty & Schechter, 1999; Websdale & Johnson, 1997). They may be unable to maintain contacts with family or friends, and the nearest neighbor may be too far

away to hear the shouts and screams. On the other hand, there may be small clusters of homes in small communities where a closeness and connectedness may be felt. This may also be viewed as a "lack of privacy that results in reluctance to disclose personal concerns that may not be held in confidence" (Fishwick, 1998, p. 281).

Rural Americans tend to have lower education levels than do residents of urban areas. According to Fishwick (1998) colleges do not usually locate in rural areas; although with the advent of distance education technology some rural areas are able to participate in college level offerings. High school graduates often relocate to urban areas to attend college, and because of the lack of employment opportunities, may not return to their rural homes (p. 281). Low education, poor job skills, and poorly paying jobs serve to prevent battered women from leaving their abusive partners. Women with children face difficult challenges. "Few rural areas have domestic violence services that are culturally appropriate to reach African-American women, Latinas, Native American women and other groups of underserved women such as farm workers and recent immigrants" (Murty & Schechter, 1999, p. vi).

> Residents in rural areas generally have more conservative values and behavior.
>
> Surveys indicate that when compared with urban residents, rural residents favor greater difficulty in obtaining divorce, oppose teenagers having access to contraceptives, strongly oppose premarital sex, profess to adherence to religious beliefs and customs, and are less tolerant of minority rights. Self-reliance, independence, and solving one's problems without assistance from others, particularly not from officials or "outsiders," is highly valued in rural communities. This value of self-reliance often places the burden of resolving the abuse on the rural battered woman. (Fishwick, 1998, p.283)

Rural residents experience a higher prevalence of chronic health conditions and job-related injuries. Rural industries such as mining, forestry, and farming offer the

potential for many serious accidents. Guns and other weapons are common in rural homes because of a long tradition of hunting and the ingrained belief from frontier days that the patriarch must keep a weapon in order to protect one's family. At the same time, the presence in the home of a gun "increases the likelihood that a lethal weapon will be used in a family conflict" (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 127).

Medical facilities are often located long distances from rural patients, which means residents do not have timely emergency and hospital care. "Access has improved," on the other hand, "in some regions with the recruitment of nurse practitioners, nurse-midwives, and physician assistants" (Fishwick, 1998, p. 284). Health care professionals may be untrained in screening and identifying abused adult women and may be unsure about the correct response to any disclosures of abuse from women (Leitenberg, 1999, p. 1). Others may be "unwilling to intervene or report cases of spousal abuse" (Websdale, 1998, p. 163). Still others may subscribe to the "patriarchal imperative that domestic violence belongs within families, rather than out in the open" (Websdale, 1998, p. 164). Health care personnel in small communities also present potential sources of gossip and can be related in some way to the offenders or victims—inhibiting factors to disclosure (Fishwick, 1998, p. 287). Women who are ashamed of their battering relationships or are afraid that word will get back to their abusers will be very reluctant to confide in service providers (Websdale, 1998, p.162; Websdale & Johnson, 1998, p. 187). On the other hand, service providers may not be acquainted with the parties—they may be "outsiders"—and as a result of the rural resident's distrust and suspicion of outsiders, these providers may face resistance from their patients and the

community when the subject of domestic violence is introduced (Fishwick, 1998, p. 288).

Many rural women live in a cultural tradition of restricted roles for women. They marry younger, have children at a younger age, and are stay-at-home "housewives" (Fishwick, 1998, p. 284). This is less true of women who live in the small towns than for those who live out in the countryside. Those who do work out of the home, however, find a narrow range of occupational choices because of limited education and limited job skills. These low-wage jobs do not offer benefits or much job security (Fishwick, 1998, p. 284). In addition, there is the problem of being able to find childcare, assuming it is available, accessible, and affordable.

In communities that do not have formal institutions of social service, battered women attempt to resolve the abuse by themselves. "If the abuse continues, women may turn to...family members and friends (Fishwick, 1998, p. 285). Usually, if the abuse cannot be stopped, battered women may turn to more formal sources of help, such as law enforcement, clergy, or health care professionals. However, rural law enforcement may respond less frequently (Murty & Schechter, 1999), clergy are not trained in the dynamics of domestic violence, and the health care profession may be too far away. Finding these sources of help inadequate or ineffective, many rural women then may lose hope of changing their situations and turn to use of alcohol or drugs as a way to cope with the pain and fear (Fishwick, 1998, p.283).

Many rural women are reluctant to turn to others for help because of the very real risk of losing their privacy, their anonymity, and their reputation. Even the threat of

gossip, rampant in rural communities, is enough to prevent women from seeking help. Gossip brings shame and loss of privacy not only to the victims and their children but also to their families and friends:

> Potential helpers may be reluctant to become involved in another family's problems because involvement is perceived as interfering or causing embarrassment for that family. It is thought best to "look the other way" and leave them alone to resolve their own problems. (Fishwick, 1998, p. 285)

Law enforcement officers are not above gossip. In small towns and rural communities, there is a good chance that peace officers and members of the judicial system may be neighbors, high school classmates, friends, or family members of the perpetrators or the victims. These relationships may affect the way a spouse abuse case is handled (Fishwick, 1998, p. 286). Websdale and Johnson (1998) point out that "ineffective response of some agencies such as the local police is also intimately interwoven into the fabric of an ol' boys network" (p. 193). Moreover, a shortage of free or low-cost legal aid stymies most women from seeking divorce or legal advice.

Although rural residents profess to be more religious than urban residents and it is natural for rural women to turn to their pastors for guidance, "traditionally, the religious community has responded to family violence with silence" (Fishwick, 1998, p. 286). The woman has been told to forgive, to try harder, and to take responsibility for the relationship's continuation—for the sake of the children, to preserve the extended family's integrity, and to follow biblical teachings. However, in recent years religious organizations are coming to recognize the importance of educating their clergy about the dynamics of wife abuse and "to take an active role in assisting those involved" (Fishwick, 1998, p. 286) in ways that protect the victim and her children.

An ethnographic study of a small community in Appalachia by Gagne (1992) explored the forms of social control evident in the rural area. She identified nonactive forms of control, such as failing to help with children, and active forms of control, such as denying a wife's access to friends, family, a job, or social life (p. 388). These non-violent forms of control, when combined with a community attitude that accepts these behaviors, were as much an instrument of social control over women as physical violence. While the Appalachian area of Gagne's study had its own unique qualities, many of the attitudes and controlling behaviors she explored are found in many rural communities across the United States.

From a study of rural Kentucky domestic violence, three conclusions were formulated by Websdale and Johnson (1998). First, the rural setting and environment provided opportunities for batterers to go undetected. Distances from town and neighbors, unpaved and unmarked roads, and the lack of a telephone mitigated against a rapid police response. Second, the isolation of rural family life exacerbates the vulnerability of women to their abusive husbands and at the same time fosters the notion that family matters are private. With little outside contact, it is easier to be influenced by traditional and conservative values and religious beliefs that extol the virtues of the sanctity of marriage and the woman's responsibility for sustaining the marital relationship. Third, isolation prevents battered women's ability to avail themselves of potential sources of help from local, urban, or state agencies (p. 164).

Women in rural communities are faced with barriers that their urban sisters do not have. Although they experience similar forms of spouse abuse, the unique

characteristics of the rural community present challenges to rural women who are coping with abusive relationships. Geographical conditions, isolation, patriarchal attitudes and conservative values, inadequate response and services from community organizations and institutions are some of the barriers to rural women who seek to change their lives.

Oak Tree County

The stories of the women of Oak Tree County consistently revealed that the battered women of this county deal with the kinds of barriers and challenges that are reported in the research. There are few organized providers of services in Akern, the county seat, and Parkstone, the two towns chosen for the study. In fact, the nearest shelters are located in adjacent counties, each about an hour's drive away (see Figure 1). These shelters are not obligated to serve the women of Oak Tree County, but their staffs say they will not refuse haven to an abused woman if there is space. What is missing from Oak Tree County is the services of an outreach worker, someone who visits regularly to meet with women, counsels with them, presents options, and encourages their empowerment.

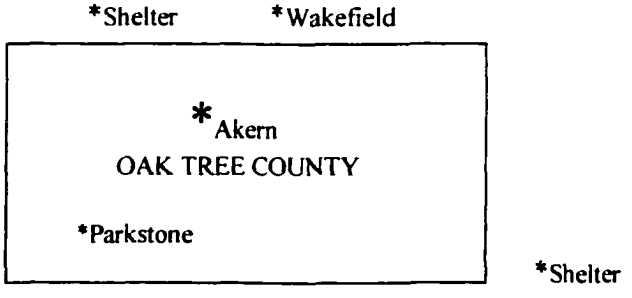

Figure 1. Map of Oak Tree County. Relationships of places mentioned in the study.

The Texas Census population data for the year 2000 shows Oak Tree County has 24,238 residents in a land area of 1,017 square miles. Akern, the county seat, has about 5,000 residents. Seventeen miles away is Parkstone, also with about 5,000 residents. Each has its own police department. Over 21% of the population lives below the poverty level. Residents of Hispanic origin make up 18.6%, African Americans make up 11%, and White persons make up 69.2% (Texas Department of Health, 2000). The Uniform Crime Reporting Office lists for the year of 2000 a total of 68 reported victims of domestic violence (Uniform Crime Reporting Records Service, 2000). With the recent hiring of a female assistant county attorney who is funded by monies provided through the Violence Against Women Act, it is expected that not only will police reports increase but also cases of prosecution will increase. This young woman has assumed an educator role in addition to her other duties and is working with peace officers to improve investigations and arrests.

Several participants were aware of the lack of employment opportunities, especially for single women and minorities who have difficulty keeping up the payments on their utilities. A school counselor said, and others repeated it:

> I have children come in here all the time—they don't have any water. They don't have any lights. They don't have any gas to cook with. And if they get some water, the water might get turned on when so and so gets paid, but you won't have hot water yet, because the gas people turned their gas off, too. I'd guess that 80 to 90% of our community lives from payday to payday. There's not a lot of savings.

Those who are employed with the large industrial plant outside Parkstone, "have a pretty good chance of making a good living wage," even as a laborer, if they do shift work and work overtime. "But it's very hard work. And it's hard to get into the job, of course."

Other jobs, "You aren't even making minimum wage. I know some people who work at like the local tire shop that are making $10 or $15 a day." As a member of the Children's Protective Services (CPS) board, she noted that the people she can think of "that have been under CPS care have large families, and their finances are not wonderful."

> There is a wide range in income and housing.
>
> You have some people in town who, by the standards of our rural community, are fairly well-to-do. They're living on the equivalent of Nob Hill in 3,000-square-foot houses. Or they're living out in little ranchettes. But then you have people who are living in tarpaper shacks.

Another participant also commented on the "poor" towns, and the low-wage jobs at which many people work. "That's why I told my kids. 'You need to get out of Akern whenever you graduate.' And mine are gone." She knew of several teachers, however, who were high school graduates, had gone away to college, and had come back to teach in Akern. A minister felt that many people did not have any ambition to get employment. "They're just really content with just what they are. Some people are content with living off the food stamps and government assistance."

It was felt that the county's population of higher income residents was growing because of city people moving to the countryside. Many commuters drive over an hour each way in order to continue their employment in the larger cities.

One participant gave her perceptions of Oak Tree County:

> We're a low socioeconomic area; you know, low income jobs, probably alcoholism, and we do have drugs here; we have a lot of single parents, we have a lot of blended families, and we do have a lot of people who move in and out of this community. We have a lot of people who come in from Mexico. They don't speak English.

A number of people mentioned a drug problem. Because Oak Tree County is surrounded by counties with large cities, it was felt that Oak Tree County was a "drop-off center." One participant noted that the police spend "a good part of their patrol to watch for drugs. They're constantly making arrests, trying to keep it as calmed down as much as they can." Two years ago there was a drug-related shooting at a Black nightclub that was subsequently closed down.

Aside from the housing projects where I was told most of the African American population lived, many of the Hispanic families reside outside of the towns where they work and live in small cottages on ranches and farms. Many of them lack personal transportation "and the money is not there" if they want to leave. There is no public or long distance bus transportation. Even if there is a family vehicle, "men will control, limit, or scrutinize" women's use of it (Websdale, 1998, p. 162)."They're pretty much stuck. They may depend on someone else, their boss or another family for transportation." A school officiai added, "When we have parent-conference day here, we provide a school bus that will circulate to bring the parents to school. Not that it's used a lot."

There are two small emergency care hospitals in the county, one each in Akern and Parkstone. Akern has two doctors, one at the hospital and one at the rural health clinic. Most people go to the city of Wakefield in an adjacent county for medical care. Those in low-paying jobs do not have medical benefits and are reluctant to see a doctor until symptoms worsen. A woman I met at the rural health clinic said she'd had an earache and "pressure" in her head for two weeks before she sought medical help.

"Families tend to take care of families," said a participant when asked about resources for those in trouble, such as battered women. She thought the churches "do a lot," because "we have a strong Baptist community, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and a strong Church of Christ here." One church member told me, however, "We're not a social organization," meaning they didn't want to become too involved in people's family matters other than their spiritual development.

Families are "so scattered that it [domestic violence] doesn't get reported very often," said another participant. The victims whom I interviewed also said they seldom relied on law enforcement agencies for help. Once labeled as a battered woman, police tended to reduce the priority of responding to calls from that woman's house. Some complained that when police did respond, there was as good a chance the woman would be arrested as the man. Officers don't like to spend a lot of time identifying the primary aggressor or looking for probable cause to make arrests. Participants were particularly cynical about the city police in Akern. They are young and untrained and look for glory in making drug busts. The sheriff pointed out that the city police chief is hired by the city council. Therefore, his primary interest is in pleasing his employers and keeping his job. Making drug busts garners more public notice.

The sheriff's department serves residents who live outside of the towns. At night there is usually just one sheriff's deputy working. It is obvious that a call for help in most cases could not be answered promptly by an officer. A deputy said that many people in the rural areas don't even know their "9-1-1 address." All they know is their postal route number. When they call for help, they are unable to give the coordinates required to

identify their place of residence. They give directions such as "where the telephone poles lean over the road," he said. When considering the introduction of an advocacy organization to help battered women, he observed, "This is a country town and it'll always be a country town. There's a mindset of, 'It's not going to do me any good to call, anyway.'"

Oak Tree County has three telephone area codes, which limits the calls many people can make without incurring long distance charges. In fact, I was told there are many people who cannot afford long distance. There are families without telephones and television, and so the radio is an important medium for keeping up with the news. The local police reports are listened to avidly, I was told.

Oak Tree County is a county of extremes and contrasts. There are "city" people and "country" people. Conservative values are evident in religion and government, but all elected officials are Democrats. There are no women peace officers, but the dispatchers and jailers are female. The justice of the peace does not work on weekends. The social life of most families is their children's athletic games and church activities. There are people of wealth and people of poverty. There are some people who see the need for change, but very few people are willing to be the agents for change, and there are many more people who want things to stay the way they are. The institutions of the communities generally do not feel the need to intervene in "private family business." They are aware of domestic violence, but it is not something they want to do anything about. Doctors and other medical professional do not screen for domestic violence. They

do not have the knowledge or resources to help battered women, other than to tend their wounds and, perhaps, refer them to a mental health counselor.

This section explored the characteristics of the rural community that present challenges to rural women who are coping with abusive relationships. Geographical conditions, isolation, patriarchal attitudes and conservative values, inadequate response and services from community organizations and institutions are barriers to rural women who seek to change their lives.

The geography of Oak Tree County is rolling hills, woods, rivers, lakes, and farm and ranch land. There are many pleasant vistas as one drives along the country roads. The approach to Akern is across a bridge that's almost a mile long. For the most part, it is quiet; so quiet you cannot hear the screams from the neighbor down the road unless the wind is blowing in the right direction.

Summary

In this chapter I chose to look at the rural context in two sections. First, the myth of the idyllic countryside was seen to be misleading when considering domestic violence. Women in rural areas experience abuse in ways similar to women in urban areas. However, the unique qualities of rural life, such as limited resources, pervasive and damaging gossip, isolation of families, and conservative values, present barriers to women who are victimized in abusive relationships. Second, the unique qualities of rural life in Oak Tree County are explored through the viewpoints of the study's participants. These included limited employment opportunities for women and minorities, lack of

transportation, concerns about family privacy, and an adherence to traditional and conservative values.

The next chapter will present personal stories of participants. Their stories illustrate the commonalities of domestic violence as well as illustrating the unique characteristics of their lives as battered women in a rural community.

CHAPTER V

PERSONAL STORIES

When victims tell their stories—and every victim I have met has felt a need to tell her story—they seem to be seeking a way to leave the reality of their past victimization and to connect to the reality in which other women are living. By telling their stories, they begin to let go of the past, the violence, the victimization. However, they cannot forget the past. Most women develop a desire to help other abused women, and many of them find ways to do so. When women tell their stories, they become survivors.

The following stories were chosen for several reasons. One reason, of course, was to give a voice to the victims who suffer in silence through their abuse. Another reason was that their stories tell what it is like to live in intimate violence in a rural community where there are few resources. Their stories illustrate the influence of the institutions which have power in the community, such as the church, the medical profession, and the law enforcement system, but whose power does not extend to their protection. Their stories are illustrative of the social forces that control their lives, such as attitudes, traditions, patriarchy, and gossip. Their stories illustrate the courage of women to survive the violence until they are no longer victims.

There are three racial/ethnic groups residing in Oak Tree County: Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic. All schools and public facilities are integrated; however, residents are generally found in certain parts of the town or county with others in their ethnic or racial group. Therefore, it seemed natural to tell their stories in two

collections, the first from Anglo participants and the second from the minority participants. Maddie, Catherine, and Dawn's stories illustrate the Anglo viewpoint and show the range of abuses that occur in violent relationships. Their stories illustrate their experiences with the institutions of the church, the police, and the rural community. The second collection of stories present unique viewpoints from the perspectives of Black and Hispanic participants. Pastor Burrell shared his understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence from the perspective of his Black ministry in Akern. The next story features experiences obtained from a focus group of Black women that included three victims. Their stories highlight the impact of police attitudes and responses on the abused woman. The Hispanic experience of domestic violence is presented in Rosa's story. Alma shared her perspective of community attitudes as an observant Hispanic who also had a personal interest in domestic violence. The next story is my own brief story of an unexpected encounter I had with a stranger at the rural health clinic. It serves to introduce an interview with the rural health clinic manager. That last story highlights the difficulty abused women have in being recognized and treated appropriately by the medical community.

Sacrifice and Faith: Maddie's Story

Sixty-seven-year-old Maddie is a life-long resident in Oak Tree County, and a woman who has been married almost 46 years to her abusive husband. I chose to tell her story because it represents the indomitable spirit of so many battered women who believe they have no recourse but to stay with their batterers, but it is also the story of a woman who found ways to cope with a bad choice and the courage to survive through

the years. Her story is one of sacrifice and faith. Maddie's story is used to illustrate what life in a small town was like before there was legislated police protection, when people believed it was not right to interfere in someone's family matters, when the medical profession ignored any responsibility to patients other than patching them up, and when even the church that she so loved failed to give her guidance that could have increased her safety.

Raised by a fundamentalist mother, who had a nervous breakdown when she was 10, Maddie remembers her parents fondly, especially her father, who was "not so religious" but had firm beliefs about marriage.

> The year before I had been very much in love with a man, but my father was so against divorce, and this man was divorced. [He had a child and his wife had left him for another man.] We went together a year and three months, and when he bought my ring, well, my father told me he would have nothing else to do with me. My father told me, "You cannot do this. If you do we'll disown you." Well, you know, that's a big statement, and I knew he was like this. And I said, "Well, I can't be disowned." Well, then, you get out and go with somebody else, and really, I think I did it for spite. You know, I married Don for spite. It wasn't for love. I hate to say, but it wasn't for love.

They married in December 1955. Maddie was aware that Don drank "some" when they got married. She found out more about his childhood after they went to visit his family five years later in North Carolina.

> His mother was full-blood [Indian]. But it's a gene in the blood, because you can tell it when you was around him. He was raised in a non-love home. His father and his mother, I think they aggravated one another between them. His father run around on his mother. He drank and all that. And I think that kind of follows in families, you know. I began to know that it was an alcoholic trend all the way, because his father was just as mean to his mother. He had a wonderful mother. But like I said, if I would have really met his family and been with them for a while before I married him, I would have never married. No, no, no!

After the birth of Maddie's first daughter, she had surgery and was told

there would be no more children. By that time the physical abuse had started, and so she told herself, "Well, I'll get her grown and then things will move on." Nine years later. "I knew something was wrong with me, but I didn't know what it was 'cause everything looked all right. Well, three months before she was born, the doctor told me what it was." Not knowing she was pregnant was a blessing, "'cause if I had realized it—you know? I had to stay with the guidance of the Man above, because if I hadn't I would have went crazy." The birth of her second daughter changed her plans. She became more trapped in a loveless and dangerous marriage.

She began working for the telephone company in the late 50s. As the new girl, she was required to commute to the town of Wakefield 35 miles away. She says she had to work, because she neither saw her husband's paychecks—nor him—from Friday morning until Monday morning. Working at an outdoor job, Don found it easy to continue to drink while at work and every night he was drunk.

Maddie's parents took care of her baby because she did not trust Don to do it. She sometimes relied on friends and acquaintances for a place to sleep or for childcare.

> Many a night I would round up things and I would go home; and like I said, many a night I didn't get to take my clothes off because I never did know what time he was coming in; and when he came in, I knew he was going to be all lit up. So I knew I was going to have to find me a bed somewhere else. People in this town, they were so good to me. And if I didn't go to my mother's and daddy's--sometimes it would get old--I would go find me a bed somewheres else. Because if you didn't it was not with a mouth, it was with the hands, you know, "Pop, pop."

She is grateful for the friends who helped her with the children. "If people hadn't opened their hearts to me where would I be?" She says, "Many a day I had to pick my little kids up and take them—I've even took them to Black men and Black women's houses that

had helped raise them." She would leave her children there while she worked her full shift. Maddie worked split shifts for four years after her first child's birth. She started work at 8:00 in the morning, worked until noon, came home to see about her little girl, and then drove back and worked from 4:00 to 8:00 in the evening. She almost always expected her husband to be violent when she came home.

During her first pregnancy, when she began working, she was required to work late. The first time she came home late, Don met her at the door.

"Where have you been," he demanded.

"I've been at work," she explained.

Suddenly, he slapped her across the face. She cried, "What did I do?"

He snarled, "You haven't been working."

"Well, I don't know where else I've been."

"Well, you haven't been to work."

Maddie found, as most battered women do, that her abuser accepts no explanation. The abuser's tactic is to keep his victim off-balance, to keep switching accusations, to be unpredictable, to maintain control over her through her confusion.

> I wouldn't ever put my gown on. I would just keep them knit britches. And I know I was laying across the bed—it was after the baby was born—and he come in and pulled me by the hair of my head, pulled me all the way across the floor. And I said, "What have I done tonight?" Well, he had been out to one of those bars or something, and he said, "My supper's supposed to be on the table." I said, "It's in the oven." You know, I would go home and cook early and everything. And it was just pop, snap, you never knowed. And the kids wouldn't hardly go anywhere cause they was scared, afraid of what they would come in and find, you know. And when you start locking yourself in the closet and stuff—well, you know, it gets pretty bad.

Maddie's plight was not unknown. She always explained to the people who asked how she stood it, "Well, it's like water going down the river. It won't come back unless you ask for it." After three abusive years she found she could cope with the verbal abuse by just not responding to it. "It took me about three years to learn to keep my mouth shut. He would come in like that, and I knew he had been with other women and stuff, and it didn't bother me. It really didn't bother me." She frequently made excuses for her bruises when she was unable to cover them with makeup.

> I would be black and blue and the people would say something and I would say. "Oh, *I* did this." You know, you'll make excuses. But after, I learned to not say nothing. You know if you talk to a wall all day and it don't say anything back, you'll shut up. Well, okay. But I've been run. I've slept in water boxes; I've done about everything that could be done.

She explained that water boxes are culverts, drainage ditches that run under the highways. She and her children slept there frequently when they had to leave the house during Don's nighttime rages and rampages. She did not like to seek medical help for her injuries. As she explained:

> By being raised in a Christian, spiritual home, I mean it was not just a go-to-church thing; it was a spiritual home. We didn't go to the doctors, you know. They would pray for us and God would heal us, okay. But by taking it—I was saved when I was 13 and I was filled. And when I would get in the place that I couldn't go no further, I would find me a little place in the corner to pray. And I would say, "God, I can't go no further." And sometimes I would cry all the way to Wakefield and all the way back thinking about. But then I thought about, well, what if he would steal one of my children and I didn't know where he was. I would go crazy. So really, fear is what made me live there.

There have been several incidents when Maddie did see doctors. During our interview, Maddie revealed she recently had had eye surgery. She reported that the doctor asked her, "Where did you get that terrible lick that you had in the eye?" She told

him, "Well, 20 years ago I got the lick that laid the eye down here." Maddie pointed to her cheek.

"I guess the worst thing I can remember is the time that my eye got put out. Letty and I had been crawfishing on a Good Friday, I remember. She was about seven years old." When they came home, she sent Letty to take a bath while she busied herself in the kitchen, frying bacon and making biscuits for a late breakfast-early lunch. As soon as Letty finished in the bathroom, Maddie planned to also get cleaned up. But she could tell Don "was ready for the birds. He was ready to get on me. I was putting my biscuits in the oven and when I turned around that's when both fists got me in the eye." Seven-year-old Letty saw what happened and quickly ran outside, grabbed a grubbing hoe, came back in and hit her father in the head so hard that he was knocked unconscious. Then she told Maddie, "Mama, you're going to leave." With her eye lying on her cheek, Maddie remembers she took time to turn off the stove, but what seemed to concern her the most was that she needed a bath and had on "just a little housedress." She wanted to look nice when she went to the doctor.

> And when I got there--the two doctors that are up there are both dead now—and they said, "But we don't believe that we're going to be able to save it," because that was back there when they didn't have a lot of medical stuff. I said, "Oh, I'm dressed so bad." And he said, "Don't worry about that. Let's worry about that eye." And for years I had trouble with that eye. But I kept quiet. I really didn't want nobody to know really what happened. Cause, you know, you'll cover for them, because you just will. Oh, but then I noticed not only was it my eye, but all the bruises, too.

Physicians have been slow to develop an awareness of spouse abuse and to come to the realization that they should be involved in intervention (Finkelhor, 1983, p. 25; Kurz & Stark, 1990, p. 249). A New Haven study described by Kurz and Stark (1990)

found that about half of the women who visited emergency rooms were merely sent home after treatment, essentially giving opportunity for more "accidents" to happen (p. 254). One-fifth of the battered women were given "quasi-psychiatric designations such as 'hysteric,' 'neurotic female,' 'well-known woman with vague complaints,' 'crock,' 'depressed,' 'hypochondriac'" (p. 250-251). These stereotypical terms not only effectively reduce serious attention to battered women's complaints but also enable health providers to dismiss the source of the women's injuries.

Although Maddie stated that she infrequently sought medical help, she related several examples that belie that memory. "That doctor up there, Dr. Mitchell's got a book probably that big on things that I had to go to the doctor for." She indicated about an inch with her thumb and forefinger. She told about a recent trip to a doctor:

> I was up here at the doctor's office the other day because I pulled some ribs doing some things down here [the thrift shop]; and the doctor said,
> "Thirty-nine years I've doctored you, and I can't believe you still just come in here like a happy-go-lucky somebody, knowing what you've been through."

