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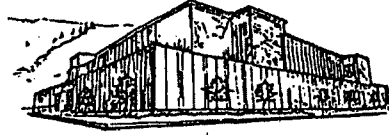
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"And I never looked back":

Adolescent Girls and Women who End a Dating Relationship

after a Single Violent Assault

by

Alison M. Cobb

B.A., Hood College, 1993

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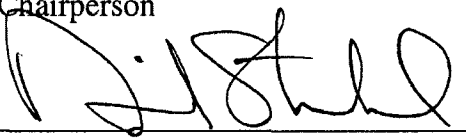
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Abstract

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"And I never looked back": Adolescent Girls and Women who End a Dating Relationship after a Single Violent Assault (165 pp.)

Director: Jennifer Waltz, Ph.D.   *Jennifer Waltz*

    While there has been much research on why women stay in abusive relationships, little is known about why some leave immediately, after a single violent incident. This qualitative study takes a grounded theory approach to explore this question through interviews with ten female undergraduate students. Their aggregate story is of a troubled relationship; a verbally abusive boy; a confident girl who suffered a self-esteem blow during the relationship but is regaining her independence; an incident that is severe enough to prompt her to critically examine her relationship and to seek help from friends or parents; and a break-up that boosts her self-esteem. Important factors uncovered in this study provide focus for future quantitative research, and findings such as the importance of social support have implications for prevention and intervention programs.

Acknowledgments

It was just a lot of regret...and then I got mad and said,

you know, *screw that*, it's not my fault, it's his fault.

And I was never gonna give him a chance to do that, ever again.

--Nora

You do not hit people.

--Deb

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"And I never looked back":

Adolescent Girls and Women who End a Dating Relationship

after a Single Violent Assault

Teen dating violence (TDV) is a little-understood, startlingly common, and

disturbing phenomenon. Perhaps one of the most troublesome aspects of TDV is its wide

acceptance among both perpetrators and peers. A fair amount of research has been

conducted on TDV's prevalence and teens' surprising level of tolerance of physical

aggression in romantic relationships. For example, some studies have found prevalence

rates as high as 65% (Bethke & DeJoy, 1993), and that about a third of teens interpret the

violence in their relationships as acts of love (Matthews, 1984; Roscoe & Kelsey, 1986).

In contrast, little research has been done on teens who do *not* tolerate or excuse violence.

This study seeks to better understand those teens who are intolerant of violence. It

examines characteristics and experiences of young women who ended relationships

immediately after the first violent incident, to discover factors that influenced them in the

direction of leaving.

"Teen Dating Violence" Defined

Research on TDV began in the early 1980's. Over the past two decades, much

attention has focused on documenting the manifestation and prevalence of the problem:

who are the aggressors, who are the victims, how often does it occur, and what exactly

happens? Simply defining and describing TDV has been a major task. One definition of

dating and dating violence that has been commonly used (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001) was

developed by Sugarman and Hotaling (1989):

1

...the process of dating is seen as a dyadic interaction that focuses on

participation in mutually rewarding activities that may increase the likelihood

of future interaction, emotional commitment, and/or sexual intimacy.

Consequently, dating violence involves the perpetration or threat of an act of

physical violence by at least one member of an unmarried dyad on the other

within the context of the dating process. Our definition of dating violence (1)

excludes married individuals and divorced couples who are not attempting to

reconcile their relationships; (2) incorporates a range of relationships from the

first dates to cohabitation and engagement; and (3) can apply to homosexual

as well as to heterosexual relationships. (p. 5)

Some researchers have included sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse in their definitions

(e.g., O'Keefe et al., 1986; Thompson, 1986); others have excluded these types of abuse

in order to limit the scope of their studies (e.g., Lewis & Fremouw, 2001). Sugarman and

Hotaling, for example, excluded psychological abuse (with the exception of threats of

physical violence) because it had not been well operationalized in the literature about

dating violence. Physical violence includes the more common acts of pushing, shoving,

restraining, slapping, kicking, and hitting with a fist, as well as acts like using a weapon

and beating.

<u>Prevalence</u>

Some studies have found such high rates of TDV that some might consider it a

"normal" part of dating life, with prevalence of up to 65% (Laner, 1983). Pioneering

research on dating violence, conducted by sociologist James Makepeace (1979), found

that 21% of his sample of 202 undergraduates at a midwestern state university had had at

least one direct personal experience with dating violence. Another survey of college students at a northwestern state university reported in 1982 found a similar rate: 22% of 355 questionnaire respondents reported violence in a relationship (Cate et al., 1982). Ten years after his original study, Makepeace administered a questionnaire to 2,650 males and females from eight colleges and universities around the country, and found a courtship violence rate of 16% (1989).

Subsequent research has found rates averaging around 33% (Helland, 1998), with estimates ranging broadly, between 20 and 65% (Bethke & DeJoy, 1993). The variance is probably due to differences in how violence is defined (Helland, 1998). For example, Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs' 1985 study included sexual aggression and found a lifetime prevalence rate of 64%; a lifetime rate of 65% was found by Laner (1983) when verbal aggression was included. Furthermore, studies may not consistently distinguish between playful acts and violence.

While researchers have found different rates of types of violence, there is consensus that the most common acts are the less serious (Arias, Samios, & O'Leary, 1987; Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1985; Makepeace, 1983); these include pushing/shoving, slapping, kicking, and hitting with a fist (Roscoe & Kelsey, 1986), as opposed to acts like hitting with a weapon or beating up. Questionnaires mailed to male and female undergraduates at a northwestern university showed that 78% of those reporting violence had experienced pushing or shoving; 61% slapping; 38% kicking, biting, or hitting with fists; 33% hitting or trying to hit with something; 4% beatings; and 3% threatening with a knife or gun (Cate, et al., 1982). A similar study at Rutgers University showed that of the respondents who had been physically abused in a relationship, 43% had been pushed,

28% slapped, 19% punched, 8% struck with an object, and 2% struck with a weapon (Aizenman & Kelley, 1988). Perpetrator gender appears to be a significant factor in severity rates: review articles consistently show that males initiate severe violence and sexual abuse more often than females and that females experience more injury (Arias & Johnson, 1989; Burke, Stets, & Pirog-Good, 1989; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). Alcohol and drug abuse also appear play a role in severity (Solomon, 2003); it is certainly a prominent factor in many occurrences of violence. For example, studies have reported that alcohol is involved in around 20% to 50% of dating violence incidents (Williams & Smith, 1994).

Teen dating violence rates are close to domestic violence rates, which have been estimated at 30% (Wilt & Olson, 1996). While there is less research on violence between dating teens than between spouses, the numbers clearly show that it is a problem of wide scope and deep impact.

How TDV Changes Relationships

Like battered spouses, many battered teens remain with their abusive partners; how many leave is difficult to determine. Follingstad, Rutledge, Polek and McNeill-Hawkins (1988) found that of 48 undergraduate women who had experienced violence in relationships, 18 (37.5%) reported leaving due to the abuse. However, most studies that report on the impact of violence on relationships only indicate whether the relationship continued, and if it did, whether it worsened or improved. For those that did not continue, we do not know how soon after the violence the relationship ended, or whether it reportedly ended because of the violence. For example, a 1989 review article by Sugarman and Hotaling reported that studies have found that from 12 to 70% of

relationships "end because of the violent behavior." They acknowledged that this range is wide; furthermore, they did not give citations for this estimate. It may be that the studies they reviewed reported 12 to 70% of the relationships ended after the violence, but not necessarily *because* of it. Information is also lacking on how soon after the violence started the relationship ended; who ended it; how close to termination the couple was before the violence began; etc. So while researchers have found that that the majority of violent relationships have ended, this may simply be a reflection of the short-term nature of teen romance. Therefore, it is more valid to consider rates of continuing the relationship than ending it; this at least shows how often relationship violence is insufficient to warrant termination.

A large minority of teens, it appears, do not end their relationship when violence begins. Aizenman and Kelley (1988) found that almost 50% of their undergraduate sample continued relationships after abuse occurred. In Roscoe and Kelsey's 1986 study of 77 seniors at a private high school, 27% of the respondents indicated that their relationships continued. Cate, et al. (1982) found that of the 79 college students in their study, 53% were still dating the abusive person; Henton, et al. (1983) found a rate of 41% stayed in their study of 78 high school students. Thirty-nine percent of Matthews' (1984) 351 undergraduate respondents continued their relationships after a violent episode.

For those who do remain in the relationship, what impact do they feel the violence has? Table 1 shows several studies indicating that a majority of teens felt their relationship either did not change or improved:

TABLE 1

Change in Relationship After Violence

	Cate, et al. (1982)	Henton, et al. (1983)	Matthews (1984)	O'Keeffe, et al. (1986)	Roscoe & Kelsey (1986)
Worsened	22%	44%	31%	45, 40%[a]	80%[b]
No Change	41	20	26	30, 37	20
Improved	37	36	43	21, 17	0

[a] O'Keeffe, et al. divided response rates by victims and perpetrators. Here, victims' response rates are listed first, and perpetrators' second. Percentage of relationships that terminated are included under "worsened."
[b] Roscoe & Kelsey found that 73% terminated and 7% worsened; none of their participants reported improvement.

Matthews (1984) suggests that couples feel the violence improved their relationships because they frequently frame it as an act of love (see Table 2, page 9). 28% of the victims in his undergraduate sample interpreted their partner's violence as love, and 27% of the perpetrators indicated that their violent behavior meant they loved their partner. Perhaps both parties see the violence as proof of the aggressor's passion, especially if it was triggered by jealousy. Another explanation for relationship improvement may be that there is a honeymoon effect; an apology couched in expressions of passionate devotion could serve to deepen a couple's commitment.

Further evidence that a violent episode is often insufficient to cause a relationship termination is found in reports of how many times violence occurs in a relationship. Makepeace's 1981 study found that violence occurred on multiple occasions in half of the relationships examined. Roscoe and Benaske (1985) found that among those who experienced violence in a relationship, the mean number of incidents was 9.6. These data indicate that a single incident of abuse is not usually sufficient to end a relationship.

It appears that adult relationships are even more likely to continue after a violent incident. Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns, and Shortt (1996) reported that only 38% of the violent couples in their longitudinal study had separated or divorced by the two-year follow-up point. Similarly, Okun (1986) found that only 30% of women at a shelter terminated their relationship immediately after leaving the shelter, and 13% more terminated within two years. Earlier studies found similar rates: 60% of Snyder and Fruchtman's 1981 sample returned to their partners within ten weeks of leaving the shelter, and 50% of Ferraro and Johnson's 1983 shelter sample returned to their abusers. A 1981 study by Pagelow found that once violence began, the median length of time women stayed was four years, with a range from one to 42 years. These studies suggest that adults are less likely to end violent relationships than adolescents. The difference may be that the ties that bind spouses together are not usually factors in teen dating relationships, such as marriage, children, and financial dependence.

<div align="center">Predictors of Leaving</div>

Researchers studying domestic violence have identified many factors that appear to be predictive of a woman's decision to leave a violent marriage. In contrast, little research has been done on a teen's decision to leave a violent boyfriend. In a review article, Sugarman and Hotaling (1989) noted that multivariate analyses were not yet available to determine which factors were predictive of a teen's decision to leave. Since that time, it appears that further research on this question has not been conducted.

The research available on adult relationships may be combined with what is known about TDV to suggest some factors involved in the decision to leave. Relevant factors may be: the victim's preconceived ideas of what behaviors are acceptable in

dating relationships; her[1] level of commitment to the relationship; her expectations that the violence might recur if she stays; the severity of the violence; role models in the victim's life who may have tolerated or rejected violent relationships; her self-esteem; her assertiveness; and factors related to the perpetrator of the violence. Existing literature on these factors is explored below. The findings served as guidelines in the initial stages of the present research.

<u>Definition of Acceptable Behavior</u>

It would seem that if a person has a strong, established sense of what constitutes unacceptably aggressive behavior, she may be more likely to leave if that line is crossed. If a young woman believes that it is "against the rules" of a relationship to hit or shove, she has an established principle by which to judge her partner's behavior. When she is caught in the ambiguity of the situation (the person she loves is apologizing, swearing he will never do it again, and begging her not to leave him), a clear, deeply entrenched definition of what is unacceptable may strengthen her resolve to end the relationship. Without this clear definition of unacceptable behavior, she may be more ambivalent. Wanting to preserve the relationship, and reluctant to accept that her boyfriend would intentionally hurt her, she may be motivated to reframe or excuse the violence. For example, as Table 2 shows, studies have found that both perpetrators and victims commonly interpret violence as an expression of love (Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher, & Lloyd, 1982; Henton, Cate, Koval, Lloyd, & Christopoher, 1983; Matthews, 1984;

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[1] For brevity's sake and because the current study focuses on male-to-female violence, the victim of abuse will be referred to as female. This is not to imply that males are never victims of TDV.

Roscoe & Kelsey, 1986). Sugarman and Hotaling (1991) write that this interpretation

suggests "a normative confusion surrounding appropriate dating behavior" (p. 107).

TABLE 2

Victims' and Aggressors' Interpretations of Violent Acts

What did the violence mean to you?	Cate et al. 355 high school	Henton et al. 644 high school	Matthews 351 college	Roscoe & Kelsey 77 high school
Anger	73%	71%, 54%[a]	39, 72%[a]	53%
Confusion	49	49, 60	-	47
Love	29	27, 31	28, 27	33
Hate	8	4, 3	-	-
Scared	-	12, 24	-	-
Sadness	-	9, 19	-	7
Other	-	12, 9	-	-

[a] Henton et al. and Matthews separated victims' from aggressors' ascribed meanings; here, the first number is the victims' responses, and the second is the aggressors'.

More broadly, there is evidence that teens do not generally have firm definitions

of violence or clear understandings of violence as unacceptable in a relationship (e.g.,

Arias & Johnson, 1989; Levy, 1990; Roscoe, 1985). Laner (1990) points out that while

physical aggression outside of a romantic relationship is clearly understood to be

objectionable (for example, sexual assault by a stranger), the same behavior within a

dating context is likely to be excused due to the aggressor's motivation. "In romantic

relationships...it may be that participants view the motives or precipitators as more

problematic than the violence to which they sometimes give rise" (p. 320). This suggests

that the victims will see jealousy, for example, as the "real" problem, and the violence as

an expected, normal response. Arias and Johnson (1989) found that around 32-44% of

college students in their sample felt that dating aggression was appropriate in

circumstances of infidelity or retaliation.

There is also strong evidence that teens often view violence in relationships as "normal" (Henton, 1983; Levy, 1990; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989) and acceptable. Matthews (1984) surveyed male and female undergraduates who had *not* experienced violence in relationships and found that violence was not perceived as particularly unusual or necessarily unacceptable. Twenty-five percent of his sample of 272 responded they felt that slapping may be necessary in a relationship; 50% indicated that they believed this behavior to be at least somewhat normal; and 31% felt it to be at least somewhat acceptable. Roscoe and Benaske (1985) found that 70% of their college sample believed behaviors such as slapping and pushing were acceptable. Cate et al. (1982) suggested that the acceptability of violence increases as the dating relationship becomes more intimate. Finally, some teens who participated in focus groups for a qualitative study by Lavoie, Robitaille, and Hebert (2000) saw violence or aggression as *positive* when in a sexual context, as in rough sex or consensual explorations of behavior modeled in pornography.

Labeling aggression or violence "abuse" may make a difference in whether victims see the behavior as unacceptable. Women who do not leave violent relationships are unlikely to label their treatment abusive (Werner-Wilson, Zimmerman, & Whalen, 2000). It has been suggested that labeling it abuse is critical; it helps a teen recognize that the relationship is unhealthy for her (Sousa, 1999) and can lead her to seek help (Pirog-Good & Stets, 1989; Sedlak, 1988; Werner-Wilson, Zimmerman, & Whalen, 2000). Unfortunately, it may be that only the more severe incidents of violence will be labeled abusive (Sedlak, 1988). Ferraro and Johnson (1984) found that their respondents did not generally label slapping or punching "violent" or "abusive." Besides severity,

other variables have been found to be associated with differential definitions of violence. For example, Herzberger and Tennen (1988) studied definitions of abuse against children and found it varied by the respondent's socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion, history of abuse, and gender. When factors such as "casual" violence and a history of abuse combine to cloud a victim's perception of her treatment, the likelihood that she will leave decreases.

Relationship Commitment

A woman's propensity for leaving a relationship after a violent incident would likely be related to how strongly she is committed to the relationship. It seems that a woman who has been thinking of leaving anyway would be more apt to leave when her partner hits her than a woman who is committed to her relationship. Existing research on spouse abuse supports this supposition, and many of the factors involved may be applicable to teen violence.

Although not developed specifically for violent relationships, the Investment Model (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) is helpful in operationalizing relationship commitment. The model incorporates three predictors of persistence in a relationship—satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size—that comprise the construct of relationship commitment (Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998). These variables have been found to correlate with battered women's stay/leave decisions in many studies.

