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Positive Self-Talk Statements as a Self-Esteem Building Technique

Among Female Survivors of Abuse

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In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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by

Fred Jackson Teaster III

December 2004

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Dr. Patricia Robertson, Chair

Dr. Jim Bitter

Dr. Patty Wahlberg Gibbs

Keywords: positive self-talk, self-esteem, learned helplessness,

psychological entrapment, self-verification theory

ABSTRACT

Positive Self-Talk Statements as a Self-Esteem Building Technique

Among Female Survivors of Abuse

by

Fred Jackson Teaster III

The purpose of this integrated review of literature was to explore the relationship between and among females in abusive relationships, self-esteem, and positive self-talk. Various models are discussed that provide possible explanations in the understanding of the complex social and psychological nature of cyclic abuse. These models are: learned helplessness, psychological entrapment, self-verification theory, and feminist theory. It is suggested that positive self-talk statements used by the female survivor as a basis for cognitive restructuring can act as a self-esteem building technique, thus promoting healthier cognitions over time. Furthermore, it is argued that self-esteem enhancement can assist females in developing strengths necessary to abandon abusive relationships. In summary, a review of the literature suggests that self-esteem is an important construct in understanding how individuals evaluate and ultimately determine their own sense of competency, self-worth, and success.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis, as well as my accomplishments in school, to the single most important and influential person in my life, Heath Stanley. Your encouragement and inspiration gave me the motivation to pursue and achieve my academic goals. You believed in me when I thought no one else did. You have taught me the true meaning of love. Thank you, my partner and best friend for all of your faith and support.

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Last, but certainly not least, thank you Mom for teaching me what true courage is. Your strength, determination, and will to survive during your battle with lung cancer opened my eyes

to just how strong you really are. I truly thank you for your love and wisdom you have provided me all throughout my life. I remember even as a little boy that you taught me that all people are equal and deserve respect and compassion. You taught me well! I would also like to thank my father who has always supported me in any way he could, without his assistance I'm not sure I would have made it at times.

I would like to thank God for giving me life and the physical and mental strength to carry on. He has always been there, guiding me and helping me along the way. I would like to thank him for giving me the wisdom to see good in all people, to see their potential, and that people are our greatest asset in this world.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence in the United States is a serious problem, especially for female victims who find themselves in abusive relationships. The problem of violence between intimates is widespread, and researchers now estimate that each year close to four million women are physically abused by their husbands or live-in partners. It is also estimated that women are five to eight times more likely than men to be victimized by an intimate partner (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). There is some indication that violence against women is finally starting to be taken more seriously by our federal government. The recognition of domestic violence as a true social problem that affects the lives of all Americans is a positive first step in addressing this issue. However, there is still much to be done on the behalf of women who need the protection of law and support in recovering from an attack.

Very little research has been conducted that identifies the effects of abuse on the female victims' self-esteem level and how this contributes to the termination of or the decision to remain in the abusive relationship. Some researchers, however, have addressed this problem and demonstrated its possible relationship (Frieze, 1979; Jack, 1991; Landenburger, 1989; Lempert, 1996; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Mills, 1985; Walker, 1979, 1984). Investigating female survivor's of abuse and their self-esteem level, and helping them learn new ways to enhance self-esteem through self-help exercises is necessary because women at risk for continued physical and psychological forms of abuse can be distinguished from those who successfully abandon violent relationships (Walker, 1979, 1984).

This integrated review of literature will explore self-esteem as pertaining to white heterosexual women in abusive relationships and how the promotion and maintenance of this construct might possibly assist the female survivor in developing a greater sense of identity and empowerment. When mentioning females in abusive relationships throughout my thesis I will refer to them as "survivors". It is my belief that this term more accurately reflects these women and their experience due to their courageous nature and attempts at survival in counteracting violence that can leave them feeling fearful, hopeless, ashamed, guilty, and emotionally overwhelmed. Also of interest is whether or not self-esteem is somehow linked to many of the social and psychological dynamics that may bind the female survivor to the abusing partner.

First, my thesis will explain many of the effects that abuse can have on the female's self–esteem level. Second, I will present an historical overview of the concept of self-esteem as defined by those who have conducted extensive research in this area. Third, a listing of theoretical speculations and their importance in understanding the relationship between both the abuser and the female survivor is delineated and annotated with a summary of theoretical perspectives. Fourth, the concept of self-talk will be discussed as it pertains to the promotion of female's self-esteem. Fifth, a brief history of cognitive-behavioral modification will be introduced as well as the idea of positive self-statements and their usefulness as a cognitive restructuring technique. Sixth, a restatement of the problem followed by a discussion, suggestions for future research, and finally a listing of positive self-talk statements by category will complete the thesis.

Effects of Abuse on Female's Self-Esteem Level

Abusive relationships, especially psychological ones, seem to have the most devastating effects upon women's level of self-esteem and overall emotional well-being (Aguilar &

Nightengale, 1994; Follingstad, Brennan, Hause, Polek, & Rutledge, 1991; Katz, Arias, &

Beach, 2000; Katz, Street, & Arias, 1997; Leidig, 1992; Tuel & Russell, 1998; Walker, 1979).

Self-in-relation theorists propose social intimacy as an organizer of women's experience and

view the development of depression and ultimately self-esteem as tied to the importance that

women place on the establishment and maintenance of close relationships (Gilligan, 1982).

Researcher Jack (1991) asserts that relationships play a key role in women's identity and their

over-all level of self-esteem.

According to Jack as cited in Thompson (1995) silencing the self theory posits that

women's depressive symptomatology and loss of self-esteem are developed out of close

relationships where the female is expected to conform to societal expectations. Thompson

continues with Jacks' thesis:

Jack maintained that women, whose sense of self is relationally based and who are

encouraged to seek attachment in self-sacrificing ways, are likely to develop gender specific

schemas about intimate relationships and that these schema presumably influence relationship

behavior and the processing of relationship information. These schemas, collectively termed

silencing the self, are responses to cultural prescriptions for feminine relationship behavior that

involve the devaluation of personal experience and emotion, censorship of experience, repression

of anger, and emotional deprivation.(p. 338)

In conjunction with Jacks' (1991) silencing the self thesis, other investigators have put

forth the idea that females adopt psychological strategies that assist them in surviving an

abusive relationship. For example, Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995) as cited in Campbell, Rose,

Kub, and Nedd (1998) discovered that in counteracting the abuse experience, "women first

relinquished parts of themselves, minimized the abuse, and fortified their defenses as the first

part of their process of breaking free" (p. 744). The authors argue that *relinquishing parts of self* "is a survival strategy that involves giving up significant aspects of self that are important to personal self-image" (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999).