Maddie said she would have left the day Don injured her eye if she had not had Letty. As she told her story, it was clear that she felt that she had no choice. In her mind, staying with Don was the best thing for her children, although she did leave once.

> He got to where he would be mean to the children about slapping on them and stuff. And I told him I can't take that. So I moved out. And of course, then he come, and you know how you'll go back. That was the worst mistake I ever made, was to go back.

Maddie said she did not move out that time "to quit him." She moved out "to get peace of mind. I wasn't getting any rest. I couldn't sleep at night." There was a problem for the

girls, also. "And the boys dated the oldest girl—we had to date from the kitchen, cause he took the living room."

> I told him when I came back after I left, I said, 'Now I'm going to tell you something. I'm coming back, but you'll never lay the weight of your hand on me again. Because if you do, you do have to go to sleep and I will kill you. I guess he believed me, cause he has never touched me since then. And I still go to church, and God has been so good to me.

Most women who choose to stay in their violent relationships weigh the benefits and costs of staying or leaving as suggested by the social exchange theory (Wiehe, 1998).

> She must decide first if the benefits or satisfaction of her current marriage (income, family, friends, home) outweigh the costs of the marriage in terms of the abuse, its pain and suffering to her, and the implications for her children who witness the abusive behavior (p. 98).

No one really can say how women decide the value of each factor in their decision. Mothers will often say they stay because of their children. Invariably, though, they will hear from their children that they always wanted her to leave. Maddie's children told her, "Mama, you didn't do us any good." Maddie believed that only through staying with her abuser could she give her children the things they needed, even when the reality was different. Gelles and Straus (1988) pointed out, "They are willing to accept pain against the cost of trying to survive outside of the home with little money, credit, or experience" (p. 31). Maddie said of her children, "They had a little bit more, and both of them got college, which they wouldn't have got if it had just been on my paycheck."

The children suffered, though. As Maddie talked about her daughters, she revealed that Letty frequently had problems in school. "It affected the children in school.

It affected them bad, because they would see these things, you know." Letty fell asleep in class, and the teacher told Maddie that Letty was lazy. Resentful, Letty "would talk back." Letty was the child, who, as an adult, also found herself in an abusive marriage. After 11 years of marriage, she finally went to Maddie and said, "Mother, I'm not going to put up with this." Maddie told her, "You have made your bed and there's thorns there; you do what you need to do, Baby. I'm not going to tell you like my people told me." Researchers suggest that many "women who are victims of wife battering are also likely to have witnessed domestic violence as a child" (Dutton, 1995, p. 175). That this is not true of everyone is evidenced by the fact that Maddie's older daughter is reported to have a solid marriage.

Maddie's religious faith sustained her through the years. "Had I not kept myself in church—when I would get so depressed and think—I never thought about committing suicide or anything like that. I really didn't, because I had too much of God about me." She made sure her children were also raised in the church. Her parents, who frequently had the children, "took them and raised them. That's the reason I've got such two good girls. But had I not accepted it, had I fought back, it would have been a terrible thing." She said she looked for the first preacher she could find "and I would go and have a counsel with him." As Maddie talked about her strong faith, one wonders why no preacher ever suggested that she leave her abuser. The fact is, in rural areas, churches are traditionally more conservative, and many pastors feel their proper response to women in violent marriages is to provide comfort through the scriptures and prayer. Although this is changing—several ministers in Oak Tree County told me that they frequently

recommend separation and divorce in abusive marriages—thirty and forty years ago divorce was not an option for many women, especially those as devout as Maddie.

> Nearly any of these preachers around here know me, the older preachers. I've seen the times I would run off and I had only what I had on my back. But then, you know what, I would wash it and I would go to church. And the preacher would say, "Well, I see you're in church." But God was good to me. They know me and they know what I stand for.

Maddie is amused when she recalls one of the younger ministers coming into the thrift shop where she volunteers several days a week. Reverend Burrell came by recently to ask for help for two women. "But you don't know about the kind of problems they have," he said. "You're too happy." She laughed and told him, "Oh, yes, I know. I'm married to an alcoholic."

Maddie described what it is like being married to a violent man who is also an alcoholic. Her oldest sister urged her to move into town, saying, "things won't be near as bad, because he'll be scared." But, Maddie said, nobody would come around anyway. "I never got to have any of my folks ever to come and eat in my house." She added, "If he had ever said, 'Honey, let's go somewhere,' it would have scared me so bad I probably would have went on to the great beyond!" When anything needs repair, Maddie said, "An alcoholic never fixes up anything. You just go on and take care of it yourself, 'cause they don't care what they live in, they don't care what they look like." Holidays and special occasions are not important to an alcoholic. "All they want to do is breathe. They don't have any expectation; like Monday is a holiday." Maddie said there would not be any offers of "Let's go somewhere, let's do something. Alcoholics have no feelings. A kid could fall out in front of them and they could walk over it." She said he is just a

violent alcoholic. "You know, when somebody—if there's any love there for them, if they beat on you and knock on you, well, pretty soon—I mean there's nothing there."

Don continues to drink, although he gave up whiskey as his health worsened. He drinks over 12 beers each day, "just according to how his feelings are." He has an old back injury—a tractor fell on him when he was a young man—a bad heart, and cirrhosis of the liver. He gets pain shots frequently. "But when he gets too much drink, he can't move his leg. So he goes on home now, but he still takes all that drink with him. He drinks at home."

Dutton and Golant (1995) found that abusive men generally have very high alcohol consumption. Men who match the abusive personality profile also experience depression and anxiety and alcohol is "one of the common ways they learn to suppress and blot out these uncomfortable feelings."

> So is anger. Unfortunately, since these individuals experience the dysphoric feelings as a function of their personalities, and since alcohol is a disinhibitor—that is, it relaxes one's inhibitions—what results is a volatile combination of unhappy, angry men who have lost all restraint. This puts them at an ever greater risk for violence. Alcohol and anger clear out depression, but unfortunately, they do so at great cost to the drinker (p. 54).

Dutton and Golant said it is a mistake to blame alcohol for violence. They said alcohol and violence are both symptoms of an abusive personality (Dutton & Golant, 1995, p. 54). Walker (1979) suggested that alcohol may be a precipitating factor, but it is only one component in the battering relationship. "Many of the women [in her study] felt that if they could only get their men to stop drinking the battering would cease. Unfortunately, it just did not happen" (p. 25). Maddie would agree. "He never was a kind man. I mean, he always had this streak in him of meanness." Even when he is not

inebriated, his verbal abuse continues. "He has a real bad mouth on him, you know. It was the way he was brought up." After Maddie's last threats, the physical abuse stopped. However, other forms of abuse continued.

Maddie said she likes to browse the World Wide Web on her computer. "One day he come in and he was lit high, and he come in there and grabbed a hold of my computer, and out the backdoor."

> I said, "What the?" And he said all them bad words, and I said, "You're not going to do anything like that." I just told him, "You go set my computer back in yonder. I'm not bothering you and you're not going to bother my computer." He said, "These women get on these computers and find these men." I said, "I don't have to get on a computer to find a man if I wanted them. That's my *last* request! [Maddie laughed.]

Community attitudes are an important factor in the rural community when a woman considers the option of seeking help or leaving her marriage. For example, she recalled the telephone company's policy. The company did not want an employee's personal problems to be brought to work. The policy was clear: "You come to work, stomp your problems when you come in, but do not bring them in. People do not want to hear them. And when you go out you can take them home." Many a night Maddie had no sleep, but she still made it to work. She always kept her key in her purse in the car, "because I didn't know what time I had to run."

She was always concerned about what people said about her and her family. In fact, when she talked about staying for her children, she said it was to protect them from talk around town. "In a town like we've got here, it's a small town, it's a 'clique-y' town. I just didn't want my kids to be downgraded." Maddie seemed unaware that she contradicted herself a little later. "I had such a terrible time keeping Letty in school,

because kids would say something to her and she would resent it." When asked to provide examples, Maddie said, "Well, you know, like, 'Your daddy's going with his woman over here." She concluded, "The smaller the town, the worse it is." She asserted that people try to protect their children from the gossip.

> Those ifs and those ands and those ors and those buts—they make a lot of difference. And maybe there's three little kids sitting over here, and maybe they haven't been abused, but this woman is willing to take the abuse to keep these kids from being hurt by talk. She's really protecting the children, but a lot of people think she's protecting him.

Maddie believed she protected her children.

It is automatically assumed when somebody is assaulted, that a call is made to the police department. After all, it is against the law to beat up and injure others, whether they are strangers or spouses. In the case of domestic violence, however, a different attitude has prevailed. Police have been reluctant to get involved in "domestics" (Finkelhor, 1983, p. 25). It is important to realize that laws to protect domestic violence victims are fairly recent. Maddie's suffering, of course, predates legislation.

> In those days, you know, they didn't think too much of it. The law didn't. Back then you just had the sheriff. You didn't have the police like you've got today. You didn't have things with the law like you've got today. I know one time, he broke the windshield out of my car, and then he hit the back of it. And I came, and Mr. Black was over here at the jail. And Mr. Black said, "Well, Maddie, really you just need to try to go ahead and try to make sure he doesn't get so riled up." But, see, he was an old sheriff. Nowadays you wouldn't have to put up with that.

Peace officers stopped Maddie a number of nights. She would be driving around at two or three in the morning with little Letty asleep in the back seat, staying away from home until she thought Don had had enough to drink and had passed out. One night an officer pulled her over.

> Well, one night one of them said, "I've been watching you and every night, and I see you out about this time." He said, "The woman up there at the service station tells me that you have a bad life." And he said, "I'm not going to give you a ticket or anything." And I said, "Yes, sir, there's no use in me telling you about it." But I'm not doing anything, and I'm not meeting another man." And he said, "No, ma'am, I don't believe so." I said, "But you do what you have to do."
>
> I saw him about two nights later, and he stopped me again. He said, "Well, do you got to ride again tonight?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Most women wouldn't do this. They would go get them a gun and start shooting."

It is startling to hear that policeman's words. His comments indicate he realized a crime had been committed—Maddie's life was in danger; she was afraid to go home. However, their conversation was mostly about whether Maddie was breaking some law by driving around town in the middle of the night. In many ways, this attitude of overlooking the crime of domestic violence continues in the rural law enforcement community to today. As an additional note, Maddie said, "The most peculiar thing is he's [Don] done all this but he's never been in trouble with the law."

After 46 years, how does Maddie feel about her husband and her life? What sort of accommodation has she reached with Don? Her thinking reveals ambiguity. Maddie said, "I don't feel responsible for him. He comes and goes in the back door and I come and go in the front door. We don't talk. He lives in one part of the house and I live in the other." She has many friends, activities, and her church that give her satisfaction. "I just live my life, and I get up on Sunday morning and get ready and go to church. But I never fail to say, 'Would you like to go to church?'" She said she believes that one day he may say yes. On the other hand, appearing unaware of the contradiction, she reveals a different expectation.

> It's not ever going to get any better. I give that up a long time ago. And I said, "Well, you know, you can either give it up or you can sit there and hope and go to nothing." But there's no use in doing that. Well, I mean like I say, you just have to say," Well, if it's going to be like this or it's going to be like that—if you're 46 years and you haven't changed, you're not going to change it now."

She realizes that Don's health is deteriorating, but appears to be determined not to be involved with his care. "I tell you what, I will not take care of him if something happens to him. I will not take care of him." In fact, Letty is the one who usually takes her father to the doctor. And what does Don do for himself? "He drinks a cup of coffee in the morning, and he doesn't eat anything else until night. I have a brother-in-law that has a café over there, and he goes over there and gets it." He drinks the rest of the day.

Letty recently suggested that her mother could still leave. "Wouldn't five years of peace be better than none at all?" Maddie replied, however, "But the longer you live with them the more you accumulate." Also, she pointed out, "Now his folks have all nearly died out in South Carolina. He has no place to go." In Maddie's mind, she has effectively separated her daily existence from his but has accepted that she is inextricably bound to him for the rest of her life. "And I go on with my life, and he goes on with his, and I don't think he'll every change. I think he'll always be abusive and I think he'll always be violent." She finished with: "It was no desirable life."

Maddie shared a poignant conversation with her father shortly before his death.

> He passed away when the small one was five years old. He was a diabetic and a calf got on his toe, and they had to have amputation, and he told me before that happened, he said, "I'll tell you one thing. I sure did make a mistake." I said, "Well, we've lived through it, haven't we?" And he said, "Well, I know I'm not going to get well, but I don't ever want you to hold that against me." I said, "I don't hold it against you." I don't hold things against people. I just know that you learn a lot. I wasn't going to let him go to his deathbed like that.

Maddie has never wavered in her faith. It sustained her through the years of abuse and provided her with the strength to prevail when there was no help from any other source. She became self-reliant, used to making the best decisions about her life with the information and help available to her. The legal system was not empowered to deal with domestic violence, so she dealt with it however she could, thinking only of protecting her children. That this did not wholly occur is no detraction from Maddie's efforts. A combination of social forces such as religious faith, the fear of gossip, and her indomitable spirit contributed to her choosing to remain with her abuser of 46 years.

Guns and Gossip: Catherine's Story

Catherine's story is pertinent for several reasons. Her story illustrates the involvement and attitudes of law enforcement institutions in the present time and the problems they have in dealing with one of their own. The impact of community attitudes on victims of domestic violence was seen as Catherine considered the responses of friends and neighbors. Catherine's story also illustrates the power and dynamics of small town gossip.

Catherine was in high school when she fell in love with Rob, who was from a neighboring town. She described him as "defiant and unruly," and her parents were concerned about the relationship. Catherine considered him her "knight in shining armor," because he was tough and protective, but he also bragged about illegal escapades and winning fights with other young men. When he became bored with her and began seeing other girls, she was devastated. When her father was transferred to California, her parents decided it was best for her to go with him, live there a while, and

attend school there. Later, back home in Texas, she resumed her relationship with Rob. Again he cheated on her. It seemed fortunate that he was called up to active duty with the Army and was sent to Honduras. Just as he was leaving she had a call from her former art teacher in California, inviting her to come out for senior year spring break. While there, the art teacher coerced her into having sex with him and persuaded her parents to allow their marriage in May, before high school graduation. The following January she had a daughter. It was a bad marriage, to a much older man, who later confessed that he had once sexually abused another student. It was a bad divorce, too; she lost all rights to her child.

Coming home, she resumed her relationship with Rob who had just returned from active duty with the Army and was happy to be her knight in shining armor again as she suffered through the horror of losing her little girl. Before her divorce was final, she was pregnant with Rob's child. He told her he would rather that she focused on their baby and forgot about her daughter; "pretend she is dead," he said.

While Rob had been in the Army Airborne Rangers he had also married and divorced. Catherine realized that "his military training and experiences had changed him, hardened him even more, and gave him the tools [with which] to hurt others." She worked at two jobs while he attended the police academy. His first jobs were in small towns around Texas. In one town he started an affair with another woman, an Emergency Medical Technician for the town. She compared the woman and herself:

> She had had several affairs with lots of people in town; nobody liked her. He didn't even like her at first. Thought, "God, she's slutty." But after he got to know her, he liked her toughness. And here I was, this dainty—I was the only small, thin, blonde, lady-like Christian girl/woman he had ever dated, much less

> married. Everyone else was chunky, big-breasted, big-boned, loved to fight, you know, and loved to argue—drinking, tobacco-chewing—I mean, all kinds of stuff. That was something he was always very susceptible to. He was having an affair with her while I was still pregnant.

Catherine is tall and slender and weighs about 120 pounds now. During the marriage she was depressed and had no appetite. During her marriage she weighed 90 pounds, except when she was pregnant. Rob "constantly made fun of me, and of course, that made me feel worse. I was upset all the time. Food wasn't important." Many women report that the emotional abuse is worse than physical abuse because of the damage to their self-esteem. Websdale said, "It leaves deep-seated psychological scars (1998, P. 15).

Three months later when they moved back to Oak Tree County, she was stunned to find Rob's girlfriend had followed them. Catherine saw her driving through town and then found her trailer parked in the local trailer park. She called Rob at work, and said, "She's here. Did you know she was here?"

"That's none of your business," he replied. "Where she lives is none of your business. She can live anywhere she wants to live." Then he hung up on her.

As a police officer, Rob had many weapons. "He always had a gun on his body. In church, wherever we went in public, whether he was in uniform or not, he would have one in his boot, in the back of his pants. He had a gun on him at all times."

> I mean, he basically throughout the time we dated and were married slept with a 9 mm in his hand on his chest. Especially when he was agitated and angry with me or with someone. I would come in and I would know he had had a bad day when [I saw] he was sleeping with his gun. He felt threatened in some way. Throughout the pregnancy I tried to have him put it in a pillow he had that had a slot in it for a gun, but the pillow rested there in the bookshelf of the bed, just above his head. That's the farthest I could get the gun away from him.

The verbal abuse began early. "He used my friends or my family or my child against me. My love for him against me." His attitude and conversations were often threatening. "I was always a bitch or a whore or a cunt, and all kinds of horrible names he'd come up with; very degrading." He frequently described what he was going to do to other people if they interfered with him in any way. She always felt the danger—for herself, her family, her friends, and others in town. "He was a hothead, a very convincing person, that he had some power over you, that he would get you—some way."

Catherine remembered Rob's reaction when she discovered she was again pregnant. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) suggested that in some instances, "the battering of the pregnant wife may be an act designed to abuse the unborn child. Battering a wife to achieve a spontaneous abortion (which often happens) can be easier and cheaper than seeking a legal abortion" (p. 187.) Rob's girlfriend found out that Catherine was pregnant and "threw a hissy because obviously that meant he was still sleeping with me." Rob began pressuring her.

> He would come home, in front of his friends, in front of anyone, and say, "I don't know what you're going to do about that pregnancy, but I'm not having another kid." You know, made me feel this big; of course, I grew up in a Christian background; abortion is not something that I think is out of the question for certain individuals, but not for a married woman. Especially when you just had a baby a few months before, having another one is not out of the question. I was not going to have an abortion."

She still loved him. He "was the one that gave me butterflies." One evening he came home and embraced her. She thought, "Okay, good, we're gonna make love." During the weeks that he had been pressuring her about the pregnancy, he "had

abstained" from her. What she thought was going to be a loving, intimate embrace "turned into him holding me down and sodomizing me."

> I mean, I was just screaming, the baby woke up, and he rolled over and went to sleep. He was snoring by the time I got out of the bed to go get my son and bring him to bed with me so that he could sleep—and also so he wouldn't touch me again.

She had been seeing her pastor for counseling, and she thought the sexual assault was retaliation. "He didn't like that I was telling people our problems. He wanted to be there, to know what was being said." To counter his threats, the minister had invited the sheriff to a counseling session to calm her fears about the law. He had told her, "Honey, nobody likes him in this town. He is not this wonderful guy that he has painted himself out to be to you. He is not going to take your child. He will be paying child support by the law." He had continued, "You just have to be prepared to go through with this and get it over with." The next day after the sexual assault, she went to work and called the sheriff, who picked her up and took her to the doctor. She gave a statement and Rob was arrested several days later. The police officers didn't feel comfortable arresting a fellow policeman, and that's why the sheriff's department handled the arrest. Unfortunately, someone forgot to read him his rights, and the record of arrest was not filed correctly. "They didn't send the card because they didn't read him his rights; and they didn't want to have him make a claim of false arrest." When she decided to drop charges, they were relieved that their mistakes would not be known. Catherine still believes that these "mistakes" were accidental, although a common characteristic of rural areas in the "'good old boy' network which makes law enforcement slow, arbitrary, and ineffective" (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1991, p. 13).

Why did she drop charges? As soon as Rob bonded out, he was joined at their home by his police buddies from the academy, police officers from other towns, state policemen from the county, and his "girlfriend circling the house in her little Bronco, trying to find out where he was because he hadn't been over to her house lately." The stress got to her.

> And I was just a mess, three months pregnant; husband arrested and out of the home, had a baby, already a young child eight months old. Here I was, making five bucks an hour, and I knew there was no way I could make it financially. So his friends pleaded with me, these grown men were in my living room crying to me. Here the police are the ones telling me he's sorry. "Please take him back. Don't jeopardize his career. You can't do this." So I ended up going back to the district attorney and dropping the charges.

Twelve days later she had a miscarriage.

Things didn't improve. Rob and the girlfriend played "the game" with her, "making me miserable, making me jealous." The game included how many times Catherine would leave, how long it would take her to do so, "and how long it would take for me to come back." She blamed herself, believing that she was incompetent as a woman, as a wife, as a cook, mother, housekeeper, lover, as a friend. She responded by crying. "For two years, I cried every day." If she didn't get called names, "that was such a wonderful day. I was just on the top of the world for not getting called a bitch."

Catherine tried to anticipate his demands, "tried to make things as easy for him as I possibly could." Rob worked the 7:00 p.m. shift, getting home after 3:00 a.m. He wanted her to keep the baby up late so his sleep wouldn't be disturbed in the morning hours. When Catherine refused, Rob got his girlfriend to come to the house to baby-sit

after Catherine went to work. If she came home early, she found the door locked. When she got home in the early evening, Rob was already getting to leave.

Catherine found it difficult to sleep. Rob made people angry, and she would frequently be awakened in the middle of the night with people looking for him, wanting to leave messages. When she complained to Rob, he said, "Well, he knows I'm on duty, so he came basically to threaten my wife and child." Catherine was left thinking, "He's made someone mad, and they're going to come kills us, to get back at him."

Many victims of domestic violence search for ways to cope with their partners' abuse. When in that cycle of tension building (Walker, 1979, p. 56), many women choose to provoke an abusive response from their spouses in order to end the "walking-on-egg-shells" suspense. Walker, (1979, p. 60) said, "The woman often senses that the period of inevitability is very close, and she cannot tolerate her terror, her anger, or anxiety any longer." The battering occurs and then there is the relative peace of the next phase, when the partner is either remorseful or, at least, leaves her alone. This manipulation of the situation is sometimes unconscious, sometimes deliberate.

Catherine found a "Happy Anniversary" card in Rob's brief case. The purple envelope caught her eye, and she "snuck into his car" to get it while he was asleep. It was from his girlfriend, signed "from Miss Kitty." This was a reference to his typical explanation whenever leaving the house: "I'm gonna go pet the cat." Catherine understood that this was a "just very nasty" way to refer to his relationship with his girlfriend and was another example of his emotional cruelty. There were two cards from

the girlfriend, both talking "about her love and what they shared in their relationship and how they were so happy to be raising Joshua with him—our son."

She took the cards to work and "showed them to everybody and their dog, made photocopies, and kept the originals at work, and I stuck the copies in his face when I got home that day." First she went to the store and bought groceries. When she came into the house, carrying the bags and the baby, she thrust the cards towards him, saying, "Oh, by the way. What are these?" Thus began some physical tussling, pushing and shouting. Catherine fought back, pushing him away, even though he had grasped her arms firmly enough to cause bruising. "I got this smart idea to knee him in the groin, and that doesn't work very well for someone who used to ride bulls; they kind of can deal with that sort of pain." He backhanded her to the floor, where she hit her head hard enough to knock her out and to cause a concussion and a whiplash injury to her neck. When she regained consciousness, she was still on the floor, being shaken, surrounded by cans and groceries and with Joshua lying across her where he had also fallen from her arms. "And so all I know is I'm waking up, and he's saying, 'Why? Why did you have to do that?'"

> I took my son and I got into the car. And it's so difficult driving a standard—a stick shift—when you're shaking, 'cause your foot is just—you're back and forth. Fortunately, I was only a few blocks from the hospital. So I went in, just devastated, my little baby in my arms, saying, Can you please call?

The police chief was called to the hospital. She told him, "Larry, this is not good. I need something to be done." The chief sat with her and explained, "You know, Catherine, I don't have very much control over your husband. You know, I can tell him what to do, but he's not going to listen to me." She did not want to press charges. "I just wanted him to love me. I just wanted him to be nice, and I just wanted someone to make sense to

him, to talk to him." Once again, a law enforcement agency revealed its reluctance to take action against a fellow officer even when he had committed an assault with bodily injury, a felony crime.

Catherine was asked about the worst conflict in her marriage.

> For me, it was the constant threat of the unknown. For me to analyze the whole situation—for me the worst part of it was the emotional and verbal abuse, because the physical meant it was anticlimax. I mean, you almost wish for them to hit you, 'cause you can almost take that more than you can take the mental and the anguish. You know, "Show me what you got, because I'm tired of the other!" And I feel that there are times when I may have pushed him to the limit; like, in the instance where he hit me and I hit the floor. I felt that maybe I escalated the issue. I didn't help it any; I know that. So I got him back a little bit.

She knew she could never do much damage in a physical fight. He outweighed her 100 pounds and "constantly worked out to maintain his physical strength to wrestle down criminals."

In May of 1995 she left for the last time—"something snapped. I'm really not happy with this person anymore; he is not worth it." She moved to another small town about 15 miles away. However, the abuse continued in the form of stalking and harassment. "He knew exactly who I talked to during the day, what I bought at the store. He would call me when I'd come home and say, 'I heard you bought this, this, and this.'" He knocked on her door at all hours and insisted on coming in. There was no help from the police, because Rob did this during his on-duty shift, and he was the only one on duty. She felt she had no choice but to let him in. "He would search every cabinet, every closet, everywhere, looking for a man. I had to be with another man, because that's the only reason I wouldn't be with him," he believed. "And all the while with his gun, he was 'room-clearing,' basically, with his gun." Room-clearing, she explained, is when the

officer enters a room, back against the walls, sweeping the room with his gun held in outstretched hands.

Catherine felt tied to Rob. Every morning she left Joshua at Rob's while she went to work. "Had to go into the home and wake him up, him with a gun on his chest, and leave my child with him." When she returned after work to pick up Joshua, Rob would be playing Christian music, and she'd find Joshua dressed in t-shirts that were imprinted with "My daddy loves my mommy." It was still "the game."

The arguments and threats continued. He resisted giving Joshua back at the end of each day and threatened to sue for custody of the child. She told him:

> "You fixing to go on duty, what are you going to do, bring him with you? You have baby-sized Kevlar [bullet-proof material used in vests] that you're just going to pack him up? You know, bulletproof baby. Use your brain. Do I need to go down and have your partners come up here and make you relinquish him to me, because, you know, I'll do that." I was getting an attitude with him. And ooh, he didn't like that.
>
> So I proceeded to get into my little car, put the clutch in, and it's rolling. He opens the car door, and he's walking fast, trying to put the baby in there, and I, of course, stopped. He's fiddling with the buckles, and he's taking his time, and he called me a bitch and other names. He's trying to get the buckles buckled, and I'm swatting at him, "Get out of my car!" At the stop sign down the road, "I want you out of my face!" You know, I'm mad. And he didn't like that; he didn't like me rolling with the car; he wanted me to stay and fight with him. Then he reached into the vehicle, turned off the ignition, pulled out my key.
>
> So, me having a little bitty car, having a big, bulky car seat and the baby right there, I couldn't use my right hand to reach for the key. All I had, it was like a fluid motion, he reached in and did it and here I was going after it. I got my hand on the keys as well. He took his hand and he twisted my hand back so far that "pop, pop, pop," my fingers broke. In a spiral. They just fell limp. He knew something was wrong, and he threw the keys down on the floorboard, and I had to get them. Here I was trying to drive "stick" with one hand, and crying, devastated, hiccupping, and shaking in the foot, trying to get back to the darned hospital.