Satisfaction level. Longitudinal studies have shown that battered wives who are dissatisfied with their relationships or feel their marriages are not well adjusted are more likely to leave (Gortner, Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1997; Malloy, 1987). Similarly, Herbert, Silver and Ellard (1991) found that women who stayed in abusive relationships

perceived greater positive aspects such as mutual trust, love, respect, satisfaction with sex, sharing household chores, and moments of great happiness. This suggests that those who are more satisfied with their relationships are less likely to leave.

Quality of alternatives. Many studies have found a positive correlation between the quality of a woman's alternatives to her abusive relationship and the likelihood that she will leave the relationship (Lloyd, Koval & Kate, 1989). When deciding whether to leave her abuser, a woman is likely to consider the possibility of other relationships or how well she can make it on her own (Strube, 1988).

The latter consideration is often informed by economics and access to resources. Economic dependence appears to be a robust predictor of staying in an abusive marriage (Strube, 1984). For example, Gelles and Straus (1988) found that those who stayed in violent marriages were less likely to be employed than those who left. (They suggest two explanations for this: one, that lack of economic resources can trap women in relationships, and two, that those without jobs are more socially isolated.) Strube and Barbour (1984) found that those who returned to the relationship after a stay in a shelter were more likely to feel they had nowhere else to go. Malloy (1987), in a longitudinal shelter-based study, found that those who returned were less able to "handle" not having a partner and less able to "keep busy," suggesting that for these women, the alternative of living alone was not viable.

While economic dependence is a strong predictor in domestic violence, it is unlikely to be as relevant in TDV. When a teen considers alternatives to a violent relationship, she may be thinking more about whom else she could date or whether she would be happier not dating at all. For example, Cate et al. (1982) found that teens who

remained in abusive dating relationships viewed themselves as having fewer alternative dating partners than those who ended the relationships.

Investment size. It seems likely that the more a woman has invested in her relationship, the more likely she will be to stay in it after a violent incident. Social exchange theory, for example, would predict that investment in the relationship serves as a barrier to termination because the loss of invested time and emotion is viewed as a cost (Levinger, 1979). Rusbult et al. (1998) defined investment size as the magnitude and importance of the resources that are attached to a relationship and that would be lost if the relationship were to end. Using Rusbult's measure of investment size, Lloyd, Koval, and Cate (1989) found investment size to be one of the strongest discriminating variables between couples in violent and nonviolent relationships; they suggest that people are trapped in violent relationships by their investments.

In married relationships, the investment is often quantified in children or material possessions (e.g., Rosen & Stith, 1997). With dating relationships, it might better be assessed by length of the relationship, personal intimacy and disclosure, and mutual friends. Among both groups, the most studied aspect of investment is the amount of time the relationship has existed. Research findings, however, have been inconclusive. Several studies have found a negative correlation between relationship length and leaving. Snyder and Scheer (1981) found that adult women who returned to their relationships after spending time in a shelter were more likely to be married and to have been in the relationship longer. Two studies on wife abuse by Strube and Barbour (1983, 1984) found that the longer a woman had been in an abusive relationship, the less likely she was to leave. Cate et al.'s 1982 study of college students suggests that abuse is

viewed as more acceptable in more intimate relationships. Makepeace (1989) found that 100% of his college sample broke up when the first incident happened on the first date; 70% when it happened during casual dating; 38% when living together; and 11% when the couple was engaged. He interpreted his findings as suggesting that entrapment is less a function of physical living together or household and life constraints, but more of emotional attachment and commitment.

Other studies, however, have shown no or inconsistent correlations between length of relationship and leaving (Bergman, 1992; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). Okun (1988) suggests a nonlinear relationship could explain this discrepancy: his shelter-based study showed that the likelihood of termination after a single violent incident peaks at 5-7 years. This curvilinearity may explain some of the inconsistency in the research.

Expectations of Recurrence

A well-known turn in the cycle of domestic violence is the honeymoon phase, during which the abuser apologizes for the violence and promises it will never happen again. If he is convincing, the woman may decide to give him another chance. Studies on domestic violence have consistently found that women who expect that their mates will change and the violence will not recur are less likely to leave (Dutton, Burghart, Perrin, Chrestman, & Halle, 1994; Strube, 1984; Strube & Barbour, 1983; Werner-Wilson, Zimmerman, & Whalen, 2000). It has also been found that individuals in violent dating relationships may believe they can change their partners (Ferraro & Johnson, 1984; Lloyd, Koval, & Cate, 1989). On the other hand, Makepeace (1989) found that promised reform was rarely indicated (3 out of 228 respondents in his undergraduate

sample) as a reason for staying, which he interpreted as suggesting that the cycle of violence theory may fit dating couples less well than married couples.

<u>Severity</u>

In 1978, Mildred Daley Pagelow wrote, "An Irish woman raised fourteen children and then left for England after frequent batterings during thirty years of marriage. On the other hand, some women leave a spouse after one slap; a slap represents different things to different people" (p. 18-19).

It seems likely that the severity of violence would be predictive of a woman's decision to leave. Yet once again, findings have been inconsistent. Some researchers have found that levels of violence do not significantly predict the likelihood of leaving the relationship, in either direction (Gortner, Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1997; Wardell, 1991). Other studies have found that women who suffer from more severe violence are more likely to leave (Gelles, 1976; Rounsaville, 1978). Pagelow (1981) and Snyder and Fruchtman (1981) found the opposite: the more severely beaten women are the ones more likely to stay.

Clearly there is insufficient evidence for a simple correlation between violence severity and likelihood of a break-up. It is likely, however, that there is some, more complex relationship. In an effort to explain his finding of no statistical relationship between severity and leaving, Okun (1988) noted that linear statistical analyses are insufficient; he suggested that a curvilinear relationship may exist, with moderate violence leading to the highest termination rates. Pagelow (1981) proposed that severity has been found to be positively correlated with staying because abuse increases over time, and that severity or frequency alone cannot predict the decision to leave. In partial

support of this suggestion, Follingstad, Hause, Rutledge and Polek (1992) found that abuse increases significantly in discrete periods and then levels out. The range of findings on this issue suggests that severity of violence is an influential factor that interacts with other variables, such as length of the relationship. It could also interact with an individual's definition of acceptable behavior, as suggested in the above quote by Pagelow.

<u>Role Models</u>

What teens learn about violence from those around them may contribute to their stay/leave decisions. Social learning theory and decades of research suggest that there is a relationship between violence witnessed or suffered as a child and subsequent experience with violence as an adult. Research has found a consistently positive correlation for *perpetrators* of dating and domestic violence: men who are violent in relationships are more likely than controls to report that they witnessed or suffered violence in their family of origin (Malik, Sorenson, & Aneshensel, 1997; Riggs & O'Leary, 1989; Schumacher, Feldbau-Kohn, Smith Slep, & Heyman, 2000; Tontodonato & Crew, 1992). The empirical data on *victims* of dating or domestic violence, on the other hand, are often contradictory (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001), with studies showing positive, negative, and no correlations between violence in the family of origin and victimization in dating relationships.

Some research has found that those who experience dating violence are more likely than those with no dating violence history to have witnessed or experienced violence in their families of origin (Emery, 1983; Laner & Thompson, 1982; Lewis & Fremouw, 2001; O'Keefe, 1998; O'Keefe, Brockopp & Chew, 1986; Okun, 1988;

Roscoe & Callahan, 1985; Smith, 1992). Researchers have suggested that witnessing or experiencing violence in the home increases a teen's tolerance for dating violence; a daughter learns the victim role from her mother. In contrast, Gelles (1976) and others have found no statistical relationship. Sugarman and Hotaling (1989, 1991) wrote that the majority of studies yielded nonsignificant findings, and point out that researchers who found no correlation had performed multivariate analyses on their data, unlike the researchers who found a link.

Two researchers have examined the connection between witnessing interparental violence and leaving a violent dating relationship: Follingstad (1988) found that those who witnessed violence were more likely to terminate relationships because of the violence, and Pagelow (1981) found that they terminated sooner. Contrary to the idea of learning a victim role, these data suggest that witnessing violence decreases teens' tolerance of it in their own lives.

The apparent contradictions among these studies may be partly explained by a closer examination of the theory behind the conclusions. Social learning theory does not necessarily imply that those who witness violence in their families will have a greater tolerance for violence themselves. This would only be the case if they witnessed tolerance of violence being reinforced. According to learning principles, if a child sees her mother continually punished and never reinforced for staying (i.e., the mother is frequently beaten and never escapes the relationship), she will not be likely to stay herself. Likewise, if the mother escapes to a shelter and begins a new, better life free of violence, the daughter will learn to terminate abusive relationships.

As Riggs and O'Leary (1989) point out in their social learning interpretation of the use of aggression in dating relationships, testing this hypothesis is difficult because punishers and reinforcers are different for different people. Social disapproval, for example, may be more important for some women than others. Additionally, consequences for a single act may be both positive and negative: a passive response to aggression may end an argument (reinforcing), but it may result in more conflict later (punishing). If a study could accurately distinguish between punishers and reinforcers in this context, it might find that, as predicted by social learning theory, observing role models would lead a woman to leave immediately if she witnessed immediate leaving being reinforced or if she witnessed staying being punished. If she witnessed staying being reinforced, or immediate leaving being punished, she would be less likely to leave.

Social learning does not, of course, take place only in the home. By the time teens are in dating relationships, they have gathered information about intimate violence from their friends, school, and the media. Makepeace (1981) found that 61.5% of his undergraduate sample knew of others who had experienced courtship violence. Some studies hint that this information may have an influence on involvement in violent relationships and willingness to leave. For example, O'Keeffe et al. (1986) found that teens involved in a violent relationship were significantly more likely to know of child abuse in homes *other than their own* than teens not in a violent relationship. Helland (1998) found that high school students who had experienced dating violence were more likely to have friends who were victims as well. These studies suggest that teens are well aware of family and dating violence, and that even distant exposure to violence may predispose them to be involved in a violent relationship. Furthermore, there is some

evidence that teens learn to tolerate aggression through peer group interactions (Helland, 1997). If teens see their friends in violent relationships, they may feel that violence is more normal and less of a reason to leave.

Besides gathering information about dating violence from their peers, teens may also be observing how it is presented in the media. There has been much research on the media's influence on people's perceptions of the acceptability of violence. For example, Corne, Briere and Esses (1992) found that early exposure to pornography is related to young women's supportive attitude towards violence against women. Rock videos depicting women in subordinate roles have been shown to influence adolescents' judgments of male/female interactions (Hansen & Hansen, 1988) and to increase girls' acceptance of dating violence (Johnson, Adams, Ashburn, & Reed, 1995). It seems reasonable that teens are also influenced by relationships they see depicted in movies, television, and books. A teen's decision to stay or leave a relationship may be informed by role models she finds in her family, among her friends, and in the media.

Self-esteem

Studies on both domestic and dating violence have generally found a strong relationship between being assaulted by a partner and low self-esteem (domestic violence: Campbell, 1989; Gelles & Straus, 1988; Schutte, Bouleige, Fix, & Malouff, 1986; Star, Clark, Goetz, & O'Malia, 1979; dating violence: Callahan, 1998; Carlson, 1987; Deal & Wampler, 1986; Gibson, 1984; Gwartney-Gibbs, 1987; O'Keeffe, Brockopp, & Chew, 1986; Pirog-Good, 1992). Unfortunately, no research to date has definitively determined the direction of the causal arrow. Are people with low self-esteem easy targets for victimizers? Or, do people develop low self-esteem as a result of

being abused? A bi-directional relationship is possible as well, or a third factor may be causing both the low self-esteem and the violence. (It is interesting to note that Emery (1983) found that abusers report lower self concept than their partners.)

Researchers have also found that self-esteem influences the decision to leave a violent relationship. Werner-Wilson (2000) found that one of the most common reasons their focus group participants gave for staying in an abusive marriage was low self-esteem. This study identified "gaining a sense of self" as the second of six critical steps associated with leaving a violent relationship. Aguilar & Nightengale (1994) provide empirical evidence that low self-esteem contributes to the difficulty victims experience when disengaging from abusive marriages. Graham and colleagues (1995) found that undergraduate dating women with lower self-esteem were more likely to respond to partner maltreatment with tolerance than those with higher self-esteem. Katz, Street, and Arias (1997) presented their study participants with hypothetical dating situations and found that their participants' self-esteem was correlated with intentions to forgive violence, but not with intentions to end the relationship. The divergence of this last finding from the general pattern may be explained by its hypothetical nature. In summary, low self-esteem has been found to be correlated with both experiencing violence in romantic relationships and staying in violent relationships.

Assertiveness

Assertiveness, or "social boldness," as Spencer Rathus called it (1973), has been conceptualized as how little a person inhibits behavior due to fear of aversive social consequences. The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) takes a behavioral approach to assertiveness, assessing how willing a person is to argue a point, say no, express

annoyance toward a close relative, complain about poor service in a restaurant, and generally speak up for oneself. One can imagine that a woman who responds in the negative to RAS items such as "People often take advantage of me" and "I avoid arguing over prices with salesmen" would be likely to leave a man who beats her up or rapes her. While it makes intuitive sense that assertiveness would be a strong predictor for leaving a violent relationship, it has not been extensively studied, neither in the areas of dating nor domestic violence.

The few existing studies suggest that assertiveness is a variable worth investigating further. Adams-Roy & Barling (1998) found that in situations of sexual harassment, a high RAS score predicted the victim's decision to confront the harasser. Hammond-Saslow (1997) found no correlation between abuse and assertiveness in her study of battered men; it is uncertain how generalizable her findings are to battered women or to the stay/leave decision. Finally, in a study on argument styles of married couples in abusive relationships, Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns, and Shortt (1997) found that wives who defended themselves in an assertive manner were more likely to leave. The researchers videotaped couples having nonviolent arguments in a laboratory, coded their interactions, and then contacted the couples two years later to find which couples had split up. They found that most likely to leave were women who had stuck to their points of view in arguments and reacted quickly and without humor toward their abusive partners; these women's responses were not contemptuous or belligerent. The authors considered "assertive" to be a better description of their behavior than "aggressive," and acknowledged the risks that these women were taking by being verbally defensive.

In summary, it seems plausible that assertiveness would be a predictor of intolerance of TDV; two of three studies in the general area support this idea.

Perpetrator Factors

There are many possible explanations for stay/leave decisions that are more closely related to the perpetrator. If a young man has been severely emotionally abusing his girlfriend prior to the first episode of physical violence, she may be so psychologically shattered that she is unable to defend herself. In another situation, a perpetrator may make threats to frighten the victim into staying. Alternatively, the perpetrator may apologize and pledge never to use physical violence again. The batterer's personality and particular style of abuse may also have a strong impact on how easily the victim can extract herself from the relationship.

In a 1988 study, Follingstad, Rutledge, Polek and McNeill-Hawkins found systematic differences between women who experienced only one incident of violence in a relationship and women who experienced ongoing violence. They concluded that the former may simply be random victims of aggressive males, and would therefore be more similar to women who had never experienced violence than to battered women. Another conclusion that could be drawn is that stay/leave decisions are influenced by factors related to the perpetrator. For example, they found that women were more likely to leave because of the violence when their boyfriends exhibited aversive controlling behaviors.

Makepeace (1989) described two distinct types of courtship violence: predatory and relational violence. Predatory violence is intense and dangerous. It often includes sexual assault, and is usually motivated by sexual exploitation. Makepeace found that this form of violence appears to predominate in early-stage relationships, especially first

dates, and usually results in immediate breakup. Relational violence, in contrast, is less intense and more characteristic of longer-term relationships. Again, immediate leaving could therefore be more related to the type of perpetrator than to the victim's personal characteristics: those victims who leave immediately may be leaving predatory men, while those who stay may be involved with men who have somewhat more benign anger control problems.

<u>Summary of the Literature</u>

The experiences of teenage women who left a relationship immediately after a single incident of violence have not yet been specifically studied. The violence literature reviewed above suggested some areas for exploration for the current research:

1. Women who leave immediately may have had clear ideas of what level of violence is unacceptable in a romantic relationship that influenced their decision to leave.

2. Their lack of commitment to the relationship may have made it easier to leave.

3. They may have decided to leave because they expected the violence to recur.

4. The severity of violence may have influenced their decision to leave.

5. They may have witnessed violence in other relationships (e.g., their parents', siblings', and friends' relationships, as well as relationships depicted in movies, videos, television and books) that guided their decision to leave.

6. They may be characterized by assertiveness and high self-esteem.

7.   Factors specific to the perpetrator may have influenced their decision to

leave.

Additional Factors of Interest

The seven factors listed above were identified prior to conducting the present

study. Additional factors arose during analysis that prompted the researcher to return to

the literature for corroboration or new ways of thinking about the data. These research

areas include stages of change, resilience and post-traumatic growth, and attribution style.

These topics are briefly summarized here and applied to the current data in the Results

section below.

Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992) proposed that people modify

behaviors by progressing through five stages: pre-contemplation, contemplation,

preparation, action, and maintenance. They displayed these stages in a spiral pattern,

suggesting that as a rule, people tend to relapse and recycle through the stages several

times before the process ends.

In the literature on resiliency, Calhoun and Tedeschi (1999) describe post-

traumatic growth, which they define as positive changes resulting from a struggle with a

traumatic event. These positive changes occur in three major domains: an improvement

in the victim's sense of relationship with others (including enhanced intimacy and

emotional honesty and expressiveness); an elevation in her sense of self (pairing feelings

of increased vulnerability with enhanced strength and self-reliance); and a change in life

philosophy (featuring a shift in priorities and a deeper appreciation for one's life).

The study of attribution began with Heider (1958), who analyzed attribution style

by internal and external causes of behavior. This model has been embellished to include

a dimension of global and specific attributions, and the resulting styles (Internal Global, External Global, Internal Specific, External Specific) have been applied to depression (Seligman, 1990). While people may tend toward one style, they also may blend two or more to make attributions for traumas (Frazier, 1990). One's choice of attribution style appears related to increased sense of control over an event (Walster, 1966), enhanced coping (Bulman & Wortman, 1977; Hickling, Blanchard, Buckley, & Taylor, 1999), and reduced depression (Janoff-Bulman, 1979); these outcomes are further explained in the Results section below.

<u>Purpose of the Current Study</u>

The research appears to suggest that the foregoing factors are relevant in the decision to leave a dating relationship, and these findings guided the initial stages of the present research. However, many of the studies described above are contradictory, and there are many more factors that likely play a role in the decision-making process. Furthermore, most of the studies on stay/leave decision making are on adult women. It is not at all certain that these findings can be applied to teen women and dating relationships (Makepeace, 1989); more research is needed.

The studies to date on stay/leave decision making in violent relationships have attempted to answer the question, why do women stay in violent relationships? This study seeks to answer the reverse question: why do they *leave*? Some young women seem to have a "zero tolerance policy" for violence in their romantic relationships. Current research does not tell us much about these women. Their experiences, however, are critical to our understanding of TDV. By studying the exceptions, we may learn more about the rule.

As previously indicated, the purpose of the current study was to examine the experiences of young women who ended a relationship immediately after a single violent incident. Through a qualitative, grounded theory approach and in-depth interviews, common threads were explored to identify factors that may have influenced the participants' decision to leave. The results provide direction for quantitative research and intervention programs.

A Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach was used for the current study for a number of reasons. David Krathwohl (1998) wrote that "qualitative procedures are ideal for complex phenomena about which there is little certain knowledge" (p. 229). He further lists several instances in which qualitative research is particularly appropriate, including when research is lacking so that new research must focus on discovery rather than confirmation; when the process under study involves complex interactivity and feedback loops; and when detailed description with many nuances is useful.

Applying Krathwohl's considerations to the proposed study suggests that a qualitative approach is appropriate:

1. *Complex phenomena:* Every person's story is so complex and unique that it would be very difficult to construct a questionnaire or structured interview that could capture the true, complete story. A holistic view is needed first to ensure that important variables are not overlooked; once the story is understood in its complexity and richness, discrete variables can be parsed out and examined quantitatively.

2.   *Little certain knowledge:* This is a new area of study. As noted above, it is not

certain that findings from other areas, such as spousal abuse, can be generalized.

The population of interest, teens who leave immediately after the first violent

incident, has rarely, if ever, been the focus of study. Therefore, there are no data

to validate or detailed theories to test. Qualitative research can lay a foundation

for further inquiry.

3.   *Interactivity and feedback loops:* A qualitative approach will allow examination

of complex interactions. A woman's decision to leave will likely be influenced

by characteristics of her partner, her own personality and experiences, and the fit

between the couple. It can also be influenced by friends and family members.

These influences can build on each other and reverberate throughout the whole

system. Qualitative research is better suited to describe all the components of the

system.

In addition to Krathwohl's considerations, a qualitative approach also has a

flexibility which was an asset for this study. Because leaving is rarely immediate and

rarely clean-cut, it is a behavior that can be difficult to sample through quantitative

means. Strict exclusion criteria could eliminate very relevant stories, such as that of the

young woman who knew she had to leave immediately after the incident but, frightened

by his threats to kill himself, avoided him for a month before telling him it was over.

With a qualitative approach, exclusion criteria can be more flexible. This flexibility

allows for the shades of gray that are unavoidable in this topic.

As immediate leaving is under-researched and poorly understood, description is a

more reasonable goal than prediction. This study is a preliminary look at a complex

process with a vast number of variables, intended to give a sense of how real people, in all their variability, act in messy, real-life situations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Analytical Approach

The theoretical orientation of this study is generally an interpretivist approach, as opposed to social anthropology or collaborative social research (Miles & Huberman, 1994): human activity is a "text," the meaning of which is inevitably *interpreted* by both the participants and the researcher. Neither is unbiased or detached from the text. More specifically, the analytical method of this research is based in grounded theory (Straus & Corbin, 1998). This is an inductive method in which the theory is derived from (or *grounded in*) the data. Due to their origins, grounded theories are expected to closely resemble reality; they are "likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action" (Straus & Corbin, p. 12).

The Researcher's Perspective

A major source of bias in this study is the assumption that a decision to leave a violent relationship is better for a victim's psychological health than a decision to stay. Some researchers have suggested that in certain cases, the best decision for the woman may be to stay. However, this researcher's orientation is that physical and sexual violence are unacceptable: violence sends such a clear message about the perpetrator's willingness to harm the woman he loves that leaving is always the psychologically healthier course.

Since the early theory that battered women stay in abusive relationships in order to fulfill their masochistic desires (e.g., Deutsch, 1944, p. 276), research has at times taken a victim-blaming view of domestic violence. This focus on the woman's pathology

has since been strongly criticized; some have insisted that instead of looking at what is wrong with the abused woman, we should focus on the violent perpetrators or at the society that tolerates abuse. The present study falls somewhere between these two approaches. It is not examining the pathology of either partner or of society, but rather, the strengths of a woman who escapes a dangerous situation. By examining strengths, this research does not intend to imply that women who stay are weak, or to blame them for allowing themselves to be victimized. The violence is clearly the sole responsibility of the perpetrator.

Another source of bias is the researcher's interest in factors that might be influenced through prevention or intervention programs. As the ultimate goal of this study is to improve interventions, there is a focus on processes that can be altered. For example, a finding that the length of a relationship influences leaving is not very helpful to a health class teacher who is leading a discussion on dating violence; more useful would be a finding about how friends can help each other get out of dangerous relationships. Given that there is a vast number of important factors that influence people to leave, a filter is needed to make the study manageable. This researcher has generally used a filter of what would be useful to the health class teacher.

Method

Overview

As explained above, the proposed study takes a grounded theory approach (Straus & Corbin, 1998) to understanding women's experiences of leaving after a single violent incident in a teen dating relationship. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews

with ten subjects. The research process, described more fully in the pages that follow, entailed: recruiting, screening and interviewing participants; writing analytic notes following contacts with participants; transcribing and coding the interviews; analyzing the data; verifying conclusions with a subset of participants; and ending the data collection when reasonable theoretical saturation was reached. ("Theoretical saturation" is a term used by Strauss and Corbin (1998) to describe the point at which no new properties or dimensions are emerging, and what variability occurs can be accounted for.)

<div align="center">Participants</div>

Recruitment Strategies

A range of strategies was used to recruit subjects from the University of Montana (UM) and the Missoula, Montana community :

1. Fliers announced the research opportunity to UM Introduction to Psychology students, who earned six credits toward their course requirements for their participation.

2. The researcher announced the research to advanced psychology and Native American Studies classes, and passed out recruitment cards to students.

3. Recruitment fliers and cards were posted around campus and in the Missoula area, including the two counseling centers on campus and the Indian Center.

4. The researcher spoke about the project to five groups (a Business and Professional Women of Missoula meeting; American Association of University Women's state convention and a Missoula branch meeting; a

MHCOP/InPsych class; and a social work class on family violence), and gave the audience recruitment cards to pass on to potential subjects.

5. Recruitment cards were distributed to volunteers at the YWCA and UM's Student Assault Recovery Center (SARC).

6. A memo announcing the research was distributed to the social work students at the Missoula campus of Walla Walla College.

7. All research participants were given a recruitment card to pass on to acquaintances.

Introduction to Psychology students who participated received six research participation credits, and other participants received $20 in appreciation for their time.

<u>Screening Criteria</u>

Volunteers were screened by phone for eligibility. Eligible participants met the following criteria:

- between 18 and 25 years of age;

- female;

- experienced a single incident of physical violence in at least one dating/romantic relationship during adolescence (when she was between 13 and 20, Levy, 1990); and

- ended that relationship shortly after the first incident.

Because sexual assault and other forms of sexual abuse are physical acts of violence, they were included in this study's definition of dating violence. As in most research to date, this study's definition did *not* include incidents of verbal and emotional abuse. These forms of abuse tend to begin gradually and build in severity (Sabourin,

1996), so it would be very difficult to operationalize a first incident. Nonphysical aggression is, however, often a precursor to violence (Murphy & O'Leary, 1989; Straus, 1974) and was a common experience among participants in the study.

In all cases, the researcher and participants agreed that the incident in question clearly qualified as violence. There was no ambiguity or confusion around incidents that may have been "joking around;" all of the participants were frightened by their boyfriends' behavior. While one incident, a telephoned death threat, involved no actual physical violence, the researcher and participant agreed that it met criteria, given the conditions of the incident (the threat was specific in method, and was made in an attempt to coerce sex; the participant feared that her boyfriend would break into her house and attack her). It also falls within Sugarman and Hotaling's (1989) definition, which includes threats of violence.

The final criterion, that the participant left the relationship following the first incident, was interpreted liberally. While all the participants broke up with their boyfriends because of the violence, some ended it during the incident and some broke it off days or weeks later. Some ended it clearly and definitively, and never reconsidered their decision; some were ambivalent or confused; some fear that it was only external factors, such as her moving away or his being arrested, that created a clean break. This variation provides the foundation of some of the richest findings of the study. It allows speculation about correlations much as a control group of "non-leavers" would have in a quantitative study (e.g., seeking out social support after the incident seems to be associated with clear, definitive break-ups).

Fourteen interviews were conducted between November 2002 and June 2003, and ten of these are included in this analysis. The first two interviews served as pilots to test the procedures; these participants met all but the current age criteria (they were older than 25). One interview was set aside because there had been two occasions of pushing before the final incident, and another was not used because the break-up was not clearly due to the violence.

Procedure

Pilot interviews were conducted to test the interview questions and protocol. After being interviewed, these participants were asked for feedback on various aspects of the process such as how comfortable they felt, how distracting the recording instruments were, and whether the interview questions were adequate for eliciting the intended information. The only suggested change through this process was that the question "How would you describe your personality at that time?" was difficult to answer.

As described above, participants were screened for eligibility by phone and scheduled for a two-hour interview. Before the interview began, the purpose of the study was explained, confidentiality protocols were reviewed, and consent to participate was obtained. So that respondents would be fully informed before giving consent to participate, the consent forms and verbal explanation described the interview as potentially upsetting, and included "physical violence" and "sexual assault" in the description. Participants signed and returned one consent form and kept a second for their records. While the interviewer prepared the recording equipment, the participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix A). The interviewer then guided participants in constructing a timeline of the significant relationships in their lives,

including information about start and end dates and whether violence occurred. An example timeline is included in Appendix B.

All interviews were audiotaped for transcription purposes. In addition, the interviewer took notes on a laptop computer during the interviews, in case of a problem with the audiotape. After the first few minutes of the interview, the researcher asked the participants about their comfort level with the laptop; none felt distracted or uncomfortable with it.

In-depth interviews have been called "a conversation with a purpose" (Kahn & Cannell, 1957, p. 149). The researcher deviated from the interview protocol when the order of questions needed to be changed or additional questions needed to be asked. Responses were probed by rephrasing, confirming, getting examples, and asking for clarification or elaboration. As common themes emerged, questions were added to the basic interview. This occurred formally at two points: following the pilot interviews and at the midpoint of the study. The final interview format is included in Appendix C.

At the end of the interview, participants were debriefed. The purpose of the research was reiterated, and participants were asked whether they had any questions. They were asked how they were feeling at that moment, and encouraged to contact the researcher later if they felt unsettled by the interview. All participants were given a resource referral list (Appendix D), the researcher's contact information, and a recruitment card to pass on to others. Finally, participants were asked about their willingness to be contacted for follow-up questions.

Contact was attempted with all of the participants several months after the interviews, but only two responded. These two, who had been given the false names

Beth and Nora, came in for follow-up interviews. During these sessions, the researcher and participant reviewed every summary or interpretation that had been made about her story to check for accuracy. Feedback was sought on findings, and the participants elaborated on various points. No factual errors or faulty interpretations were discovered through this process, and Beth and Nora confirmed that the analysis reflected their experiences.

Confidentiality and Emotional Safeguards

The highest standards of participant confidentiality were applied in this study. Participants were assigned false names, identifying information such as cities or boyfriends' names were changed, all paper records were stored in a locked file cabinet, and all computer files were protected by passwords and stored on non-networked computers. As the interviews focused on distressing events, emotional safeguards were in place as well, such as the debriefing process described above. Low-level distress was normalized at the beginning and end of the interview by a statement such as:

> Sometimes, people find that talking about their experiences with violence makes them feel sad, anxious or scared. You may find that this interview affects your emotions—during, after, or even before our appointment. On the other hand, some people find that it is helpful to talk about their experiences, even if it is upsetting to them at the moment. I want you to know that I will be available to talk with you about these feelings, and to give you suggestions of some resources that are available, if you need further help.

Several participants commented that it was helpful to tell their story in the interview, and none conveyed distress to the researcher.

Analysis

Procedure

As discussed above, the data analysis was based on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory approach; elements from other researchers' methods were incorporated as well. A general description of the analysis procedure is presented here, followed by a detailed explanation of the coding procedure.

A one-page "Contact Summary Form" (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was written immediately after each interview, which included subjective notes such as behavioral impressions and questions triggered by the interview. Interviews were generally transcribed within one week. Five of the final ten interviews were conducted and transcribed in November and December, 2002, and in January, 2003 a preliminary analysis was performed. An interim report was written to review the findings to date, assess the quality of the data, and identify gaps that future interviews should fill in (Miles & Huberman, 1994). New questions and a coding scheme were generated through this process. The emergent themes listed in the report were described in presentations made to community groups (described above in "Recruitment"); questions asked and stories told by the audiences at these talks were also helpful in identifying gaps and illuminating connections in the data.

Coding

Strauss and Corbin (1998) write that the analytic process is only artificially broken down into distinct steps, but for the purpose of explaining their approach they list three coding techniques that progressively refine the data: open, axial, and selective coding. In open coding, the data are broken down into discrete parts and grouped into

categories. The data are then reassembled in axial and selective coding to develop hypotheses about relationships between and within categories.

Open coding began with a spreadsheet that was generated for the purposes of condensing information for the interim report. To develop this data summary, the first interview was read through carefully for facts that seemed important, such as demographic data, the quality of the relationship when it began, and the participant's commitment level. These details were recorded in a chart format. Reading through the second interview, more facts were added to the chart, such as whether the couple had had sex before the incident. The first interview was then re-examined for that information. This process continued until all five interviews had been mined for the same 94 pieces of information. Through the creation of this data summary chart, commonalities that the researcher suspected during the interviews were investigated. For example, the participants' sense that their boyfriend was "unrecognizable" during the incident was not, upon examination, a common experience. On the other hand, the fact that the participants were all at a point of transition in their lives when the incident occurred was confirmed. The data summary charts are included in Appendix E.

After the data summary and the interim report were completed, a coding scheme was developed. Codes were identified through the same technique employed with the data summary chart, although at a more detailed level: the first interview was read through carefully, and almost every sentence was labeled with a code (for example, "He had to spend some time in jail during the middle of our relationship" was coded BLaw, for "boyfriend had problems with the law"). Often, sentences were given two or three codes. Next, the second interview was read through and labeled, and new codes were

generated. The first interview was then re-read and re-coded as needed. The first two interviews were sufficient to generate most of the codes, but new codes continued to be added throughout the ten interviews. The resulting breakdown of data was similar in organization to the data summary charts, but much more detailed. The coding scheme, with a total of 95 codes, was then applied to all ten interviews.

While open coding fractures the data, axial coding reintegrates it. The term refers to coding around the axis of a category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once all ten interviews were coded, the data were merged into 14 major categories. Hypotheses about linkages between categories flowed easily as the data were rearranged; they were tracked in an informal list of questions such as "Does attribution style interact with social support?" and "Some participants are obviously coping better than others; can this be explained by how long ago the incident occurred?"