Lempert (1996) explored many of the strategies that women employ to "halt, change or cope with their partner's violence". As cited in Campbell et al. (1998), she suggested that women chose to respond to their partner's abusive behaviors by developing "self-erasures as face saving strategies to maintain invisibility" (p. 744). These women actually conceal their true "selves", they go on pretending, denying what they want to say and what they may feel.

Campbell et al. (1998) discovered from their in-depth interviews with thirty-one women that many routinely found it necessary to negotiate with themselves or with their partner. Thus, the implication is that women in these relationships, time and time again, are forced to compromise or rearrange various aspects of their lives and themselves in counteracting abuse. The authors also discuss one woman's description of her strategy for survival as "subordinating the self". The researchers, therefore, defined her example as a defensive strategy she used in avoiding abuse. Hence, given these examples, it is plausible to suggest that female survivor's self-concepts increasingly over time would become diminished.

Thus, these schemas are silencing schemas, and they are a major contributor to a loss of self-esteem. Beck (1964) also addressed this idea of schemas and suggests that they are cognitive structures within the mind, the specific content of which are core beliefs. According to Beck (1995), he theorized that negative core beliefs essentially fall into two broad categories: those associated with helplessness and with unlovability. Researcher Beck (1995) asserts that:

For most of their lives, most people may maintain relatively positive core beliefs (e.g., "I am in control"; "I can do most things competently"; I am a functional human being"; "I am

likeable"; "I am worthwhile"). Negative core beliefs may surface during times of psychological distress (Beck, 1995, p. 166).

Beck continues with her description of core beliefs and how they influence an individuals processing of information. She maintains that "negative core beliefs are usually global, overgeneralized, and absolute" and that "the patient is easily able to process information that supports it, but she often fails to recognize or distorts information that is contrary to it" (p. 167). Also, she states that it is perfectly acceptable at some point during the therapeutic process to help the individual identify, evaluate, and modify the core belief; the goal is to assist the client in specifying a new, more adaptive core belief.

A woman's definition of self based on her connection with the abusing partner and combined further with gender norms for interpersonal behavior (society's expectation of her to behave in a certain way) can put the woman at particular risk. This is especially true when the development of these relationship behaviors and beliefs are lodged inside a violent partnership. Hence, it is suggested that these schemas over time can create negative cognitions or erroneous thinking, and it is these patterns of thinking that help keep the female survivor enmeshed with the abuser and ultimately inhibits her self-expression and restricts her potential.

Katz and Arias (1999) report that women will become more passive in coping if they believe they lack control in the relationship. Thus, it is suggested by the authors that such behavioral responses can be damaging emotionally. They further state that continued exposure to partner dominance and isolation behaviors will likely lead to the destruction of any perception of interpersonal control.

Dominance and isolation exhibited by the abuser has been defined as a form of psychological maltreatment by a host of researchers (Follingstad et al.1991; Tolman, 1989;

Walker, 1979). Dominance and isolation abuse as explored by Tolman "included items related to partners' demands for compliance/subservience, isolation from the personal and social resources, and observance of traditional gender roles" (p. 283). Another form of psychological maltreatment was investigated by researchers Aguilar and Nightengale (1994). They hypothesized that measures of emotional and controlling abuse (comprised of dominance/isolation behaviors, e.g.., "told you who could speak to"; "told you, you could not work") had detrimental effects on women's self-esteem.

Tolman also investigated a second factor related to psychological maltreatment of women. He suggested that emotional and verbal abuse was prevalent among abusive partners in their interactions with women. Examples of emotional and verbal abuse according to Tolman, include the abusive partner's devaluing, humiliation, and withholding of emotional support/affection. Follingstad et al. (1991) investigated the item of ridicule (i.e., emotional and verbal abuse) and discovered that overall this type of abuse experience was the most destructive for emotional well-being. These researchers go on to hypothesize that emotional and verbal abuse may be linked to depressive symptomatology, therefore reinforcing the ideal that being exposed to such behaviors can greatly impact the female's behavioral responses (e.g., passivity, social isolation, fear of men, shame, and acceptance of responsibility for partner abusive behaviors).

However, Katz and Arias (1999) propose the idea that women who feel a moderate level of control may feel enough distress to leave the relationship if on-going psychological abuse is present. These women may also be buffered some from depression by their sense of having some control. Thus, an important task for females experiencing abuse would be to increase their perceptions of interpersonal control, and working on self-esteem will affect this. This is

important due to the survivors' need to become increasingly more autonomous and less affected by partner abuse.

Katz, Arias, and Beach (2000) suggest that a female may have difficulty accurately appraising and terminating an abusive relationship because of the impact on her well-being that was created by the abuse. There are many reasons why some women either stay or leave an abusive relationship such as children, income, level of educational attainment, mistrust, negative self-concepts, fear, shame, self-blame, guilt, etc. (Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Gelles, 1976; Hornung, McCullough, & Sugimoto, 1981; Pagelow, 1981; Truninger, 1971; Walker, 1979, 1985). According to Campbell (1989), Walker (1979), and Wang and Mckinney (1997) however, it appears many stay out of a personal sense of helplessness and hopelessness and a loss of self-esteem.

On the other hand, it is considered by many a myth that low self-esteem causes individuals to form and ultimately stay in abusive relationships. For example, according to Hornung et al. (1981) and Miller and Porter (1983), research on self-esteem and traditional role expectations have not supported that such factors are directly attributable to a woman's decision to remain in an abusive marriage. Furthermore, Cahn and Meier (1995) assert that survivors of domestic violence do not share common characteristics other than being female. Walker's (1984) research reported that some survivors of abuse feel equal to or better than others because of their ability to survive the terror of an abusive relationship. Nevertheless, self-esteem as proposed by many of the major theorists mentioned earlier plays a major role in the way we interpret our options, both within our internal and external worlds.

The primary purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between positive self-talk statements as a self-esteem building technique among abused women. Such positive self-

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evaluative statements as "I love myself" and "I'm okay" can possibly serve as repetitively

healthy cognitions that over time can play psychological host towards a healthier self-esteem. A

secondary purpose is assessing the relationship that exists between a woman's level of self-

esteem and her decision to leave an abusive relationship.