As she made her way to the hospital, she later found out that Rob had called the police dispatcher to report that Catherine was hurt. "Catherine's going off, she's just nuts, and she's just saying I hurt her, I broke her hand, and I didn't even touch her. She jammed her hand in the door." His "police partners" met her at the hospital. By this time she felt she had convinced them that Rob was abusive and had lied about her. "Because by this time, systematically, I had been able to show them that I was a real person. I was nice to them." She felt their pity and support. The x-rays confirmed that one finger was broken, her wrist was sprained, and her ulnar nerve was severed. Several months of treatment ensued and she was unable to work for a while.

Again, Rob evaded prison, pleading out on a Class C misdemeanor, receiving a fine and a year's probation. She said the district attorney at the time "really was never the type to go to trial with anything. He was Mr. Plea Bargain Man." Catherine considered herself fortunate that she did not receive disfiguring or life-threatening beatings. "It was incidents where he knew better than to get that violent. He constantly held himself in check not let it get so bad that he could get in trouble." He controlled the force of his physical assaults. "He wanted control and dominance over me, but he didn't want to get in trouble for it." Most of the time, Rob managed to prevent serious injuries in his attacks, which enabled Catherine to minimize the attacks and thus, kept her in the relationship. There was always an implied threat.

> When Rob was angry, he would turn into just a different person. To tell you how sad this person is, he identified with Clint Eastwood and John Wayne. He would mimic them and talk like them. He would walk like John Wayne. When he was mad, he'd clinch his teeth together and talk like Dirty Harry and whisper and keep it down low.

He wanted to be "someone." His motto was "Yeah, I'm not prejudiced; I hate everybody." Rob felt that drinking beer added to his persona. Although he didn't like beer, "he would have his friends over and they would drink beer. I guess he thought it was something that cops did. In addition to working out, "he thought that drinking beer would make him bulk up, but all it did was make him have a little potbelly."

Catherine did not get much support from her family. There was a lot of shame and embarrassment:

> Having my dad come down and have to hear that I was sodomized and pregnant. My dad was afraid of him. Here's your father who wants to go kick anybody's butt who's gonna hurt his little girl, and he's afraid of him.
>
> The family was obviously alienated. My father was afraid of him. My mother adored him, but when it got to the point where he was really abusive, he was very unkind to her.

Catherine's mother became ill and was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia.

> Before we were able to diagnose her and get her treatment, it was just really scary for her, dealing with this guy. At first, he felt like he would just need to protect her; he was this "cop, my son-in-law," you know. But after he became ugly towards her, he really alienated my family and my friends. Every friend I had he said that I was lesbian, or he would talk real ugly about my friends in town, saying they were lesbians.

Not wanting to hurt her friends, she saw them less and less. "I felt bad for them because they had to endure him." He followed them through town in his patrol car, pulling them over for contrived reasons. Websdale (1998) pointed out that when "women find themselves without the emotional support of friends, neighbors, social services, and families," it "makes it more difficult for victims of abuse to summon their psychological resources against the controlling behavior of their abusers (p. 15).

For several years, Catherine felt powerless not only to change her situation but also felt powerless to call on help from anyone. Her family, as was seen, was unable to intervene. The town police force was reluctant to get involved. The chief of police admitted he had little control over Rob. The district attorney's office mishandled simple paperwork and procedures. She became isolated from her friends. Isolation is a common weapon of the abuser. Less common is the way Rob used townspeople's fondness for gossip as a way to achieve the isolation of his wife, to prevent intervention from others. She felt that she eventually gained the respect of the policemen in town, but she had to overcome Rob's portrayal of her.

> He painted me to be this horrible, ugly, nasty trailer-trash bimbo that was worthless, and that deserved to be beaten, that deserved to be beat on because I was just scum. I found that throughout the town many people thought that of me, and that excused his behavior in their eyes. If someone came to you today, a friend of yours, called you aside, and said, "Gosh, you wouldn't believe this woman; goodness, she's just horrible. I cannot believe that he's with her. Poor guy." It's very easy to express that as true and as fact. All our close friends said, "He didn't do that to you. He didn't."

As the divorce proceedings went along, and Rob left town, people came to her, astonished. "*You* were his wife? He was married to *you*? I knew him—he was cheating on you—and he had *you* at home?" That made Catherine feel better, but she knows that "he had the whole town duped. Because I really wasn't allowed out of the house, except a few minutes to go to the store." If she wasn't back at the expected time, he called the store. He called her work if she was a few minutes late coming home at lunch. She was accused of cheating on him. She did not have enough contact with people to show them her true self.

She felt living in a small town enabled the abuser. She spoke of her neighbors' attitudes toward abusers: "It's easier to go along with them [the abusers] than it is to buck them and make them mad, because the last thing you want is to have this person as an enemy." Catherine tried to explain how her neighbors and friends felt about her situation:

> The people that could see something is wrong don't know quite how to handle him because he's a hot head—he is a police officer—it's my word against his. "If she [the victim]—you know, she needs to be the one"—and these are the common sense people talking here. "I really don't need any trouble in my home life. I really don't need this guy stalking me or giving me trouble, making me feel bad for being supportive of his wife. She needs to get enough—get her fill of it, and she needs to leave." And that's pretty much the apathy almost; but, you know, they feel bad—but not that bad—because they don't want to stick their nose into that. Until she's ready to get out of the situation once and for all. "When you're ready, and you're at that point, give me a call." That was the attitude and that's the sad truth.

There were other attitudes that Catherine dealt with. "There were still others that—for whatever reason, thought it was funny; you know, ha, ha, ha." There were women at work, one of them in particular who goaded Catherine. "Is your husband beating ya still? Is he still being a jerk to ya?" These taunts were embarrassing and served to isolate her even more. It is probably for that reason that Catherine took the greeting cards to work to share with her co-workers. Perhaps she thought she could gain their sympathy if she showed them proof of his cruelty. Another possible motive was to manipulate the gossip mill, also. Perhaps she hoped that people would talk about the messages in the cards and laugh at Rob and his girlfriend.

She said people were more willing to help her when she got out of the relationship. They held back because "it's not worth it to me to go into that home life when I could get killed."

> They don't need someone talking ugly about them or threatening them for helping someone who needs them. Basically, people need to understand wholeheartedly that in order to get the kind of help you need, you need to get out of the situation.

Fear of retaliation is an important factor in preventing people from intervening in a family fight. She said her neighbors never called the police when they heard the screams coming from her house. However, she said she had a lot of help after she "got out of the situation. That's when the help comes, when you're free of that." She emphasized, "The people in this town were very supportive; it was only his friends—the police officers from other towns that he called in." She mentioned his police academy "buddies" and Department of Public Safety officers from the surrounding areas who supported Rob. "The local police were scared of him, in my opinion. They won't admit to feeling intimidated by him now." Obviously, Catherine talked of different kinds of support at different times in her marriage, but she reflected the kind of contradictions that the other women in the study expressed when analyzing their relationships and the help they received from others in the community. Catherine did find counseling for her son and herself in Wakefield for three months.

When thinking about Catherine's two abusive marriages and how women, in general, go from one abusive relationship to another, there is another part of her story that needs to be examined. From the age of five to nine, Catherine was sexually abused by the husband of her childcare provider, her first abuser. Her second molester was also

the husband of a babysitter. He was also a member of the church and a very good friend of her father. Her third abuser was a family friend who occasionally attended the movie theater with them, always asking her parents if she could sit beside him during the movie. The fourth abuser was a family friend who attended an annual convention with Catherine's parents and grandparents. Her parents were grateful when he offered to "take me off their hands for a while and show me around." Her fifth abuser was a patient at the nursing home where her mother worked. Catherine volunteered after school to sit with the elderly patients and talk with them; but one man, a stroke patient, groped and fondled her when she got too close to the bed. To this day she feels uncomfortable being around elderly men.

She was in the sixth grade when she heard a radio discussion about sexual abuse and child molestation and realized she had a name for what had happened to her. She was in the car with her parents. "To this day I remember the exact bend in the road we were on when this revelation came to me." She thought about it for several days and then began having nightmares. One night she told her parents about the first molester. "Their reaction to my sobs and to my story was enough to let me know that they could not suffer through hearing about the others. So I never told them." Charges were brought against the offender, but "back in the 70s and 80s the subject of child abuse and molestation was very taboo and hard very hard to prove." With no witnesses, eventually the case was dropped, and the childcare facility continued on with "business as usual."

How did this history of sexual molestation figure into Catherine's development? Along with the lessons she learned from her parents to "turn the other cheek," to "act like

a nice young lady," and with being bullied in school, she was a very disturbed girl. She frequently missed school and had numerous physical complaints. Although the abuse was reported to her doctor, his "final diagnosis and explanation of my illness was that it was just 'typical female hysteria.'" Her religious parents counseled her to "put on the armor of God," to withstand the torments. She was later allowed to attend another, larger high school where she flourished. She "loved the way" she "could just blend in without much notice. It was wonderful." Then she met Rob.

> Basically, I was conditioned from early on, from five years old on, to be very submissive to men, through the experiences of sex abuse in my childhood, by going to church and really being raised to, as the Bible says, to submit. I had a very confused chance of knowing what it was to be a woman and be a mother and a wife; what was tolerated and what was not. I married two very dysfunctional men that came from families of dysfunction, of divorce.

According to Websdale (1998), "The abuser is more likely than nonabusive men to have grown up in a home where he has experienced or witnessed abuse as a child" (p. 74).

Looking back, she thought, "What a kid. I was just so impressionable and such a doormat." She said she almost longs for those days when she was innocent and loving towards everyone. "And not so logical and not so analytical." When she sees "all the people that have lived a good life with one husband and healthy, happy children, I'm, like, you know, that would have been nice."

Catherine's story illustrates the powerlessness she experienced in dealing with her abusive husband. His being a policeman increased the isolation she felt, because not only were her neighbors and family afraid of him and afraid to offer her support, but his fellow officers did not come to her assistance because of their friendship with her husband. The potent negative power of gossip was shown to be an inhibiting factor in

her decision not to seek or accept help. Gossip was shown to be a weapon of abuse just as powerful as was Rob's gun.

Sex and Secrecy: Dawn's Story

Dawn's story illustrates the "newest form of family violence to emerge as a social problem" (Finkelhor, Gelles, Hotaling, & Straus, 1983, p. 117). Marital rape victims, like battery victims, are trapped in their abusive relationships. They are repeatedly assaulted and psychologically manipulated and controlled—not only by their abusers but also by the institutions and societal assumptions which hold that there is no such crime as marital rape or marital sexual abuse. Finkelhor et al. (1983), studying childhood sexual abuse in a representative sample of 326 women, found that 10% of their participants reported their spouses had used physical force or threats to coerce sexual acquiescence. In comparison, assaults by strangers were reported by 3% of the participants (p. 120). Most women and others consider rape to be an assault by strangers, and therefore, many women victims do not even identify their experiences as rape (Gelles, 1979, p. 122).

Dawn was a victim of her husband's abuse as well as a victim of religious and societal controls; she was also a victim of the secrecy that many people impose on the subject of sex abuse. Her story also illustrates Walker's (1979) cycle theory of abuse.

> I had never felt like anybody cared much, even my folks. When I was younger, I just didn't feel like I was loved, and here was this man who seemed like he wanted me. Who else would want me was my thinking. That was my train of thought. You know, no one but a prisoner would want me.

Dawn said she felt ugly inside and out. Even in junior high school her weight was over 200 pounds. Her brother suggested she become pen pals with his best friend, Darrel. She

was led to believe there were false charges of sexual assault of a child, and that he really was imprisoned for assorted robberies and drugs. She was 18, and already corresponding with an inmate in Ohio, when her brother suggested, "If you're going to write anybody, you ought to write him; he's here in Texas." She began the correspondence. "Through our letters we never really talked about what his supposed crime was. He said don't mention it because it could get him killed; but he said it didn't happen. I was naïve and I believed."

But he made her feel good about herself. He said it was only because she wrote to him and visited him that he began to accumulate "good days." He was able to reduce his sentence of 12 years to a time served of four and a half years. He was "mad and angry when I started writing him and visiting him, and it calmed him down." He was "articulate," he thought she was "special," she "made a difference in his life," he was complimentary and grateful. After spending six weeks in a halfway house, he was paroled to her. She was "totally overwhelmed" with the responsibility and "didn't know what to say or what to think."

She realized later that the abuse probably started in the letters. "He was manipulating me from then on. That's what I feel like now." Dawn had little experience with men and dating. "I had never been with anybody before, and when he was paroled out to me, the very day I went to pick him up, we had sex." She had rented an apartment, and after checking in with his parole office, they went to the apartment.

> That first time we were together, it was, no exaggeration, at least a dozen times from the moment we walked through the front door to the next day about the same time. And I just thought that was normal. I thought that's what couples did when they were on their honeymoon. I thought after all this time we had been

> separated through wire mesh and glass and unable to hold hands—but I look back on it now and he was just—he was in charge and I was going to do anything to make him happy. And it was just—from then on.

At first she felt loved and cherished; but as the months went on and as she looked back on everything that happened, she came to realize that he had lied to her from the first week together. At first it was just little things: cigarettes in his pocket when he told her he had quite smoking. "Oh, I just bought those as souvenirs." She believed it. Then he lied about money. He neglected to pay the bills, but the money was missing from the checking account. She found out after the divorce that he had even lied about his date of birth. "The funny thing is we didn't fight about the sex, the things that he wanted sexually. It's like he always knew the next day that he shouldn't have asked or wanted those things with me. The next day he treated her lovingly, "just extra sweet and huggy. "We always held hands and hugged and he opened the car doors and that sort of thing."

She had difficulty reconciling his brutality of the night before with his tender behavior of the next day. She was experiencing the second phase of Walker's (1979) cycle of abuse theory, the loving contrition phase. As Walker said, "The tension built up in phase one and released in phase two is gone. In this phase the batterer constantly behaves in a charming and loving manner" (p. 65). Phase two, the tension-building phase, seemed to start with Darrel "acting kind of standoffish, like I had done something wrong, like he was mad at me about something." Then something at work would go wrong, something at work "was going out of his control, overwhelming him and stressing him," and abusive sex was his way of regaining control over an aspect of his life where he could do so with impunity. Marital sexual abuse also contains elements of

physical and emotional abuse. Being forcibly held down and being cajoled with promises and pleas of need by the abuser lead the victim to believe in her powerlessness to prevent succeeding episodes. Dawn exhibited the characteristics of "learned helplessness." Perceiving she had no power in the sexual relationship, and being unable to control other areas of the marriage, Dawn became passive and submissive (Walker, 1979, p. 47). "I just wanted everything to be quiet and smooth and calm. Just pretend like nothing ever happened."

His behavior made it difficult for Dawn to characterize the sex as a type of abuse.

> There were things that he wanted me to do, things that I wouldn't have done, but he coerced me into it. You know, "We're husband and wife and there's nothing wrong with it'. He would always talk me into it, and then afterwards it was, "Oh, I just love you so much. I love showing you how much I love you." Now, I'm not saying everything is wrong or not wrong, 'cause maybe I'm still confused about some things. Most things should be done out of love, sexual things. But he always wanted—it was he always wanted oral sex; there were times he wanted anal sex that just were absolutely—he knew I wasn't—and then there was at least a couple or three times that he just wanted sex in general when I did not, and it was just—I wasn't physically hurt from that, but the emotions afterwards and the next days were—it was rape.
>
> And he even admitted that when we were separating. He said we shouldn't have got married as soon as we did. And he said, "I know I raped you."

Darrel's behavior was unpredictable to Dawn. Intermittently reinforced with charming, loving behavior, she became more confused about the man she had married and more entrapped in the victimization. He was friendly and polite to her friends and family. "My folks loved him. They considered him another son 'cause he was funny and charming and he loved their girl." She now believes that he was "good to my family intentionally, so he could stay in good graces with them." But that was fairly easy to do since they lived some miles away.

> He liked the idea that we were so far away so we could "have our own life" was kind of how he phrased it. I mean, I feel like emotionally he kept me cut off from everybody, that he was my world. And I allowed him to do that. I did it myself. I mean, he was my world and I was cut off. As far as if anybody else said something against him I wouldn't have listened anyhow. He changed my whole outlook on everything. Psychologically.
>
> I don't trust anybody. I assumed that anybody I came across would be the same way. I still am kind of paranoid with things. Anybody that I come across that seems like a nice, good, true person, I'm always thinking, "Well, they're manipulating me. They're after something. There's got to be something."

Research shows that a previous history of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse is associated with marital rape (Wiehe, 1998, 78). Dawn recounts an incident with a man she knew at work. He complimented her and told he wanted to get to know her better before he moved to Houston. She felt uncomfortable with the attention, and when he said he was coming over to her place on a specific night, she told him not to come. She refused to tell him where she lived, but he was able to get her address through the office. That evening she dawdled on the way home, stopping at the grocery and the bank, hoping that if he came, he would see she was not at home and he would leave. However, he was waiting for her.

> So then I let him in, and he, basically, raped me. I mean, he didn't throw me down on the ground and tear my clothes off, but he said, "If you tell me to stop, I'll stop." So I said, "Stop. I don't want this." And he just kept on and on, saying how good he could make me feel, and I just froze and I just stayed totally numb the whole time. The next day I can't remember ever feeling anything that was going on. I was just like numb from the neck down.

When Dawn contracted genital herpes, her first thought was that it was from the man who had raped her, and she even revealed the rape to her husband. Later, it was decided that she got it from Darrel. "The way I got herpes is he had a cold sore on his mouth, and we had had so much sex, and I was so raw that—that it was oral sex." She said it was the

worse case of herpes that doctors had seen. "They ended up taking me to Fort Worth." There were bladder problems, her body "was shutting down," she had a sinus infection. She thought she was going to die. Darrel "felt like it was his fault. I said, 'Oh, it may not be your fault, 'cause this man came to the house," and she told him about the rape which had happened several months before their marriage. Strangely, she said, that was the only time she has had an outbreak. "The doctor's theory is that I had them so badly for so long—it was like a week and a half—that they think it ran its course." When she was able to go home, she had lost 30 pounds, and was still very ill. The doctors cautioned her. "Make sure all the sores are healed and there's no discharge."

Darrel "had been cut off from me for like two or three weeks now, so he said it was okay to have anal sex." He had bought her "a little nighty" for the occasion of her homecoming and wanted her to wear it. I said, "I really still don't feel very good." But she just did whatever he told her. "And that was the first time we had anal sex. And it wasn't the last, but it just wasn't right. And he knew I was sick, I was exhausted, I had all these infections." She could not resist his pleading. "And then I say, 'We shouldn't do it this way, I don't want to do it.' And he's like, 'Well, we can do it this other way. Everybody does it, this is what married people do.'" She believed him and relented. "But it was just wrong." Finkelhor and Yllo (1983) consider this form of abuse as "social coercion" (p. 121). "Women submit to sex in the absence of desire because of social pressure—because they believe it is their wifely duty" (p. 121).

There were suicidal thoughts. One particular time was shortly after her grandmother died. She felt there was nobody to depend on. She began to remember things.

> These repressed memories were coming up, that I had been hurt by this person. I felt like my mom was involved somehow. I feel like I don't have clear memories, but I feel like I told her that something was happening and she got angry with me and told me that it was my fault. I have a lot of confusion there.
>
> Grandma was somebody that I knew if I was hurting I could run to her. And she was the only one that I ever truly felt like, and sometimes still do, accepted me just like I am. I didn't have to be perfect for Granny. And that's when after she died, I realized that the man who had hurt me so bad was this man that she loved. I couldn't tell her about that.
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> When she died—get this—my husband was so overcome with emotion that I was the one that had to be strong for my mom and dad. This was *my* granny. I was trying to hold myself together. I was a volcano inside. And once we actually put Granny in the ground and we were driving home, I was so angry with him and with my best friend, Josie, that I just cussed them.
>
> See, this is where a lot of confusion really came in with this husband, because he was so—I know it sounds sick—but he was so supportive. After Grandma died, when I was this volcano exploding, he was so supportive.

Previously she had talked to her brothers at different times, trying to find out what had happened when she was a child. She had asked her mother about it, but "it made her angry." She had talked to her father.

> "Dad, this is tearing me up. I was sexually abused and I'm just now remembering." He said, "You would never forget something like that. Every day of your life you would think about it." I said, "Daddy, I'm not crazy." And he said that he remembers what happened to him with his stepfather. So it was hard for my daddy to believe at first that I had actually repressed these memories, because he relived his vividly every day for the rest of his life. He finally did admit to me. I said, "You've got to look at my weight, the depression." I was up and down emotionally; you could say it was hormones, but it wasn't. It was total anger one minute and calm and quiet the next. He finally admitted, "Yeah, I can see that something happened."

Dawn described what happened when she "exploded" after her grandmother's funeral.

> We went home after Grandma's funeral. My brothers were all around the table and we were fixing to eat. Mom was in the kitchen cutting something up, and Daddy was sitting at the head of the table. I stood there and I said, "Look, we've finally got everybody together, and I'm finally going to talk to y'all about the things I've been talking to you on the phone about.
>
> "I want everybody to realize that I was sexually abused." My mother screamed bloody murder. She ran in there and said, "Not in my house!" She was purple with rage, holding a steak knife and saying, "Not in my house, not in my house." And my older brother, Roderick—which still confuses me—he screamed and told me to get out. And my dad is standing at the head of the table with his arms uplifted, asking, "What's going on?" And all I can remember is screaming and running through the front door and going to my friend Josie's house.
>
> My daddy ran over, and she wouldn't let him talk to me. My best friend's Mama wanted to know what was going on. I was 23—it's not like I was a kid—but that's how I was acting. I don't even have true memories about that, but I was curled up at the foot of her bed behind a trunk because I didn't want them to find me.

And through it all, Darrel was there, being kind and sensitive and supportive. They stayed at a motel where "we talked and we cried; and that's one thing that made it so hard for me to leave him when I knew I should have."

> There was this big rift with my family and them not wanting to believe me. In fact, after my husband and I finally separated and divorced, my mom tried to say, "Well, he's the one that turned your mind and made you think you have been sexually abused." I said, "No, Mom. Actually, he helped me through that. As incredible as it may seem, he wasn't a monster. He did help me through that." It was a weird time. I knew it was an inappropriate time to bring all that up, but it just—like I said, I was a volcano.

This was one of the times she contemplated suicide. "I was never going to cut myself or anything. I was going to take a bottle of some kind, anything that would make me go to sleep and not wake up." In fact, there were times when her husband also threatened suicide. One time they were fighting about money.

> I was angry at him because he had lied to me for the umpteenth time, and I remember he ran into the bathroom and took pills. A friend was there in the house and the friend held him while I was sweeping my fingers through his mouth, getting the pills out of his mouth. So he did the same thing.
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> When we were separating, he said, "Well I would have left you a long time ago, but you said you would kill yourself." I started thinking about that. You know, actually that's what he told me when I was going through counseling. I said, "Honey, I love you, but we need to try to maybe step aside from each other. Let's see if we can't find out what's really going on between us, and let's separate for a little bit."
>
> That's when he convinced me that the counselor was trying to twist my brain and manipulate me against him. And he said he would kill himself if I ever left him. So for him to throw that back at me later and say I had said that, and he would have left me sooner. I think that's another thing that strengthened my resolve.

Dawn had found a counselor in Wakefield, a drive of about 50 miles. Insurance did not cover the counseling, so she had to find an agency with United Way funding, which limited the number of counseling visits. During our interview she stated that she still felt she needed counseling. I suggested several churches where she might be able to talk to a minister, but she maintained she is "so distrustful of men that it's going to have to be a woman." She pointed out other limitations. "Money, you know."

The lack of counseling services is a common characteristic of rural communities. The local branch of the state Mental Health Mental Retardation system (MHMR) in Oak Tree County does not offer counseling, as it does in some other urban areas, such as Houston and Dallas and their suburbs. The lack of other resources is felt keenly, especially when the type of abuse is not readily apparent; there were seldom bruises to show investigators. Again, the fear of public opinion and disbelief limited what she believed she could do.

There were times I realized that I probably needed help, that I needed to stop what was going on between us. But who was I going to call? I wasn't going to call the police officers that I knew. I wasn't going to call people who were going to see me on the street every day and tell them that these things were going on in my own home. I'd been told, "You make your bed, you lie in it."

And you don't tell everybody what's going on; you keep it a secret. I wasn't going to be able to face people on the street and them know that something had happened. [They'd say] "Your own husband raped you? You know that doesn't happen; you're married."

I didn't know of any facilities that I could go for help and stay totally anonymous. I mean, you need to stay anonymous. You can't hardly go anywhere in a small town. They can promise you that you can stay anonymous, but then when you see them in the grocery store, you're wondering are they going to say hi and act like they know you. And then people are going to start thinking and wondering.

So, it's really hard to do. Unless you've reached that point where your resolve is strengthened and you're going to get past it. If you're still where I was at times, just crumbling—when I needed the help the most, I wasn't going to ask for it; because I didn't want everyone to know there was something wrong.

What kind of help did Dawn need?

I needed to be able to talk, even just like I'm talking to you now. I needed—you know, really, you have to take the situation in your own hands. You're the one that's in control of what decisions you make; but really, it would have been great for someone to know what was going on in the relationship and say, "It's going to stop, and he's going to stay away." But I don't think there's anything like that out there.

I guess, the police officers, if I would have told them what was going on. But then, you're always afraid that they're going to say the same thing; you know, "Your husband can't rape you." I can hear it now: "You're over-reacting."

How did Dawn reach the decision to end the marriage?

I finally felt like I had permission to do it. Now, permission from whom, I don't know. Maybe permission from society in general. Because like I said, "You make your bed, you lie in it." When you marry, you marry "until death do you part," unless the man cheats. So, he finally cheated and he finally admitted he cheated. Well, thank God for that, because then I felt like I was in the right and I could tell him to get the hell out and never come back. And nobody could say you didn't try hard enough. Where that comes from, I don't know. Maybe society.

The control of social forces in the small rural community was apparent to Dawn. Awareness and fear of public attitudes shaped her decision process as well as commonly held religious beliefs about marriage.

> My folks have been married ever since day one. They've never separated or even acted like they wanted to. I don't know where that gets ingrained in you though, but you're supposed to stick together "Until death do you part," unless you've been cheated on. I sustained all these other abuses and lived through it, and then he finally did to me the small thing of cheating on me so I could kick him out.

Her husband's infidelity changed the way she and others judged her relationship. Divorce was now acceptable to the church, and support was forthcoming from "my parents and anybody else in the society."

> I could go to church and it was okay, because he had cheated on me. That's really sick, but that's the truth. I started going to church after we divorced. And I remember the preacher asking me, because I was thinking about remarrying. And he said, "I have to ask you." I told him it was because the man was unfaithful to me. That was okay. I could get remarried. Because in the Bible, it says that's the only way that a woman is not considered an adulteress.
>
> [Then] it was acceptable to me. Only because I was pleasing everyone else. See, I probably would have done it a long time ago. I probably would have after the first lie—told him to get out. Part of it was that nobody else would love me. But the main thing, once we actually had our vows in a church, it was [permanent]. And [even though] he continuously lied and manipulated and abused me, I still didn't have any right to divorce him until he cheated on me.