Selective coding is the process of integrating and refining the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Core categories are delineated, and they are linked to each other. This process occurred as the researcher worked through the list of questions generated in the previous step. Separate documents were written to summarize core categories such as "Attribution Styles" and "Coping," and information was copied from one document to another to examine potential relationships. At this point the researcher also returned to the literature, refining ideas and confirming validity with the help of studies on topics such as resilience and stages of change. Frequently returning to the original transcripts and searching for inconsistencies, exceptions, and gaps in logic also helped refine the central ideas. The final model of the process of leaving was developed over time, with

the seeds of the idea being sown during the first pilot interview and new ideas still being

added during the write-up.

Results

The Stories

The ten participants in this study are demographically uniform (see Table 3): all

but one are Caucasian, all but one are heterosexual, all are students at UM. Their ages

range from 18 to 24. None has ever married, although one, Nora, is currently engaged.

All but one began dating by age 15. The relationship that became violent began when the

participants were 15-20 years old. Generally, their boyfriends were one or two years

older than they.

Their experiences in the violent relationship are diverse, however. The length of

the relationship varied from one month to five years, and the incident happened between

seven months and almost five years before the interviews. The severity of the violence

ranged from an incident that caused no physical pain to battery and rape. Five of the ten

assaults included some form of sexual violence or coercion. Four participants described

visible injuries on their faces, torsos or legs. Only two sought medical attention. Six

participants described fighting back during the assault. Five reported that their

boyfriends threatened to harm them or their families or to kill themselves.

The single element that almost every incident has in common is the presence of

drugs or alcohol: nine of ten violent incidents occurred when the boyfriends was drunk,

high, or both. This finding is higher than in other studies, cited above, which have

reported that alcohol is involved in around 20% to 50% of dating violence incidents

(Williams & Smith, 1994). In contrast, the participants generally did not report being

influenced by drugs or alcohol themselves during the incident. Only one participant reported that she had been drinking, and none mentioned having used drugs at the time of the assault. This was a question that was not asked directly in the interviews, however, so this information is less reliable than that of the boyfriends' substance use. In two cases, participants did not mention drinking or using drugs. Four participants described intentionally limiting their intake in order to remain clear-headed (three were designated drivers on the night of the incident). Three others also drank very little or not at all on the day of the incident. This information is displayed in Table 4 on page 52.

Five participants said that they had not experienced physical aggression in previous relationships. Of the remainder, three reported experiencing pushing or grabbing and two reported sexual assaults.

Demographic information is presented in Table 3 below, followed by a descriptive summary of the participants. Longer accounts of their stories are provided in Appendix F. As explained above, names have been changed. All quotes in this text are presented verbatim, except where repeated words and expressions such as "like," "just," and "you know" have been deleted to increase readability without changing meaning. Interviewer questions within quotes are in italics. To assist the reader in matching names to stories throughout the remainder of this report, a brief summary of participants is provided on the last page, Appendix G.

TABLE 3

Demographic Information

name	ethnicity	sexual orientatation	age	class	referral source	currently dating?	age started dating	total # other rel.s	her age during rel.	his age during rel.	length of rel.	how long ago rel. ended
Amber	caucasian	heterosexual	21	fresh.	Psych 100	yes	~14	3	19-20	not reported	8 months	1 year ago
Beth	caucasian	heterosexual	22	senior	Psych 100	yes	15	2	17-18	17-18	1 year	4 years 6 months
Carmen	caucasian/ hispanic	heterosexual	22	junior	Psych 100	no	20	1	20-21	not reported	~1 year	1 year 3 months
Deb	caucasian	heterosexual	20	soph.	campus	yes	~13	6	18	18	3-4 months	2 years 11 months
Emily	caucasian	bisexual	19	fresh.	campus/ Deb	no	~12	5	17	19	1 month	3 years 7 months
Heather	caucasian	heterosexual	19	fresh.	Psych 100	no	15	2	~17	~19	1 year intermit.	7 months
Laura	caucasian	heterosexual	18	fresh.	Psych 100/ Heather	yes	~14	2	15	16-17	9 months	3 years 1 month
Mandy	caucasian	heterosexual	18	fresh.	Laura	no	14	5	17	25	2 months	8 months
Nora	caucasian	heterosexual	24	senior	psych class	yes	15	2	15	17	5 years	3 years
Tamara	caucasian	heterosexual	18	fresh.	Psych 100	yes	~13	~6	~15-16	~16-17	2 years intermit.	almost 2 years

The nature and severity of the incidents varied widely, as did the outcomes. Amber's story is an example of severe violence leading to an immediate, abrupt ending to the relationship. When she was pregnant with her second child, her partner beat her up and punched her in the stomach in an apparent attempt to kill their baby. She ended the relationship during the fight. Some participants experienced less severe violence but ended the relationship with the same clear definitiveness. Deb was "haymakered" by her boyfriend (punched in the face with a flailing fist), and ended the relationship abruptly the following day when he failed to apologize. Tamara ended her relationship during a phone call in which her boyfriend threatened to kill her if she did not have sex with him. Mandy's boyfriend attempted to restrain her as she tried to leave his yard during a fight. As she struggled against him, he pulled her down from a fence, which tore through her jeans and scraped her legs. After that night she avoided further contact with him.

In contrast, some of the participants had difficulty extricating themselves from the relationship, regardless of the severity of the violence. For example, Beth's boyfriend was criticizing her driving when he grabbed her hair and slammed her face onto the steering wheel. While the incident was shocking and frightening, she did not experience physical pain. She tried to end the relationship in the weeks that followed, but about a month passed before she was able to end it for good. Laura also had difficulty ending her relationship, although she was a victim of severe violence: she was pushed down two flights of stairs and kicked in the face and ribs by her boyfriend. She ignored his subsequent attempts to repair the relationship and tried to avoid him, but did not break up with him until a week later when she found him in bed with another girl.

Two of the participants experienced sexual assaults that were ambiguous to them. Carmen was unclear about whether she had been raped when her boyfriend forced her to have oral sex and briefly penetrated her, and she also experienced ambivalence about breaking up with him. Emily was in the process of ending a brief dating relationship when her boyfriend put a date rape drug into her drink. She avoided contact with him afterwards to keep from thinking about what might have happened; it was half a year later that she began to suspect that she had been drugged and raped.

Another two participants were sexually assaulted and did not struggle with ambiguity of the incident or the break-up. Heather was raped by her boyfriend on the night of her high school graduation party. She told her mother, who called the police and took her to the hospital. Her boyfriend was arrested that night. Similarly, Nora was sodomized by her boyfriend after an argument, and after fleeing the bedroom she had no further contact with him.

The incidents and their outcomes are further summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4

Incident Summaries

	incident type	incident context	substance use	when relationship/ contact ended	ambivalence in leaving?
Amber	pregnant mother beaten & punched in stomach	she returned home after spending a night out of the house	he was likely "loaded on meth;" she wasn't using because of pregnancy	during the fight	never looked back
Beth	face slammed on steering wheel	in front of their friends, he was harassing her about her driving	she was the designated driver; others had been drinking	1 month later	ambivalent
Carmen	forced oral sex & penetration	she did not want to have sex before marriage; he mocked this and raped her	incident occurred first thing in the morning, so likely neither of them had been using	after the assault refused contact; told him 2 days later	ambivalent
Deb	punched in face & house broken into	leaving a party, they got into a fight that became violent	he was very drunk and likely on cocaine; she was designated driver	next day	never looked back
Emily	given date rape drug	at a party at her house, she turned down his offer of sex; remembers very little after that	he was likely both drunk and high; she was limiting herself to 4 beers because she was hosting the party	there was no contact after the incident	never looked back
Heather	raped at camp-ground	he came to her graduation party, uninvited & drunk; she left with him to avoid a scene	he was very drunk; she did not mention whether she was	that night	never looked back
Laura	pushed down stairs & kicked	a screaming fight turned violent; his friends choked him to stop the beating	both had been drinking "all day"	1 week later	ambivalent
Mandy	pulled off fence	they'd fought and she was trying to go home; he was trying to pull her back into the house	he had been drinking; she had limited her intake because she was going to college the next day	stopped answering his calls that night	never looked back
Nora	sodomized	she went to bed angry with him, and refused his sexual advances	he was likely drunk; she'd had 2 light drinks earlier, felt sober	there was no contact after the incident; she moved out the next day	never looked back

	incident type	incident context	substance use	when relationship/ contact ended	ambivalence in leaving?
Tamara	telephone threat	after a party at his house, she refused his demand to return to have sex	he was very drunk and maybe on drugs; she did not mention whether she was	during the call	ambivalent

The Boyfriends

...her love is the love that will save him...
--Maura O'Connell, "I Would Be Stronger"

The participants described remarkably similar boyfriends. Some mentioned that he was charming and charismatic, and a few called him intelligent. That is where the common positive descriptors end. Nine participants said their boyfriends were jealous, eight called them controlling, and six described them as angry. Eight of the ten boyfriends had been in trouble with the law, including jail time in some cases. All ten boyfriends used alcohol or drugs to excess, and there were several dealers and cocaine users in the sample. (The participants' regular drug and alcohol use was not asked about in the interviews; their disdainful descriptions of their boyfriends' heavy usage, however, gave the impression that their own use was lower.) Six stated that their boyfriends tried to isolate them from friends. Six reported that their boyfriends were verbally abusive or said hurtful things. Six also described them as having a history of violence against others. Three said that their boyfriends had moved in with them because they did not have anywhere else to go. Beth said her boyfriend fit all the descriptors of abusive personality types. Carmen said he met all the criteria for antisocial personality disorder. Amber said that intellectually he was more at her prepubescent son's level.

Even with these harshly critical portraits, the majority of the participants were surprised by the assault. It was commonly reported that prior to the assault she felt she

was the exception—he was violent or aggressive with everyone but her. As Tamara said,

"It was out of character for how I expected him to treat me, but it wasn't [out of

character], as far as how I'd expect him to treat other people." A few of the participants

had been trying to use their unique position as an opportunity to help him become a better

person. Tamara, for example, talked about her boyfriend as a "project." She was the

only one, she said, who saw his sweet side, and she wanted to prove to her parents and

friends that he was a good guy. Similarly, Carmen said no one had ever loved her

boyfriend well; she felt that if he could grow to feel secure in her love, he would stop

acting like a "caged animal." She said, "I really, honestly, just wanted to improve his

life." Heather stayed with her boyfriend because he seemed to need someone to take care

of him and keep him out of trouble. Beth was hoping to change her boyfriend as well.

Nora wanted to help her boyfriend with his difficult family problems, but eventually that

desire waned: "It got tiresome after a while….I think I had a lot of positive influence on

him…but there wasn't anything I could do to stop him from being the person that he

was."

<div align="center">

The Relationships
</div>

Well, it started out good, they usually do…
     --Maura O'Connell, "I Would Be Stronger"

The relationships varied widely in terms of length (one month to five years), level

of sexual intimacy (five participants reported that they had had sex with their boyfriends,

two did not mention it, and three stated that they had not), and commitment level.

Around the time of the incident, the participants considered themselves rather highly

committed. (The three components of the Investment Model described in the

introduction did not emerge from the participants' descriptions of their commitment

level, so that model is not used in this discussion.) Asked to rate their commitment on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is "expecting to spend the rest of your life with him," responses ranged from 3 to 10 but averaged about 7. Table 5 shows these ratings, along with "relative commitment," that is, how committed each participant was relative to the others in the sample, based on narrative descriptions of commitment. This table shows that except for the very brief relationships, commitment is not correlated with the length of the relationship.

Although the level of commitment varied greatly among participants, all ten young women reported that the relationship had begun to sour around the time of the incident. More than half of the relationships had already ended at an earlier point. Asked why they were still with him when the incident happened, they responded generally that it was "convenient" or "felt natural." They were attached to him (or, in two cases, to his family), did not know how to get out, or felt that things would improve if they worked hard enough. Nevertheless, with the exception of Amber they all wanted or expected the relationship to end.

Table 5 also shows each participant's "stage of change." These stages, from Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992), are helpful in examining where the participants were in their attempts to end the relationship around the time of the incident. None of the participants were in the precontemplation stage, and the majority were in contemplation. All the participants were moving toward leaving.

TABLE 5

Relationship Commitment

	length of relationship	commitment self-rating	paraphrases of commitment descriptions	relative commitment	stage of change
Nora	5 years	8	slipping to 8 from a 10; "always" wanting to break up; were living together.	medium	contemplation
Tamara	2 years	7-8	more invested than he; wanted to spend every moment with him	high	contemplation (relapsed from action)
Beth	15 months	7	thought I'd marry & divorce him; knew I wasn't in love but didn't know what to do	high	preparation
Heather	12 months	6-7	he needed me, but I was going to college; he wanted to follow me there.	low	preparation
Carmen	12 months	8	"committed out of coercion"; wanted to be out.	medium	contemplation
Laura	9 months	7-8	fully committed; "in denial" about his infidelity	high	contemplation
Amber	8 months	10	extremely committed; carrying his child; living together	high	contemplation
Deb	3 months	6	interested in continuing dating, if he was; lived together briefly but she was planning to move	medium	preparation
Mandy	2 months	4	wasn't serious, going to college, not expecting to miss him	low	action
Emily	1 month	3	never really dating; "not very" committed	low	contemplation (relapsed from action)

The Role of the Incident

The violent incident, therefore, may be interpreted as a "last straw event" (Rosen

& Stith, 1997). It prompted them to "wake up," in Beth's words, and look honestly at the

deterioration of the relationship. The maltreatment they had been tolerating up to that

point was suddenly viewed in a new light. Participants spoke of having been "in denial" about the state of their relationship, and the assault seems to have made continued denial impossible. This appears to be related to the participants' view of unacceptable behavior in relationships: although their boyfriends had already violated some of their boundaries, crossing into the physical realm was a much clearer transgression, one that was difficult to ignore. This theme of crossing a critical line is further explored below.

It is also possible that the violent incident was triggered, in part, by the young women's movement toward leaving. The participants were generally becoming more independent of the relationship just prior to the assault. They were beginning to notice problems that appeared to be increasing in severity, and they were going through personal transitions that were drawing them away from the relationship. For example, Amber was pregnant and so had recently stopped taking drugs, which prompted her to start looking critically at the relationship; she said "the more that my head got clear the more it was like, *this is not ok*." Nora was also quitting drugs, and starting to think more seriously about starting a career and a family.

Often, the violent incident appeared to be related to this increasing independence of the relationship. Nora, for example, said that her boyfriend was "seeing me get more control over myself, and he couldn't manipulate me any more. So instead of mentally manipulating me, he tried doing it physically." Beth, Tamara, and Deb noted that their self-confidence was increasing around the time of the incident. Three participants were assaulted on nights that marked academic transitions: Heather on the night of her high school graduation party, Beth on the night before a college visit, and Mandy on the night before her first day at college. It may be that the boyfriend was feeling insecure in the

relationship, and struck out violently as a last, desperate attempt to hang on to his girlfriend. (This is speculative, however, as the boyfriends' motivations were not investigated in this study.) Furthermore, she may have been behaving in a way that contributed to his desperation. It appears that most of the conflicts that precipitated the violence involved the young woman exerting her independence. As she was making up her mind to leave him, she was less interested in saving the relationship; her priority was no longer keeping the peace. So perhaps earlier in their relationship Nora would have attempted a reconciliation when he came to bed, but on this night she did not. Maybe Laura would not have screamed back at him as they fought at the top of the stairs. Heather would not have told him he could not attend her graduation party. Amber would not have spent the night away from the house. To summarize, then, the participants' growing independence may have played three roles: it may have made her bolder and less willing to back down in a conflict; it may have given the boyfriend a feeling of desperation that prompted the violence; and it may have made it easier for her to leave.

<div align="center">Response to the Incident</div>

Difficulty of Leaving

While all the participants left their boyfriends following and because of the violent incident, almost all experienced difficulty with ending the relationships. Some participants described endings that were prolonged or ambiguous, in which they were relatively passive: for example, Beth took a month to end her relationship, and Emily and Mandy ended their relationships just by not contacting him again, without ever telling him that it was over. Others ended things in active, unambiguous, and sudden ways: Amber kicked her boyfriend out of the house after he hit her, and Nora left the

bedroom after her boyfriend sodomized her and did not see him again for months. The range of experiences can be arrayed on a continuum, shown in Figure 1. To place participants along this continuum, they were scored according to the six dichotomized criteria, as shown in Table 6:

TABLE 6

Scale of Leaving

	Amber	Beth	Carmen	Deb	Emily	Heather	Laura	Mandy	Nora	Tamara
Did not initiate contact after incident	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0
Refused/attempted to refuse contact initiated by boyfriend	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0
Was clear about relationship being over during post-incident contact	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Felt clear & unambivalent about ending the relationship	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0
Told boyfriend it was over (as opposed to passively allowing contact to cease)	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Ending was clearly triggered by the incident	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1
Total	6	2	4	5	3	6	0	4	5	3

Note. If N/A (e.g., there was no contact following incident, so the 3rd criteria is irrelevant), scored 1.