The Concept of Self-Esteem

For the woman who has found herself trapped in an abusive relationship where she has

incrementally lost her autonomy and her own personal sense of self-worth as a human

being, better understanding the role that self-esteem may play in her emotional "dance" with the

abusing partner is imperative. The following theorists have investigated the concept of self-

esteem.

Frey and Carlock (1989) reported that the study of self-esteem as a concept for

understanding human behavior has been a subject of interest since the turn of the century when

William James "in 1890 defined self as the sum of all a person can call his/her own: physical

self, psychological traits, feelings, family, significant others, possessions, avocation, and

vocation" (p. 2). Others have also explored this human phenomenon (Bednar, Wells, & Peterson,

1989; Branden, 1969; Coopersmith, 1967; Cooley, 1909; Hall & Lindzey, 1957; Mruk, 1999;

Secord & Backman, 1964; Rosenberg, 1979; Wells & Marwell, 1976; Wylie, 1961). The study

of self-esteem became popularized during the 1960s as researchers focused their attention toward

its meaning and its relevancy to human psychological functioning. Rosenberg (1965) defined

self-esteem as:

A positive or negative attitude toward a particular object, namely, the self…High self-

esteem, as reflected in our scale items, expresses the feeling that one is good enough. The

individual simply feels that he is a person of worth; he respects himself for what he is, but

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does not stand in awe of himself nor does he expect others to stand in awe of him, and he

does not necessarily consider himself superior to others. (pp. 30-31)

Coopersmith (1967) in his definition of self-esteem suggests that it is very important to a

person's identity and awareness.

By self-esteem we refer to the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily

maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and

indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant,

successful, and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is

expressed in the attitudes the individual holds towards himself; it is a subjective

experience which the individual conveys to others by verbal reports and other overt

expressive behavior. (pp. 4-5)

Theoretical Perspectives

When assessing whether or not any abuse experienced by the victim has affected the

evolution of self-esteem level, it is necessary to consider the social and psychological dynamics

in which the relationship has evolved.

Theory of Learned Helplessness. There is an extensive amount of literature that argues

that violence among intimate partners can have significant psychological effects (Cascardi, &

O'Leary, 1992; Golding, 1999; Landenburger, 1989; Testa & Leonard, 2001; Walker, 1979,

1984). Walker (1984), building on Seligman's theory of learned helplessness and clinical work

with battered women reports that "repeated beatings, like electrical shocks, diminish the

woman's motivation to respond" (p. 87). Thus, she believes experiences of the noncontingent

nature of such relationships, meaning the woman's inability to predict and control violence would, overtime, produce learned helplessness and depression.

Walker (1984) asserts that for the battered woman to leave such a relationship, she will need to work against learned helplessness and find other survival techniques such as anger rather than self-shaming and being active rather than passive in her responses to life.

Learned helplessness theory maintains that there are powerful cognitive, affective, and behavioral consequences that result from living in an environment where an individual cannot predict whether or not their response will produce a positive outcome. Some researchers suggest that such a pattern, particularly within the context of cyclic abuse, can cause severe psychological symptoms. Walker (1985) asserts that it is the reality of not being able to vision success in the face of abuse that creates extreme psychological distress.

When an individual has tried unsuccessfully to control a certain situation, as with a female's experiencing repeated abuse, and her efforts have produced little or no change in her interactions with the abusing partner, it is understandable how she might develop difficulty in choosing a response. Walker's (1979) classic battered woman syndrome study helped promote greater understanding of the complexity of these relationships in which the female survivor finds herself.

Theory of Psychological Entrapment. This theory suggests that the more an individual has invested in a situation particularly one the individual may perceive as entrapping, the more likely the individual is to keep attempting investment. This theory suggests that especially between intimate partners who may find themselves enmeshed within a continual cycle of relational conflict that there are powerful social and psychological processes at work to keep the victim entrapped.

Rubin, Brockner, Small-Weil, and Nathanson, (1980) maintain there are those situations that are more entrapping in nature and once the female survivor or the decision-maker perceives her investments are too great to quit, she may find herself in an increasingly perplexing situation as time goes on. Also, it is believed that the greater the conflict between the two partners the greater the likelihood of the participant to believe that she must submit as soon as possible to the demands of the abuser or withdraw entirely. These authors suggest that more often than not this seemingly complex "trap" leads to the participant committing to, rather than abandoning, the relationship.

Rubin et al. (1980) further state that there are three pressures that motivate the individual to remain in her situation: (1) the reward associated with obtaining the goal, (2) the presumed increased proximity to the goal, and (3) the cost associated with giving up on one's investment (e.g., having spent 15 years in a marriage where the female experiences strong emotions for the partner, who says he loves her, but yet subjects her to various forms of both physical and psychological abuse). This theory predicts that in those situations where the persons' decision-making process is more passive in nature, the greater the degree of entrapment, as opposed to the individual who assumes a more active role. It is easy to see, then, why a female experiencing abuse from her partner may continue to subject herself to this type of psychological entrapment and the effects it can have on her self-esteem level.

Gelles (1976) investigated the question of why abused wives stay with their abusing husbands. His analysis of 41 families in which the wives had been physically abused by their spouses uncovered important variables that influence their behavior. The author concluded that allocation of resources plays an important role in the female's decision-making process, and this explains how a woman can become psychologically and fiscally "entrapped" in a cycle of

violence. This explanation seems logical when one considers traditional role expectations and gender inequality. Females still live in a sexist society and women are still a vastly neglected segment of our population. There also exists an unequal distribution of power and economic resources between both sexes, which makes it especially difficult for many females to become self-sufficient. Therefore, this lack of resources can serve as a powerful antecedent towards further motivating the female to remain even in a relationship where she is abused physically, psychologically, emotionally, and sexually. Relationships that are entrapping in nature can greatly impact a female's decision-making and ultimately leading her to further investing and committing to staying with the abusing partner.

Self-Verification Theory. There have been a limited number of studies that have investigated the theory of self-verification (Cast, Stets, & Burke 1999; Joiner, 1995; Katz & Beach, 1997; Swann, 1983, 1984, 1990; Swann & Ely, 1984; Swann et al., 1988). According to Swann et al. (1992) self-verification theory posits that people who have a negative view of self are more likely to seek negative evaluations about them selves than individuals who feel positively about them self. Their research findings suggest that the desire for self-verification seem to encourage some people with negative self-views to choose partners who appraise them unfavorably. Swann et al. summarize their findings by asserting that "people enact such paradoxical behaviors because negative evaluations bolster their perception that their social worlds are predictable and controllable" (p. 399).