Secrecy extended to her closest friends. "The only things I talked about were the lies. I didn't tell them about the sexual abuse." She felt guilty when one friend confided in her. The friend said "this guy that she was fooling around with wanted to have anal sex, and I said, 'Oh, it's okay; because we're married and we do it, and he says it's okay 'cause we love each other.'"

Once she tried to talk to her mother about her concerns about her husband's sexual demands. Her mother responded, "Sex is never really that great." Dawn didn't want anybody else to know. If her own mother couldn't see that it was abuse, she felt nobody else would either. "That's why I said I really feel guilty with my friend Josie, because I'm thinking—she had sexual abuse when she was younger, too. So I kind of told her it was okay to do this." Dawn and Josie had the childhood abuse in common, but "we never felt like there was anything wrong with us; and there really wasn't, except the fact that these people had put an imprint on us at a young age." She and Josie appeared to react in similar ways to similar situations. "Because we had similar backgrounds."

Dawn's experience gave her a new strength and outlook. "After we divorced, I realized I could do anything that I put my mind to. If I made it through that, and I lived through it, then I could do anything that I put my mind to." She went to school, took health occupation, and was a nurse's aide for two years.

> I'm a lot more outgoing. I would have never had this interview 10 years ago. I used to stay hidden. I never wore shorts before; even when I was married to him. I didn't. Now, I'm going to enjoy myself. And darn anybody who doesn't like it. So I am a lot stronger in that aspect. There are things that I know I have to get over and get past. I still use my weight as a wall to keep up between people. And sometimes I like that wall. I wish that I could stop using something as a shield.
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> But it feels so raw to try to open up to people, and I'm not ready to do that yet. You know, my mom and dad and some of my friends are like, "Oh, I'm sorry you married him" And I'm like, "No." My God! I have gotten so many blessings from that. We didn't have children, which at the time it tore me up. God knew I wasn't ready to have children. I finally met my [present] husband, and now we have two children. I have my nursing license; my husband and I have built a business together that is thriving. I know I couldn't have done all of this if I hadn't gone through what I went through with him. I don't regret ever having met him or having been married to him. Not at all. That's not something I'm proud of, necessarily, but I truly don't regret it.

There is one last note that is interesting to Dawn's story. Darrel admitted that he was in prison "because he did indeed sexually assault those girls." He hadn't told her because "he knew I wasn't going to love him anymore." [That was her] "perfect opportunity to divorce him, but, you know, Mom said and everybody said, 'You marry for better or for worse. So unless you know he's cheating on you, you shouldn't divorce him.'"

Dawn was the victim of religious and societal controls in her rural community as well as the victim of her husband's abuse. When family and church do not consider marital sex assault a form of abuse, the woman is effectively cut off from help from two of the most powerful support systems in her life. The secrecy that surrounds the topic of marital sex abuse is an isolating factor that adds another dimension to the growing power and control of the abuser. The cycle theory of abuse was seen in the pattern of tension building, abuse, and contrition phases which recurred in Dawn's marriage.

Segregation and Misperceptions: Pastor Burrell's Story

I begin with my conversations with Pastor Burrell, the only full-time Black minister of a church in the town of Akern, because as a resident, a minority, and a pastor he has the advantage of a unique viewpoint. On one hand he describes the isolating power of community attitudes toward the African American community. On the other hand, he describes his own perceptions and attitudes.

Pastor Burrell is proud of his church. With a membership of almost 250 and an average Sunday attendance of between 110 and 150, he said, "We're the youngest church [five years], largest membership, largest Black, and largest attendance average per Sunday." In addition, his is the only full-time African American ministry in the

community. He lives up the street from the church and tries to be available to his membership every day. Pastor Burrell feels he and his family are providing role models for the families in his church. "We have a lot of single mothers. The man is nowhere around or either a grandmother is raising them, and they see the relationship that we have."

Unfortunately, not many people seek his help in handling spouse abuse, especially the male partner. He described his counseling attempts with men:

> I've had several married couples that the wife has come to me about her husband being abusive, both physically and/or verbally. Mind games. He tries to take away their self-esteem: "You're not any good." The women don't mind coming, [but] it's hard to get the men to come. And even when the women come, they still go back into the same situation.
>
> Men have too much pride. That's the main issue, pride. They feel like they can accept it [advice] from another woman. But a man telling a man, they don't want to hear that. So he never did come back. Matter of fact, he don't even come to this church any more. His wife does.
>
> I have to go from the frame of mind that I live, which is Christianity. Unless he's a Christian man, it's going to be hard to counsel, because, like I said, pride won't allow him to come and have somebody else tell him what he needs to do.

When asked about the presence of partner abuse in the community and people's attitudes toward the problem, he revealed his misperception that domestic violence only occurs in marriage. In addition, he felt there were more pressing problems than domestic violence:

> I deal with a lot of community, but a majority of the problems in the community is not domestic violence, it's drugs. Because, to be honest with you, there are very few married people, African American, that is married. They have a lot of living together. And the majority of the problem that is happening in the community here is alcohol and drugs, in and out of prisons. So, as far as abuse, if it is, it really is on a low key.

There is a "common misconception that violence in the black community is connected only with crime" (Campbell & Gary, 1998, p. 234) and therefore domestic violence is frequently unidentified as a social problem. Even when identified, spouse abuse may be considered less important to the legal system because of the stereotypical views that violence is normal among Blacks (Campbell & Gary, 1998, p. 236). Couples who are not married do not find it is any easier to leave the relationship or to address their relationship's problems than those who are married. On the other hand, when couples are not married, many abused women think they have no protection under the law and choose not to report the abuse. The devalued status of Black life leads to unequal police response from intervention agencies, thus making it difficult for Black women to readily seek assistance from the police in her community (Campbell & Gary, 1998, p. 235.)

Many people don't recognize domestic violence as something that needs to be addressed:

> I've had a few encounters with it here in my congregation. Other than that, I've heard of some people in the community that have been a part of it. Most people view it as either he was drunk. You know: he didn't really mean it; he was under the influence. They would use it as an excuse. "Well, he was drunk" or "he was high. He didn't really mean it."

Pastor Burrell described a conversation with a woman he had recently seen:

> I believe she is being abused physically, mentally, because all of the information she shared with me is—he doesn't do anything for her financially, emotionally: he just—it's all about sex for him. And she says it's hard for her to get out of the relationship because she's been in the relationship about five years. She feels like, "I love him and what am I going to do? Who am I going to talk to?" Or she feels like she needs a man. You know, "I've got to have someone."
>
> All it is to him is physical. So I've been trying to talk to her about—actually, I didn't even mention it to her that that's abuse. I really never even thought about it until I talked to you. That *is* abuse, on her part and the children's part. Her

> children are coming up short because if she's going to have a male friend, the male friend ought to be at least there physically for the children and show some support to them. But he's not.
>
> So the next time I talk to her I'll have to let her know that. I think she has a lot of confidence in me.

Pastor Burrell described the town. "As [incredible] as it may sound, we're still segregated here. We've got the Black community here, we've got the Hispanic community over there, we've got the White community over there. Still segregated." He felt that most people preferred it that way:

> I believe they're content with living on this side of town and not being bothered. They haven't made too much of a fuss about us being over here and they being over there. I think it's from not knowing any different. They've been accustomed—they're pleased with the way they live. "Okay, I live in the projects. I just walk to the store. I don't have to have a car." Some people are content with living off the food stamps and government assistance.
>
> As far as abuse is concerned, domestic violence, like I said, we just don't hear of it too much over here. And I don't think it stems from being segregated. I don't think it stems from being [poor]. I think more so it is not knowing any different, that God did not intend for you to have a wife or a girlfriend that you have to make by beating.

Social learning plays a big part in Pastor Burrell's reasoning. "They've seen the grandfather, seen the uncle do it, and children only mimic what they see their parents do."

He acknowledged the employment problems of his neighbors. "You can get you a convenience store job or fast food job. You can get that today." The majority of his people work at fast food restaurants or nursing homes. Those who have good jobs commute to Wakefield and work at the huge regional hospital there where they are "nurses, record keepers, people who draw blood, lab technicians, x-ray technicians."

Some work at the plant in Parkstone. "But when they don't have transportation, they've got to take this five-dollar-an-hour job here, and we have a lot of people that are in poverty, a lot of people."

He shared the story of another woman who had been in an abusive marriage for quite a while. Two years ago her husband left her, taking her car. Now, he's done it again. Her experience with the police was typical, according to Pastor Burrell:

> She went to the police, and they said, "Well, what's yours is his," [even though] the car is in her name. The day before Thanksgiving, he had taken another female to the bank, forged the wife's name, and got $50 out twice in one day.

When the bank reviewed the videotape of the transaction, they were able to identify the husband's accomplice. The wife told Pastor Burrell that her husband was on "crack," had hit her a couple of weeks ago, and now not only had taken money from her account but had also taken her car. She had no way to get to work in Wakefield. The minister told her she needed to think about her choices. "He may come back and have nothing. Is your marriage worth it that another two years from now you'll have something else, and here he comes pulling you back down?" He advised her, "You've got to find some kind of way to get him out of your system, get him out of your life, and move on."

He explained why the woman reported the missing husband, car, and money. "He had been in some trouble once before with drugs, and she knew he was back on them drugs. Other than that, they [victims] try to stay as far away from the law as they can." And, of course, the charges were not because of domestic violence, even though he hit her and he took her car; forgery was the charge:

> And then she just told me that the officer told her to tell her husband, if she sees him, that all the bank wants is their money back; and they're giving him until

> today. But what about him hitting her? He didn't even say anything about that. And she won't even pursue it because that's—but look at the support the officers gave her by telling her about the bank instead of saying, "We're going to get him for domestic violence." Just telling him to come in today. "If you don't come in you're going to really be in some trouble."

He said this is an example of why most people would rather not call the police:

> "They would just as well take the law into their own hands and handle it. Somebody kill their brother, they go on and kill the other brother. They wouldn't get the law because the law don't do nothing.
>
> We got some new ones here lately that try to be what we call Matt Dillon, you know. They stop you for everything.

Pastor Burrell said the African American community has "no confidence in the police at all, sheriff, constable, any law enforcement officer, period." Loue (2001) said, "The police response to domestic violence calls has varied considerably and has, unfortunately, often been inadequate: failure to respond to the calls, refusal to arrest the assailant, failure to file reports, and harassment of the victim of such violence" (p. 98). In addition to describing instances of racial profiling in the community, Pastor Burrell said the police are really only interested in making drug busts. In fact, research shows that police officers would *rather* be involved in making arrests for extraordinary events such as drug busts, homicide, or saving a life than battering cases (Kurz, 1992, p. 31). He talked about stereotypes. "I have gold teeth, but I'm not a crook. Most officers believe if you've got gold teeth in your mouth, you're a gangster. You've got to be selling drugs." He added, "A lot of people believe they've been railroaded." He believed the police were neglecting the other areas of town and spending too much time in the Black neighborhood.

What about fair treatment for victims of domestic violence from the judicial system? "Well, it don't ever get that far. It never gets to the courts because the officers don't never make the arrests other than drugs." He admitted there is a drug problem, but he knows there are other things happening that need to be addressed through the law enforcement agencies.

Pastor Burrell was uncertain about the effectiveness of a local shelter for victims of spouse abuse. Although he saw a need for "somebody that a woman can go to in confidence:"

> The thing of it is, we have some very nosy people around here. If you have, for instance, a shelter for abused women, somebody will drive by there, see you going in there, and they're going to come over here [and tell someone else], "Child, she went in there." And that's not confidential.

He explained the ways gossip impacted the residents of his neighborhood, even those who came to visit him on church business:

> So I'm here. Anybody can come up here. They [observers] don't know what they come here to talk to me about. They may be coming here to talk about the Bible. They don't know if it's personal or anything. Yes, we have some nosy people around here. You've heard that old saying about grabbing a cow by the wrong end and running with it? They don't know what it's about, but as long as they see it, [they'll talk about it]. The gossip is terrible.

What will the neighbors be saying about *my* visit to him?

> That he had some White woman up there at the church for a long time [laughs]. But I don't let that bother me, because I just can't. As far as my ministry is concerned, I can't. That's what they're going to say, though, especially if we go outdoors and stand out there for a little bit. You know. Yeah, man, I'll be hearing about it. I'll get a phone call tomorrow, somebody be spreading it. By the time it gets back to me, ain't no telling what might happen.

Gossip is a significant consideration when a rural woman thinks about seeking help or reporting her abuse:

> They don't want anybody to know what's going on. Therefore, if it occurs, they won't say anything about it. They may be so fearful of somebody else knowing what's going on in their house. [They] may have a black eye, may cover it up and stay in the house for three or four days; start wearing heavy makeup to cover it up, or start making excuses because they don't want everybody to know, because gossip is terrible in this town. I've had people visit me in my house and people within 30 or 40 minutes will come by or call me and say, "Who was that at your house?"

He concluded that gossip prevents women from asking for help: "Because they don't want people to know—as we say, 'know my business.'"

> People don't offer to help. I mean, they talk about it, but they don't say, "Hey, let me help you." [They say] "He whupped her," stuff like that. But not, "Let me help you out of that situation." But again, gossip.

A person who helps a victim will also be the topic of gossip. He laughed, "If not gossiping herself." I'm just telling you the truth. If not *doing* the gossiping, she will be gossiped *about*." Gossip is an innate part of the fabric and texture of a small town, Pastor Burrell explained. "Town gossip has been down through the years, trickled from generation to generation."

According to Pastor Burrell's experience, domestic violence is not an important issue in the lives of residents of the Black neighborhood. This observation may result from the reluctance of the victims to talk about their problems, to seek help from others in the community, or to report violent incidents to the police. In his views, the police are prejudiced against the Black neighborhoods and base their police actions on racial stereotypes and drug activities.

The System and Stereotypes: African American Women's Stories

"African American women appear to be at multiple jeopardy for experiencing violence in their lives" (Campbell & Gary, 1998, p. 229).

> There was a girl and she had worked with me. She would come to work and she would be like, "We got into it last night." But it was always funny to her. Every morning. Then the next day she would come, and she would say, "Girl, he was just tripping last night."
>
> Her friend, the other girl that worked with us, she said when she would go over there, they would be downstairs talking, and the man would be throwing stuff all downstairs and everything. But she was like, "Oh, Girl, I'm used to this." She was like, "Girl, what are you going to do? We do this every day."
>
> Then she didn't come [to work] one day; so we was all like, "What's going on?" Then the one girl who stayed down the street from her said, "I saw all these policemen and the fire trucks at her house." I was like, "You didn't go down to check on her?" She was like, "No."
>
> So we never did find anything about her until like—well, we called her house and her husband was like, "She won't be there," and just hung up the phone. So we was like, "What's going on?"
>
> Plus, she had her baby, wasn't but like 18 months at the time. So then when she did finally call, she was in jail. What happened was he had jumped on her. They had called the police, but you know what they did when they got there? They ran both their names through and saw which one had tickets and took *her* to jail! And she had to sit in jail, and even though he beat her, he kept the child. As a matter of fact, he took the child and left. She didn't see her baby no more; she was sitting in jail and when she got out she didn't have nowhere to go. But they didn't care. They wanted their ticket paid; they wanted their money off their ticket.
>
> And it was like, "I shouldn't have even called the police. I should have just accepted what he was doing."

The stories from the women's group of the African American church were appalling and graphic examples of why Black women don't call the police when they are abused by their husbands and partners. The woman who told the above story blamed the state's

mandatory arrest policy that states that peace officers must make an arrest whenever probable cause exists that a person has engaged in domestic violence (Texas Commission of Law Enforcement Officer Standards, 2000). Probable cause is interpreted as visible signs of injury, in most cases. "Since the state of Texas has kind of changed the rules—that they'll take one—it's to the point now that they've created a problem. Rather than go to jail, just don't say anything."

Another woman met a similar fate:

> The young lady walked to a friend's house, took her house keys with her, and was on her way back to the house to get in, and then the husband comes out and says, "Well, you left; there's no reason for you to think you need to come back in the house. Just give me the keys." And she refused to give him the keys, and he proceeded to take them; and in the process of him trying to take the keys, she bit him. And the police were called out. And it just so happened that because she bit him in the process of trying to defend herself, she goes to jail.
>
> But that's the way the state of Texas is. Somebody's going. And if you can't prove by any mark or indication that you have been harmed, you're the one that's going regardless of what happened, what took place. You just should have kept your keys to yourself.
>
> This is the situation they're in—why they don't call the police; because it's a possibility that she'll end up in jail; and what defense does a woman really have with the exception of biting? So here you are: "Do I call or do I just stay here? Do I tolerate this for the night? Do I stand being raped and ridiculed through the night? Because if I call the police, and they come, and I've even just scratched him, then I'm the one going to jail. What happens to my children?"
>
> Yeah, [and then] you show up for a hearing and then it depends. They slap some kind of fine on you and put you on probation; and then you have to walk a chalk line to try to keep from having this happen again. But you're still with this man; no one's been removed from the home. You continue to be downtrodden the way this is happening.

Shepherd and Pence (1999) also reported, "Thousands of women in the United States have been charged with assault when they have fought back against an abuser" (p. 7).

Re-victimization of the victim is mentioned frequently in the literature of the 1970s and 1980s. Schechter (1982), in her review of journal articles, found there was a "growing body of sociological, psychological, and criminology literature focusing on the woman's participation in her own victimization" (p. 23). The thinking was that women provoked the violent reactions of their partners. In addition, battered women reported in the 1970's that the police did very little to help the victim and often made the situation worse by "trivializing her injuries," threatening to arrest the woman, or telling the woman to leave because it was the husband's house (Schechter, 1982, p. 25). Schechter (1982) also found that minority women were treated badly. "For women of color and poor women, sometimes even severe injuries were met with indifference, if the police bothered to arrive at all" (p. 25). As I listened to the stories of the participants in this study, it was apparent to me that the attitudes and response of police to domestic violence calls of 20 years ago described what is happening in Oak Tree County in the year 2002.

The attitude of some police officers, the women agreed, was to make an arrest and get away from the scene as soon as possible:

> So you really have a situation where it's not just fear of [the battering], it's fear of actually being caught to the point to where, "Oh, I'm going to get rest all right if I call, cause they'll take me to jail." And then you get out the next day, and then you going through the same thing again. So, I mean, you wasting your time with calling them.

Others felt that police officers gave low priority to domestic disturbances, sometimes never responding to a call. "As far as police protection, the only time the police are actually on the west side of Akern is when there are drugs involved." Another agreed. "If they think they're going to make a drug bust, or if they think somebody's

caught up in drugs, then they'll patrol the area. Otherwise, they don't have any use to come to the west side of Akern." One woman told her sister's story:

> She lived in a physical relationship; I mean, they would fight every weekend. We would try to tell her, "You need to stay away from him." "No, he just loves me," blah, blah, blah. Well, it came down to the point where he killed the baby. He killed the baby and then he tossed the baby in a ditch. And they found the baby, and she was so—I don't know how to put it—she was so afraid of him that she said, "Well, the baby deserved it."
>
> So she ended up losing all her kids—the state wouldn't let her have any of her kids because of this kind of abuse. And then the "system" only stepped in when the baby got killed. They couldn't step in before this child even got killed.
>
> Seems like they ought to come up with something where if you know this person is endangering their life and their kids' lives, you can remove them from that situation. There's nothing to stop that. It happens every day. We all feel a part of it.

The women had more to say about the System, in this case, battered women's shelters. "The system tells them, 'Well, we've got a place for you to be. You don't have to put up with that.' Well, when the next day comes, what's the System doing for them?" One woman spoke from her shelter experience. She complained about the limits on length of stay allowed in the shelter. She felt "It's good for them to get out, but not emotionally, because they're going to end up being hurt all over again." She said, "The pain is gone one night, but the next morning, it's right back, because the System just slaps them right in the face. They say they care, but they don't care." According to Campbell & Gary (1998) African American women may choose to turn to family and friends rather than a shelter located in an unfamiliar city. A long tradition of extended families can influence the woman's decision to go to a shelter. Unfortunately, family and friends may not be able to objectively provide the battered woman with available

alternatives (pp. 235, 238). The participants felt women need help in developing job skills, help in getting a safe and affordable place to live, medical insurance and health care for their children, and financial child support from the fathers or the state. "The wage in Oak Tree County is just unreal. With the exception that everyone in this room that has a job works out of Oak Tree County for that reason."

They bemoaned the lack of services available to them. "They (victims) need a place where they can go to somebody and trust somebody and talk to them where you know there ain't nobody else going to discuss it or that somebody else is going to know." Even when the police come, there's no assurance the violence will stop. "After a while the police are gonna get tired of coming out." And after you call the police once, "You're labeled."

The participants said victims "need someone they can talk to, someone they can trust, and a safe place that they can go to." However, it was pointed out, many times their families and friends do not welcome them. What does the typical battered Black woman then do?

> Most of the time they suffer through it. Because it's better than nothing. As to the System, when you're talking about spousal abuse, ...the System abuses more than anything. Because the System feels that first of all, if you're Black, you've got two strikes. First of all, you're Black, and then you're a female. So that's two strikes against you already. They're going to say, "Well, that's just a Black female. We're not going to worry about that."

Another participant added, "She probably brought it on her own self." Another agreed, "Or they going to say, 'Whose name is on the lease?' I've been there, done that." A different participant said, "If his name's on the lease, and he's taking responsibility [for the rent], then she's left out in the cold." Others added that if both names are on the lease,

the police generally do nothing. These statements led to an excited exchange of comments as the participants talked about law enforcement:

> Or they'll say, "Well, can you come in the morning?" Not right then, but "Can you come in the morning and file a restraining order?"
>
> Most of the time that's what it is. Most of the time, like with the police working like they do here, they would be dead and almost on the way to the funeral before they even recognized it.
>
> And the law had done messed its own self up, because they will not even help you unless you walking in there with your face half cut off.
>
> And they still gonna look at you crazy.
>
> And they gonna say, "Well, which one is hurt the worst?" And if you're cut there and he's cut here, it all depends on if his is more life threatening than hers. If your face is cut, and he's cut down here, who do you think's gonna win?
>
> And even another instance, speaking of the System. I've been told by a reliable source that the city's even told them there's no reason to even consider going to the west side of town to even clean it up. "Don't even bother to go on that side of town." But yet, we pay taxes.

The group participants suggested the victim should be wary of help from friends. "Because, you know, somebody might say that they are their friends, but then they're going out telling people their business." Once again, the topic of gossip became central to our discussion. The fear of gossip prevents many women from seeking as well as accepting help. "As small as Akern is, you can't help but hear it." Discussing the possibility of an advocacy group working with victims, the participants pointed out what they considered weaknesses in the project. "A lot of people aren't going to open up to just anybody. And there're a lot of Black people that's not going to open up to a lot of White people, or even other Black people." The police aren't above gossiping about their calls. "If I'm going to get beat up and the police comes out, then they'll go back and blurt

it out at the station, and then the station blurt it out to somebody else, and it goes back on the street."

One woman said even the abuser will gossip. "Everybody wants to hear gossip, but nobody knows what goes in that house but you and [the abuser]." However, when you call the police, they ask a lot of questions. "I shouldn't have to come out here and tell you everything I did and what I did, because you know what? The person that's done did all the wrong is the one that's going to be doing all the talking." The abuser gossips in order to gain an advantage with the police, with his friends, and with the neighbors. "I've noticed that people always would rather believe a lie than the truth," she said.

The participants in the women's group had plenty to say about what they feel are the causes of domestic violence. Self-esteem and low income were two issues. "In Oak Tree County, the biggest problem is men have gotten to the point where the women have allowed them to sit and do nothing. They (the women) go on the $6 an hour job and they come back and they give that man their paycheck:"

> They're literally taking care of them for whatever reason. There's no self-esteem, the children are being hurt, the mothers are being hurt through this—because they're totally afraid. It's either, "You give it to me, or there's going to be trouble."

Another participant disagreed:

> I don't really think it's Black women who are so low in self-esteem. Our problem is our children. We don't really think about us. Even in a relationship like that, you say, "Well, look, I don't mind going out there not having nothing. But the child is used to this, and I don't want my child not to have that."

The women agreed that the battered woman more than likely chooses to stay

with her abuser because of the children, the food and clothing, the roof over her head, and the insurance for the children. On the other hand, what motivates the woman to leave is to finally realize the harm being done to the children as witnesses to the violence against her. As one woman pointed out, "It's a Catch 22." The children suffer if they stay, and the children suffer if they leave.

One informant suggested, "There's bearable abuse and then there's unbearable abuse. Most of the time when it's emotion and stuff, you don't hear it no way." Of course, she adds, "If you're depending on them [for financial support], you're going to take anything you have to take to stay there." That is why employment is necessary for the battered woman, not only for self-esteem but also for a means of escape. "They've got to be able to take care of themselves. A job where they can support themselves and their kids."

Most of the women felt a responsibility to teach their children not to be violent:

> [We need to] teach our sons that hitting, slapping, beating, biting, kicking, is not the answer. Because you're going to come out of a family like that and then your kids are going to be like that, and it's just like tradition. A kid will just take it on and on and on. And what do we have? It's got to end somewhere; but we have to teach them.
>
> The way kids are now, there is no instruction at home, and there is no "Don't slap Mama around."
>
> "Well, it seemed like Mama enjoyed it, so when I get married, I'm going to slap my wife around and she might enjoy it."

Why would the son think his mother enjoyed the beatings? "Because she stayed. Because next month she's laughing and kissing her husband, and they think that's all right. The women tell their children, 'Well, daddy hit me because he loves me.'"

Research reveals there is a tendency to "implicate the victims of the abuse as well as, or rather than, the offenders" (Finkelhor, 1983, p. 22). Gelles (1979) said the relationship between exposure to violence as children and acts of violence as adults "is that the experience with violence as a victim and observer teaches the individual how to be violent and also to approve of the use of violence" (p. 101). The participants agreed that both their boys and girls needed to be taught appropriate ways to express love and non-violent ways to solve relationship problems.

> But the good thing would be if there was a way to get to the bottom of the anxiety. If there was a way to see why the violence, why the male feels that this is the answer, or he feels that this is the way that you solve the problem. And nine times out of ten, it's because that was the kind of home they came out of. They tend to emulate what they've seen.

The group's opinions and views differed in many ways from Pastor Burrell's perspective on domestic violence in the Black community. They were in agreement about police officers' slow and disinterested response to battered women, but they also explained why women frequently chose not to involve the police. They complained about insufficient and ineffective support from the System. The participants indicated some understanding of factors of domestic violence, such as low self-esteem, low or no income and jobs, childhood experiences in abusive families, and lack of resources in the community. Gossip was implicated as a factor in women's decisions to not ask for help from friends and acquaintances, to not call the police, and to refuse offers of help from others in the community.

Silencio: Rosa's Story

Rosa's story illustrates the difficulty that many Hispanic women have in dealing with abusive husbands. Besides dealing with prejudice, there are also problems associated with low education, low income, and a cultural acceptance of male dominance. Although Rosa, now 51, was born and raised in Oak Tree County, she is not fluent in English. This causes difficulty in dealing with service providers such as doctors, police, or other agencies. She relies on her four daughters, three of whom are independent now, to guide her and to interpret for her when necessary. "There are few studies that examine domestic violence in the context of specific ethnic groups," according to Loue, (2001, p. 18). There are few that examine the Hispanic victim in the rural context and even fewer that address the compounding of the problem of domestic abuse when literacy levels are low or English is not the victim's primary language.