FIGURE 1

Leaving Continuum

Ambiguous *Ambivalent*			*Moderately Clear*				*Unambiguous* *Unambivalent*
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Laura		Beth	Emily	Carmen	Deb	Amber	
			Tamara	Mandy	Nora	Heather	

This continuum shows that the decision to leave is not always a simple, straightforward matter. Several participants in this study struggled with doubt and confusion and agonized over the decision. Even though the young women were already planning to leave their relationships, and even though they did not generally face the

legal, financial, and familial entanglements that keep abused spouses in relationships, they found it difficult to break free.[2] As Laura said, "It's so hard when you're not only questioning him, you're questioning yourself too."

While this continuum is descriptively useful, it does not appear to correlate significantly with factors such as incident severity, relationship commitment or length, stage of change, or self-esteem. It does, however, relate to whether participants received an apology from their boyfriends: the only woman who did, Laura, had the most difficult time leaving. This is further explored in the "Expecting Apologies" section below.

Instead of spreading the participants along a continuum, they can also be dichotomized into those who felt ambivalent about leaving and those who did not. The split is shown in the Incident Summary table above (Table 4). With this arrangement, a relationship can be detected between clear, unambivalent leaving and factors of help-seeking and disclosure about the violence. This is discussed further in the section titled "Social Support."

Emotional Responses

The most common emotional responses during and following the violent incident were fear, disbelief, anger, confusion, aloneness, and regret. Shame was reported much more often by the participants who were sexually assaulted; in contrast, these participants mentioned feelings of numbness or disbelief slightly less often than the others. While anger and confusion were prominent responses immediately following the assault, they appear to decline over time, and none of the participants reported feeling numb or in denial currently. In the moments immediately following the assault, Beth and Nora

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[2] Interestingly, two of the participants who made the most "clean breaks," Amber and Nora, were the two participants most entangled, with shared households and, in Amber's case, a pregnancy.

described a clear transition from numbness (Beth) and self-blame (Nora) to anger; their anger appears to have been an integral component of their decision to end the relationship. Deb had a similar experience, with her self-blame turning to anger when he called her the following day. Carmen and Laura also described intense anger that helped cement their resolve to leave, but their anger was more in response to their boyfriends' infidelity than to the violence. Emily reported that she did not feel anger at the time, although she "should have."

<u>Crossing the Line of Acceptable Behavior</u>

I have a bruise on my <u>face</u>, you know what I mean, I'm <u>really</u> not into that. You have crossed a line that I <u>do not</u> allow people to cross.
     --Deb

Each participant said that she had a preconceived idea of what behavior she would not tolerate in a relationship. Five referred explicitly to violence (for example, Amber said, "I knew I'd never let anyone put hands on me"), but seven spoke more broadly of issues such as controlling or disrespectful behavior. Amber, Heather and Tamara spontaneously mentioned that their boyfriends had already started to cross their boundaries before the violence, voicing disappointment in themselves for having allowed things to deteriorate so far. Tamara, Carmen and Laura described how difficult it was to cope in reality with something they knew they disagreed with in the abstract.

Asked how they learned where their lines were, participants mostly named experiences in other relationships and watching their parents. Three participants reported that problems with violence or jealousy in previous relationships had taught them where their boundaries were. Seven of the ten participants said that they developed their boundaries at least partly through the influence of their parents.

Four participants said that their parents gave them clear, explicit messages about self-respect and the unacceptability of violence. Beth, for example, reacted strongly to her boyfriend's violence because it was so foreign to her: "I've never been around any sort of physical abuse; I mean, as a child we weren't ever spanked even, at all, and so I always thought of physical abuse as, like, really, really bad." Deb told a story about a time when her parents, who have a very good relationship, were kidding around and her father jokingly raised his hand to her mother:

> She got so fucking pissed. Like, she started crying at the dinner table, and she was like, 'That was totally rude and I will never have you do that in front of my kids again, whether you're kidding or not!' And I just thought about that for so long. Like, he didn't even hit her, we were totally having a kidding moment.... My dad [was] like, "I'm sorry. I really didn't, I wasn't—you guys, I would *never* hit your mom. And I was just kidding and it wasn't funny."

Deb said that she thought about this story when she was deciding to leave her boyfriend.

In contrast, Carmen and Amber learned about violence from watching their fathers mistreat their mothers. The lessons they learned, however, were different. Amber learned intolerance of violence from her parents: "Watching my mom get her ass kicked for eight years, you know, I don't want to live like that. I *won't* live like that. I don't have to." Carmen, on the other hand, speculated that seeing her father scream at her mother may have made verbal abuse easier to accept in her relationship. Even so, she always knew that his behavior was unacceptable; she said that "there was never any time

growing up...that I thought that's just how all families are. No. I always knew my father was being an asshole."

Watching Others: The Role of Role Models

The preceding discussion points to the importance of role models in the participants' processes of evaluating their relationships. Parental relationships emerged as one of the strongest influences on the young women's thinking about how they should be treated by their partners. Frequently participants related stories that fit the social learning model, which predicts that people will emulate behavior they witness being reinforced, and will not engage in behavior they see being punished.

As described above, Amber saw her father abuse her mother. She also saw her mother divorce him, and saw that she was "so much happier alone." In a simplification of two very complex situations, Amber witnessed her mother's leaving be reinforced, and so she was likely to leave her own abusive partner. Carmen saw her mother continue to tolerate her father's abuse; in this case, her mother's staying was punished. Carmen stated, "I've seen what my mother's gone through. I'm not taking any crap. From anybody. I always had that attitude." In this way, Carmen's leaving her boyfriend also fits the social learning model. There is an additional component to this story: Carmen's mother appeared relatively unaffected by her father's abuse, and for a while Carmen tried to abide the verbal abuse in the same way. This may account for some of Carmen's ambivalence in leaving the relationship after the rape.

Many of the participants saw their parents' relationships as positive models. Tamara, Deb, Laura, and Mandy referred to their parents' relationships as very healthy, and spoke about learning the importance of respect and compromise from them. Deb and

Beth cited the absence of violence in their homes as influential in their reactions to their boyfriends. They sounded as if they were taken by surprise by the violence, as it was so foreign to them. Deb said, "You follow what you're modeled…and I wasn't modeled getting beat up. So why would I ever get beat up?"

Two participants were influenced by their friends' parents. Parallel to Amber's story, Laura's friend's mother left her abusive husband and was much happier alone. Nora had a friend who was abused by her step-fathers; Nora stated,

> I did have her in mind then…I did think about her, that I didn't want to end up like her…. She was headed down. I could tell she wasn't gonna make it in life, and I didn't wanna end up like that.

Laura and Nora both reported thinking about these stories when deciding to leave their boyfriends.

Deb's thinking about how to handle the violence in her relationship was strongly affected by a friend's experience of dating violence. Her friend called Deb for help after being beaten, and Deb called the police. She said that the abusive boyfriend hit the police, was arrested, and then, incredibly, was released later that night.

> So I just kinda lost all faith in cops, cause what does it do, it just pissed [him] off more, you know what I mean. It's like taking a bee, and shaking it in a bottle and letting it out. You know, now he wants to sting, now he's looking to hurt us.

This situation was the reason Deb decided not to go to the police for help on the night her boyfriend hit her.

Four participants said they were further influenced by images in the media. None cited specific sources, but they reported thinking about the consequences suffered by women in movies who were abused. Heather described movies in which women do not tell about a rape and are then further stalked or harassed by the perpetrator; she said thinking of these consequences motivated her to tell the police about the rape. Laura mentioned movies in which women leave their abusers and "then their lives are all peachy and stuff." In contrast, Mandy described movies in which women leave their abusers and then:

> ...seemed to have extreme emotional problems. And I've never had anything like that, never had any deals with depression or anything like that, and so I was like, Oh God, is this gonna start?....They just felt like outsiders, always distanced themselves, cause they were so afraid of being hurt again. I was like, I'll just block [the incident] out and never think about it again and then that won't happen to me.

Laura mentioned a bit of "angry girl music" that helped sustain her determination to leave her boyfriend. The song, *Love is Blind*, is about rapper Eve's reaction to her friend's abuse:

> *She was in love and I'd ask her how? I mean why?*
>
> *What kind of love from a nigga would black your eye?*
>
> *What kind of love from a nigga every night make you cry?*
>
> *What kind of love from a nigga make you wish he would die? ...*
>
> *That wasn't love, babygirl, you was dreamin...*

Love is blind, and it will take over your mind

What you think is love, is truly not

Four participants spoke about messages they had heard in school about relationship violence, although they indicated that the didactic information had little influence on them. For example, Emily saw a video in a "relationships class" about an abusive relationship in which the girlfriend took the blame for the abuse. Asked whether the movie influenced her, she said derisively, "Um, [it] influenced me in the fact that I knew I would never be that girl." Beth and Nora had both learned in school that they should talk to a counselor, teacher, parent, or police about relationship violence. Both rolled their eyes when saying this; Nora said, "Like I was gonna talk to my mom, you know?" Deb, on the other hand, was strongly influenced by her middle school health teacher, who talked about what she learned from being beaten by her husband. She told the class, "If a boy's gonna hit ya, move on; there's a boy that's not gonna hit ya somewhere, he's a lot better than a boy that is....A boy that's gonna hit you isn't worth waiting around for, you're better than that." Hearing this from a survivor may have made the message more palatable to Deb than it was to Beth, Emily and Nora. This idea is further explored below in the "Social Support" section.

<u>Losing Strength: Confidence and Self-Esteem</u>[3]

A classic conundrum of research on battered women is how to determine the relationship between abuse and self-esteem. As mentioned in the literature review above, the direction of the causal arrow has not yet been determined—does abuse cause low self-esteem, or do women with low self-esteem get abused? The findings of this qualitative,

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[3] In the interviews, participants did not discriminate between confidence, self-esteem, and assertiveness; therefore, these characteristics are blended in this discussion.

small-n study obviously can not settle the question, but the trend that emerged is consistent enough to report on. According to the participants, their self-esteem and confidence was in flux through the relationship. The general pattern seems to be that these young women were confident and assertive prior to and in the beginning of their relationships. As the relationship wore on (and often, as they were subjected to verbal abuse), their self-esteem dropped. Around the time of the incident some were regaining their personal strength, but others were at "rock bottom." Following the break-up, their self-esteem rebounded, so that almost all of them reported feeling stronger now than ever before. This experience of increased strength following a traumatic event is reflected in the literature on resiliency (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999). The participants' statements about their self-confidence and esteem are summarized below.

Asked to describe herself during the relationship, Amber stated, "I was a drug addict"—focused on what she could get for herself. She was not self-confident, and her personal strength vacillated. At the time of the interview she seemed to feel much stronger, and was working toward a career focused on helping others.

Beth was "always one of the popular girls," a cheerleader; during the relationship she became less outgoing and more isolated. She feels that her self-esteem, confidence, and personal strength were eroded during the relationship. With graduation, she was becoming stronger and feeling better about herself. She named her strength as a primary factor in leaving, and attributed it to messages she got from her parents about her self-worth. After leaving the relationship, she said her confidence and self-esteem "shot up. I felt so good about myself—I was *strong*."

Carmen described herself as deferential, self-sacrificing, unassertive, and overly trusting before the relationship. During the relationship she felt she had lost self-esteem, self-respect, and personal strength. Following the incident, her self-esteem was "rock bottom;" she said, "I hated myself." At the time of the interview she said her self-confidence was "higher than it has ever been;" while she struggles with "huge pockets of insecurities and confusion," she is generally confident and unconcerned with people who don't like her. "I'm gonna be me, all the time, unequivocally me."

Deb was learning to be more confident during her relationship. She said she had always been independent and had always liked herself, although that wavered in some situations. During a previous relationship that was abusive, she grew to hate herself: "Every time [he] pushed me, he took more self-esteem away from me." Her self-esteem was suffering in this relationship as well; she recognized that if she let things continue with her boyfriend, "I was just gonna lose all esteem for myself." At the time of the interview she said she was feeling more comfortable with herself and better at avoiding people who are not good to her.

Emily said that she was experiencing a depression when she began dating the boy who assaulted her. Although she was outgoing and sociable, there were problems in her family that left her feeling insecure. When he showed interest in her she felt better about herself, but "then he wasn't a nice guy so much, so it kinda made me more depressed." She has always felt, however, like an independent person who could stand up for herself; she appeared to see her lack of confidence and security as a transitory effect of her depression.

Heather said that "for the most part" she was assertive, although her personal strength was lowered during the relationship. While she didn't believe the mean things her boyfriend would say to her, they would "get to" her. Around the time of the incident she was feeling excited about college but uncertain and scared about breaking up with her boyfriend.

Laura said that she had lost herself in the relationship, and that she had low self-esteem and felt unhappy with herself. She was unable to stand up to her boyfriend: "He's one of those guys...he knows my weaknesses, and he plays on them....He was the only guy that could ever ever do that to me, cause I think I'm a pretty strong person." At the time of the interview she reported being "really independent, just kind of for myself, and not anybody else; I guess that [relationship] just taught me not to lose myself."

Mandy reported no change to her sense of self or confidence; she said she has never had doubts about herself or her potential. She attributed her consistently strong self-esteem to the supportiveness of her family. She is the main exception to the pattern of self-esteem fluctuation over the course of the relationship, which may be explained by the very brief nature of her relationship.

Nora said that during the relationship she had "big problems" with assertiveness and confidence. She became more confident when she began dating again and turning men down: "That gave me the boost to see that I was fine on my own, and I didn't have to have this guy around, and I can make it, and maybe never be in a relationship for the rest of my life, and that was ok." At the time of the interview she said that she still gets pushed around on small issues, but "I can stand up for myself when I really need to."

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Tamara described herself as experiencing a severe depression during her relationship, triggered perhaps by a previous acquaintance rape. Around the time of the incident, she felt she was gaining respect for herself, and she said she has always prided herself on being confident. However, she said she still struggles with saying no to men. She stated that she has never actually wanted to have sex, but has given in to pressure each time. She finds it difficult to maintain her own standards in relationships, although she has a clear idea of what is unacceptable.

Table 7 shows a distillation of this information, with the construct of confidence separated divided into trait confidence (when participants said "I've always been..." or "I am...") and state confidence (the fluctuations in their self-esteem before and after the incident). Evaluation of the participants' strength and confidence was not always possible from the transcripts, but what information is available suggests a consistent pattern: a self-confident young woman suffers a blow to her self-esteem during a relationship then experiences an ego boost when she ends it.

TABLE 7

Participants' Levels of Confidence

	Trait confidence (I am, I always was)	State confidence— Pre-incident	State confidence— Post -incident
Beth	high	low; getting higher	high
Deb	high	low; getting higher	high
Nora	high	low	high
Mandy	high	high	high
Carmen	low	low	high
Laura	high?	low	high
Tamara	high	low; getting higher	
Emily	high	low	
Heather	high?	low	
Amber	high	low	

Expecting Apologies

A number of participants discussed the impact of their boyfriends' behavior in the aftermath of the incident. It appears that this may have been an important variable in helping the young women to leave, as the majority of participants expected but did not receive apologies and demonstrations of contrition or remorse. The participants were not asked whether they were expecting an apology from their boyfriend after the incident, or whether they received one, yet only two participants, Beth and Mandy, did not mention this as a factor. Seven indicated that their boyfriends did not apologize for the assault; only Laura described receiving an apology. Laura was also the participant who had the hardest time leaving. This suggests that without an apology or remorse, victims may find it easier to disentangle themselves from violent relationships.

For example, it appears that for Deb and Tamara, the lack of apology helped them sustain their motivation to stay away from their boyfriends. Deb spent the day following the assault feeling sad about what had happened. "I was really hoping he was gonna call and justify it, explain himself....I was hoping somehow he had a damn good excuse for his actions. And he called and acted like it'd never happened." She said her sadness turned to anger when she heard his nonchalant voice. This anger built through their conversation, in which he denied the severity of what had happened. It was during this exchange that she decided not to continue contact with him.

Tamara described a similar experience when she saw her boyfriend a week after the incident:

> He said something about me being mad at him, and I'm like, you threatened to
>
> kill me, Ben, you threatened to break my neck, how am I supposed to feel

comfortable around you? And he's like, what? And I'm like, shut up, you

know exactly what you did. And he's like, oh my God, that's hilarious! And

I'm like, no, it's really not funny at all....So he tried to play it off as a being a

joke. He was just laughing it up, he thought it was funny that I was so

threatened by it. *How did that affect you?* It reinstilled the fact that I

shouldn't see him or have contact with him again.

A lack of contact with the boyfriend also appears to be influential in the

participants' thinking about the assault. For Emily and Nora, the fact that their

boyfriends did not attempt to contact them after the assault represented an admission of

guilt. In Heather's case, the boyfriend did not have an opportunity to apologize, as he

was arrested immediately after the rape. This may have been deliberate on Heather's

part: she said, "I knew if I didn't call the cops, he'd sober up and he'd call me and he'd

apologize, and he'd want to get back together." It appears that Heather was hoping to

avoid an apology as a way of simplifying the break-up.