Thus, it would make sense then that, females in abusive relationships whose daily lives are often unpredictable would seek evaluations of themselves that support their negative self-views. If females view themselves negatively (and many do, due to continual verbal, emotional, and controlling abusive behaviors exhibited by the abuser), according to self-verification theory

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they may become susceptible to prefer a partner who supports their negative views of self (Cast et al. 1999). Swann et al. (1992) also support these findings' they suggest that perhaps many of these individuals who exhibit a preference for unfavorable evaluations may purposefully seek out "relationship partners who hold them in low self-esteem" (p. 393).

Researchers Katz et al. (2000) investigated whether or not self-verification theory can predict females' responses to abusive partner behavior. The variables under analysis were psychological abuse from partners, self-esteem, and relationship outcomes in women involved in dating relationships. Results from their study indicated that partner abuse is related to relationship instability and less intimacy. Their results suggest that females do not necessarily seek and prefer negative partner behaviors in their quest for negative self-verification. They concluded that self-enhancement theory (according to Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996) may better explain the association between relationship stability, intimacy, and psychological abuse and that self-verification theory may explain how a survivor might respond to types of partner behavior" (Katz et al. 2000).

Katz et al (2000) go on to suggest that more research is needed on self-verification theory and its possible relationship to females who experience more severe psychological abuse and suffer lower self-esteem. Moreover, they caution that the application of self-verification theory to an individual's tolerance for abusive partner behaviors could "lead to erroneous and victim-blaming conclusions about women in abusive romantic relationships" (Katz et al. 2000, p. 356).

Feminist Perspective. In an attempt to understand the relationship between self-esteem level of abused females and their decisions to remain in an abusive situation, one must consider the socio-cultural context in which these dynamic events take place. From a feminist theoretical position, violence against women is viewed as a result of a patriarchal culture that promotes

inequality between the sexes. The feminist perspective maintains that those finding themselves in oppressed states have at least been partially entrapped by a societal system that is traditionally male-dominated, thus contributing to a devaluation of women and severely limiting their influence. From this perspective, the male-dominant, abusive relationship is just an individual incident of a larger societal problem.

According to author and feminist therapist Brown (1994), feminism is about the politics of gender and power and the necessity of recognizing the difficulty for women to focus on behaviors that enhance self-care. Feminism is about understanding how important it is for females who find themselves oppressed by men in the dominant culture, to listen closely to their own voice. Furthermore, it suggests that practicing psychotherapists, counselors, doctors, nurses, and social workers letting each individual they encounter tell their story in order to validate the clients' own unique experience. Brown argues that the experiences of each individual woman should be valued and the individual woman should be recognized as the "expert" in her life. Indeed, the female who has lived with an abusive partner has her own story to tell, and her reality can never be fully comprehended or explained by another.

We, as a society, must change the way we think about and view women and other marginalized groups who experience abuse. As feminist ideology teaches, we are not the expert when it comes to another individuals' own personal experience. As mental health professionals we must always remember that all people deserve our respect, our willingness to listen to their story in a nonjudgmental manner, and to validate, as best we can, their suffering and their intrinsic worth as a person. What cannot be overemphasized is how important it is for those in the helping profession to be mindful that many women are subjected to ongoing episodes of

psychological manipulation and physical threat on a daily basis. We might also shift our question

from "why does she stay?" to "why does he batter"?

Abused women are one of the most neglected, mistreated, and misunderstood segments

of Western society, and there exists patriarchal structures that help support this oppression.

Patriarchy helps to perpetuate the myth that violence against women is not a social problem but

rather an individual pathology versus a problem in the social fabric. Brown maintains that

psychological testing is often used to pathologize the victim. She also notes that these tests and

their outcomes are supported by years of patriarchal research. Brown describes these tests as

"patriarchal tools" used in a system that sometimes views the battered woman as a schizophrenic

or borderline personality. The author argues, that when a woman is being beaten, it would be

expected that she would become overwhelmed, confused, and depressed. This tendency to

pathologize female's experience of abuse (saying that because a woman finds herself in an

abusive relationship she is somehow mentally ill) is unfortunately an all too often occurrence in

our society.

Summary of Theoretical Perspectives

Combining the aforementioned theoretical perspectives establishes that there are

powerful social and psychological forces at work when a female finds herself enmeshed with an

abusing partner. Over time, the experience of an abusive relationship can be detrimental to a

woman's level of self-esteem. It has been hypothesized that many females remain in a cycle of

violence due to the noncontingent nature (or their inability to control environmental events)

within these relationships (Walker 1979, 1984). Furthermore, this learned helplessness

(developed through the woman's inability to successfully predict or control the actions of the

abusing partner) has been associated with human depression, and both have been found to

consist of cognitive, motivational, and behavioral components. Briefly stated, many women start to believe whatever it is they are told due to the conflicting nature of their interactions with the abusing partner and, as a result, develop distortions in the way they think.

The idea of psychological entrapment is also another possible theory to explain a female's decision to remain in an abusive environment. When a female finds herself in a relationship where there exists a high degree of conflict between herself and the abusing partner, who is often controlling, she may find it difficult to abandon the relationship because she has invested much time and energy. Waiting for rewards that she believes she deserves is a potent motivator to "stick it out" a while longer.

The female who finds herself in an abusive relationship in many respects is no different from anyone else. From time to time, we all seek some type of self-verifying information from our significant others, and more often than not, we prefer that such feedback confirm those views we already hold about ourselves. It has been suggested that self-verification theory may be helpful in understanding the maintenance of abusive relationships. It is, therefore, imperative that we examine the role of positive self-talk as a means of establishing a functional and useful, perhaps new, self-verification in women recovering from abuse.

Feminist ideology argues that there are gender-based inequities (Brown, 1994) brought about by the process of socialization. Feminist thought traces the subservient roles of females and all other oppressed groups by way of a patriarchal dominant culture in which we all find ourselves. Feminist therapy, which is more relevant for the aim of this thesis, "concerns itself with the invisible and sometimes nonconscious ways in which patriarchy has become embedded in everyone's daily life – in our identities, our manners of emotional expression , and our experiences of personal power and powerlessness – to our profound detriment (Brown, p. 17). In

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better understanding the complex environmental factors and situations in which females find themselves, especially within abusive relationships where their identities have become enmeshed with the abusive partner, it is necessary to explore feminist theory.