Our conversation was somewhat difficult because of limits in Rosa's English vocabulary, but her frustration and pain were just as evident as the other victims. Rosa's story illustrates the disadvantages of a minority culture, when a woman victim from the older generation must live in the altered culture of a newer generation. There are things Rosa cannot do for herself because, in her experience, women don't do those things. This "emphasis on patriarchy and maleness, and the concomitant devaluation of women" (Loue, 2001, p. 39) is evident in its impact on women victims of domestic violence. When she relies on her daughters, she finds it difficult to support their actions even though what they say and do may help her. Essentially, she has left the problem of the

husband to be handled by their daughters. Rosa's is an example of a woman silenced: silenced by her culture, her language, her abusive husband, and her community.

"Hispanics have less education on average than whites," and fewer Hispanic wives work out of the home (Torres, 1998, p. 261). The daughter of migrant workers, Rosa did not enter school until she was 14. By the time she was in the third grade, she had caught the eye of Victor, a ninth-grader who was nearing the age of 20. She dropped out of school before she learned to read and write and was married at 18. She says her father was against the marriage because Victor drank too much, but she felt she loved him. He was "a pretty good husband" when they were first married, and he had a good job at the railroad. Now? "Like right now, I don't feel nothing for him. I don't. I might feel sorry for him."

Victor's drinking and abuse began when he was injured on his railroad job in 1991. Some kind of water tank fell on his back and neck, causing an injury that prevented him from working. He began drawing disability pay and apparently received a large sum of money as settlement for his injuries. Rosa does not know how much he gets each month nor did he ever tell her the amount of the settlement. In fact, the only money she ever gets is in payment for babysitting her nephew every day. The oldest daughter "always help me. When I need something and I don't got it, she give it to me because I take care of her kids." She occasionally goes home to cook dinner for her daughters, who live near her and Victor's home. Then she sleeps at her daughter's house, where she is picked up early every morning and taken to her nephew's to babysit.

There was only one time that the police were involved in an abusive incident. There was arguing, "and then he slapped me in the face." Irma, her daughter, "run in between me and him, and he was going to hit her with the phone." Irma stood up to her father. "Hit me; I ain't scared of you, Daddy." Inexplicably, Victor dialed 9-1-1, perhaps as a threat to report Irma for interfering in his argument with her mother. Although he did not speak to anyone on the phone, apparently the 9-1-1 Operator heard him "yelling and slapping" and dispatched a police officer. "And then they came, and the cops told [asked] me what happened, and I told them nothing. He told me, 'Ma'am, don't tell me; I can tell your face. You got a mark.'"

Victor was arrested and spent the night in jail. Rosa knew he went to court and had to pay a fine—of $200, she heard from someone. The policeman had tried to get Rosa to go to the station the next day to give a statement but she refused. "The cop told me to go in the morning, do whatever I had to do to go, but I didn't go because I didn't want him [Victor] to complain." Irma urged her to go. "My daughter said, 'Go, Mama, go. You need to go, so Daddy can learn.' But I didn't want to go." To go through the whole legal system must have been unthinkable to Rosa, whose understanding of the legal process is very limited. In addition, her inability to read and write and speak English fluently—as well as the accompanying shame of her illiteracy—served to prevent her participation in the system.

Victor drinks every day, starting in the morning. "He don't drink water. Instead of water, that's all he drinks—beer. He just go to the park and park over there and stay for hours." She was concerned that he drinks and drives and may hurt himself or someone

someday. In fact, he had several seizures at home and was hospitalized for a few days. When he got out he refused to take his prescribed medications. But he stopped drinking for almost a year. During that year things were very different. "He have time for everything. He used to have the yard clean, he used to do a lot of things: worry about the kids, go pick them up from school, and all that. But now he don't worry about nothing." She paused and then said, "I used to hope that one day he would change and be the same way like we was before, but that's never going to change"

Another time he was hospitalized but signed himself out before being discharged. The daughters, concerned about his health, persuaded him to return, but the doctor refused to readmit him. Instead, he was referred to the hospital in Wakefield. Lucia, another daughter, threatened him, "If you don't go, I'm going to take you or I'm going to call the cops." They told him the police were looking for him because he had left the hospital too soon. Eventually they got him to the hospital in Wakefield. A week later, when he got home, he "was shaking and he needed a beer." That time he experienced delirium tremens; "he was seeing and killing bugs."

Rosa confided that once she fought back:

> He was coming after me like he was going to hit me, so I pushed him. He almost fell, and I said, "I ain't scared of you no more." I used to be, but not no more. And one time we were arguing and he was—I was washing dishes and he was coming after me like he was going to hit me or something. So I was washing dishes—and I know I shouldn't do that, [but] I pulled a knife on him. He went back and I say, "I hope that never happen no more." I got scared. I know he got scared.
>
> I told him, "I ain't scared no more." And sometimes he argues with me; he tells me "Come on outside so I can whip your ass." And I tell him, "I ain't crazy. I'm not stupid. You can go outside if you want to, but I ain't going outside."

Once when the children were younger, Victor had an affair with a friend of the older daughters. How did the affair end? "I think she left town, because Lucia and Maria beat her up." Years later, when Victor received his settlement, Rosa suspected he had other women. "Sometimes he came home and sometimes he didn't come home. That's when I started don't feel nothing for him." When he made overtures toward her and tried to apologize, "I just tell him that it's too late for that; because you're the one who brought it, not me." She said, "When I think about that, it makes me angry and I can't forget it." She said they have not slept together for years. "He always say, 'I sleep like a dog in here.'" She explained that he was sleeping on the sofa and she slept in the bed. "I told him, 'Well, you're the one. It's your fault to go and [get involved with a girl].'"

Rosa wants help. She wants to be able to stay in her own home, quietly and peacefully. Who can help her? "I could go talk to the Father, but I didn't want people to know—know the way I'm living. A lot of people—almost everybody here in Akern know me." Rosa's fear is another example of gossip preventing a woman asking for help. Although she conceded that many people know something about her abusive marriage, she did not want anyone to know the details. "Sometimes I want to do it, but at the same time I back out." However, the depth of her frustration led Rosa to request her sister-in-law to ask me for an interview in the hopes that I could offer some help. She gave me permission to confer with the district attorney's crime victims' assistance coordinator about her plight. The coordinator promised to call Rosa and provide assistance. However, when I followed up, I found that the coordinator only suggested Rosa call the state's legal assistance hotline and ask about a divorce. Rosa does not want a divorce.

She wants to be left alone and to be able to stay in her own home. A few weeks later, after the advocacy group had been trained, Rosa gave me permission to give her phone number to a Spanish-speaking advocate, who is now working with her. They are attempting to use the legal system to hospitalize Victor or to get a protective order that will allow Rosa to go back home.

Rosa has no aspirations to go to school to learn to read. "I tried one time to go, but the main thing, I'm too old. I think I'm never going to learn. That's what I think." She believes that Victor will never change. "Because he's already used to arguing for anything. Sometimes you don't got no reason to fight, and he argues." Victor received two letters recently from the doctors. He has spots on his lungs, but he refused to go. He has liver problems, seizures, and some kind of body rash that needs "light treatments." Rosa repeated, "I want to be in my house, relax, and do what I want to do." Rosa whispered, "I hope the Lord God will take him."

Rosa's culture seals her lips and prevents her from asking for help. Her voice is silenced because she fears to ask for help from the church or others. When she breaks through the silence and does ask for help, she gets "referred" to a distant state agency. She cannot read or write or drive a car. Victor does not accept advice or suggestions from her. Her daughters' attempts to intervene are fruitless. The violence continues, and she is virtually barred from her own home. For Rosa, the victimization continues.

Barriers and Beliefs: Alma's Story

Alma retired recently after 33 years as a teacher in the Akern school district, the first Hispanic hired by the Akern school board. She now works as director of religious

education and the life teen program at the Catholic church which most of the area's Hispanic residents attend. Their church burned down several years ago, and Akern's only other Catholic church absorbed the parishioners. Alma shared her perspective on domestic violence and the Hispanic culture. The isolation of rural Hispanic families is a factor in providing service to that group. Low income, language, and discrimination also impact the help sought by or provided to Hispanic women who are in abusive relationships.

Alma believed verbal abuse was the most common abuse among Hispanic couples:

> It's just a different way of thinking of what women should be doing. [The men] are more of the macho type. [They say], "This is where you belong," "This is what you should be doing," or "I'm the boss."

Another example was a woman who complained to Alma that her husband wanted more children. "They have so many children, and she didn't want to have anymore children. But he said, 'Well, you're going to have the kids that I want you to have. No birth control, no nothing.'" Alma said the husband would not allow the wife to work. "I'm the man of the house and you're going to do what I say." Alma said that attitude is part of their cultural family values, but she sees some changes. "We're getting away from that more and more as we go. Some women are getting educated and they're getting more independent." According to Torres, (1998), the Mexican American population is the youngest group in the United States, but they tend to have larger families than non-Hispanic groups, consisting of not only more children, but also extended family (p. 261).

Low education and job skills are factors which work to keep the victimized woman with her partner. Alma said couples fight, the woman may leave, but she always comes back. She said, "My people, a lot of them, don't have high school diplomas. They don't have an education like they need to get a good job." Most of their jobs are in cafeterias, restaurants, or factories, or in seasonal migrant work. This view is corroborated by research. Torres (1998) said Hispanic males and females are most often confined to relatively low-paying jobs and have less education on average than Whites (pp. 260-261). Very few Hispanics have white-collar jobs. Many Hispanic men work on the farms and the families live on the farms and ranches outside of town, and they infrequently come into town. Alma said, "Some of them are a bit braver in coming out and working in the factories—the factories that will take them. But some factories get checked [for illegal, undocumented workers] ever so often."

In thinking about the causes of domestic violence, Alma mentioned generational factors. "It's kind of like a cycle. The kids see it, they want to do it, too." When she was teaching, she realized many children were affected by violence in their homes. "They're angry at the whole world, and they are problem children in school. And sometimes they're even being abused, too. If their mother gets abused, the child gets abused." She told about one woman who grew up to have several husbands and partners as had her mother. She and her mother both are verbally abusive to their husbands. Alma mentioned education again as a factor. "In Mexico, they don't emphasize education that much for women. She's just supposed to stay home with the kids. But even the people from here, there are very few girls that graduate. They get pregnant. Most teens desire

only to get married, and pregnancy is a natural consequence of that desire. She recognized that teens need to be educated about the risks of early marriage, and she'd like to have some kind of teen program offered by her church.

How do women cope with violent relationships? "They just suffer through the whole thing. It's just the way it is. They tough it out." She does know of some who have left their husbands, but most women just stay. "It seems like the men abuse their wives or partners, and then the next day, it seems like nothing happened. I guess that's why women keep coming back; because the men make them believe this isn't going to happen again."

Alma was not aware of any social programs or agencies that provide services to abused women. Most of the people she knows "just go to relatives or friends for help. I mean, I've never heard of anybody coming to Father Craig, the pastor, for help." She assumed neighbors of abusive families are supportive, "but not to the extent that they will go and turn it in. They don't want to get involved that deep." She herself has asked her husband's sister (Rosa) to come stay with her in order to get away from her alcoholic, abusive husband:

> Her husband verbally abuses her all the time. He's constantly drinking, everyday from morning to night. He gets up real early in the morning and takes his quart with him, driving around the car real slow and all over town. And he abuses her, and then the kids now abuse their mother. The girls, the children. They're all teenagers and they do what Dad does. I even asked her one time to come and stay with me to get away from them, and she won't.

Alma revealed that her husband echoes what many people feel about battered women who find it difficult to leave the abusive situation. "It's her fault," he said. "Because we've told her to come stay with us to get away." Another time Alma's

husband said of his sister, "I don't know what's wrong with her. We tell her to leave him and all these years, and she still hasn't left him." Alma and Rosa each have been married 34 years.

> Rosa came to me crying one day, and she said, "I can't stand it anymore." And she went on and told me what the girls had done—her daughters had done to her, and she said, "And they don't appreciate me, and they tell me I don't help them out." And I told her why don't she come stay with me and leave them alone so they can find out that they need you. She said, "But I can't, because of the younger one." And she was talking about the little one. Actually it's not hers, it's a grandchild that she keeps. One of her daughters got divorced and the custody was given to the father. And the father, who is her [ex-] son-in-law, brings the little girl to stay with her while he goes to work. And she babysits for my son who lives next door, and her husband won't even bring her to work. My son or my daughter-in-law has to go get her to come to work.

Alma described an anonymous phone call she received about a year ago. It was from a woman who lived in the countryside:

> She said, "You don't know me, but somebody referred me to you. They told me that maybe you could help me." She said, "I don't want my husband to know that I'm calling you." And she told me about how she was being abused. She said that her husband wouldn't let her get out of the house. She said she can't go anywhere without him going with her. And he didn't let her go with her friends or let her visit. He didn't like to let her call on the phone. So, she was a very sheltered-type person.
>
> And I said, "Well, if you don't want your husband to know, would you meet me at a certain place?" I told her where she could meet me so that nobody would know. She said, "I don't want nobody to see me." So I said, "Okay, how about if we meet here; nobody should know you there." So she said, "Okay, I'll have to call you back." And she hung up and she never called back. So probably, I don't know, maybe somebody came in while she was talking. She didn't give me her last name. And I could tell she was very scared when she called. She said, "Can you help me" And I said, "What's the matter, who are you?" And she told me her first name. She said, "I can't talk on the phone too long. This lady gave me your name and told me to call you; you might be able to help."

Alma believes there are many women who live in the county outside the towns and who need help but have no way to get it.

Alma brought up the topic of prejudice. "I know there is a lot of discrimination and prejudice here in this town. I think a lot of this stuff [abuse] that goes on probably goes on because the women are afraid to go to the police." She thought the women were afraid the police wouldn't listen to them or believe them. "And sometimes people just believe a certain thing—Hispanics do this type thing, Blacks do this type thing, and they believe those things." That is why Hispanic victims do not expect to be taken seriously when they complain to the police. "I've been here around 37 years, and it's come a long ways, but it still has quite a bit to go."

Language barriers, poverty and high unemployment, a higher than average school dropout rate, cultural attitudes toward marriage and relationships, men who control through violence, and a lack of services and resources are illustrated in Alma's story. All these factors have the potential to create stress-producing situations (Torres, 1998, p. 262) that exacerbate the presence of partner abuse. These factors are powerful forces of social control that increase the isolation of Hispanic women in rural areas.

A Chance Encounter: My Story

I arrived early at the rural health clinic for a 1:00 p.m. appointment. It was cold and windy so I sat in my car with the heater running, waiting for the staff to unlock the doors after their lunch break. My attention was drawn to a large white van that slowly drove through the parking lot, paused at the corner, then continued going out of the lot. A few minutes later, the van returned, pulled up at the corner of the building, and a woman got out. The van left.

Thinking the doors must now be unlocked and the woman had already gone in, I gathered my bags together, drew my scarf around my neck, and got out of the car. When I climbed the stairs to the building's entrance, I found the woman standing there. Obviously the place was still locked. The entrance was at the corner of the building and it formed a perfect passage for the icy wind to whip past the doors. We drew closer, smiling and silently acknowledging our shared predicament. She shivered in a gray raincoat and purple headscarf. "I didn't dress for the weather," she suddenly said. She showed me that she had on a short-sleeved summer dress beneath the raincoat. I heard her accent and realized she was Hispanic.

"I have pressure in my ear. It's making me nervous, very nervous," she confided. I believe she thought I was a nurse or doctor. "Can pressure in my head make me nervous?" she asked.

"How long have you had the pressure?" I asked, avoiding her question.

"Two weeks." She paused. "I was going to kill myself." Stunned, I watched her decide to continue. "I need counseling—do you know--?"

"As a matter of fact, I *am* a counselor, but I don't know any others in town," I answered.

"Are you gonna be here?" Did she think I was reporting to work at the clinic?

"No, I just have an appointment with somebody." The wind felt colder.

"My husband just dropped me off and left. I should've stayed in the car. He just left me." I, too, was thinking about returning to my warm car. Could I just leave her there in the cold? "I need counseling," she repeated.

Thinking I needed to explain my presence at the clinic, I said, "I'm doing research on domestic violence, that's why I'm here. I'm going to talk to somebody about wife abuse." Then, without thinking, I blurted out, "Are you being hurt by your husband?"

"No." She paused. "He says I'm...grumpy, yell at him. I need counseling."

My suspicions aroused, I ask carefully, "Does your husband need counseling, too?"

She considered. "No, he don't need counseling. He complains. I...no sex with him. I'm grouchy. He tells me I am a bad wife. I don't do nothing in the house." She pressed her hands to the sides of her head. "There's pressure in my ear. Can pressure in your head make you kill yourself?"

"I don't know," I answered, feeling helpless. "You must be sure to tell the doctor about it." Suddenly, I turned and banged on the door. It was two minutes past one o'clock. Open the damned door, I muttered to myself.

When I left the clinic at 2:30, the woman was still sitting in the waiting area, hoping to be "worked in" because she had had no appointment. She sat with her raincoat drawn tightly around her body, purple headscarf tied under her chin, staring at the floor. She looked defenseless and alone. She looked up when she saw me come out. "Are you gonna be here?" She asked, with what seemed to me to be hope.

"No, I'm just visiting," I replied. I continued walking to the door. "Hope you feel better soon."

As I sat in my car, waiting for the heater to warm up, I pondered the different paths this encounter could have taken. As a counselor used to helping women deal with life's tragedies, I was drawn to her pain and need. As a researcher I was sure she was an abused wife and had a story to tell. For half a second, I had had the crazy notion of taking her to my car, turning on the tape recorder, and conducting an interview then and there. I did none of these, of course. What I did was to tell Betty, my interviewee, that the woman had spoken to me about suicide, and I asked her to give that information to the doctor. She looked at me, startled. I saw that my words had gotten through her public "façade," but I left with a disquieting feeling that she might not pass on that information to the physician or nurse.

This encounter has haunted me for many months. It is the perfect rebuttal to those people who argue that women won't talk about their abuse. It corroborates the assertion that many women seek medical help for ailments not directly related to their abuse and are often not identified as victims of domestic violence by their healthcare providers (Little, 2000, pp.1, 6). Walker (1979) found that battered women "are often seen by their doctors for a variety of minor physiological ailments. Battered women often complain of fatigue, backaches, headaches, general restlessness, and inability to sleep. Psychological complaints are, frequently, depression and anxiety" (p. 35). This encounter and interview also confirm that many women themselves still do not recognize that they are victims of abuse by their husbands. It was a cogent example of the existence of domestic violence in rural communities.

Deaf and Blind: Betty's Story

This incident preceded my appointment with Betty, presently office manager of the rural health clinic and a former nurse in the emergency room of the small hospital across the street from the clinic. She explained the clinic exists in a designated "healthcare shortage area," because there are only two doctors and two physician's assistants in the town. One doctor practices at the health clinic and the other is at the hospital. Most people who have transportation go to Wakefield for serious illnesses.

In response to an increasing awareness of intimate abuse and a growing acknowledgement that many victims are seen first by medical providers, "Large numbers of health care providers have recently developed screening protocols to detect intimate partner violence" among its patients (Loue, 2001, p. 87). Keeping in mind the disturbing encounter with the woman outside, I asked what sort of screening was done for domestic violence. Do they have a form that asks if the patient is a victim of abuse? Betty was pretty sure their forms did not. She picked up a patient's file and shuffled through the papers in it. "Oh, here is something. It says, 'Have you experienced episodes of violent behavior?'" She went on, "Usually it's up to the patient when they come in and they talk with our doctor, or they talk with our physician's assistants at that point. Then they will open up and they'll tell them what's going on."

I recalled asking about disclosure in a conversation with another nurse in Parkstone. She had thought there was "a questionnaire that they [patients] fill out when they come in," but she did not think many people would check that box or that the doctor would ordinarily ask about abuse. "As busy as they are, to just say, 'Is there any abuse

going on in the family?' I don't know that he [the doctor] would do that." As a matter of fact, Loue (2001) said, "The extent to which any of these tools [screening protocols] can detect partner violence among either non-English speakers or specific immigrant groups with differing values remains unclear and uninvestigated" (p. 87).

Betty said that if a patient needed "help," she would be referred "downtown," but she couldn't remember the name of the agency. "There is an agency downtown that sees people that are having problems, mental, and everything else." After some discussion, she thought perhaps it was the local branch of MHMR (Mental Health Mental Retardation system). She thought the place offered "a lot of counseling." She added, "Some people will get referred, you know, if they're having problems; we refer them to counselors in Wakefield." I realized that Betty equated domestic violence problems with mental illness. This is not an uncommon assumption. Many health care providers often fail to recognize that symptoms may be the result of emotional abuse (Loue, 2001, p. 112). Betty then remembered that there is a Medicare/Medicaid bus that takes patients twice a week to doctors and hospitals in Wakefield if they can afford the fare.

"Health care providers have often been found to be the least helpful of all professionals in assisting individuals who have been battered" (Loue, 2001, p. 83). Betty told about her previous job working at the hospital in the emergency room. "I know from over there that there was episodes that would come and everything. But to get the women to go for help is—that didn't happen." She said the women were afraid of retaliation from the spouse or the boyfriend. She gave an example:

> I don't know specifics, I just knew there were some that came in, and they were scared. One lady I can remember had family out of state and she moved. Just

> boom, left. She moved out in the middle of the night and everything. Her brother worked for the FBI. He knew what was going on, and so she knew there would be retaliation from the husband. So she was moved out in the middle of the night. He found out about it much later, that she was gone and why.

> We worked with the lady and never knew this [abuse] was going on in the home. And she had called her brother and told him and everything, and he came with friends, or agents, in the middle of the night and moved her out.

Not knowing about the woman's abusive marriage caused Betty to comment about gossip and how women hide their abuse:

> They feel it's a social whatever to admit to what's going on in the home. It's a traditional view of what people think that it should be. It's been give to them by their parents, grandparents, and "Oh, no, you don't tell that." That's just, you know, it's kind of human nature for them. They learn to hide it very well.

> In a small community everybody knows everybody so they don't want people to know. And it's going to be very hard to get people to come out.

> I live in a rural community; I don't want to be gossiped about. It starts off this way and it ends up an altogether different story. It grows and grows out of all proportions. I would think that would be hard for some women to come out and say, "Look, I'm being abused." Instead of just doing something about it and just getting up and leaving and going.

Betty said she witnessed the results of physical abuse when she was at the hospital: bruises and black eyes. I asked Betty if the police were ever called when it was determined that domestic violence had occurred. "Oh, yes. They have to. I think that's almost a state law, if I'm not mistaken." She went on to say, "Anytime someone comes in, if the person admits that someone else—if they don't try to say, 'I fell down the steps,' you know. If they will admit, 'Yes, my husband did this.' Okay, we've got to call the police." As a matter of fact, there is not a law requiring medical personnel to report adult

partner abuse, although there are laws requiring reports to be made when child or elder abuse is suspected or identified.

Betty offered some opinions about causes of spouse abuse. She felt financial stress contributes to domestic violence. She pointed out that many rural wives did not work because the family only had one car. Therefore, their income depended on the male. Lack of transportation leads to isolation for the wives, and low income increases family stress.

Betty's view of the police contrasted sharply with the views of others I talked with. When police officers were called to the hospital, she said, "They were very good, very caring, very sensitive to the ladies." She said they offered to take the women to a safe place until their husbands cooled off.

The interview with Betty was difficult for me. I realized she frequently gave me answers she thought would please me. Often her comments were based on nothing more than misinformation or guesses. Her conversation about abused women made me realize how many people there must be in helping positions who have little idea of how to recognize or help battered women. They have distorted views of the dilemmas of abused wives. Websdale (1998) found some service providers not only stigmatize battered women "because they are poor but also implicitly accuse women of being accomplices to their own intimate victimization by lacking the willpower to leave" (p. 167). Betty thought every woman could leave who wanted to leave. Her advice?

> Educate them. They can leave, they can stand on their feet; they do not have to have a man to support them. They can support themselves: good hard work, even if you have to wash dishes and mop floors to earn a living. There's nothing wrong with it. It's honest work. Do it.

She did allow there were few well-paying jobs for women in the county. "Yeah, they would have to leave or go on welfare. And that's something we don't want them to do, is go on welfare." She thought too many people were on welfare, as it is. This is an attitude Websdale (1998) found in his Kentucky study of battered women in shelters. "These social services personnel either do not understand battered women's plight or have little sympathy for welfare recipients" (p. 166).

This is why I am haunted by the memory of that woman outside the clinic: there are too many Bettys who are in positions where they can make a difference for so many women if only they themselves were educated in the complex issues of domestic violence. Betty's prejudices and naïve opinions actually pose a danger for the abuse victims she might meet in the course of her job. Her "advice" and suggestions could lead many victimized women to feel even more misunderstood, even more helpless, and even more entrapped in their abusive relationships.

Summary

The stories in this chapter, while chosen to illustrate particular isolating strands of the web of domestic violence, also serve as a whole to illustrate how complex the problem is in the rural culture of Oak Tree County. Every victim's story had elements of social control by institutions such as the church, the legal system, and the medical profession. Community attitudes that are reminiscent of the attitudes of two decades ago were seen to shape largely the responses of these institutions. The phenomenon of gossip was seen to have a tremendous impact on victims, abusers, and potential helpers. Thirty years ago domestic violence did not have a name, and what is not named does not exist.

The participants' views illustrate that while the problem now has a name in Oak Tree County, it is a problem whose dimensions are little known or understood.

CHAPTER VI

MAJOR THEMES

This chapter presents the six major themes gleaned from analysis of the data collected in this study of domestic violence in Oak Tree County. An examination of the individual stories of participants uncovered recurring strands of social forces that impact and influence the behaviors and beliefs of the battered women, their abusers, and the other residents of the rural communities. When woven together, these strands become an isolating web of social control that entraps battered women in their abusive relationships. The first section presents a discussion of the forms of social control exemplified in non-violent behaviors and attitudes of the community. The second strand, or theme, discusses the controlling effects of gossip on women's decisions to stay or leave a relationship. This is a phenomenon frequently mentioned in the literature when characteristics of rural life are described, but it has not been deemed significant as an important force in analyses of domestic violence in small towns and rural areas until now. I detail the ways that gossip ensnares and isolates battered women from seeking or receiving help. The roles of the church and the law enforcement agencies as inhibiting forces are presented as the next two themes. The traditional and conservative actions and attitudes of these institutions and many residents in the rural community form thematic strands that serve to diminish the power of battered women in Oak Tree County. The last discussion, though not long, details some of the little-known helping agents that have arisen as the result of a few people's perceptions of the needs of victims in the county. It also presents the ways that battered women cope with limited or nonexistent services.

The Role of Social Control

In examining the characteristics of rural life in Oak Tree County and domestic violence, the elements of social control are evident. When Gagne (1992) looked at Raven Ridge in Appalachia, she saw social controlling behaviors of the male partner that were violent and nonviolent. However, she was concerned that by looking at "a continuum of violence rather than of control," the connections between violence and the elements of social control inherent in other activities" would become obscure. (p. 388); therefore, she further categorized these behaviors as nonactive, such as "failing to help with child care or to provide money," and active forms of control, such as isolating the woman from family, a job, or a social life (p. 388). An analysis of the reasons women gave for staying in their abusive relationships reveal these forms of nonviolent social control in Oak Tree County.