This range of experiences with apologies shows the importance of the honeymoon

phase of the cycle of violence. Without the flowers, apologies, and promises never to do

it again, victims may be more likely to leave the relationship. As Amber said, "They

always say, 'I'm sorry, I'll never do it again.' And the next thing you know it's been 20

times down the road and you've had your ass kicked and your face fixed, cause it's

bound to happen again."

Expecting Escalation

...worse and worse and worse...
                              --Beth

...bigger and bigger and bigger...
                              --Deb

As Amber suggested in the previous section, the second line of the stereotypical post-incident apology is "It will never happen again." It may be that if they believe this promise, women will be more likely to stay in the relationship. All but one of the participants in this study thought that their boyfriend would be violent again if they stayed, and said that that this expectation was part of their decision making process. As Amber further stated, "I believe that once they hit you, the second time will come soon." Heather noted that this was the most important factor in her decision to leave.

Their expectations of recurrence seemed to come more directly from previous experience in the relationship than from information they might have heard about the patterns of abuse: they had witnessed their boyfriends' aggression mount over time. Some described the incident as a "wake-up call" that helped them see this cycle of escalating aggression. For example, Beth said,

> When we first started arguing, we would...just argue, and then it got worse and worse and worse, and then it would get to the point where he would break things, and then it would get to the point where he would punch things, and kick things, and then now it was at the point where he was taking it out on me physically. And I think...that [incident] really made me wake up and see that spiral.

Echoing this, Deb said,

> His blowups had just gotten bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and
>
> bigger. He started with a little temper tantrum…and then like, slowly but
>
> surely they'd get bigger, and he'd just explode….Yeah, I knew it would
>
> happen again. I don't doubt that it would happen again.

Mandy was the only participant who said that she was not thinking about whether

he would do it again. She said that her thinking was more focused on how the violence

"had overstepped a line that wasn't worth it to me."

Making Attributions

Now, I don't blame myself
for the present situation
For this kind of behavior
there is no justification…
No one has the right to hurt me
Especially when they say they love me
Apologies don't make anything better
So I'll take my love and my life
And leave today
                    --Sweet Honey in the Rock, "Run"

By the time they were interviewed, all the participants were attributing the

violence to transitory or personality traits of their boyfriends, such as his alcohol abuse,

his family problems, or his controlling nature. Six participants, however, had blamed

themselves immediately following the incident. The attributions can be categorized as

Internal Global (e.g., "I'm a bad person"); External Global (e.g., "He's a bad person");

Internal Specific (e.g., "I led him on"); and External Specific (e.g., "He was drunk").

All of participants made external global or specific attributions at the time of the

interview. For example, Amber, Beth and Mandy appeared to blame their boyfriends'

drug addictions. Seven of the participants cited their boyfriends' psychological issues, often naming a history of family problems as contributors. Tamara described her boyfriend as "the throwaway child" in his family; Beth's boyfriend learned alcoholism and abusiveness from his father; Emily's boyfriend was unable to trust women, she said, because he was molested as a child. Nora described her boyfriend as "a pretty messed up person," "from a pretty messed up family." She said, "it was Greg's fault that he was the way he was, it wasn't mine. It had to do with his environment, and who he was....The fact was, it didn't have anything to do with me."

While all the participants made external attributions, some also blamed themselves for the violence, at least in part. Deb, for example, appeared to blame her poor choice of partners, making an internal global attribution. Immediately after the incident Nora felt that it was "90 percent" her fault; she, Deb, Laura, and Mandy all reported thinking about what they could have done to avoid a fight and prevent the violence. Carmen blamed herself for many things: for not getting out earlier, for not resisting enough, and for blaming him. "Maybe it was easier for me to say he was abusing me, but really I was letting him do it. Like I was saying that to escape responsibility or something." Carmen also blamed her parents for being poor role models. She was angry at her father for mistreating her mother, and angry at her mother for allowing it: "you showed me to take that." Again, she criticized herself for this attribution: "I'm just trying to blame everybody else, to avoid taking responsibility...it's nobody's fault but mine and Chad's."

Most of the participants appeared to mix attribution styles, either moving from one to another over time or blending two simultaneously. For example, Carmen blamed

herself and her parents, but she also blamed her boyfriend. Other research has also found

this blend (Frazier, 1990). Table 8 summarizes the participants' attribution styles, with

current, primary attributions in boldface.

TABLE 8

Attribution Styles

	Global personality traits	Specific to the situation
Internal	*(I'm a bad person)* Deb	*(I led him on)* **Carmen** Deb Emily Laura Mandy Nora
External	*(He's a bad person)* Amber **Beth** **Tamara** **Carmen** Emily **Heather** Laura Nora	*(He was drunk)* **Amber** **Deb** **Laura** **Mandy**

In general, the participants started with internal specific attributions and with

time, moved to external global attributions. This may be an adaptive way of thinking

about the incident. It has been proposed that people engage in "self-serving bias" as a

way to gain a sense of control over events (Walster, 1966). Behavioral self-blame

following a trauma (with statements such as, "I should not have put myself in that

dangerous situation") has been found to be a predictor of good coping (Bulman &

Wortman, 1977; Hickling, Blanchard, Buckley, & Taylor, 1999) and lower rates of

depression (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Perhaps the participants in this study made internal

specific attributions when they needed to feel a sense of control about their world, and

with time and clearer information they moved to more accurate external attributions.

The strong tendency to arrive at external attributions for violence may be a factor that discriminates between women who leave and those who do not. In this sample, there is no direct correlation between attribution style and the scale of leaving described above, but there may be an indirect relationship. External attributions appear to be related to labeling, as the next section describes.

Labeling the Violence

The literature described in the introduction suggests that labeling an incident violent or abusive is critical to leaving the relationship, and that often it is only the most severe violence that is labeled (Werner-Wilson, Zimmerman, & Whalen, 2000; Sedlak, 1988). The results of the present study do not follow this pattern perfectly; it is likely that a large number of other factors muddy the picture and obscure a direct correlation. There does, however, appear to be a system of interrelationships: the more severe the incident and the more clear-cut, the more likely the participants were to label it, the less likely they were to blame themselves, and the more likely they were to seek support from others (as discussed in the next section). Seeking support from others is in turn related to clear, unambivalent leaving.

Severity and clarity of the event were operationalized here in relative terms. The designations of high, medium and low severity were made based on the participants' experiences relative to those of the others in this sample. High severity incidents featured significant injuries, the immediate potential of severe injuries, or completed rape. "Clarity" refers to the participants' *initial understanding* of the event. For example, Heather was quite certain that she had been raped; in contrast, Carmen and Emily were unclear about whether they had been. Mandy and Beth are the other two participants who

had ambiguous views of the incident. The distinction between clear and ambiguous events is closely tied to whether the participants labeled the event: those who had a clear initial understanding of what had happened were those who labeled it violence or abuse immediately. It took those who were caught in ambiguity longer to label the event. In fact, Beth and Carmen appear never to have labeled the event with conviction. Although they volunteered for the study, they continued to feel uncertain about what to call the incidents.

Factors of severity, clarity, labeling, attributing and support-seeking are closely related. Amber, for example, suffered a severe beating and saw it as a very clear-cut event. She labeled it abuse immediately, made an external attribution—it was his fault, not hers—and immediately sought support from friends and the police. She left immediately as well. Mandy, in contrast, experienced an incident that was ambiguous (her injuries resulted from falling from a fence, not directly from a beating) and low in severity. She stated that she had not labeled it violence until she was asked about it in the interview. (While she did volunteer for the study, suggesting that she had labeled it to some extent, she was referred by Laura; so it is possible that Laura labeled it and she did not.) Her immediate attribution was internal; that did not shift until she confided in a friend months later. "I remember it being really sudden, just like, *Oh wow*, it wasn't my fault!" Similarly, Nora reported that she did not label the event violence at first because she was making an internal attribution. During the weeks that followed she switched to an external attribution and began to label it; she said that telling her sister about the incident a month afterwards "crystallized it" for her. In Nora's case, then, labeling influenced telling, which then reinforced the labeling. Among all the participants, there

is a particularly strong link between when participants labeled the event violent and when

they told others about it, suggesting that these two processes are mutually influential.

Table 9 displays these relationships, and Figure 2 shows how the system works:

TABLE 9

Relationships between Severity, Labeling, Attributions, and Seeking Support

	relative severity ranking	subjects' view of the incident	when labeled	when told	initial internal attribution/ self-blame
Amber	high	clear	immediately	immediately	
Heather	high	clear	immediately	immediately	
Laura	high	clear	6 months	6 months	internal
Emily	high	ambiguous	6 months (before telling)	6 months	internal
Deb	medium	clear	immediately	immediately	
Carmen	medium	ambiguous	never	1 year	internal
Nora	medium	clear	weeks	1 month	internal
Tamara	medium	clear	immediately	immediately	
Beth	low	ambiguous	never	never	
Mandy	low	ambiguous	interview (8 months)	a few months	internal

FIGURE 2

Cognitions and Behaviors Associated with Severe/Unambiguous Violence

```
                        ┌─────────────┐
                        │ labeled the │
                        │   violence  │
                        └─────────────┘

┌──────────────┐                              ┌──────────────┐
│   suffered   │                              │   made an    │
│   severe/    │                              │   external   │
│ unambiguous  │                              │ attribution  │
│   violence   │                              └──────────────┘
└──────────────┘
                        ┌─────────────┐
                        │    sought   │
                        │ support from│
                        │    others   │
                        └─────────────┘
```
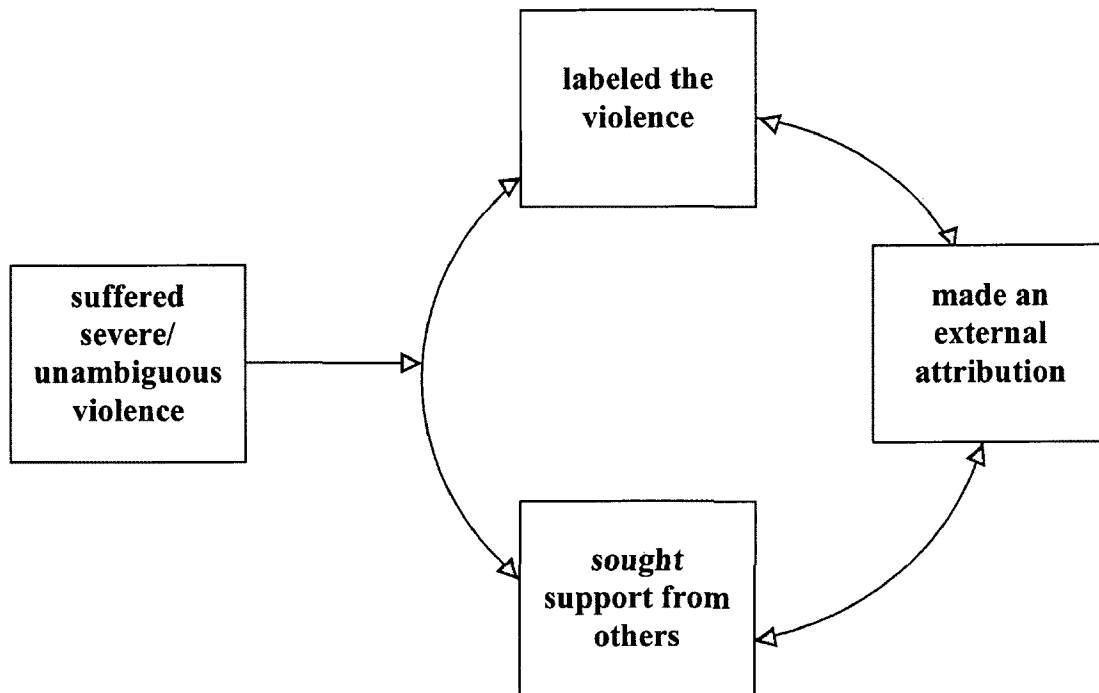
Seeking Social Support

And when I needed my mother and I called her
She came and stayed with me for days
              --Indigo Girls, "Prince of Darkness"

The factor that most consistently helped interviewees end their relationships was

social support. The involvement of friends and parents affected how the participants

thought about the relationship before and after the incident. In some cases, the

involvement was beneficial, but not in all. Those who experienced helpful involvement

often gave a great deal of credit to social support when asked what helped them leave

their relationships. Each participant, for example, indicated that she received strong

support from friends in ending the relationship. This is one of the few factors that

emerged from the data with 100% consistency.

In all cases, parents played a role in the stories the participants told. The roles varied along a continuum of involvement. In Emily's case, she made no mention of her family at all except to say that her mother was physically abusive and that "family problems" were behind her depression at the time of the incident. Similarly, Amber's parents were not at all involved in the incident or its aftermath, but some of Amber's decision-making was based on having witnessed her mother being abused. At the other end of the continuum, Heather and Nora relied on their mothers to help them with the logistics of breaking up: Heather's mother called the police for her, and Nora's mother helped her move out of her boyfriend's apartment. In general (with the prominent exception of Emily, as mentioned above), the participants came from close, protective, and concerned families. Often participants were aware of and influenced by their parents' opinions of their boyfriends (the influence was in both positive and negative directions, as explained below). Interestingly, there does not seem to be a correlation between the participants' age and the extent of parental influence.

A composite portrait summarizes the ways significant others influence the participants' process: Prior to the incident, her friends and parents disapprove of the relationship. She argues against their judgments, defending her boyfriend, and her defensiveness prevents her from critically evaluating the relationship. The incident, however, is a strong enough "wake up call" that it breaks through her "denial," and she reluctantly sees that they were right. When thinking about leaving, she knows that her friends and family will enthusiastically support her decision to leave. The messages they have given her previously ("you deserve better," etc.) are in her mind as she decides to end it. She tells someone about the incident, setting a chain of events in motion that

would make it very difficult for her to return to him. Once she has left, she leans on her family and friends for support in her process of grieving and recovering from the assault.

Disapproval and defensiveness.

And some kind of help is the kind of help
That helping's all about
And some kind of help is the kind of help
We all can do without.
　　　　　--Shel Silverstein, "Helping"

Many participants indicated that their friends and parents strongly disliked their boyfriends prior to the incident. Carmen's friends, for example, nicknamed her boyfriend Satan. Six of the participants mentioned having problems with their friends and parents about the boyfriends.

The disapproval did not always have the intended effect: it appears that often, the young women would defend their choice to be in the relationship, at the expense of being honest with themselves about it. Tamara described how her contrary nature kept her in the relationship:

> Everyone else saw [how bad the relationship was], my friends, my family, my
>
> therapist. So at the same time that was like, a major support, but my
>
> personality would take that as, it would almost work in the opposite way,
>
> against me, where I would just take that and be like, yeah, everybody's saying
>
> [leave], and I don't want to.

She spoke of trying to prove everyone wrong—a doomed effort, as she eventually realized. Laura was somewhat more open to her friends' input than Tamara, but still found that their pressure was not helpful.

> All my friends would tell me, you know, to get out of that relationship, you
>
> know, he's mean to you, blah blah blah, but I guess you just have to want to
>
> do it or else it doesn't work. Cause, like, I tried to…talk to him & stuff, and
>
> just, like, it was more my friends talking through me than me talking.….*So*
>
> *was their pressure to leave him helpful or…?* It kinda went both ways, like,
>
> you know, when people tell you not to do something you want to do it
>
> more.…When people tell you that, you almost get angry at them…I would've
>
> rather have them just kind of there, like so I could talk to them and stuff, just
>
> kind of help me, but not be, like, 'you need to leave him,' just, like, help me
>
> find myself.

Beth agreed that a more open attitude, asking "How's it going with your boyfriend?"

instead of "He's such a jerk to you!", would have made it easier to talk without getting

defensive. This is echoed in Rosen and Stith's (1997) statement, "Allowing a woman to

give voice to her own doubts can be far more powerful than trying to tell her that the

relationship is destructive and not workable." (p. 180)

<u>Thinking through.</u>

Messages that friends and family had been trying to communicate to the

participants started to sink in after the incident. No longer able to ignore the problems in

the relationship, the participants became more open to the input. When describing their

decision-making process, they often cited messages from their parents. For example,

asked what helped her leave, Deb said,

> Good parents. That's the fundamentals of it. And a good support
>
> system.….My parents just really helped instill in me that I, I know better than

this and I...*deserve* better than this. ... If you don't have anybody there to say,

you know, 'you're worth more than this, you're better than this'...it's hard to

see past the lies that people tell you, that 'you can't get any better than me.'