Self-Talk

There appears to be a limited amount of attention given to the study of self-talk (Beck, 1976; Ellis, 1962; Mahoney, 1974; Martin & Pear, 1999; Meichenbaum, 1972, 1977; Meichenbaum & Goodman, 1971; Morin, 1993, 1995; Morin & Everett, 1990; Schneider, 2002; Sokolov, 1972). Many authors use other terms interchangeably when referring to self-talk. For example, the term *internal dialogue* as described by Meichenbaum (1977) is referred to as "attributions, appraisals, interpretations, self-reinforcements, beliefs, defense mechanisms, and many other constructs" (p. 12); and thus, this term parallels the term self-talk.

According to Morin (1993, 1995) self-talk can be viewed as a cognitive tool used for self-reflective activity. He postulates that there is both effective and ineffective internal dialogues and that self-talk can provide the individual with self-knowledge. Moreover, Morin proposed the idea that, self-talk gives information about oneself and helps in the creation of self-concept. He asserts that effective self-talk helps in the acquisition of self-information by reflection of others' positive views. Also, he suggests that a rich content can be developed with an affirming vocabulary.

Schneider (2002) considered Morin's hypotheses and has made additional assertions. He suggests that the difference between effective versus ineffective self-talk resembles the "reflective and ruminative types of self-attentiveness" (p. 807) as introduced by Trapnell and Campbell (1999). He also suggests that ruminative self-consciousness is related to what

researcher Hoyer (2000) described as "dysfunctional" self-consciousness and that his concept of "functional" self-consciousness refers to self-reflection that is associated with confidence in personal problem solving. Thus, he maintains that "effective self-talk" is instrumental in eliciting the more functional and reflective aspects of self-consciousness. If this is true, then further scientific inquiry on both effective and ineffective self-talk could prove promising in better understanding cognition types.

Some researchers have demonstrated that self-talk is a useful psychological resource for women attempting to deal with and counteract the harmful effects of abuse. Campbell et al. (1998) report that self-talk was used as problem solving strategies with their sample of women, when trying to effectively manage various aspects of the relationship. For example, the authors report that the women would actively silence themselves by keeping feelings in and often taking a stance of passivity by using various phrases such as "ignore it" and "pretend it doesn't exist."

This inference has important meaning for the female who has existed in an abusive relationship where a powerful psychology is at work. For example, as with learned helplessness, where an individual may find herself entrapped within the conditions of noncontingency where one's perceptions overtime can become distorted, being able to "talk" to oneself positively could help promote greater self-confidence.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy as an Effective Modality of Treatment

Cognitive-behavior modification theory posits that it is possible to modify thinking and also the attitudes that support the cognitions (Meichenbaum, 1977). It is reported that behavior change can be achieved by changing cognitive processes. Cognitive restructuring techniques used as a treatment tool in helping modify maladaptive behaviors has met with much success in

various client populations as with children, adolescents, and both younger and older adults. It is this model that supplies the theoretical and practical applications for addressing self-talk in therapy. Meichenbaum (1977) is one of the first founders of cognitive-behavior modification and has helped create many of the techniques that have developed into successful treatment modalities. Cognitive-behavior therapies (CBT) have shown to be a successful modality of treatment for all age groups suffering from various forms of trauma (Beck, 1976; Beck & Emery, 1985; Clark, 1989; Freeman, Pretzer, Fleming, & Simon, 1990; Meichenbaum, 1977). There are many CBT techniques used with a wide variety of clinical populations such as weight management, cigarette cessation, sexual dysfunction, anger management skills, anxiety producing situations, phobias, fear, embarrassment, marital distress, vocational deficiencies, etc.

Meichenbaum (1977) suggests that a therapist working with cognitions would help the client identify cognitions that may be distorted and help the move to valid conceptions through the use of reason. Much of Meichenbaum's work focuses on maladaptive cognitions and the role they play in helping determine behavioral outcomes. The author uses the terms self-verbalizations, self-statements, internal dialogue, and inner speech interchangeably throughout his research. The fundamental premise that he addresses to the client is for them to consider that behavior change is possible through monitoring what they say to themselves. Thus, CBT emphasizes thought processes and their role in erroneous thinking and beliefs that can inhibit one's level of social, psychological, emotional, and occupational functioning, therefore, limiting an individuals' potentiality.

A review of the literature suggests that there has been scarce research conducted in the area of positive self-statements and their usefulness as a behavioral modification technique (Beck, 1967; Ellis, 1962; Heimberg, Acerra, & Holstein, 1985; Kendall, Howard, & Hays, 1989;

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Meichenbaum, 1972, 1974; Meichenbaum, & Goodman, 1971; Schwartz, & Michaelson, 1987).

Some of these empirical studies have focused on the relationship between both negative and positive self-statements and the features of each one (Kendall et al. 1989; Schwartz & Michaelson, 1987).

Most recently, there has been some research that has examined the role self-talk may play in depression and self-esteem development (Philpot, V.D., Holliman, W.B., & Madonna, S., 1995; Philpot, V.D., & Bamburg, J.W., 1996). It has been suggested that the frequency of positive self-statements made by an individual does affect overall well-being (Heimberg et al. 1985; Kendall, Howard, & Hays, 1989; Schwartz & Michaelson, 1987). Kendall (1984) suggests that perhaps the "absence of negative self-talk is more important than the presence of positive self-talk to the overall well-being of the individual" (Philpot et al. 1995, p. 1008).

It has been theorized that positive self-statements serve to improve self-esteem level. According to Frey and Carlock (1989) an individual can learn self-talk that affirms and nurtures, just as she or he has learned self-talk that harms. Others suggest that perhaps it is the ratio of positive to negative self-statements that matter more than frequency (Philpot & Bamburg, 1996).

After reviewing the literature on the issue of intimate partner abuse and the very often complex variables that have been shown to play a role in this problem, it has become increasingly clear that the female survivor is in need of greater support and therapeutic attention than what she gets or seeks. Females trapped in an abusive cycle are in need of a treatment modality that addresses their self views without risking victim-blaming, or pathologizing their situation. Walker (1984) asserts that cognitive restructuring techniques are more suited for these women due to their need to control their own minds, and she further states that "cognitive

restructuring procedures which broaden her choices are most compatible for long-term therapy" (p. 127).

CBT has many advantages over other forms of psychotherapy in that clients complete their treatment much sooner, and perspectives from feminism and self-verification theory can be integrated into treatment. Moreover, according to Meichenbaum (1994), there are other important therapeutic factors involved with CBT that help foster enhanced outcomes for the client. For example, he maintains that the development of a therapeutic alliance and a collaborative client-therapist relationship is fundamental to successful treatment.