Fear of retaliation, even if only tacitly implied, was cited frequently by the battered women as one reason for not leaving their abusive husbands. This fear is a "form of social control exacerbated by the cultural acceptance of male dominance" (Gagne, 1992, p. 392) and the knowledge that her abuser could very well get away with it. One Oak Tree County victim explained:

> I was too scared of him, even. I thought if I tried to leave him that he would cause some serious problems
>
> I always thought he might set the house on fire. He was like that. If I left he might set the house on fire. It was really fear that made me live there.
>
> But then I thought about, well, what if he would steal one of my children? And I didn't know where he was? I would go crazy.

Another participant described a woman she knew who was so "manipulated she did not even know how to run a house, how to write a check, how to do nothing, and all she's been doing is sitting there, her husband done did everything." Apparently the woman was taken to a shelter in an adjoining county where she was expected to make life choices for which she was unprepared and for which she received little guidance. "She don't know how to go nowhere, she don't know how to explain anything." Being kept in ignorance and dependent on the abuser, while not violent behaviors, does constitute a form of social control.

Participants also gave other examples of nonactive and active social control. Lack of money was probably the most cited reason for not leaving. Many women were not allowed to work because of the commonly held belief that a woman's place is in the home taking care of the house and children and husband.

"This is where you belong."

"This is what you should be doing."

"I'm the boss."

"The man is supposed to be the head of the household."

One Hispanic woman complained to a church staff member that her husband insisted she stay home and continue to bear children. "You're going to have the kids I want to have. No birth control, no nothing."

Several women said they stayed with their husbands because they could not get jobs or the jobs did not pay enough to support themselves and their children. "She gets frustrated, you know. Nobody wants to offer you a job, and this man is saying 'I'm the

way out.'" One young woman, with an eight-month-old child and three months pregnant with another, explained, "Here I was making five bucks an hour, and I knew there was no way I could make it financially." Gagne (1992) found gender norms of employment strong in Raven Ridge. "Employment considered suitable for women included clerical, restaurant, and domestic service work" (p. 396). One participant described what women faced:

> Your choices are lead a life of maybe not luxury but where my needs and my children's wants and needs are taken care of and strike out on my own to do what? Be a waitress down at the local Sonic? A carhop? A waitress at the Pizza Hut? There's not much else. So, I think the fact that it's a one-horse town as far as employers go, I think that particular thing does play a factor.
>
> One woman went so far as to get a divorce from the abusive spouse and moved out and moved into one of those little bitty apartments; there was not much on the walls and not much between you and the outside; and she was there about a week, and she went back to the husband, although she was no longer married to him. She put if off on the child. "Well, she missed her daddy."

In another example of non-violent social control, many men found ways to avoid paying child support, which left the mothers trying to live on public assistance. Several women complained that there were limits placed on the amount they could earn when they lived in public housing, which meant they could not earn enough to purchase health insurance for their children and pay rent and utilities. One mother complained that she might be able to do without the coverage for doctors' visits, but she did not have the money to buy needed prescriptions for a chronically ill child. "They be stuck in this trap." That "trap" is social control exerted by the local, state, and federal institutions of government. Other obstacles, often overwhelming, encountered by the women are in the battered women's shelters. They are limited to a short period of residency, from a few days up to 30 days.

during which time they are to see a counselor for partner abuse issues, they are to update or acquire employable skills, they are to find a job that can support their children and which they can reach without a vehicle and with no public transportation, and they are to find a dwelling place that is affordable and near to schools.

Gagne found another important component of non-violent control was in the efforts men made to isolate women from each other, from their families, and from their friends (1992, p. 401). Many Oak Tree County women who live in the outlying areas, such as wives of ranch hands, were confined to the cottages provided as part of their husband's wages. Without a car and without a telephone, their freedom was restricted.

Violence and threats lose a great deal of their effectiveness in a social structure which affords adequate police and court protection to battered women (Gagne, 1992, p. 410). Participants in Akern and Parkstone frequently shared stories about lack of protection or hostile behavior by police. In Oak Tree County, as in Raven Ridge of Gagne's study, and in other places,

> acceptance of a man's authority over his wife and the belief in the sanctity of the home, together with officers' belief that they would be in danger if they responded to domestic violence calls, resulted in the failure of the legal system to provide protection for physically battered women. (Gagne, 1992, p. 411)

One participant whose husband was a policeman described how her husband's fellow officers came to her house to plead with her to return to her husband. Her husband also isolated her from her friends. When on patrol, he would sound his siren, flash his lights, and pull over her friends as they drove around town. She stopped seeing her friends as a way to prevent their harassment. The police chief admitted to her that he had little control over her husband's activities.

This section explored the ways social control is exerted in nonviolent ways in Oak Tree County. As Gagne (1992) says, "Without cultural and structural acceptance of men's dominance over women, the forms of social control would have been less effective. It is not violence alone that controls women" (p. 413). The rural culture also contributes conditions which are favorable to men's perpetuation of dominance and control of their wives and girlfriends. Social control is a community force which is manifested in the behaviors and attitudes of abusers and other residents. A policy of non-involvement on the part of churches and law enforcement and other citizens enables abusers to exert powerful and frightening control over the women in their lives.

The Role of Gossip

Pueblo chico, infierno grande. ("Small town, big hell") (Mexican saying)

> There's an old joke about the woman in church. The preacher gives the invitation, and the lady goes down front, and she says, "Preacher, I just have a bad gossiping problem. I just want to lay my tongue on the altar." And he backs up and says, "Ma'am, it's only 27 feet long, but make the best of it." (Sheriff)

Gossip is considered a form of social control in a number of sociological studies. In fact, Bergmann (1993) says. "The assertion that gossip functions as an important means of control in all primary groups is almost a sociological cliché" (p. 140). The definition of gossip is presented in various forms in the literature: (a) A proposition for belief, passed along from person to person, usually by work of mouth, without standards of evidence being present (Allport & Postman, 1947, p. ix); (b) Small talk about personal affairs and people's activities with or without a known basis in fact (Rosnow & Fine, 1976, p. 131); (c) Relates the good and bad fortune of the great and small people around us (Kapferer, 1990, p. 14); Expresses news about the personal affairs of another; is

morally contaminated information; possesses relevance only for a specific group (Bergmann, 1993, p. 45). Each of these definitions is pertinent to the presence of gossip in the communities of Oak Tree County.

Websdale (1998) stated, "A well-known characteristic of small communities, rural or otherwise, is the pervasive and ubiquitous gossip mill. This was frequently given by abused women as the reason for not seeking help from neighbors, friends, or the local police" (p. 9). However, he discovered as did I, that in conversations "they revealed intimate details of their personal lives. They knew I was not part of the 'gossip circuitry'" (p. 9). The prevalence of gossip in small towns is accepted as a part of rural life. "As small as Akern is, you can't help but hear it." Even the police are not above gossiping One woman said, "You get beat up and the police comes out, then they're going to go back and blurt it out at the station, and then the station blurts it out to somebody else, and it goes back on the street and it gets back to them [the abusers]." Sometimes, people laugh, "You know everybody else's business, but that's okay because they know yours, too." Shared another participant: "That particular community is so ridden by gossip that you cannot make a move without everyone knowing what is going on."

An amusing example of the way gossip spreads in the community was told by Alma, a Hispanic woman who recently retired after 33 years as a teacher in the Akern school district. After applying several times for a teaching job and being turned down, she finally took a low-wage job at the factory. She told about learning that she had been hired by the school system:

> After three tries, I finally got in because it was a new superintendent. And when I did get the job, the rumors started going around, and I found out through the

> grapevine I had a job. It was all over the factories, and that's how I found out. And when the superintendent finally called me and let me know I had a job, I said, "I know. I heard through the grapevine." The people in the factory knew before I did.

"We have some very nosy people around here," agreed practically every participant. "I can sneeze and it's going be all over the county in the five minutes after I sneezed. Something can happen right now in this room and all of this town is gonna know about it." Maddie said that something can happen in Akern and a person could sit on it for ten days. "But then let it leak out and in three days everybody's got it and it's not even the true report." She told me about a young man whom a deputy stopped one evening after dinner. Apparently, as he was driving, his trousers felt a little tight, so he loosened his belt. As he was getting out of the car at the deputy's request, he was observed buttoning his waistband or fastening his belt (the story is not clear on this). However, the story of his arrest quickly made the rounds, and it had been embellished to include the "fact" that he had been arrested for indecent exposure and was wearing nothing but his shirt and shoes when stopped. His reputation was shredded, his children and wife suffered embarrassment and shame, and his job was jeopardized—by gossip. "They don't even have to know what's going on," said Pastor Burrell, "because they will make up something."

He speculated that my visit to him and his church would be a hot topic of gossip after I left. "I guarantee you people are wondering about why a White woman is in here talking to a Black man." It was apparent that the curiosity and talk had started while I was still interviewing him. Shortly after we started the interview, the phone rang, and Pastor Burrell was on the phone a short while to answer a question which he

characterized as being unimportant. About 30 minutes later, we again had to stop while he answered the phone. Before we were through, he had received three calls. Each time, he mentioned he was being interviewed by a woman from Texas A&M. In addition to the phone calls, women dropping off bags of oranges interrupted us at different times. It was nearing Christmas, and the church was planning to give oranges and other gifts to the children in a few days. He reminded each woman that the oranges were supposed to be taken to his wife at their residence up the street from the church, and he introduced me to each of them as a person from Texas A&M who was interviewing him about domestic violence. Finally, just before our interview ended, we were interrupted for the last time. It was his wife.

There are several ways gossip functions as a means of controlling women, especially women who are in abusive relationships. The husband can use gossip to discredit his wife's allegations of abuse and even justify his treatment of her. Sometimes just the threat to gossip about the victim is enough to deter her from seeking help, because she thinks everyone believes her husband's gossip.

In many cases, the battered wife is reluctant to seek help because she fears being the topic of gossip. Her fear of gossip can prevent her from accepting help from others because she believes they are just nosy and will talk about her "business." Family, friends, and neighbors are reluctant to offer help or get involved because they fear becoming part of the gossip about the victim. In many traditional views, it is the wife who is responsible for the success or failure of the marriage, and she works hard to maintain the myth of her peaceful family life (MacLeod, 1980 p 39). Gelles (1979)

found, "Many women we spoke to would never think of calling the police, going to a social work agency, or filing for a divorce because those actions would rupture the carefully nurtured myth of their fine family life" (p. 108). He concluded, "Gossip's controlling aspects could be extremely oppressive when used to reinforce stereotypical expectations of female behavior" (Gelles, 1979, p. 183). As long as the woman is not a topic of gossip, she can maintain the public image of a good wife.

Bergmann (1993) asserted that gossip is a controlling agent when it is used merely as a threat of sanction against a person who is considering deviant behavior. "It preemptively ensures conformative behavior. Thus it may never actually come to gossip. The anxiety that accompanies the knowledge that people can gossip about one is enough to prevent people from acting deviantly" (p. 143). With domestic violence, however, the problem comes in expecting gossip or the threat of gossip to deter the deviant behavior of the *perpetrator* of abuse. In some cases, the victim suffers even more abuse when her husband discovers people are talking about him. He believes she is somehow to blame for the gossip and punishes her, although it is probably the husband's own actions and talk that have caused the gossip. Therefore, it is the victim who takes on the responsibility of preventing gossip about her husband, his abuse, and their relationship. The deviant behavior becomes a description of the *victim's* disclosure of her abuse to others in the community. Catherine was beaten when Rob discovered she had shared with her coworkers ("everybody and the dog") the contents of greeting cards from his girlfriend. Catherine's counseling sessions with her minister escalated Rob's abuse. "He didn't like that I was telling people our problems."

Gagne (1992) described one husband's use of gossip against his wife in her Raven Ridge study: "He undermined her credibility and limited the support she had been receiving from his family" by telling them she was going crazy from lack of hormones after a hysterectomy (p. 403). The husband's tendency to be charming to other people made it easy for those other people to believe the gossip about his wife. Rob also manipulated potential sources of help for Catherine by talking about her to his fellow law enforcement officers who were inclined to believe him on the basis of their friendships.

> He painted me to be this horrible, ugly, nasty trailer-trash bimbo that was worthless and that deserved to be beaten, that deserved to be beat on because I was just scum. I found that throughout the town many people thought that of me, and that excused his behavior in their eyes. He had the whole town duped.

Even her coworkers knew about her abuse. Being the topic of gossip made Catherine a source of ridicule. "There were still others that—for whatever reason—thought it was funny. I had women at work—one of them in particular—'Is your husband beating ya still?' You know: 'Is he still being a jerk to ya?'" Catherine thought everyone believed the gossip about her. She believed that there was no one to help her because no one would think she deserved help. The gossip and the fear of gossip prevented Catherine seeking help. Rob's gossip added to the ridicule and shame she felt. Her isolation was increased as a result of Rob's gossip.

The women in Oak Tree County fear gossip that originates from the police station or the courthouse. Several participants explained:

> Every domestic disturbance gets published in the paper. And they will tell you a domestic disturbance at Route 3, Box such and such. So if you know your way

> around town pretty well, and you know who lives where, you can pretty much figure out who's having a problem.
>
> One of the favorite things, they call it "terroristic threat," and you'll see this published in the paper.
>
> There's a couple of little small-town papers around—Akern has one and Parkstone has one—and they all have these little gossip sections in there. And you'll have domestic violence things in there. They won't exactly spell it out, but you can figure it out.

The fear of gossip, or more accurately, "the fear of the loss of reputation through gossip" (Bergmann, 1993, p. 143), prevents many women from seeking help. Participants had their reasons. For example, Rosa would not talk to the priest. "I could talk to the Father, but I didn't want people to know—know the way I'm living." Catherine spoke about her predicament:

> There were times I realized that I probably needed help, that I needed to stop what was going on between us. But who was I going to call? I wasn't going to call people who were going to see me on the street every day and tell them that these things were going on in my own home.
>
> I'd been told you make your bed, you lie in it. And you don't tell everybody what's going on; you keep it secret. I wasn't going to be able to face people on the street and them know that something had happened. "Your own husband raped you? You know that doesn't happen—you're married."

It would be difficult to ask someone for help. Dawn said:

> I mean you need to stay anonymous. You can't hardly go anywhere in a small town. They can promise you that you can stay anonymous, but then when you see them in the grocery store, you're wondering are they going to say "hi" and act like they know you. And then people are going to start thinking and wondering.
>
> So it's really hard to do. Unless you've reached that point where your resolve is strengthened and you're going to get past it. If you're still where I was at the time, just crumbling—when I needed the help the most I wasn't going to ask for it, because I didn't want everyone to know there was something wrong.

Dawn endured six years of her abusive marriage before she strengthened her resolve to "get past it." In rural areas, she pointed out, "Everybody in town is going to find out. Probably it will get on the radio and in the newspaper, and they're going to say, 'Oh, my gosh! Did you know that so and so?' I think it's (abuse) probably not reported a lot."

Other participants discussed the shame of being the topic of gossip. "They don't want anybody to know what's going on. Therefore, if it occurs, they won't say anything about it." Another way to avoid the gossip is to cover up the bruises or hide in the house for a few days with a black eye. "I don't want anybody to know my business," they explained.

Women pointed out that it is impossible to know whom to trust when deciding whether they should seek help or tell someone. Pastor Burrell told how people think: "Somebody is out there willing to help and get you out of the situation, even take you to their home, but [the fear of gossip] will prevent that because they don't want to share that with anyone." One participant said, "A lot of time they can't go to their families, they can't go to their friends. Because, you know, yeah, somebody might say that they are their friends, but then they're going out telling people their business." They all agree, "Everybody wants to hear a gossip. People would rather believe a lie than the truth."

One of the greatest fears of mothers is the effect of gossip on their children. The sheriff gave an example how the whole family can be hurt by gossip:

> You know when we put Daddy in jail for blackening Mama's eye and Daddy gets out of jail, and then everything kind of settles back down at the house. And then a week goes by. Well, the eighth grade girl—somebody comes to the eighth grade girl in school. It's done made it there, and she hears about her daddy being in jail. Well, she knew it, but now all of her friends know. And then she brings that back into the home because she's distraught because all of her friends are

> saying, "Ha, ha, your daddy went to jail for beating up your mama." Well, that just adds fuel to the fire and makes it that much harder to solve these problems or work these problems out.
>
> People in these smaller towns, that's all they've got to do is talk about this, that, and the other. And they'll talk about everybody but themselves.

Maddie was one of those who chose to stay with her husband because she feared what gossip would do to her children. Unfortunately, "It did affect the children in school. It affected them bad, because they would hear these things." Women try to protect their children.

> Maybe there's three little kids sitting over here, and maybe they haven't been abused; but this woman is willing to take the abuse to keep these kids from losing their home. She's really protecting the children, but a lot of people think she's protecting him.

The sheriff, thinking (mistakenly) the proposed advocacy group would be offering counseling to battered women, saw such a program as a gossip opportunity:

> That's really not going to work real good in a community like this because you're going to have to have a counselor and a secretary, and you're going to have other people working in and around that office; and they say, "You won't see me walking in that door, 'cause they'll know that I've got problems." And people tend to hide their problems.

Several participants remarked on another negative aspect of gossip. The fear of gossip also prevents potential helpers from coming to the aid of a battered woman. Besides being open to retaliatory attacks from the abuser, the helper may decide, according to Catherine, "I really don't need any trouble in my home life." Neighbors don't intervene because they're afraid others in the neighborhood will gossip about *them*. Pastor Burrell said, "Neighbors will talk about it, but they don't say, 'Hey, let us help you

out of that that situation.' But again, gossip." The person who helps another person will become the topic of gossip—"if not *doing* the gossiping, she will be gossiped *about*."

This section has described the ways gossip is a force of control in the lives of battered women. Bergmann (1993) pointed out that gossip as a means of social control possesses validity as long as the people in their everyday life believe in it and guide their actions by it" (p. 144). It is clear that the residents of the communities and rural areas of Oak Tree County believe in the negative power of gossip. Abused women allow their fear of gossip to prevent their seeking help, and potential helpers allow their fear of gossip to prevent their offering help to the battered woman. The abuser uses the threat of gossip to control his wife, and manipulates gossip to prevent his wife from seeking help or leaving him. The use of gossip as a mechanism of social control effectively builds the walls of isolation around the battered woman. It narrows her options and traps her in the web of domestic violence.

The Role of the Church

The church is central in the social structure of the rural communities of Oak Tree County. As I spoke about my interest in organizing a domestic violence task force and training volunteers to advocate for victims, I heard over and over, "Oh, the church would be interested in that." "You should talk to the church." The church's interest in every aspect of community life is an assumption that I encountered from most of the participants. The church members and clergy with whom I discussed the problem of domestic violence and the possibility of interventions and preventions were aware of the presence of partner abuse, although many were not aware of the extent and seriousness

of the problem. I encountered a reluctance of many church representatives to involve themselves in any meaningful way. The church is reluctant to use its presence and prestige in the community in ways that might put its position at some perceived risk. There is a kind of passive or tacit condonation of domestic violence that reflects the attitudes of most in the community.

Religious belief systems and the churches play a significant role in the lives of many people in all social systems, but particularly in rural communities. "Feminists argue that religion acts as a mechanism of social control" (Websdale, 1998, 172). In Oak Tree County the church is an organizing institution, one that brings certain people together and legitimizes their standing in the community. People with whom I talked frequently mentioned their church membership or affiliation. I had the idea this was to identify themselves by their faith and beliefs, and also to identify themselves within the hierarchy of community status. Certain churches and their congregations had the reputation of being powerful and wealthy, others were reputed to have a higher degree of devoutness, and still others were known for their stewardship of a particular ethnic or racial group.

One of the Methodist churches has over 400 members, a Sunday attendance of around 125, and numerous committees whose every decision must be approved by the administrative board. The church and its fellowship hall cover a city block, and a new family life center was recently opened in an adjacent block. It is undoubtedly a wealthy and influential church. Its governing body wields extraordinary power—power that can frequently do great good, power that frequently is used to protect those in the church's

governing hierarchy, and power that occasionally is used for the benefit of The Church, as reflected through the eyes of the community.

About two years after Catherine, the church secretary, was divorced from her abuser, she became interested in helping other battered women. She talked with the Methodist minister and they found a few others who volunteered to develop a plan to help battered women. They thought they could devise a transportation program, using the church van, to take women to a shelter in an adjoining county. A former policeman, retired from a major city police force, contributed his expertise in writing a "Protocol and Procedures" for the program. Their mission, as stated, was "to assist law enforcement agencies and victims of domestic violence by providing immediate transportation of stranded victims of domestic violence from the scene of such violence to a safe place."

In Catherine's words:

> We were on a roll. We had the county officials at the courthouse on board, we had the sheriff and the police officers and the constables on board. Everybody was ready to go, but the church pulled the plug. They did not adopt this as one of their missions, and they sold the church van soon after. Certain individuals—two individuals—brought up liability, and that it probably wouldn't be beneficial to the church to take this on as a mission because it adds liability to the church. So they tabled it, and then they sold the van.

I heard this same story from several people, all members of this church. Many disapproved of the administrative board's decisions and actions, but nobody said he or she had disagreed openly. Basically, they seemed to say, "Well, that took care of that problem."

Catherine arranged for me to speak to the church's council on ministries to describe our volunteer advocacy project, to ask for their sponsorship of a local county advocacy program, and to ask that they adopt our project as a new ministry of the church. If we were adopted as a ministry, our program would get free use of the meeting facilities and other support. I appealed to the members' sense of community responsibility when I presented the project as a way for the church to contribute meaningfully to the community through advocacy for healthy families and family relationships, to support the formation of a coalition of various community organizations, and to engage in outreach to marginalized residents. After an overview of the presence and problem of domestic violence in Oak Tree County, I asked them to provide a meeting place for training and periodic meetings, to help in publicizing the advocacy program, and to help in recruiting volunteers. Minimal monetary assistance was requested to cover expenses for items such as paper, copying, postage, and refreshments. The response from the council on ministries was overwhelmingly positive. Some attendees even talked of taking the advocacy training.

The chairperson presented the council's approval of the proposal to the church administrative board. I was told later that discussion centered on concerns of church liability. The board members, which included several attorneys, felt that sponsorship of the advocacy project would somehow make them vulnerable to lawsuits or even retaliation from perpetrators. A vote was taken and the project was denied. However, enough supporters were there to protest the negative vote, and they prevailed in getting the board to grant without fee a meeting space in the fellowship hall for training and to

allow an announcement in the church bulletin. In no way were we to suggest that we had sponsorship from the church, however. This concern for liability was heard over and over, even from the church members who later went through the volunteer training. We were never able to really pin down the kinds of liability that the church and its members feared. Members confided privately that there were some in the church who had a great deal of power and exerted it in many ways in order to protect their power. One informant, a member of the board who did not attend its meeting, said she gets "a little aggravated sometime with the politics. There is politics in everything—schools, churches, communities, whatever." Catherine confided that she had received several calls from members reminding her that her volunteer activities were not to interfere with her duties as an employee of the church. Whenever I called her for the briefest of conversations, her side of the conversation was always conducted in a whisper. She felt that her job was at stake. A few months later I was told that the minister had offended some of these powerful members, and it was common knowledge that his days were numbered.

Even though a lot of power is centered in the church and it is seen to have a lot of control over church business as it relates to its congregation, many people see the church as ineffective when it comes to intervention in family violence. Several informants stated they were aware of family violence, but they had different views of the role the church plays or should play in intervention. For example, one participant said, "You know, Oak Tree County has a lot of churches, religious beliefs. I'm always surprised that, I think, basically we're a Christian community." As an elementary school counselor she

described seeing young children in church on Sunday, knowing that on the previous Saturday night those same children had "seen their mothers being abused by drug dealers. We have a lot kids whose mothers are on the streets, and they get knocked around by people, and the children see it. But religious beliefs, I think religion definitely helps [in reducing domestic violence]." This was the same informant who felt there was too much "politics" in the church that prevented it from supporting domestic violence programs and projects.

My informants frequently gave me contradictory opinions about their churches and seemed unaware of their incongruent views. The church as an entity in the community occupies a presence in the constructed reality of the participants. The perception of the church is that it is supposed to be a beneficent presence, looking out for its members, outreaching to the less fortunate and the poor—and therefore, *that* is what it *is*. On the other hand, the informants do see and are aware of many problems in their towns and county that need to be addressed; however these problems do not need to be addressed by *them*. After all, they say, the church is there for *that* kind of thing. They do not seem to see their role as anything other than as a good member of the church. Sally, a school nurse and president of the board of Children's Protective Services (CPS), said, "No one really wants to be in charge of something." In discussing spouse abuse, she said, "Nothing has been organized. And I think that's the main thing stopping people here. They don't mind helping as long as somebody else is in charge." The church is seen as powerful in the eyes of the community, but no one really expects it to be involved in actively *doing* something to intervene or prevent domestic violence.

"It's a very fundamentalist religious community. There's about 50 churches for 5,000 people," shared one informant as she described her town and church attitudes towards partner abuse. "They'll tell you right quick, 'Well, you know, your marriage is sacred,' and blah, blah, blah. And after awhile the women are coerced into going back." This informant, a mental health professional in private practice, went on:

> They say something needs to be done. But when it comes right down to where the rubber meets the road, the good fathers of the church will take the man aside and say, "Now you shouldn't be hitting her like that." And they'll put them back together again and send them home. They don't seem to realize that just saying, "Don't do that any more" isn't enough. And they'll say a prayer together, and "we'll send y'all back home."

This example echoes that of the participants' experiences that Walker (1979) recorded:

> Some women told stories in which their religious adviser suggested they pray for guidance, become better women and go home and help their husbands "become more spiritual and find the Lord." Needless to say, these women did not have time to wait for their husbands to "find the Lord" while they continued to receive brutal beatings. (p. 23)

Websdale (1998) agreed that "religious influences seem to be stronger in rural communities and appear to be more likely to work against battered women leaving violent men" (p. 172).

> These influences sometimes include local preachers who advise battered women to "weather the storm" with their abusers. The religious rationale behind discouraging women from leaving is often pitched in terms of maintaining the sanctity of the marital bond also in terms of wives (not husbands) fulfilling their duty to stay in the marriage. (Websdale, 1998 pp. 172-173)

Father O'Brien, a priest in the same town as the above informant, said, "This is Oak Tree County's biggest dirty little secret. There is no support system for the women." He spoke particularly about illegal Mexican nationals ("trailer Mexicans") who do not seek help because of their culture which accepts the right of the male to maintain his

pride in masculinity (*machismo*) through control of his wife or girlfriend and his family. Father O'Brien said that he seldom gets counseling requests from battered women, and my sense of this conversation was that he did not particularly represent himself as being open to such requests. He did agree to publish my referral card in the church bulletin and offered the use of his church and his office as a place for me to interview participants. He also gave me some referrals to other religious contacts in the county. On the other hand, he did not offer to talk about my study with his parishioners or to help in recruiting participants. That certainly is what would have been very helpful to persuade women to share their stories.

These attitudes were prevalent among the larger churches in the two communities. I also met several pastors from smaller churches who were very much involved in the lives of their members. One pastor of a tiny church spent most of his days visiting congregants, and he and his wife took the advocacy training in order to enhance their skills to help victims of domestic violence. Later I met another couple who had established a prison ministry. They spent days at a women's incarceration facility in an adjacent county, ministering to and counseling women inmates. Among those inmates they had found numerous survivors of spouse abuse. The smaller churches have a service-oriented mission; they see needs and attempt to minister to those needs. Thirteen churches in one community joined in opening and supporting a thrift store. Maddie, who has run the shop since shortly after its opening, says the churches were tired of being bothered by individuals needing help. The shop allows them to serve the unfortunate without being "bothered" by those who are in need.