<u>Being pushed /Getting help to leave.</u>

The participants in this study could be divided into two groups of styles of

leaving: there are those who left quickly and never looked back (Amber, Deb, Emily,

Heather, Mandy, and Nora), and those who struggled to leave, working through

ambivalence, confusion, and second thoughts (Beth, Tamara, Carmen, and Laura). Many

factors were examined for possible correlations with this breakdown, to determine

whether this distinction might lead to a parsimonious explanation for what helps women

leave. Variables such attribution style, time elapsed since the incident, assertiveness,

shame, and relationship length could not be split along these lines. Immediate help-

seeking behavior, however, does discriminate between these leaving styles. The

participants who "never looked back" sought help immediately after the incident. Those

who were ambivalent did not, and often actively resisted offers of assistance. The

exception to this is Emily, who did not seek help immediately after the incident because

she did not know what had happened. This pattern is shown in Table 10:

TABLE 10

Leaving Styles and Help Seeking

Never Looked Back	sought help from...	Ambivalent	refused help from...
Amber	friends and police	Beth	police
Deb	his mother and friends	Carmen	did not tell; later, friend and aunt
Emily	no one	Laura	friends and hospital staff
Heather	mother and police	Tamara	did not tell
Nora	mother		
Mandy	friend and police		

The question this raises is how, exactly, the two are related. Does the help-seeking lead to a clear decision to leave? Or does a clear decision to leave lead to seeking help? Figure 3 shows the possible causal links:

FIGURE 3

Hypothetical Causal Links between Telling about the Incident and Deciding to Leave
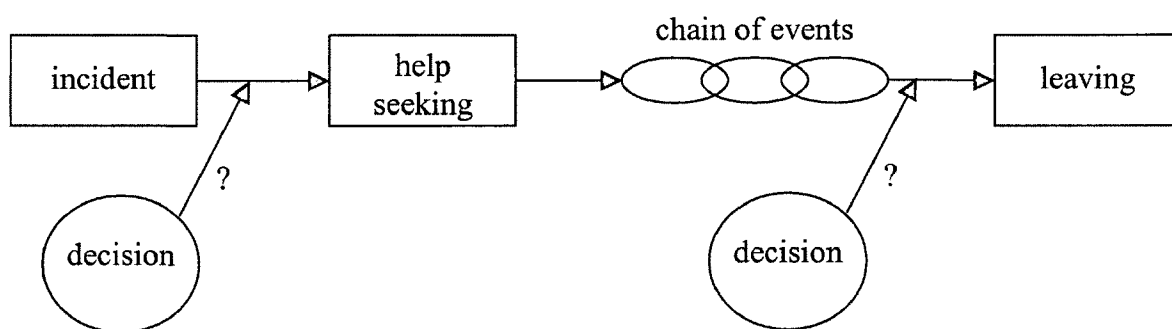
Perhaps help-seeking leads to a clear decision. Something in the telling results in a clear decision to leave. Once she tells, people will pressure her to leave; she won't want to be seen as a victim; or the act of seeking help creates the break-up. Heather appears to be a good example of this hypothesis. Immediately after the rape, she told her mother, who called the police. She never saw her boyfriend again until she testified against him. The decision about whether to leave was essentially taken out of her hands

once she told her mother. Seeking help set in motion a chain of events that made it very difficult for her to return to her boyfriend.

Similarly, if Beth had allowed the policeman to help her, he might have told her parents, who would have insisted that she not see him anymore. If Laura had told the hospital staff who beat her, he would have gotten in trouble, which would have made it difficult to go back to him.

On the other hand, Heather and Beth stated that they considered the sequellae of getting help from the police before they decided whether or not to. Heather knew that her mother would call the police, and Beth said she decided not to get help because it would get her boyfriend in trouble with her parents. Furthermore, Laura said that she thought that telling the hospital staff would destroy her chances of reconciling with her boyfriend, so she lied to them about who had beaten her. Nora did not tell her housemates about the assault because she did not want them to think badly of him. This supports the second hypothesis, that a clear decision leads to seeking help. If she intends to leave, she seeks help and does not care about protecting his image. If she is not sure that she wants to leave, she will not tell, because she knows that telling will set a break-up in motion.

A third possibility is a combination of the two hypotheses. A woman who is undecided but leaning toward leaving tells people, knowing that it will force her hand in the future; she invites the pressures of friends or circumstances to help her make her decision or to bolster her resolve. Figure 4 shows this pattern: following the incident, the young woman decides to leave; the decision leads her to seek help; the help reinforces her decision, which pushes her further in the direction of leaving.

FIGURE 4

Help-seeking and the Decision to Leave may be Mutually Influential
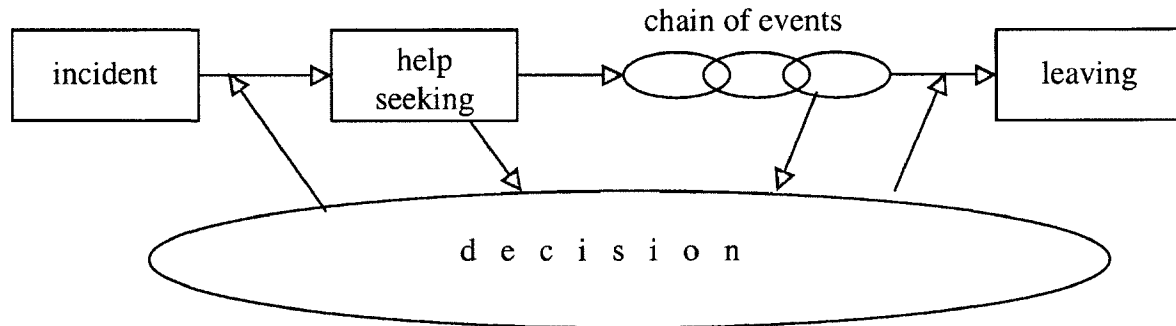
Settling this question is beyond the scope of the current study: it is impossible to determine causal relationships, and, as explained above, the factor of seeking support is closely linked to issues of severity, labeling, and attributions, so the picture is complex. What is clear is that seeking support from others seems to be an integral component of the leaving process. A possible model of the system of relationships is shown in Figure 5:

FIGURE 5

Severity, Labeling, Attributions, and Support Influence Leaving
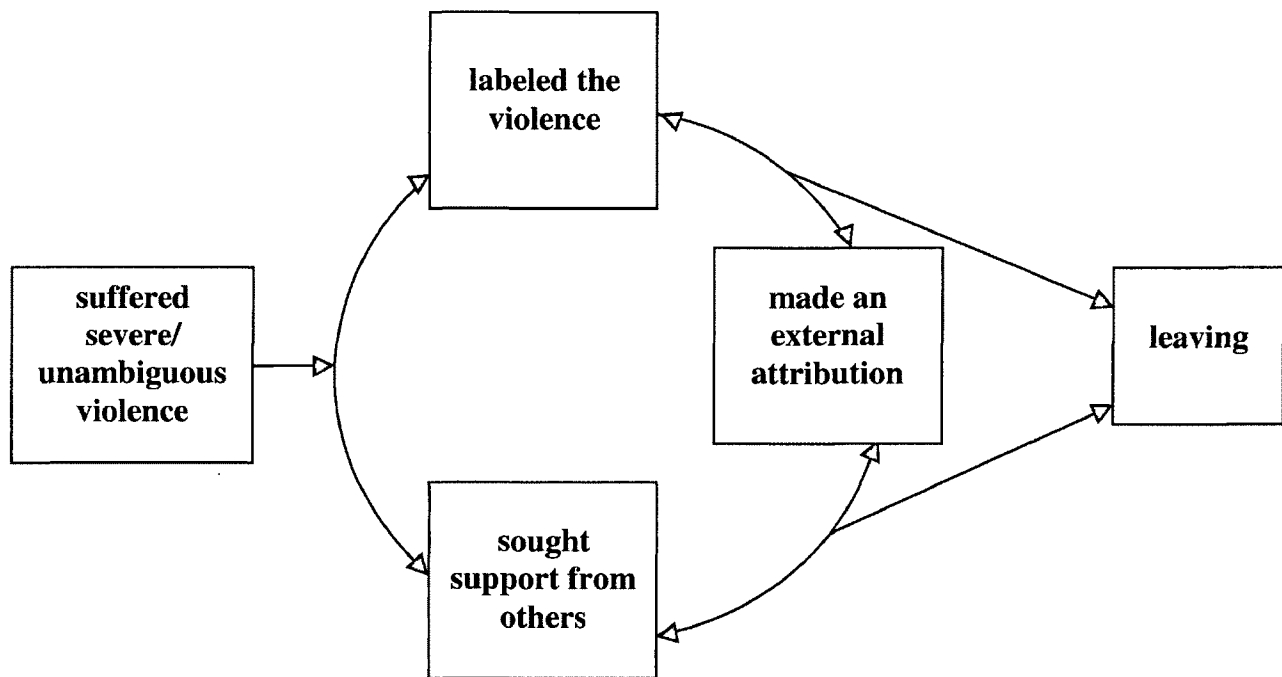
The role of friends: Telling to sustain motivation.

A strong finding is that the participants considered support from friends essential

to sustaining their motivation to stay away. This was also a robust finding in Rosen and

Stith's 1997 study of teen violence. Tamara told people about her boyfriend's

threatening phone call specifically to reinforce her decision to stay away:

> To get over it I had to start hating him, you know, I had to put into my mind
>
> that he was such a jerk. And then I kinda wanted to hear that more, you know,
>
> reinstate that fact in my mind...I'd tell them about that phone call, just to
>
> prove [it].

When Deb was asked if social support helped her stay away from her boyfriend, she said,

Oh, it was the *sole* reason I wouldn't reconnect with him. My heart hurt, and I

wanted to, but everywhere I turned I really had a strong message of, 'Deb, you

need to get away from this, right now! This is a pattern.'

One friend said that if Deb did not call her boyfriend for a week, she would take her to

dinner. She also found support from two friends with abuse histories, one of whom she

quoted as saying,

'This is a cycle. You let him do it once, he's gonna do it again. You didn't

think he'd ever hit a girl? Well all of a sudden he just learned power from

hitting a girl, Deb. And you're allowed to forgive him if you so choose, but

what have you learned about people who cheat? You take them back, they

cheat again.' She was just really, like, cut & dry about that. And she called

me every day, every day.

Emily, Nora and Beth also got support from friends with abuse histories, which

Beth said "made a big difference to me because I knew it was important to her and she'd

been there." She believed that her friends' support was the main reason she was able to

finally end it with her boyfriend. She speculated that the day she broke up with him, she

was feeling strong because she was with her friends, "and I knew they were gonna be

with me and they were gonna be supportive—and they were." To sustain her motivation,

she called a friend and "I was like, 'I need you to help me,' and she stayed with me for

like, three days. ...She may be the only reason that it actually worked that time."

The role of parents: Keeping it vague.

If you hear something late at night
Some kind of trouble, some kind of fight
Just don't ask me what it was
Just don't ask me what it was
                    --Suzanne Vega, "Luka"

While the participants generally wanted to tell one or more friends about the assault, they were quite reticent in telling their parents. Only two willingly told their parents specifically what had happened. Nora referred to "the I told you so syndrome," which seemed to affect Tamara as well: they were reluctant to admit that their parents had been right to distrust their boyfriends. Beth, Nora and Laura expressed relief that their mothers had not asked them directly what had happened. Nora said that during the night she spent thinking after the assault, she was mostly preoccupied with

> ...what I was gonna tell people, most of all what I was gonna tell my mom,
> cause the first thing she was gonna tell me was *I told you so, I hated this*
> *guy....* But it turns out that wasn't the case, she was really understanding. I
> didn't tell her any detail.... She just drove me home, she said that she
> understood.

Deb was also reluctant to talk to her mother about the incident, saying "it'd make her really upset." It may be that she was also unwilling to hear 'I told you so,' as her mother had often told her, "C'mon Deb, you can do so much better than this." Mandy stated that she did not tell her parents because

> It was kinda embarrassing, I didn't want them to worry, I didn't want it to get
> blown out of proportion. My dad's not one of the most, um, he—he acts
> before he thinks. And so I could see him—I don't know, I don't know what I

thought he would do, I just knew that it wasn't a good idea to tell. I still

don't, I don't think I'll ever tell my parents.

It seems Mandy feared that she would lose control over the situation if she told her

parents. Similarly, Beth and Laura did not want their parents to know about their

boyfriend's aggression because they knew their parents would intervene; as described

above, a chain of events would be set in motion. It appears that although these young

women wanted to end the relationships, they wanted to do it on their own terms; they did

not want to turn control over to their parents. This contrasts with Heather's response, as

she welcomed her parents' intervention and surrendered control to them immediately.

The difference may be explained by Heather's immediate readiness to end the

relationship, as opposed to Beth and Laura's ambivalence. In general, the role of parents

is quite complex: voicing their negative opinions of their daughters' boyfriends may be

counterproductive, but their daughters may rely on them to help them out and keep them

safe.

Recovery: Getting help to lift off a weight.

Once the relationships ended, participants went through periods of adjustment.

Emily, for example, coped through denial about what had happened, using alcohol and

drugs to numb herself and trying to block out thoughts about the event. Several found

that subsequent dating relationships were healing, and Amber and Carmen sought

therapy. A few of the participants spoke about feeling at a loss because breaking up with

their boyfriend meant losing their best friend and their primary support. They had to look

elsewhere for comfort. And although their boyfriends had isolated them from their

friends and caused rifts with their families, the participants were still able to turn to these

relationships for help. (This may be a significant difference between the experiences of victims of teen dating violence and spousal violence: whereas wives can be completely isolated from family, coworkers, and friends, held virtual prisoners in their homes, it is impossible for boyfriends to do the same when their girlfriends live with parents and go to school every day. Social support may be a more important factor to teens than to their married counterparts for this reason.)

As mentioned above, some participants found comfort talking with other survivors. Other studies have shown that people are particularly receptive to encouragement and advice from people with experiences similar to their own (Lyons, 1991). This may explain why few participants wanted to confide in their advice-giving parents, and why they sought out their experienced friends for support. Nora, Mandy, and Emily found that talking to others helped them clarify how little they were to blame for the assault. Thompson (2000) found support for this in a study of the benefits rape victims found from talking to others: in that study it was reported that feelings of pain and guilt decreased, and women moved from feeling stupid and victimized to having a new identity as a survivor. As Nora said of talking to her friend who had been abused, "She treated me with respect...I didn't feel stupid about it."

Some participants have told their story with the intention of helping others. All, for example, volunteered for this study with the hope that it would help. Amber and Laura have volunteered to speak to groups of students about their experiences. Carmen decided to confide her experience when her best friend was raped. Nora told her sister, in an attempt to warn her away from an abusive relationship.

Relating the story was not always easy. For example, Emily's friend trivialized the experience, which was quite painful for Emily, who had just begun to admit to herself that she may have been raped. When Mandy told her friend about the assault, it forced her out of her denial:

> I remember being like, *oh God*, cause it was the beginning of having to deal with it. ...It was scary but it was also really good, it was really therapeutic, to get that off my chest and to not have to hide it.

For Mandy, that process of having to deal with it continued through the interview: as she responded to questions of labeling her experience, she said, "When you think about it in terms of abuse and violence, it's huge, it's big....Like, oh boy, I've gotta put a label on it now...I have to deal with it, I have to face it." She described feeling scared and intimidated by the labeling. Carmen had the same reaction during the interview as she struggled to label her experience: "It's just that when you say it, it's like, *ooh,* it's *real* when you say it."

In contrast to the participants who found that talking to others essential to their healing, Laura found telling others only somewhat helpful:

> It helped, it relieved a lot of weight off my shoulders, but at the same time it's just like, I'd talk about it and talk about it and talk about it and it wasn't getting anywhere. I mean it helped a lot but still, I guess there's just a point where you have to find it yourself, you just have to do it on your own.

There is ample literature on "productive confiding" and account-making as an integral part of successful coping with trauma, resulting in improved psychological and physical health, and as a component of post-traumatic growth (e.g., Calhoun & Tedeschi,

1999; Pennebaker, 1995). One study supports the idea that early confiding—within the

year of the trauma—is particularly beneficial (Harvey, 1991). The ten participants in the

present study confirmed this, even through their participation in the research process. For

example, a few months after the interview, Nora commented on the effect the interview

had on her. She had felt unsettled in the days after the interview: "I felt like I was

pushing everyone away." Then, she said, she began feeling better: "better, actually, than

I ever had before. I didn't have that pit in my stomach whenever I talked about it."