CBT techniques such as self-monitoring, self-instructional training, self-talk, and cognitive restructuring hold great promise as coping skills for a wide variety of problems. It has proven to be successful in helping people to better manage their behavior and their ways of thinking and to adopt healthier attitudes. As Meichenbaum (1977) argues, self-talk has important implications in helping people make decisions due to the fact that what individuals say to them selves can determine what action they might take.

Statement of the Problem

Countless research studies have been conducted that clearly communicate that violence against females is a frequent and often understated problem in our society. Intimate partner violence has the greatest effects upon the female populations. According to reports from the U.S Bureau of Justice (1994) 92% of all domestic violence incidents and crimes are committed by men against women. Furthermore, in women experiencing physical abuse since the age of 18, three-quarters (76 %) were victimized by a current or former husband, cohabitating partner, date, or boyfriend (1998). Women, both young and old, can find themselves enmeshed within an

abusive relationship due to the patriarchal structure of our traditional values. The cycle of violence in which women find themselves can lead to serious physical and psychological consequences and for these reasons alone, further scientific inquiry is needed. The Learned Helplessness theory as introduced by Seligman (1975) and later on elaborated by Walker (1979) in her research with battered women indicates that there are complex psychological factors involved in a woman's interactions with the abusing partner. A primary purpose of this study is to examine how women deal with violence and its overall effect upon their identity, an issue that is still greatly misunderstood. This literature review may be important in helping better understand what therapeutic endeavors need to be undertaken when clinicians attempt to assess and treat a female whose self-esteem has been eroded during the course of an abusive partnership. Another purpose of this study is to investigate the role that self-esteem may play in the abused female's dealings with the abusive partner and whether or not self-esteem itself is instrumental in understanding why some women choose to leave these relationships while others stay. By understanding the effects of self-esteem, especially within the context of an abusive relationship, mental health professionals will be better able to address those concerns that the female survivor brings with her.

CHAPTER 2

DISCUSSION

Many women may remain in abusive relationships due to a continually poor self-concept. Self-esteem is an important construct in understanding how an individual views self in relation to *competence*, *worth*, and *success*. Thus, this construct plays an integral role in how individuals evaluate various aspects of their abilities, their overall strengths versus their weaknesses. A female's self-esteem level has been shown to be affected by ongoing interactions with an abusing partner (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Tuel & Russell, 1998; Walker, 1979, 1984). Based on Walker's Cycle Theory of Violence, there is some evidence that suggests self-esteem issues are "more complicated than originally viewed" (Walker, 1984, p. 127).

The purpose of this integrated literature review was to examine the role self-esteem may play in helping females who find themselves in a cycle of violence with an abusing partner view themselves more positively. Another focus of this study was to determine the relationship that may exist between a female's self-esteem level and her decision to either remain in or abandon the abusive relationship.

The relationship between abuse, self-esteem, and positive self-talk statements amongst females was examined. There are several interesting findings suggesting self-esteem may have important implications for why females stay in or leave an abusive environment. A review of the literature suggests that the learned helplessness model is one explanation for some women choosing to remain in abusive relationships. Based on Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale's (1978) helplessness hypothesis and Walker's (1979) classic study with battered women, those who develop the belief that they have little or no control over what happens to them may decide that they are helpless. Thus, it is hypothesized that relationships of a noncontingent nature appear

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to affect the individuals' perception that she has no control over environmental events and at some point may become passive and submissive, as with the female survivor and her interactions with her abusive partner.

The theory of psychological entrapment is important in helping better understand how certain characteristics of the abuse experience influence a female's perceptions and her decision-making processes over time. For example, it is predicted that there are some situations that are more entrapping than others (Rubin et al. 1980). According to this theory, those situations where the level of conflict is highest make it most difficult to decide to escape. Indecision is motivated in part by the individual weighing her options, assessing the rewards versus the costs of maintaining her connection with the other party, and thus, trying to determine whether or not to commit or withdraw from their situation.

Researchers Strube and Barbour (1983, 1984) investigated factors related to the decision to leave an abusive relationship. Their findings revealed that the longer a woman remained in a relationship the more committed she may become, and, as a result, she may be more susceptible to psychological entrapment. The more committed a woman is to the relationship the more difficult it is to justify leaving (Strube, 1988). Therefore, based on these findings, it seems plausible that a female who finds herself in conditions such as these and experiencing abuse from her partner might be subject to remain in such a relationship.

There has been little research examining the self-verification perspective and its possible relationship in helping understand female's reactions to continued forms of abuse. It is suggested by this current researcher that perhaps some feedback may be better than no feedback, particularly in those relationships in which the female survivor has experienced much abuse over time, thus, diminishing her self-esteem. As the aforementioned researchers suggest, "benefits of

self-verifying feedback, even when negative, include an increased sense of self-knowledge and perceived predictability and control within the social environment" (Katz et al. 2000, p. 350). Application of this theory to the female who finds herself enmeshed with an abusing partner seems especially plausible when the frequency and duration of these abusive partner behaviors can grow increasingly complex in nature.

Morin (1993, 1995) distinguishes between two types of self-talk, effective and ineffective. Schneider (2002) later builds on this idea and compares both self-talk types to reflective and ruminative types. This inference is particularly relevant for the female who has existed in an abusive relationship where a powerful psychology is at work. Environments where conditions of noncontingency exist can influence one's perceptions of reality, and over time individual's cognitions can become distorted. Thus, it is essential to replace these distorted cognitions with what Hoyer (2000) referred to as "functional" self-consciousness, or self-reflection that is more positive in nature.

These theories help in understanding why a female would remain in an abusive relationship; one where she is often humiliated, criticized, and, worst of all, physically assaulted. Society in general asks over and over why women stay in abusive relationships and some even suggest flawed personality characteristics as the reason for remaining in an abusive relationship, such as a tendency towards masochistic behavior. To assert that females possess a psychological need to be a victim grossly diminishes the seriousness of violence in the females' lives and puts the blame where it doesn't belong, on the woman. Perhaps the most pressing and relevant question is why do male partners abuse women in the first place? This question has been addressed in several studies (Bancroft, 2002; Bowker, 1983; Davidson, 1978; Dutton, 1988,

1995; Gelles, 1974; Giles-Sims, 1983; Gondolf, 1988; Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986; Martin, 1976; Ptacek, 1988; Saunders, 1992; Sonkin, 1988; Walker, 1979, 1984).