Alma, a retired teacher who is now working in an outreach program for a Catholic Church in a different town, shared her view of the church's involvement. "Well, the help, as far as religious help, there is no program or educational program for people. But the doors are open for counseling and Father Craig has his little office over here, but not many people use it." She felt people were probably not comfortable talking to Father Craig about abuse in their families. Rosa, a Hispanic participant, spoke adamantly that she would not talk to anyone at the Catholic church. The church secretary confirmed that Father Craig had few visits from members. She added,

> "I think a lot of the women are abused. And I think that as a church that may be an area where we have a chance to bring that out into the open. You know, they may not know--the [Hispanic] women may not realize that that is not acceptable unless someone tells them that what's happening to them is wrong."

Apparently, "The Church" does not see that as its role. Unfortunately, even if the message were presented from the pulpit, chances are few of those who needed to would hear it. Attendance by the members who live out of town is sporadic. "You see them at things like weddings or when they get their babies baptized." Therefore, there is little expectation that they would come into town for counseling. One problem is the lack of transportation. Many Hispanic members live out of town in the remote areas of the county, working on the farms and ranches, and do not come into town unless there is a special occasion and a ride presents itself. Another problem, according to Alma, is that many Hispanics have been made to feel unwelcome by the Anglo members of the church.

How do the rural churches feel about marriage abuse and divorce? "Well," Catherine replied, "there's a lot of people that don't believe in divorce. I'm one of them. I

mean, I've been through divorce, and it was not what I wanted, but I got it." Divorce was a decision that she made after eight years of abuse by her husband. Her minister, after several months of counseling and witnessing her abuse, eventually supported her decision to get a divorce; although at first, she said, "The pastor was for primarily trying to make it work, but he knew this wasn't a good situation." Maddie never received the kind of guidance that could have spared her over 40 years of abuse. However, she found strength from her association with various churches and ministers. Her faith enabled her to justify the sacrifices of her life. Some of the participants in Walker's (1979) study also found "belief in a deity helped them endure their suffering, offering comfort and solace" (p. 22). Also Dawn, as we saw earlier, received permission and support from her family to file for divorce only after she could show evidence of her husband's infidelity. Marital sex abuse was not an acceptable reason for divorce. " I still didn't have any right to divorce him until he cheated on me." She started going to another church after her divorce.

> And I remember the preacher asking me, because I was thinking about remarrying. And he said, "I have to ask you about your being divorced." I told him it was because the man was unfaithful to me. That was okay. I could get remarried. Because in the Bible it says that's the only way that a woman is not considered an adulteress.

The Scriptures are frequently quoted when people talk about marriage. "Basically, I was conditioned from early on, from five years old on to be very submissive to men, " Catherine said. Pastor Burrell, a Baptist, explained his views of the biblical verses that address submission:

> Oh, yeah, there are lessons in Ephesians, in Galatians, relative to men loving their wives as Christ loved the church, the women being submissive to their

> husbands; but a key thing is in referring to the scriptures [where] God is talking about a religious man, a Christian man, whereas it's hard—most women don't want to follow a man that he don't even know where he's going.

When asked how he interpreted that word, submissive, to women who don't like the meanings usually attached to it, he described his approach:

> Well, what I tell them, submissive means actually obeying. When you say "submissive," I don't mean he tells you to get down on the floor and roll over and all, like you a dog or nothing; but it has to be out of respect. That's the kind of submission. You're not going to ask your wife to do anything, and then if you've taken care of your wife—I tell them this: If you're taking care of your wife both physically, mentally, psychologically, financially, as well as sexually [reading from my handout], then you don't have to worry about her; she's going to be submissive to you. You don't have a problem with that. And submissive means that when your husband asks you to do something, you do it; or if you don't want to do it, you sit down and have a decent conversation of why you don't want to do it or why do I always have to do this here. That's part of marriage.
>
> She asks you to do something; man has to be submissive as well as the wife has to be submissive. So, I try to break it down to its lowest term where the male and the female—but like I said, a majority of the time I don't even get the men.

There are difficulties getting the African-American male to come to counseling. He described several men who not only stopped coming to counseling sessions, but some that did not even come back to church. "If I try to do three-week counseling sessions, I usually get one."

The church is the institution that provides a center for social congregation as well as a center for worship in the small communities in rural counties. Many in the churches—the small, poor churches for the most part—also feel a calling to minister to the needy. The larger churches support the "safer" programs, such as Girl Scouts, foreign missions, or the local thrift shop. The prestige of one's church raises one's own prestige in the community. Those who attend church regularly have more say in church affairs.

This control is in turn applied to the preservation of their and the church's power. The church, through its ministers, pastors, and priests, exerts a social control through the establishment of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. There is also a tacit control. In these communities, what the church does not address does not exist. If domestic violence does not exist as an appropriate ministry for the victims of domestic violence, the church then becomes another factor of isolation of the victim.

The Role of Law Enforcement

This section is concerned with the theme of response and attitudes of law enforcement personnel, such as police and sheriff's deputies, toward domestic violence calls in Oak Tree County. Participants frequently shared their dissatisfaction with the inadequate response of their local peace officers. "They're not going to do anything until you're running around and you're dead or you're bloody or whatever," said one focus group participant. I will detail the views of Oak Tree County residents as they discuss their perceptions of and experiences with their criminal justice system. I will illustrate the isolating role that ill-provided police response and protection play in the rural community.

Nationally and locally, there have been recent changes in the criminal justice system as a result of increasing public attention to the problem of wife abuse, and those changes are reflected in the legal process in Oak Tree County. For example, in the past year a female assistant county attorney has been assigned to prosecute only domestic violence cases. Also newly added to the staff is an investigator who will ensure a more thorough collection of evidence that will aid the county attorney in winning cases.

The duties of peace officers are delineated by the Texas Commission of Law Enforcement Officer Standards (TCLEOSE, 2000). Nationally, it is clear that increased public attention has brought about legislation which funds programs and provides for protection of victims. At the state level there have also been positive changes. At the rural level, however, changes in attitudes and police procedures are slower to occur as revealed in the discussion of the participants in this study.

According to statistics from the U. S. Bureau of Justice, over 50% of violent attacks upon women are from family members (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1992, p. vii). However, much research shows that interpersonal assaults are notoriously underreported (Stanko, 1990, p. 80). There are several reasons for this. One is that women believe police are reluctant to become involved in private family matters. Historically, it has been difficult to consider familial violence as criminal behavior that should be prosecuted. The typical thinking is that interpersonal violence is random crime perpetrated by strangers against what is perceived as innocent and undeserving strangers (Stanko, 1990, p. 83).

Another reason for underreporting is that many times the police will choose not to make an arrest or even to file a report, or the charges are not identified as domestic violence. A perusal of the Oak Tree County records of arrest and prosecution for the year of 2001 showed many arrests for "terroristic threat," "assault," "assault with bodily injury," or "harassment." Some charges were identified as "assault with bodily injury to a member of the household;" but very few had "family violence enhancement." As a result, when partner abuse is counted for the year 2001 in Oak Tree County, there will be

very few cases to report. For example, the Uniform Crime Reporting Office in Texas recorded only 68 victims and 62 offenders of domestic violence in 2000. This is less than 3%, compared to personal communications from peace officers that say half of their calls are "domestics."

Most police officers believe "intervention in spousal assault cases is dangerous and threatening to the lives of the police officers" (Wiehe, 1998, p119), and therefore police are reluctant to get involved in family violence situations because "as many police officers are killed answering domestic disturbance calls as are killed pursuing armed robbers" (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 232). Wiehe (1998), however, states that "analyses of statistical data on the number of police deaths as well as ranking the danger that domestic assault calls pose to police officers in relation to other offenses do not support these high rates (p. 119). Gagne (1992) was also told "so many officers had been shot responding to domestic calls that few were willing to risk going to the door" (p. 410). However, she found an undated FBI study that found the "number of officers killed as a result of responding to family quarrels was less than the number accidentally shot by other police officers" (p. 414). However, when looking at rural domestic violence, with the isolation of the families, the propensity of rural residents to own guns, and the low numbers of officers available for assistance or back-up, it is quite clear that officers' concerns are not without merit.

In rural areas, the first contact of a battered wife with a service provider is frequently the local law enforcement officer. In Oak Tree County, as in other areas, many women who seek help will turn first to their families or friends who can offer a

place to stay or well-intentioned advice. However, with no other service providers, such as an advocacy group or a shelter, the only other recourse when the battering becomes very serious is to call the police (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1992, p. xv). Even then, women are reluctant to call because they are faced with patriarchal attitudes of many police officers and they are afraid they will not be supported or protected. Victims name many fears: retaliation from their abusers, social disgrace and gossip, involvement of their children, patronizing attitudes of the police, lenient treatment of the offender by the courts, and reluctance of the police to arrest the abusive partner, among others (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1992; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Walker, 1979; Websdale, 1998;Wiehe, 1998).

The Texas Commission of Law Enforcement Officer Standards (TCLEOSE, 2000) is a document that charges peace officers with protecting society according to the laws in the Texas Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure. Texas has a mandatory arrest policy when the officer determines probable cause exists that a person has engaged in domestic violence even if the victim does not want to press charges (Van Hightower & Gorton, in press). Texas law also requires domestic violence training for all peace officers. Eight hours of continuing education in family violence is required every two years after initial training. The sheriff explained that training was sometimes difficult to obtain in small departments. "We don't have the training and an instructor or an academy, so it's pretty hard for us to have our own school. And *some*body's got to work." He said small departments "couple up with some of the bigger departments" and have training for officers from surrounding counties.

When an officer arrives on the scene, he is supposed to ensure that the victim is safe and then collect evidence for probable cause through questioning the parties and witnesses involved and examining the crime area. Victims, especially the African American women, complained the officers basically looked for visible signs of injury. Whoever had the scratch or wound, no matter how superficial, was deemed the victim, and the unmarked party was arrested. When an arrest is made and the perpetrator is taken to jail, the victim is encouraged to ask for a magistrate's emergency protective order (MEPO) that is good for up to 61 days. The arresting officer can ask for an MEPO for the victim at the time of arrest, but many police officers do not want to take the time to do the paperwork. Some participants said the officers always ask them, "Can you come in the morning and file a restraining order?" They were not given the option of obtaining an order the evening of the arrest.

During the protection period offered by the MEPO, the victim may apply for a permanent protective order. Violation of any of the terms of the protective order is a crime. The officer is also required to give the victim written information (in English and Spanish) about her rights and the availability of shelters and other community resources. However, it is only in the last six months that the officers were given information packets specific to Oak Tree County. This pamphlet was only recently created by the new assistant county (and district) attorney. Additionally, the officer is supposed to make a written report of family violence offenses and label them as such. The offender should be seen by a magistrate, in many cases a justice of the peace, within a few hours of the arrest. At this time bond may be set, and when posted, the offender will be

released. If the arrest occurs Saturday, however, he will not be seen by the justice of the peace until Monday since the judge does not work on the weekends. The victim will be notified of the release if the system works correctly. This does not always happen for any of several reasons, for example, the victim was not at home to receive the call or somebody got busy and just didn't make the call.

When the district attorney is satisfied that evidence exists for prosecution, the case is brought to trial. The victim is not required to attend, since it is the state that has brought charges against the offender. However, many courts still retain the feeling that the victim should be present and may use the non-appearance as a reason for leniency for the offender. For a first offense—usually a misdemeanor—a fine is levied, the offender pays it, and that's the end of the case. Most offenders have already returned to the home and, in too many cases, the abuse has continued.

Notwithstanding the last decade's advances in legislation, some victims in Oak Tree County have complaints about how police enforce those laws as well as police attitudes towards domestic violence and its victims. For example, African American participants complained that police officers were interested only in making drug arrests in their neighborhood. "The only time the police are actually on the west side of Akern is when there are drugs involved." In fact, one informant said, the police spend so much time in the Black section of town that they are probably missing some good arrest opportunities in the White and Hispanic parts of town. Pastor Burrell said, "It [domestic violence cases] never gets to the courts because the officers don't never make the arrests other than drugs." He acknowledged there is a drug problem, but "I know there are other

things happening." On the other hand, non-victims felt looking for drugs was a good use of police manpower:

> I would say it occupies a good part of [police efforts] for them to patrol, to watch, to look for [drug transactions]. I mean, they're constantly making arrests and everything, trying to keep it as calmed down as much as they can. And I think they're doing a great job. It was worse two years ago.

Many battered women were afraid to trust the police to maintain confidentiality and cited several other reasons for not calling the police for help. One woman felt police officers gossiped as much as everybody else in the town. She felt this was something officers should not do.

Another problem for some women is their fear that a call to the police will backfire on them, and they will be the one who ends up in jail. "And then you get out the next day, and then you're going through the same thing again; so, I mean, you're wasting your time with calling them." One story told about an abused woman who was arrested during a domestic violence call because she had an outstanding traffic ticket. This was the easiest way for the policeman to handle the call. He was able to separate the couple and end that evening's violence by simply arresting the wife.

Women say they just don't have any confidence that they will be protected if they call the police. Another example which illustrates the fears women have is the incident described by Catherine. The sheriff's department "forgot" to read his rights to her husband, which ultimately led to her husband not facing any charges. She also related how her husband's fellow police officers were more concerned about the consequences of his arrest on his police career than they were about the reasons for the arrest. When they talked her into dropping charges, she was left vulnerable to more abuse. When

Catherine asked the police chief for help, he admitted he could not control her husband. "I can tell him what to do, but he's not going to listen to me," the chief said.

When the perpetrator is arrested and goes through the legal process, chances are good that he will be back in the home in a few hours and a fine will be the only punishment. "They slap some kind of fine on him and put him on probation, and then he has to walk a chalk line to try to keep from having this happen again, but you're still in the situation." She added, "No one's been removed from the home." Women do not feel a fine is a deterrent to future abuse. In fact, the arrest may so anger the perpetrator that he will intensify the abuse when he gets home. "When women realize they don't have any place to go," they will not call for law enforcement help, said one participant.

Many participants' comments reflected research on police attitudes. Participants understand that officers get discouraged when they have to make repeated visits to a home and that they eventually prioritize their calls, placing that particular address at the bottom of the list. "Sometime people call too often and they get to the point where they don't pay attention to them any more when they call so many times. They don't go check it out any more," was one participant's observation. African American women felt they had "two strikes" against their receiving prompt and fair responses from police officers. A group of Black participants reconstructed a typical conversation among officers:

> They're going to say, "Well, that's just a Black female. We're not going to worry about that."
>
> "She probably brought it on her own self."
>
> "You know how they are."
>
> Or they're going to say, "Whose name is on the lease?"

Others felt that police officers did not like to answer domestic violence calls because they do not want to interfere in private family matters. Some lawmen secretly identify with the perpetrators. Gelles (1979) reported, "Many a battered wife has heard a police officer, attorney, or even judge mumble under their breath, 'If I were married to her I would have done the same thing'" (p. 142). The sheriff of Oak Tree County listed what he considered the causes of domestic violence: alcoholism, drug use, writing hot checks, kids who get into trouble at school or in the neighborhood, disagreement on parenting practices, and mental illness of some family members. He believes "Family violence is a result of other circumstances and situations; so therefore, it's hard to just address family violence [as a separate crime]." He thought if these things were "got rid of, then our family violence would all drop." The sheriff's list included many of the family characteristics that Gelles in 1979 identified as being typical of families with the highest rates of marital violence (p. 141). However, Gelles (1979) identified them as stressors, not causes of marital violence.

Dawn was afraid to call the police because she thought they would not give serious attention to her complaints. "You're always afraid they're going to say the same thing; you know, 'Your husband can't rape you.' I can hear it now: 'You're overreacting.'" Some women were concerned that police would arrest them instead of the abuser as in the story about their coworker being arrested. The woman had bitten her attacker during the assault. When she finally got out of jail, her husband had left and taken the baby with him. There is a lot of misunderstanding about the powers of the police in making arrests. Probable cause is frequently difficult to determine. Many officers need more training in

investigation work and "reading" a crime scene and in determining the primary aggressor in a domestic violence situation.

> Rona, a school counselor, was concerned about the city police in Akern.
>
> Because the turnover rate is great and they tend to be young. I would say most of them are in their 20s, middle to late 20s. It doesn't mean they're bad officers or any of that, but they lack the experience sometimes, and they, too, are reluctant—there are some areas they will not touch when it comes to—or they will avoid it as long as possible. And most of that tends to be in the more violent spots that might be involved with drug abuse.

She felt the young policemen tried to stay away from the dangerous drug arrests, which contradicted the observations of the residents of the African American part of town. However, she, along with quite a few people, spoke highly of the sheriff. "We have a sheriff who is very cooperative and really wants to help and to work with the schools," she said. Others said they have seen changes in the way the laws are now enforced and in police attitudes toward victims of domestic violence.

The stories and concerns of this study's participants reflect the concerns expressed in the extant literature on police response and attitudes. However, while there are changes being made at the state and national levels, and even in urban areas, rural communities are still struggling with some of the issues prevalent some 20 years ago. Attitudes prove slow to change among the front line officers of the towns in Oak Tree County. The negative attitudes and inadequate response of law enforcement officers to victims of domestic violence dissuade victims from making the call and asking for help. These are factors that further isolate the battered woman and serve to keep her trapped in her abusive relationship.

The Role of Community Attitudes

> The women are more liberated. I mean, before, you didn't have family violence; 20 or 25 years ago you didn't have family violence, because the woman did what the man said, or he whipped her rear end. Now women are saying, "Hey, I'm not going to be treated like that. I'm going to treated more as an equal," and they're standing up. (Sheriff)

An examination of the data from the interviews with participants in Oak Tree County reveals some attitudes that might well have been prevalent in the United States 20 years ago. Participants spoke about attitudes that support the notion of male superiority and dominance, that support the belief that family matters are private, and that support the acceptance of violence as a means of male control. These attitudes are not only held by individuals but also are reflected in the policies and decisions of the social institutions of the county, such as the church, the law enforcement system, and the medical profession.

When asked their perceptions of domestic violence in their communities, all participants were familiar with some of the dynamics of abusive relationships but had different ideas about the causes and the prevalence. At one point Pastor Burrell said, "Basically, most people perceive it as a problem." However, later in the interview when comparing the problems of partner abuse and drugs, he said of domestic violence, "...it really is on a low key." As he continued to talk about domestic violence, he admitted he had had only a "few encounters with it here in my congregation." Apparently a lot of people do not even recognize that they are in abusive relationships. Pastor Burrell said he was unaware of sexual and economic abuses until he read about them in my informational flyer. He also was of the opinion that a marriage or a couple that does not

"have Christ in their lives" would have more difficulties in maintaining a stable and loving relationship.

Several informants pointed out that domestic violence is not openly viewed as much of a problem in the communities. Although a few people, such as formerly battered women and some private citizens who had been involved indirectly with victims, did think "something should be done," the community had not addressed the issue as a social problem.

The sheriff described the community's attitude:

> In the community, the average person on the street—they don't condone it. They think it's horrible and they'll talk about Joe Blow that beats his wife, or they'll talk about Suzy Q who runs around on her husband, and they don't condone it. They'll talk about how bad it is on the kids.
>
> They don't condone it, if they're confronted with it; but the problem is the community really doesn't confront it. They tend not to get involved in it. [People will say], "They're friends, but they're having trouble, and we're not going to be around them until they straighten up." I mean, they definitely don't condone it, but they don't confront it either, as a community. They kind of leave it up to us [police].
>
> And, you know, you and your wife are friends with so and so and his wife, and y'all go out together and out to eat, and then family violence erupts. Well, instead of going in there and sticking your nose into—"Well, that's their business; I'm going to stay out of it." They don't condone it, but they ain't gonna get involved.

Walker's (1979) research supported this attitude about violence in marriages:

> Wife beating has been considered an acceptable resolution to marital disagreements as long as the violence is confined to the home. The assumption was that if a man and a woman are arguing in public they must be married, and this gives the man license to abuse the woman. (p. 13)

Most participants recall being taught that marriage was a sacred contract, and "you're supposed to stick together until death do you part;" and couples need to work out

their differences in the privacy of their home, out of sight and earshot of neighbors, family, and friends. "It's been given to them by their parents, grandparents, 'Oh, no, you don't tell that.'" Another participant said, "I'd been told you make your bed, you lie in it. And you don't tell everybody what's going on; you keep it secret." One participant said the family's attitude was "We'll take care of it as a family." She thought that was pretty much the prevailing attitude in all rural communities. Family arguments are personal matters and do not call for intervention. Reports to the police or telling others would result in the family being a topic of gossip.

An interesting counterpoint to the "don't tell" attitude is the feeling among many residents that one does not really want to know about what goes on in other families. People really do not want to get involved in intervening between a violent couple or helping a battered woman. Betty said, "They would rather not know about it. They would rather hide behind [the supposition that] everything's perfect." Maddie also found that employers do not want family problems brought to work. One woman in the focus group described what she thought about the "system's" attitude toward victims. "They say they care, but they don't." She based her opinion on the way police and the courts handled cases of partner assault. "First of all, you're Black and then you're female. So that's two strikes against you already." In her experience, the police officer would think, "Well, that's just a Black female. We're not going to worry about that." Walker (1979) called this "society's laissez faire" attitude (p. 57). This hands-off attitude meant social institutions had no right to interfere with the private and personal matters of a family.

Neighbors prefer not to know about domestic violence in other families. For one thing, they fear reprisal from the abuser if their help becomes known. In a way, this "apathy" actually "enables" the abuser to continue his abuse, as one battered woman pointed out. She said people "feel bad—but not that bad—because they don't want to stick their nose into that." Moreover, most would-be helpers feel their efforts would not "do any good anyway, until she's ready to get out of the situation once and for all." Several participants thought the victim needed to take the first steps at ending the relationship before they could step in to help her. "People are more willing to help once you get yourself out of that situation, because it's not worth it." She meant the risk of becoming a target of retaliation was too great to take. This belief goes against what advocacy organizations say, which is that early intervention has the most success at enabling the woman to leave the abusive relationship. The Methodist church exhibited this same hands-off attitude when they opted out of the proposal to provide victims transportation to shelters in other counties. By selling the van, they avoided the decision to get involved in domestic violence situations.

There are very few acceptable reasons for divorce, unless, of course, as in Dawn's case "you've been cheated on." Dawn's minister approved divorce in that case. One participant, Della, said, "It's a very fundamentalist community." Della said she had seen marriages that lasted for 25 or 30 years, and then "the last child grows up, leaves home, and the woman stands up and dusts herself off and says, 'I've had it,' and out the door she goes." She says, first, though, everyone tries to intervene, and the family frequently blames the mother's actions on mental aberration:

> Even the children, the adult children who have seen their mother, heard her cry, listened to this [abuse]; and when she walks off and leaves the man, they will come down on the side of Dad, in many cases, and try to get Mom to come back. "She's gone crazy. The woman just doesn't know what she's doing. Sure they had their problems—everybody has their problems—but it's not serious enough for her to go do this. She's changed. How dare she change?"

Marriage is valued in the rural community, and it is expected that people will settle down, get married, and raise a family. Several people said that many young Hispanic girls' only goal was to get married and have children. They tended to drop out of school early before they obtained any employment skills. As a result, if their marriage became abusive, they had few choices except to remain in the marriage. With no employable skills, no high school diploma, and several children to support, a woman is trapped. Married teens are allowed to attend school, however, said the high school counselor. In fact, one currently enrolled 17-year-old female student is married and has two children. There is the problem for most teen mothers, of course, of finding someone to take care of the children while the mother is in school.

The traditional view of marriage does not extend to racially mixed marriages, at least in some parts of the county. Della told how shocked her secretary was to see a family with a Black father and a White mother come in for family counseling. The secretary confronted her after the session, "You didn't tell me that they were Black!" Della replied, "Well, I didn't think I needed to." The secretary protested, "Why, they're married and you should have told me." From that time, Della made a joke when she scheduled a counseling session with a family. "The So-and-so family is coming in and they're White!" Della's treatment of the incidents was not considered funny, however. "It just so violated the code of how they thought things should be. They were rattled by it.

It's a strange little town." Alma was also aware of a few mixed marriages, but "it's mainly Blacks and Hispanics." She can remember the first couple. "When it first started happening, the first couple that wanted to get married in the church was a Black and a Hispanic and the pastor back then didn't want to marry them."

The Black community does not hold such a traditional view of marriage. Pastor Burrell said, "To be honest with you, there are very few married people here" in the Black part of town. He said there is no pressure on or censure of a woman living with a man—"other than me telling them what the Word says." Several women in the focus group agreed that many singles lived together but still considered themselves a couple in many ways.

Attitudes toward the battered woman were frequently negative. One fairly common opinion was that the woman provoked the man's violence. "I'm sure there are certain times that women do overstep, push and push. And sometimes it's just over, say, something for the house and they just keep on and on." The sheriff described several family situations in which the wife's actions caused the man to lose control of his temper. He cited, for example, the wife's "running around on the man," overspending of the household money, not doing the housework and keeping his clothes clean, writing hot checks, not disciplining the kids, or not making sure the kids stayed out of trouble in school. As far as finances, though, he really felt it was the man's role to control the family money. Walker (1979) also found many people believed that the husband had not only the right but also the responsibility of ensuring the obedience and discipline of his wife and children. This patriarchal view of the family "has been supported not only by

religion but by the law, beginning with the century-old right of a husband to beat his wife with a stick no "larger than his thumb" (p. 12). Other researchers have found "some evidence that all forms of abuse are more common in families that are more patriarchically organized" (Finkelhor, 1983, p. 21-22; see also Straus et al., 1980).

Another example was the woman's perpetuation of family values, such as having too many children to support. Betty explained:

> I think if you're a mother and you have all these children with no father—I think you can have two mistakes, but after that, that third mistake belongs to you and the government doesn't support it. I mean, it follows from one generation to another; you can see it happening. It becomes a way of life.

Betty implied that battered women stayed with their abusers because they wanted to, that all they needed to do was to get a job and become self-supporting. Another way to hold the woman accountable was described by a Black participant. A woman who called the police and complained about her abuse too often was "labeled," and subsequent calls were not given high priority. Another Black participant said, "Domestic violence is so big because women have allowed them [their partners] to do that." By allowing herself to become so dependent on a man, the battered woman sets herself up to be vulnerable. Alma's husband complained, as so many people do, "I don't know what's wrong with her. We tell her to leave him, and all these years and she still hasn't left him." These attitudes reveal a lack of knowledge about the dynamics of intimate violence that encourages inaction in the community. Women are socialized to feel responsible for the success of their marriages (Dutton, 1995, p. 172), and therefore the community can shift blame to the woman if her marriage is an abusive one. This blaming attitude toward the victims of domestic violence leads to the belief that no one can help the victim until she decides on

her own to stop the violence, usually by leaving the relationship. "When they reach their wits' end and realize they have no alternatives, then they'll step forward," Catherine said. She went on, "People are more willing to help once you get yourself out of that situation." Contrary to these opinions, however, there is research that shows women's entrapment is due in part to:

> the unequal power balance in most abusive situations, to the lack of social supports that are available to victims of abuse, and also to our potent ideology of family dependency, which makes it difficult for victims to contemplate surviving outside their family, no matter how abusive it is. (Finkelhor, 1983, p. 21)

To find a description of community attitudes in Oak Tree County today, all one has to do is read the literature of the 1970s and 1980s. It is apparent that many old attitudes linger in the rural communities where values are instilled through early contact with the conservative ideology of their churches, family traditions, and community expectations. However, many participants did feel that community attitudes were changing. For example, people are being exposed to other views through public media such as television and radio. Although they may not subscribe to the weekly newspapers, many families sacrifice to get television in their homes. The proliferation of cellular telephones makes communication with others possible. The influx of "city folks" from neighboring metropolitan areas is bringing in new ideas and ways of thinking. The observation by the sheriff illustrates how things are changing:

> I mean, before, you didn't have family violence; 20 or 25 years ago you didn't have family violence because the woman did what the man said or he whipped her rear end.

Twenty or 25 years ago there was not a name for what women were experiencing. Now that "women are more liberated," and there is a name, attitudes are changing.

In this study, however, it was clear that many residents still retain conservative views about marriage, feel that the woman could change things or leave if she really wanted to, and consider family matters to be private.

The Role of Resources

Oak Tree County was chosen for this study precisely because there were no domestic violence resource providers in the area. My question was what do battered women do when their community offers so little. A check with the shelters in the adjacent counties yielded little information about Oak Tree women. "We have had some in the past, but not for a some time," was essentially the response from shelter personnel. There was corroboration for this from several participants who remembered incidents of women going to shelters in the past. It was evident that Oak Tree County women had either been finding other places to go for shelter or they were not leaving the county. Websdale (1998) stated, "Most battered women do not enter spouse abuse shelters. In Kentucky, as in other states, many more women are served by shelters through outreach programs" (pp. xxi-xxii). Unfortunately, Oak Tree County is not served by outreach programs. "In 1976," reported Gelles (1979), "there were perhaps 20 operating shelters in the U.S. with two million battered wives in need of shelter" (p. 143). In 1978, there were six shelters in Texas; by 1980 there were 25; today there are 69 separate full-service domestic violence shelter programs (Texas Center for Social Work Research, 1998, p. 2). Of the 254 counties in Texas, there are 20 that are not assigned to the service area of a shelter. Oak Tree County is one of those 20.

As I talked with people, I realized many of them had only vague ideas about possible services in their communities. There were references to the Mental Health Mental Retardation system (MHMR), but it was found MHMR offers medication and counseling only to patients that are diagnosed with bi-polar disorder, major depression, or schizophrenia. According to Della, "Family problems, domestic violence, alcoholism, none of that fits into that." Patients who could afford it drove an hour to Wakefield for counseling and other health services. There is also a Medicare/Medicaid bus that goes to Wakefield's major hospital and medical community twice a week for patients who can pay the fare. Poor women went to the rural health clinic, staffed by one doctor and a couple of physician's assistants, and where it was probable that no one asked them about partner abuse. During my interview with Alma, she told me she also thought there were places in town that could help women or that she could ask about help if someone came to her. Two months later, she called *me* for help for her sister-in-law!

One of my participants, a counselor who sees very few private clients, said she did not accept couples any more, "unless I know them very well and I know that there is no violence involved in their marriage." She stopped domestic violence counseling after she had to replace four slashed tires, which act she believed was done by a retaliatory husband.

Most women in Oak Tree County did not necessarily consider the clergy the first source of help, although Maddie always turned to the church "when I would get so depressed. I would look for the first preacher I could find and I would go and have a counsel with him." Many ministers were not considered approachable, especially the

ministers of large churches. One minister of a small church, Pastor Burrell, said he did not receive many requests from abused women. He said he had "degrees in crisis counseling, marriage counseling," but the frames on his wall held mostly certificates of attendance at a few workshops, none related to domestic violence counseling. In fact, several times during our interview, he asked me to conduct a workshop or seminar on the topic for the congregants of his church. Another pastor of a small Baptist church did attend the domestic violence advocacy training and became a valuable volunteer. He told me he was incorporating into his ministry his new understanding of the problem. Several ministers agreed to offer support groups in their churches after some members of the newly organized Task Force approached them (described in Chapter III).

In the two communities of Akern and Parkstone there are thrift shops sponsored by the alliances of ministries. Those in need are referred to these stores by clergy who give them vouchers for food and clothing. Maddie has managed the Akern store for years, and it has helped to keep her centered and in a position to help others.

A surprising source of help turned out to be the school counselors. Rona said, "There's a lot of disclosure [from children] about what's going on at home." Also, children from violent homes frequently have trouble in school. When the mother comes to talk to the counselor, the mother will disclose the abuse in hopes the counselor can help them all. In illustration, when I was interviewing her, Rona received a call from the school office, telling her there was a woman who wanted to see her. Rona said the woman was one she had previously told me about who had been having trouble with her husband. Rona said she would ask the woman to meet me for an interview, and even

introduced me to her on my way out, but no contact was ever made. Another example was shared by the counselor:

> This has been several years so. The mother showed up in the counselor's office at the end of the school day with her two children and said that she and the children had been kicked out of the house, and she had no place to go. I sent her to [a shelter in another county]. I was able to get her there through Human Resources [Texas Department of Human Resources]. They just happened to have somebody that lived in [that city] who was willing to take her.

Another resource turned out to be the nurse in Parkstone. Sally, a resident for 27 years, has worked for the health department, the hospital, and the schools, and, as a result, "people know me in this community and know that they can come to me for help." She describes herself as the "contact person" for people to call on when help is needed. Even though there is no organized group, "there are lots of people in this town, like churches and different individual members" who respond to her calls. If families need clothing, food, or "they've been kicked out of the house, we put them up." She calls members of the church and business people in the community for donations of supplies or money. She recounts one time when an ER nurse talked to Sally's husband (a doctor) about a stranded family she wanted to help. His answer was, "I'll call my wife." Sally arranged for the family to stay in a motel and then got them transportation to their destination.

Maddie, at the thrift shop in Akern, had a similar story to tell:

> The other day I came down here on Saturday afternoon, because I just had it on my mind. And I parked right out there in front, and I started in—I was going to do a little bit of work here. There was a woman drove up, and she had two little children with her. I looked over there at her and I seen she was crying; so I walked over there and said, "How are you this afternoon?" And she said, "Oh, I'm terrible." And her husband had just clawed her face and choked her.

> And the little kids were just a screaming and they were hollering they were hungry. I said, "Y'all come on in and let's see what I can do for you." I usually keep some stuff in there. I said, "Baby, give me your shoes, I can put my feet right through them." And so we went in there in that front office, and I talked to her. She said, "I can't go back; he'll kill me tonight."
>
> I said, "I know what you're going through." She said, "I don't have no family. I ain't got nowhere to go." I said, "Yes, you have." I called this friend of mine—she's real good about things, and I asked her, "How's your extra bedroom?" So I sent her over there to this girl's house and she spent the night and the next morning.
>
> But I had $50 in my purse. I gave her the $50 and I told her, "You take those kids and you feed them." She said, "How do you know about all this stuff?" I said, "Honey, I've been there, done that. I tell you what, if people hadn't opened their hearts to me, where would I be?" I said, "Many a day I had to pick my little kids up and take them...."
>
> So about two weeks later, she came back in, and she had a fifty-dollar bill, and she said, "I want to give it back." I said, "Oh, no, you don't owe it to me. That was God's money." She said, "What would I have done that night if it hadn't been for you?" I said, "I didn't know I was supposed to come down here, but that's why I was supposed to come. And I was here, wasn't I?" And you know what? That little girl don't even look like the same little girl. She got her a job and she's gone to work.

The stories of Maddie, Sally, and Rona are examples of individual people who took on the task of helping others in their communities.

A recent change in the county was the election of a woman district attorney who has promised to be more diligent in prosecuting cases of domestic violence. Through a grant from the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) she hired a young woman as assistant county and district attorney who will spend the major portion of her time pursuing prosecution in domestic violence cases. An investigator has been hired to assist peace officers in gathering evidence that will strengthen the prosecutor's case in court. As required by state law, there is a crime victims' assistance coordinator whose duties

include notifying victims of their offenders' court dates and referring victims to other resources.

In Oak Tree County, a county that has no service providers specifically for domestic violence victims, I was surprised to find unofficial resources. These were individuals who felt called to become involved in helping battered women and their families through informal networks of friends and acquaintances. I was told there are many people who want to help in various ways, but, unfortunately, there were few who wanted to be in charge of or to lead helping programs. Even Maddie, Sally, and Rona did not want to formalize their help. They were content to carry on doing individual acts of kindness when called upon occasionally.

What do women do for help in rural counties? How do they break out of the isolation imposed on them by the violence? They call on families, friends, and acquaintances. Some of them call on their ministers. Some call the police or sheriff. And some of them call on strangers. Sometimes, there is an answer to their call.

Summary

In this chapter I presented the six major themes revealed by the data from Oak Tree County. Five of the themes represent the mechanisms of isolation that contribute to the continuing power and control of women by their abusive partners. The sixth theme presents the resources found being provided by a few individuals in each community.

Non-violent forms of behaviors were seen as forces of social control by husbands and the institutions of the county. These forces of social control were seen in the powerful effects of gossip, in the inadequate response and protection by the agencies of

law enforcement, the non-involvement of the church in social problems such as domestic violence, and in conservative and traditional community attitudes toward marriage and women's roles. One positive discovery was the efforts of a few concerned residents who voluntarily assumed helping roles.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Domestic violence has been a "cause" for social activists, feminists, and women of all races and ethnic backgrounds since the 1970s. Researchers from the fields of psychology, sociology, and medicine became interested in the problem and have contributed much to the efforts of making sense out of the phenomenon and attempting to describe the causes or factors of intimate partner abuse from a variety of viewpoints, such as individual pathology, family systems, societal controls, and feminism. For most of these years of research, investigators have chosen their participants from the areas where access has been the most obvious and convenient: from shelters and other service providers in mainly urban areas. Thus, when we talk of domestic violence today, we are in reality discussing the problem as it has been identified and manifested in the urban milieu.

In recent years, a very few researchers have turned to the rural areas of the United States as an area of investigation. They realize that the study of domestic violence in the rural areas of our nation may reveal information which can lead to a new and richer understanding of domestic violence as it is experienced directly by battered women and indirectly by the family, friends, and neighbors of the those who reside in the small towns and communities of our rural counties. It was not my purpose to compare rural violent acts with urban violent acts against women; nor was it my purpose to attempt to provide quantitative data on the prevalence of battering in rural areas as

compared to urban areas. Rather, my purpose was to study the manifestation of domestic violence in rural areas from the perspectives of those who live there. I wanted to know what it is *like* to be a victim and live in a rural community.

A qualitative research method was used. Participants for my study were residents of Oak Tree County, a rural Texas county that had no service providers for victims of domestic violence. There were 7 victims and 11 non-victims, Anglo, Hispanic, and Black, who shared their experiences and perceptions of the problem in audio taped interviews that lasted from 45 minutes to almost two hours. The transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed and coded for patterns and the emerging themes were noted. I was already aware of uneven and often inadequate police response in rural areas to victims of domestic violence, but as I worked with the data, five additional major themes emerged which helped to answer the questions I posed for this research study.

Conclusions

A somewhat different way of looking at domestic abuse, especially in the rural area, developed as the themes emerged from data analysis. It was seen that every thematic factor had as its ultimate goal the increase of the perpetrator's power and control of the victim through the isolating qualities of each theme. A discussion of the conclusions reached is presented. Conclusions One, Two, Three, and Four relate to the first research question: *From the perspectives of victims and other residents, what are the major social factors of the rural culture that affect the victims of domestic violence?* Conclusion Five relates to the second research question: *What are the experiences and perceptions of the rural community toward domestic violence?* Conclusion Six relates to

the third research question: *From whom do battered women seek help in a community that has no domestic violence service providers?*

Conclusion One: Myriad forms of non-violent social control contribute to the increased isolation of domestic violence victims and the increased power and control of their abusers. Women are isolated not only by the cruel and violent abuses of their intimate partners, but also by the non-violent abuses which are perpetrated by the rural culture: minimization of their complaints, non-recognition of their situations, neglect from the churches and other institutions, cultural acceptance of male dominance, lack of skills and jobs, and poor education. These elements of social control are reflected in many of the characteristics of rural culture and perpetuate domestic violence.

Conclusion Two: Gossip is extremely pervasive as an isolating factor of victims of domestic violence and contributes to the power and control of the abusers. Gossip represents the victim's loss of control over the one thing she believes she has: her privacy. The fear of gossip prevents victims from seeking outside help. The abuser finds that manipulation of gossip is an effective weapon of abuse. Not only the spreading of untrue allegations about the victim, but just the threat of gossip is enough to dissuade victims from seeking help. Suffering from low self-esteem, victims think everyone believes the gossip about them and their relationships. Potential helpers are afraid of becoming part of the gossip mill if they give support to the victim. Victims are inclined to view with suspicion such offers of help, dismissing the offers as just the acts of nosy neighbors wanting to know her private business. The use of gossip as a mechanism of social control effectively builds the walls of isolation around the battered woman.

Conclusion Three: The attitudes and responses of law enforcement officers to domestic violence calls are far less than adequate and do not serve to prevent the incidence of domestic violence nor to protect its victims. It is seen that calls to victims of partner abuse receive low priority, especially if the caller is a repeat caller and she lives in the Black neighborhood. Patriarchal attitudes and poor investigational skills on the part of policemen deter many victims from calling the police for help. Most participants express very little confidence in the policing agencies of the county. Several participants feel peace officers are more interested in making drug arrests than protecting battered women.

Conclusion Four: The church and conservative religious belief systems play a significant role in the lives of many people in Oak Tree County but do not serve the interests of domestic violence victims nor do they address the problem of domestic violence. Many participants believe their church is involved in addressing social problems such as domestic violence. However, the data reveal that the larger churches are more involved in maintaining their prestige and power over their congregants than they are in combating the social problems of the county's citizens. Most participants, while expressing a strong faith, do not go to their ministers for help. Several pastors from small churches, however, are seen working in the community and in direct contact with needy residents. Many churches are joined in supporting a pantry and thrift shop for needy people; although a welcome resource in those communities, the motive for the alliance is to stop being "bothered" by those needy people. The church, for the most part, does not address domestic violence as a social problem.

Conclusion Five: The attitudes of Oak Tree County reflect the attitudes of the nation some 20 to 25 years ago toward domestic violence and do not help in addressing the current challenges of partner abuse in the rural communities. Participants reveal attitudes that support the notion of male superiority and dominance in the family relationship. Many believe family matters are to be kept private and the family members must not go outside the family for help. Many people believe the battered woman probably provokes her abuser and deserves the abuse. Another belief is that the victim probably can leave if she just makes up her mind to do it; all she has to do is to leave, and then she will have lots of help from the community. Community attitudes reflect a disturbing distortion of the dynamics of domestic violence.

Conclusion Six: There are informal and little known resources in Oak Tree County that are accessed in meeting the needs of victims of domestic violence. School counselors and school nurses are sources of help for women who disclose their abuse while conferring about their children's problems. Each community in the study has at least one or two people, such as the doctor's wife or the lady who runs the thrift shop, who feel the call to help individuals and families in crisis. There is evidence of a changing attitude at the prosecutorial level, which portends more community awareness and legal help for domestic violence victims.

In summary, a model emerges of the isolating factors of the rural community (Figure 2) based on the findings of this study.

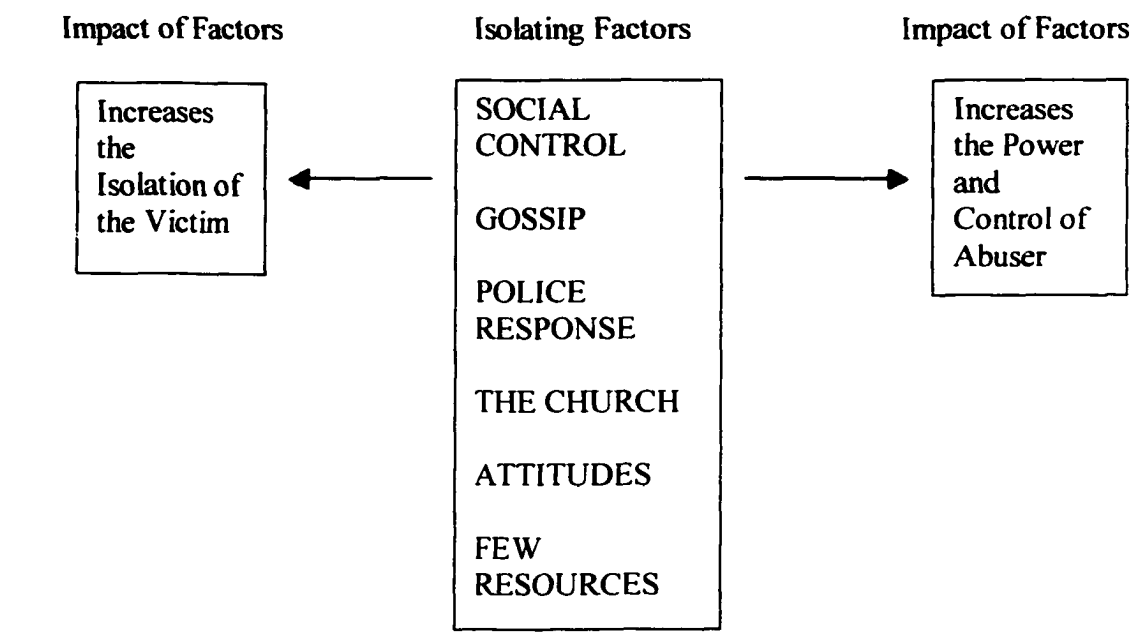

Figure 2. Isolating Factors of the Rural Community.

Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations are intended to identify needs, to increase understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence, to increase awareness of the problem, to change community attitudes, and to increase services to victims of domestic violence. Many of these recommendations can be effected through the efforts of the Task Force and the advocacy group in collaboration with other institutions of the community.

Recommendation One: Rural communities should engage in projects of community awareness in order to address the negative or uninformed attitudes of their residents. Educational programs in the schools, media campaigns, and recognition of domestic

violence as a community problem that affects everyone will lead to community responsibility towards the problem. Increased understanding of victims and of the dynamics of abusive relationships will lead to a change in community attitudes and increased services to victims.

Recommendation 2: Community leaders should conduct an assessment of the available resources in the community and identify the types of resources needed to serve victims of domestic violence. A list of resources can be helpful to victims as they make decisions about their future. This information can also be used to develop new resources and services for domestic violence victims.

Recommendation 3: The leaders of the community should collaborate in developing needed resources for victims, such as emergency shelter, transportation to shelters, legal aid, affordable housing, employment training, and advocacy groups. Such collaborations will not only serve to meet the needs of victims but will also serve to increase public awareness and a sense of responsibility toward victims of domestic violence.

Recommendation 4: Law enforcement organizations should increase training for peace officers in investigational skills, sensitivity, and domestic violence. Ongoing training is needed for peace officers to update them on the latest domestic violence legislation and the rights of victims. Protocols for the handling of domestic violence cases should be developed that will ensure adequate and fair responses to callers in violent situations. These approaches will help to improve the skills and attitudes of all peace officers and in turn better serve the victims of domestic violence.

Recommendation 5: County attorneys should focus on increasing the prosecution of domestic violence offenders, especially repeat offenders, in order to stop the cycle of violence. The county attorney's office should work more closely with peace officers in collection of evidence that will strengthen the prosecution's case. Members of the judiciary should have training in the dynamics of domestic violence. An understanding of domestic violence will help judges render fair and sensitive judgments.

Recommendation 6: The Task Force and advocacy groups should provide workshops and seminars that cover the dynamics of domestic violence and appropriate interventions to existing service providers such as those in the churches, schools, healthcare professions, and legal and judicial systems. When these helpers are able to recognize the signs of abuse and provide early interventions, they will help to decrease the cycle of domestic violence in the county.

Recommendations for Further Research

The following recommendations for research will add to the body of knowledge about domestic violence in rural areas. As more is known about rural domestic violence, more attention can be directed to solving the problems in this unique area.

Recommendation 1: Researchers should explore the manifestation of domestic violence in other rural counties. What differences do geography and population make in attitudes and resources of a community?

Recommendation 2: Research should be done to explore the prevalence and characteristics of domestic violence among Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, and migrant worker residents of rural communities. Are their needs different from Anglo victims?

Recommendation 3: Further research should be done in Oak Tree County to examine the effects of the new focus on domestic violence of the county attorney's department. What impact has been made by the efforts of the Task Force and the advocacy group? Have attitudes changed and how? What else needs to be done? The answers to these questions will help to focus further efforts in effective ways to meet the needs of the victims in the county.

Summary

This chapter began with a summary of the purpose and design of the study. Six conclusions were developed from the emergent themes of isolation. Their relationships to the three research questions are discussed. An illustration shows how the isolating factors identified in the themes impact the victims and the abusers. Last, I presented recommendations for practice that evolved from the findings and recommendations for research that will extend the body of knowledge about rural domestic violence.

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APPENDIX A

How to Access Participants (Working List)

1. Texas Council on Family Violence
2. Department of Agriculture Extension Service at TAMU
3. County sheriff
4. Local police departments
5. Clergy and women's church groups
6. Department of Public Health—rural public health nurses
7. Schools—counselors, nurses
8. Medical community—gynecologists, hospital ER, dentists
9. Mental health professionals
10. Local newspapers—police reports
11. Others—librarian, museum, real estate agencies, bartenders, restaurant employees, hair and nail salons

APPENDIX B

THOUGHTS ABOUT LOGISTICS AND LOGJAMS

1. Distribute referral cards to contacts, public restrooms, hair and nail salons, clergy
2. Obtain speaking engagements—women's church groups, clubs, teachers
3. Newspaper—interview for an article about the research
4. Phone number—need a number that's toll free—call phone company
5. Need a safe and discreet place in which to conduct interviews: church? Library?
6. Money for expenses: travel, supplies, transcribing, toll-free phone number, printing

   Research grant? See Women's Studies.
7. Location/area of research—one town, both towns, nearest town?
8. Send a letter to ministers?

APPENDIX C

Contents of Flyer

ABUSE

Texas A&M Research Project
Focusing on Rural Domestic Violence

Physical
slapping, kicking, punching, shoving, scratching, biting, using weapons, breaking women.
your things

Verbal
Calling names, falsely
Accusing you .
Ridiculing you

Emotional
Destroying self-esteem
Isolating you

Sexual
Forcing intimacy,
Marital rape

Psychological
Threatening to take
Children, critical of
Your parenting
Financial
Controlling the money

To discover the unique characteristics of intimate partner abuse in rural counties of Texas.

To record the domestic violence experiences of rural women.

To discover how rural women cope with domestic violence

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

1. Tell you women friends about the study; distribute referral cards; ask them to participate and to call the Research toll-free number: 1-866-266-7700 to schedule an interview.
2. Keep their names and participation confidential.
3. Advise your women friends of the National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) if they need help.
4. Work for intervention and prevention of domestic violence through your community services, schools, medical institutions, Law enforcement, justice system, religious institutions, and advocacy groups.

Referral Card

Women in Abusive Relations
Invited to Participate in
Texas A&M Research on Rural Domestic Violence

Please Call 1-866-266-7700 (Free)
Confidential and Private Interviews
Your home will not be called

(National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE)

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent

I understand that Jackie Revuelto is asking to interview me for a study she is doing about domestic violence, or abusive relationships, in rural areas. She will ask me to share my personal experiences with abuse received from my partner, in the past and in the present. I will meet with her in a safe place and at a time that I will agree to for approximately one hour just one time. I understand that the interview will be tape-recorded. The tapes will be securely stored for three years and then will be destroyed. From five to 15 women will be interviewed for the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can refuse to answer any questions that make me uncomfortable, and that I can end my participation at any time without any consequences. If I end my participation, I can ask to have all of the tape recording and transcriptions destroyed. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential, that an alias (or fake name) will be used, and that my real name will not be used in any published reports of research.

I understand that because I will be describing unpleasant experiences of abuse I may have uncomfortable feelings of sadness, anger, helplessness, etc. I understand that I will receive a list of counselors in my community to whom I can go for help in dealing with these feelings and experiences. These resources may or may not be free. Texas A&M and the researcher are not responsible for the provision of these resources.

I understand that I will not receive any money or other gifts for my participation in this study.

I understand that if I disclose present instances of child abuse or endangerment to a child that it must be reported to the proper authorities.

I understand that if I choose not to be tape-recorded that the researcher will not conduct the interview and I will not be included in the study. There will be no consequences as a result of this termination.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Support Services, Office of Vice President for Research at (979) 458-4067.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____

Signature of Participant Date

_____

Signature of Principal Investigator Date

APPENDIX E

Interview Guide (Survivor)

1. How do you describe domestic violence/family violence/partner abuse?
   Kinds of abuse you experienced?
   Marital rape/sexual abuse?

2. How often and how severe was your partner abuse?
   Did you ever seek medical attention?

3. Can you recall the first time you were abused? The worst time?
   What happened? Were you abused during pregnancy?

4. What did you fight about the most?

5. To what extent was drug use or alcohol a factor in your abuse?

6. How would you describe your life and yourself in terms of the effects of your abusive relationship?
   How was/is your life affected by the abuse?
   How did the relationship change you?

7. Reasons abuser gave for the abuse. Your responses to the abuse.

8. Help received from the law enforcement or justice systems?

8. Where did you go for help and who helped you?
   What would have been helpful to you personally?
   What did you need and when did you need it?

9. What's it like being in an abusive relationship and living in a small rural community/county?

10. Experiences with institutional help or helpers:
    Law, justice, medical, educational, social, religious

11. How important was your religion/religious beliefs in terms of your abuse?

12. Did your husband rape you? Force you to have sex?

13. How were you able to end the relationship?

14. Were you a victim of childhood abuse?

15. Questions about the rural area: isolation, phone service, car, health care, transportation, housing, educational opportunities, employment, child care, social life?

16. Personal: (participant and her abuser) present ages, ages when married, how long married, children, educational levels, sources of income, nearness of family

APPENDIX F

Interview Guide for Non-Victims

What do you know about partner abuse in your county?
- Kinds of abuse you know about
- Prevalence in community/county
- Who most affected?
- Reasons for partner abuse?

Examples of Abuse
- Cases you know about/women's stories
- What happened to the victim? the perpetrator?
- How do the women cope?

Describe the Characteristics of the community/county
(What is it about the rural community is a factor in partner abuse?)
- People's Perceptions/Attitudes?
- Geographical Factors?
- Religious Beliefs?
- Family Beliefs?
- Transportation?
- Money?
- Gossip?
- Other?

What help is available to abused women?
- Social
- Law
- Justice
- Religious
- Educational
- Medical
- Family

What needs to be done?

VITA

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EDUCATION	Ph.D. Educational Human Resource Development, 2002 Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas
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	B.S. Language Arts, Journalism, 1961 Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana
PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE	Research Assistant and Trainer Program for the Reduction of Rural Family Violence Dept. of Political Science, Texas A&M, September 20001-August 2002
	Research Team, Foundation Coalition (NSF) Oct. 2000-August 2001
	Licensed Professional Counselor FamilyTime Foundation, Humble, Texas, April 1994-May 2000
	Educator in secondary schools in Florida, Hawaii, and Texas, 1960-1994
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