A review of the literature clearly supports the idea that low self-esteem and negative self-views are found among battered women (Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992; Gelles & Strauss, 1988; Schutte, Bouleige, Fix, & Malouff, 1986; Walker, 1979, 1984). However, there are those researchers who have conducted studies that suggest that self-esteem does not always play a primary role in the dysfunctional and complex dance that both the abusing partner and female survivor play out overtime. For example, Katz et al. (2000) make the clarification that although a woman who is abused may certainly hold herself in low self-esteem this does not mean that a woman is seeking an abusive partner.

Nevertheless, it goes without saying that abuse of any type is an aversive experience and the repercussions of such experiences have even been compared to by some researchers as having the same symptomatology as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Walker, 1984, 1985). Battered Woman Syndrome, a widely recognized set of symptoms, is even recognized by the American Psychiatric Association and subsumed within the diagnostic criteria for PTSS, coded on Axis I in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Many women have ambivalent feelings about the batterer (Walker, 1984). This is one of the reasons the abuse experience grows increasingly frustrating and complicated for the female. What woman does not want to believe that the person she grew to love will try to keep his promise not to hit her or become verbally abusive again? Many males who inflict abuse will soon thereafter apologize, then embrace and profess their love to the female, and promise that the abuse will never happen again. These series of abusive behaviors coupled with apologetic

displays for forgiveness interfere with the cognitive structuring process of the abuse experience and inhibits the female's ability to accurately discern and make sense of her partner's true intentions.

I hypothesize that the ongoing abuse that a female experiences over time will prove detrimental to her self-concept by causing negative self-talk. Negative messages such as "you're no damn good," "you're too fat," and "nobody could ever love you" she receives from the abusing partner can interfere with her decision-making abilities by reinforcing what she may already believe about herself. Thus, she may remain in the relationship, in part, due to a continually poor sense of self. According to Belknap (1999) one of the contributing factors in abusive relationships is the cognitive restructuring of the experience. The way the woman feels about herself certainly affects the process of withdrawing from an abusive relationship.

It is my contention that by replacing these distorted cognitions with healthier and more positive cognitions the abused woman will begin to develop honest appraisals of those characteristics of self such as "I'm okay," "I'm not ugly" and "I love myself." If the female actually starts to believe that she is loveable, worthy, and deserving of a better life, she has begun to put self-affirmation into action, at least on a cognitive level. This is a form of reality testing, bringing the client closer to the reality of her situation through a cognitive-behavioral modality of treatment.

By telling herself repeatedly that she is "a good woman" and that she is okay the way she is, she may find the courage to start believing these things. The further females find themselves caught up in the often chaotic and manipulative world of their abuser, the more they begin to see themselves through the abuser's eyes. Many may actually start believing what they are told by

their partner that they are "shaped funny," that they "walk" or "talk funny." Females may begin to think that they are defective and may start believing that they are the flawed one.

The reason these cognitive exercises are believed to be important is because of the sense of empowerment the client may begin to develop. Many females who have developed a poor sense of self over time may feel less empowered to make decisions that affect their well-being. This is clearly evidenced within relationships where cycles of dysfunctional behavior become the norm. Moreover, she may be more susceptible to outside influences due to a lack of "interpersonal control" and recognition of her own individual autonomy.

Our view of self is shaped, at least in part, by social intercourse with significant others; the woman in an abusive relationship is no exception. Therefore, if the man claims he loves her but suggests at the same time in no uncertain terms that she is ignorant or awkward acting, it should come as no surprise that the female survivor will develop a lowered self-esteem. Over time, the abused female learns to silence herself in order to control the level of abuse she is confronted with, sometimes on a daily basis. More often than not, what these women feel and think is of little consequence to the partner who is exerting control. As Jack (1991) asserts "women, as equals, have been excluded from the cultural dialogue, they have been the subjects of someone else's story. Women also have been the objects of male violence; a circumstance that further removes them from dialogue" (pp. 190-191).

Thus, it is suggested that the repeated use of positive self-appraisals such as "I like my self" and "I love myself" will serve as powerful internal dialogue and assist the female survivor in developing an enhanced self view. I suggest that this cognitive exercise is best done by looking in the mirror while the individual is alone without any interference (as with the abusing partner) or outside influences that would disrupt her concentration and personal sense of security.

It will be important that these exercises first be carried out in a supportive environment as with a therapist or in the group therapy setting where the client is surrounded my mutually supportive peers.

By looking in the mirror on a daily basis and repeating to oneself these positive statements, such self-talk should serve as powerful "mental scripts" that will eventually help to replace a negative self-view with a more positive view. It is further hypothesized that self-esteem will increase once these dysfunctional cognitions are decreased. The goal is to help create within the female survivor healthier self-attributions and internal dialogue of a more positive nature, thus challenging old and erroneous thinking.

The woman who has experienced abuse needs to actively and routinely reaffirm her intrinsic value as a woman. This requires daily devotions to self, something that may seem very uncomfortable to some, after being kept a mental prisoner by a controlling and manipulative partner. It is hoped that this research will help uncover important knowledge that can help females find the courage to view them in a more positive light. By seeing themselves differently, they might move closer to ending the cycle of violence in their lives, and take that first, very important step. The first step is walking towards the mirror and recognizing their intrinsic value as an individual person, seeing the beauty they possess, from both the inside and outside. This is after all, the central purpose of my research: that an abused woman develops coping strategies and the personal insight necessary in learning to "love" self.

These issues have important implications in the fields of counseling, nursing, clinical psychology, sociology, social work, and psychiatry. As mental health professionals, if we are to help female survivors of domestic assault rebuild their lives, we must begin investigating those rudimentary elements relating to their self views and how they have evolved over time. It is

imperative that females in abusive relationships begin to deal with issues of shame, guilt, and anger that the abuse experience has caused; otherwise they will be unable to make few, if any authentic and lasting repairs to their lives and risk falling back into possibly the same, or other abusive situations. However, once she begins recognizing those qualities of "self" that distinguish her from the abusive partner, she will hopefully move closer to the mirror and begin to see her true self.

Suggestions for Future Research

A review of the literature strongly suggests that females in abusive relationships have much to loose. Abuse has been shown to create a wide host of problems for female survivors. Some of the literature strongly suggests common characteristics that female survivors experiencing abuse share. For example, female survivors of abuse suffer self-blame for the abuse experience, shame, guilt, anger, and a lowered self-esteem. The literature reviewed suggests that those things that would best improve the lives of females experiencing abuse would be a strong and healthy support system, economic independence, help and encouragement with coping skills as with building a stronger self-concept, and realizing that the victimization is not their fault.

The review of this literature suggests that there is a strong need for additional research in the role abuse plays in the formation of self-concept and both its short-term and long-term effects on self-esteem level. Even though the Walker study (1979) and countless others have studied many of the complex psychological and social effects of abuse and helped to promote a greater understanding of the female abuse survivor, it appears that many articles dealing with this subject fail to devote enough attention to it.

The self-concepts of individuals' in part are based on their perceptions of the way significant others respond to them. This idea is known as the reflected-appraisal process and it

has been investigated in a limited number of studies (Felson, 1980, 1981, 1985; Hoelter, 1984; Kinch, 1963). In short, it has been argued that reflected appraisals do affect self-appraisals (Felson, 1985).

Cast, Stets, & Burke (1999) uncovered some interesting findings in their study on whether or not individuals come to see themselves as others see them. Their investigation focused on newly married couples and addressed which "others" might be influential in forming self-views, the self's agency in protecting self-views from change, and the individuals' openness to change. Results of this study report that if a partner has a higher position, than the higher partner's view affects the other partner's self-view. Since we live in a male dominant culture, where power and authority is still determined by one's gender, it makes sense then that many females finding themselves trapped in an abusive cycle will not question the males' status and will even come to believe what he says.

These inferences suggest that those individuals whose views are looked upon as a reliable source of information by another (as with the abused female who has been manipulated by her abuser into believing what he tells her) may promote influence on the females' own self-views. Further analysis of these social psychological questions, are needed in helping determine the role that these complex relationships play in self-concept formation.

Replication of this study should explore further self-verification theory and its role, if any, in the female's responses to abusive treatment from her partner. Further investigation of this theory could have important implications in the understanding of self-esteem level and those intervening variables that are present during the interactions between the couple.

This review of the literature did provide support for my hypothesis that positive self-talk can possibly help produce a healthier self-esteem by helping alter negative cognitions. However,

as suggested by more than one researcher, it may be the ratio of negative to positive self-statements that help determine self-esteem level, and not necessarily the frequency of positive self-statements. Negative messages need to be interrupted and replaced by positive affirmations. As suggested, this would best be facilitated by the use of a cognitive-behavioral modality of treatment.

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, it may prove quite fruitful for future studies to examine the variables of abuse, self-esteem, and positive self-talk by way of ethnographic fieldwork. Interviews with women who are presently involved with an abusing partner could provide important data for insight purposes, thus facilitating the literature review process. An important point to remember is that these relationships can be extremely complex in nature. The many dramas that are continually played out over time in these relationships are dynamic and not always easily understood.

For those working with abused females it must be remembered that their lives are at greatest risk when they have developed the skills and courage necessary to abandon the relationship. Statistics show that domestic violence and abusive partner behaviors escalate dramatically during the period when the female attempts to leave the abuser. Thus, any therapy with female survivors of abuse must be done with caution. It will be necessary to closely monitor the progress of the client. Too much success too soon could intimidate the abuser and put the female at increased risk for physical harm, even death.

If it turns out that positive attributions augment self-esteem and increased self-esteem acts as a preventative and remedial component of therapy for abused women, various corrective statements from the 40 listed in Appendix A might serve as a basis for cognitive restructuring. These statements need to be incorporated not merely as daily affirmations, but need to be

integrated in the conversations of therapy as well as in the discourse of everyday life. In this

sense, they become themes that permeate the woman's style of living (Adler as cited in

Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1978) and her responses to others.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Healthy Cognitions for Enhancing Self-Esteem

Positive self-talk statements and their usefulness as exercises in helping enhance self-esteem for various populations have been shown to be an effective psychological resource tool (Beck, 1995; Carlock & Frey, 1989; Dugan & Hock, 2000; Ellis & Harper, 1975; Helmstetter, 1986; Mahoney, 1974; Meichenbaum, 1977; Mruk, 1999).

Positive Self-Statement Categories:

Competence and Success: Females in abusive relationships are often psychologically and physically attacked due to attempts at realizing their potential or just for behaving in completely normal and appropriate ways. The following is a list of positive self-statements that focus on a female's belief of herself as a competent individual capable of successful outcomes in all areas of her life. These statements are important for counteracting negative and erroneous assumptions about her self.

1. "I am an intelligent woman"

2. "I do a good job at my workplace"

3. "It's okay to make mistakes"

4. "I am a good driver"

5. "I am a good singer"

6. "I can succeed at anything I set my mind to"

7. "I am not crazy"

8. "I have special talents and abilities"

9. "It's okay to just be me"

10. "My opinion is just as important as the next person's"

11. "I am not stupid"

12. "I am smart and can figure things out just as easily as others"

13. "It's okay not to be perfect"

14. "I am competent at many things"

15. "I am a brave woman"

16. "I am a courageous woman"

17. "I am a strong woman"

18. "I can achieve anything I set my mind to"

19. "I have many strengths"

20. "I am a survivor"

Worth: A female's sense of personal self-worth is often criticized or brought under attack by the abusing partner. The following is a list of positive self-statements that focus on a female's belief of possessing intrinsic value as a person. These statements are important in counteracting negative and erroneous assumptions about her self.

1. "I am worthy of being loved"

2. "I am worthy of a happy and fulfilling life"

3. "I am okay"

4. "I am a good person"

5. "I am a good woman"

6. "I like myself"

7. "I love myself"

8. "I am important"

9. "I am somebody"

10. "I am a person of value"

11. "I am a valuable member of society"

12. "I have much to contribute"

13. "I am just as important as the next person"

14. "I look good enough, with, or without make-up"

15. "I am a likeable person"

16. "It's okay to take care of myself"

17. "I have much potential"

18. "I am as equally important as my partner"

19. "I am a person with much to offer"

20. "I am not worthless"

Appendix B

Activity**:** *Mirror Technique*

Introduction: This exercise allows females to focus on enhancing self-esteem by practicing positive self-talk.

Time required: As much time as needed.

Setting: At home in private in front of mirror.

Materials: None

Procedure: Stand in front of mirror and practice positive self-statements (affirmations) e.g. "I love myself," spoken out loud or silently to one's self.

Outcomes: This exercise helps enhance self-esteem level by interrupting negative thoughts about ones self and replaces them with positive ones.

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