Summary: Prototype of a Woman Who Leaves

While the experiences of the ten participants are quite diverse, and they showed a

range of responses to the violence, there is sufficient commonality of themes to create a

synthesized portrait. No single participant fits this portrait exactly, although Nora comes

the closest. A young woman with strong self-esteem enters a dating relationship that

becomes damaging to her sense of self. As the relationship sours, she begins to think

about leaving. She begins to grow more independent of the relationship, through

thinking critically about her boyfriend and making plans for her future that do not include

him. Her boyfriend, alarmed by her withdrawal, tries to exert more control over her. She

resists his attempts. Frustrated by this conflict, the boyfriend assaults her. Following the

assault, she engages in the processes of making an external attribution for the violence,

labeling it abuse, and seeking help from others. These processes help her make the

decision to leave. After a period of time for grieving the trauma and the loss of the

relationship, she recovers and her self-esteem rebounds. This portrait is the prototype of

the unambivalent leavers, the young women who left and never looked back; it shows the

forces that seemed to contribute to their decisiveness. A brief summary of this model is

shown in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6:

Amalgam Model of Young Women who Leave Immediately

strong self-esteem → relationship begins → self-esteem drops → relationship sours → begins contemplating/ preparing to leave → begins to gain independence from relationship → "wake-up call": severe, unambiguous violence → labels the violence / makes an external attribution / seeks support from others → leaves → grieves and recovers from the trauma → self-esteem boost
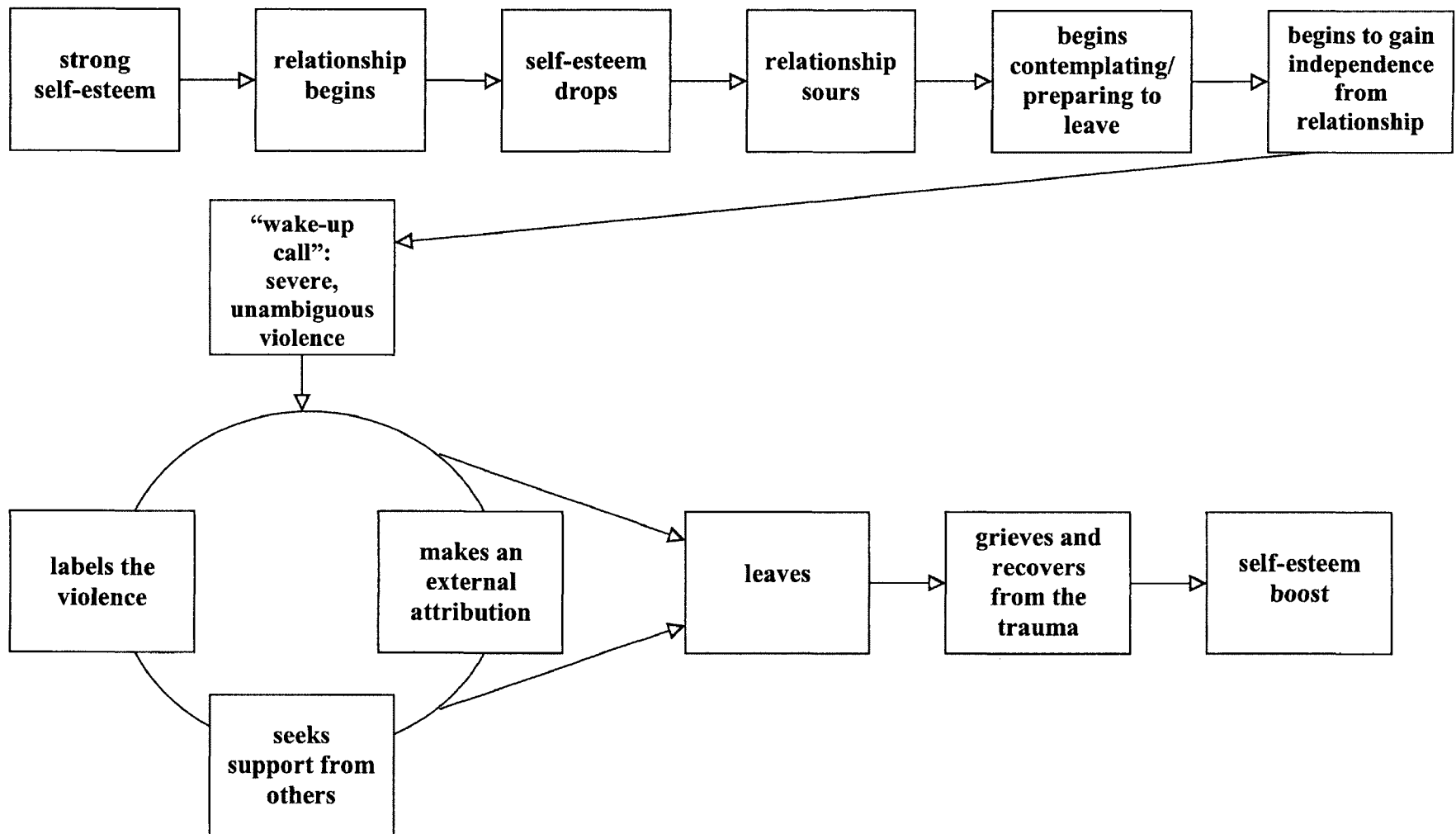
Outcomes

You can't hurt me now
I got away from you, I never thought I would
You can't make me cry, you once had the power
I never felt so good about myself
                    --Madonna, "Oh Father"

Everything's different now.
                    --Nora

The model displayed above ends with an optimistic "self-esteem boost." The interviews would have ended there, but the participants added information about the rest of their story—how they have incorporated the violent incident into their daily lives. Nearly all described positive outcomes: they are stronger, more careful in relationships, and interested in helping others who have had similar experiences. As Nora and Amber said, "It was a learning experience." The participants saw some of the positive outcomes as resulting from successfully leaving an unhealthy relationship; other consequences, however, were attributed directly to the violence itself.

More than half of the participants have developed a commitment to helping other women in similar situations. Laura returns to her home town periodically to speak to students in seventh through tenth grade about her experiences. Amber also volunteers to talk to high school girls about teen parenting and her experiences with battery. She tells them,

> One time when he got physical, that was enough for me, because no woman
> should have to stay in a relationship where a man puts his hands on
> her....Once they hit you, the second time will come soon.

Deb moved out of state and took a job at the YWCA. She now volunteers at a rape crisis center, as does Emily. Carmen changed her major after deciding "I was never gonna

submit my will to anyone, ever again" (in this case, to her father, who was telling her what to major in). She chose psychology because she wants to work with women who have experienced violence. She said, "I know I could've never done it if I'd stayed with him." At a more personal level, Nora has been working to get her sister out of an abusive relationship. She told her sister about her own abuse, knowing it would make her furious. "I wanted her to use her anger—so that if she found herself slipping into that situation or a similar one, she'd feel her anger right then, not months later." Emily reported feeling more compassionate towards women who have been through similar or worse experiences. Whereas before she couldn't make sense of why they wouldn't "just leave," now she understands why it is so hard.

Six women described changes in their dating lives due to their assault experiences. In general, they are more wary, and several have chosen to date less. They did not, however, necessarily view this as a negative outcome; they are more self-protective and cautious about dangerous situations. For example, Emily stayed away from dating for a while after being raped. She described herself as less trusting of men now, and more alert to risky situations. She will not accept a drink that she hasn't watched being poured, she does not walk home by herself, and she does not go into a boy's room unless she knows him. Carmen continues to have a very difficult time with intimate relationships, struggling with feelings of guilt, shame, and embarrassment. On the other hand, she finds it easier to say no to men now.

Several participants echoed this theme of being better at turning men down. Nora said that choosing not to start a relationship after a couple of dates

...gave me the boost to see that I was *fine* on my own, and I didn't have to

have this guy around, and I can make it, you know, and maybe never be in a

relationship for the rest of my life and that was ok. And I could tell a guy that

and the world wasn't gonna end.

Deb feels that she is quicker to detect warning signs in relationships. She ended

her next relationship when the guy became threatening and intimidating. She is also

trying to avoid dating people who are alcoholics. Beth reported that her sense of an

"uncrossable line" in relationships has changed: no longer restricted to physical violence,

now her list of unacceptable behaviors includes yelling or any sort of verbal abuse.

After the assault Nora was reluctant to date, not trusting that men wanted anything

but sex. She took a self-defense class to be more prepared: "You never know," she said.

"It kinda gave me the feeling that I could fight back." Her first serious relationship

afterwards helped her heal: "he was a really super nice guy, took it slow with me, and he

was completely trustworthy, was always open and upfront about everything, which was

exactly what I needed. It helped me a lot." She has changed her view of love from

seeing it as entrapping to freeing. "Just everything's different now," she said. She feels

the incident taught her the importance of trust and of resolving problems immediately.

Personal growth was the most common outcome theme. Amber said, "I think that

it made me stronger." Emily echoed this, saying she has gained strength and knowledge

from the experience. She stated, "I have a lot better picture of myself now as a person,

whereas before my whole world was turned upside down and I didn't know what I felt."

She learned to question herself less and rely more on her intuition.

Laura also felt that the experience strengthened her. She said she learned so much about herself and about life that it is hard to answer the question "if you could undo it, would you?". Without that experience, she would be a different person. Asked about the incident's impact on her life, she said,

> If you would've asked me questions about random things, just anything, ...before that happened and after that happened I probably would've had a different answer for every question. Before I was kind of unhappy, and just didn't really, didn't look at things, like, look at a flower as beautiful. I'd just be like, it's a flower.

Carmen felt that the incident gave a boost to her self-confidence and her maturity: "I went from a little girl to a woman, like that [snaps]." She said that she is no longer subservient, nonconfrontational, or unilaterally trusting. Deb stated that ending the relationship "was one of the most empowering things that I've done." She finds it easier now to cope with unhealthy relationships: she described the past year as "my time of just being like, you're not good to me and I don't need you." She says that she is more comfortable with herself now, and likes herself more. "I'm a different girl than I was then...I'm *more* than the girl I was then." She stated further, "the whole experience has really done me a lot of good." She enjoys, and feels she is good at, her work at the rape crisis center. She finds an advantage to knowing what it feels like both to be a victim of violence and to stick up for herself by ending the relationship.

Beth said that following the relationship her confidence and self-esteem "shot up. I felt so good about myself—I was strong." Nora has gained a greater sense of self:

It's helped me clarify what I want out of life, the kind of person that I wanna

be, and the kind of person that I wanna be with, *if* I am with someone. It

helped me realize that I'm ok by myself, and to be ok by myself I have to have

a picture in my mind of what I want, and be willing to fight for it."

The world breaks everyone, and afterward some are strong at the broken places.

--Ernest Hemingway, quoted in Sanford (1992)

Discussion

Conclusion

A popular conception of partner violence is that it serves to keep a woman in a

bad relationship. In this study, participants explained the opposite: it was the violence

that helped them leave. The first time their boyfriends crossed over to physical

aggression was a "wake-up call" to these young women, forcing them to see that it was

time to make a change. Breaking up, they realized, was something they could no longer

put off.

The process elucidated in this research is displayed in Table 11 as a confluence of

the participants' affective, cognitive and behavioral changes and external forces; this is a

more detailed and comprehensive elaboration of the model shown in Figure 6 above.

TABLE 11

Amalgam Model of Forces that Help Women Leave

Affective	Cognitive	Behavioral	External
her self-esteem is high	she knows what behavior she will tolerate in a relationship	she enters the relationship	he engages in verbal abuse or controlling behavior; others express their disapproval
her self-esteem drops	she begins to contemplate leaving	she grows more independent of the relationship	perhaps reacting to the deterioration of the relationship and her increasing independence, he assaults her; he does not apologize
she moves through many emotions, including fear, shame, and rage	she labels the violence and makes an external attribution; compares her situation to others; expects the violence to recur; decides to leave	she seeks support from others and ends the relationship	external forces collude to cement the break-up (e.g., he's arrested, her friends support her, he never calls again)
she grieves the relationship and her self-esteem rebounds, eventually exceeding its original level	she is more cautious about dating	she develops a commitment to helping other women with issues of violence	

Limitations

The conclusions of this research are necessarily tentative and limited, given the retrospective and self-report design and small n of this study. Demographic uniformity limits the generalizability of the findings. Researcher and participant bias and other

threats to validity are inherent in the chosen methodology. For example, the participants may have underrepresented their ambivalence about leaving, or may have given more negative descriptions of their boyfriends, in response to how the research topic was presented or how the questions were asked. While every effort was made to minimize these weaknesses, and triangulation of data suggests strong consistency throughout, total elimination of bias is not feasible. The best this type of study can do is to capture and analyze reality as the participants and researcher constructed it, and provide suggestions for future inquiry.

<div align="center">Questions for Further Research</div>

These findings can serve as the foundation upon which new research can build. Five levels of research questions are apparent. First, themes that emerged should be validated: for example, the attribution styles, self-esteem changes, and post-traumatic growth of women who leave could be assessed more systematically with quantitative instruments. Second, several causal questions suggested in this study are worth further investigation. For example, does the decision to tell someone about the violence lead to, or result from, the decision to leave? Is the violence actually the boyfriend's attempt to regain control in the relationship and prevent her from leaving? Does an act of defiance on her part trigger the aggression?

Third, new questions, beyond the scope of this study, arose:

- What kind of parent-child relationships encourage young women to confide physical aggression? Would these participants have relied more on their parents' support if their parents had not made judgments about the boyfriends? Or would impartiality have made them less likely to leave?

- When victims of relationship violence confide in their friends, how are the friends affected? Do they experience low levels of vicarious trauma? Are they, in turn, less likely to tolerate violence from their own boyfriends? Carmen disclosed her experience to a friend who had just been raped; was this helpful to her friend?

- Is there a gender difference in how friends respond to violence? Not enough data were gathered in this study to substantiate this idea, but there is some suggestion that male friends had a more aggressive response, confronting the boyfriend either physically or verbally, while female friends did more coaching and encouraging of the participant. How do these different approaches contribute to recovery from the trauma and the decision to leave?

The fourth area of research is how women who leave compare to women who stayed, and to women who never experienced violence. This will help determine which variables identified in the present study are necessary to the process of leaving. Labeling the violence and making external attributions appear to have been important in this study, but do women who stay do the same? Similarly, do those who leave immediately have a clearer idea of what they will not tolerate in a relationship than those who stay? Is the social support different for women who stay? Does the victim's use of alcohol or drugs at the time of the assault have an effect on the outcome? Is the occurrence or absence of an apology a significant difference between women who stay and women who leave? Research on questions like these will identify the most important variables. The fifth area of needed research is to examine which of the key variables are responsive to prevention or intervention programs.

Implications for Intervention Programs

No research without action; no action without research.
                --Kurt Lewin

While the findings have yet to be validated by quantitative research and many unanswered questions remain, this study presents clear implications for intervention programs. As has been suggested by other researchers, teens may be able to protect themselves by attending to warning signs, such as violence toward others, heavy alcohol and drug use, escalating verbal abuse, and controlling behavior; the current study confirms these risk factors. Teens may be more likely to end the relationship if they confide in a friend or someone else they are close to. Leaving may also be easier if they are wary of apologies; expect recurrence of the violence; and accurately label it and attribute it to the perpetrator, not themselves.

This study also suggests that intervention programs might focus on friends, not victims. Teens are educated about how to respond to a friend who is depressed or suicidal; similarly, guidance on what to do if a friend is being beaten or raped by her boyfriend is needed. Participants in the present research gave clear information about what they found helpful from a friend: namely, a sympathetic, open, listening attitude gives her an opportunity to question and come to terms with how she feels about the relationship and what she wants to do. On the other hand, a judgmental, advice-giving approach, even if couched in loving terms ("You deserve so much better than that!"), creates defensiveness and shuts down her process of questioning. The exception to this is that advice-giving from a survivor of similar abuse is better tolerated and can be quite helpful. Once she has decided to leave the relationship, friends can help by supporting her in concrete ways ("If you don't call him for a week, I'll take you to dinner," as Deb's

friend said, or keeping her busy so she will not think about him, as Beth's friends did).

Friends need to walk a delicate line of being supportive but not intrusive, so that she

knows she can rely on them but continues to feel in control of the situation. Detecting

where that line is can be difficult, as it varies for each person and relationship; it seems

that support in sorting this out could be helpful to concerned friends.

Parents are confronted by the same delicate line, but the issues are much more

complex. This study demonstrates that parents are very influential in young women's

thinking about their dating relationships, but not always helpful. The participants seemed

reluctant to tell their parents about the violence because they feared their parents'

intervention; some also did not want to upset their parents or hear "I told you so" from

them. More research is needed to develop specific suggestions on how parents can best

walk the line between being supportive and intrusive. One point is clear from the present

study, however: girls are watching and learning from their parents' relationships. How

parents handle their conflicts, and what behavior is tolerated, appear to strongly influence

how their children will respond to violence. It may be that the best way for parents to

help their children is to be good models of non-violent conflict resolution.

Beyond specific content areas, this study suggests structural considerations for

school-based prevention programs. Research has found that effective prevention

programs for teens share specific features, including that they are: comprehensive,

featuring multiple interventions across settings and addressing community and school

norms; interactive, relying on skill practice more than didactic information or group

discussions; theory driven and empirically justified; and appropriately timed (Nation et

al., 2003). Combining these recommendations with the present study suggests that

efforts to protect youth from dating violence must go beyond the brief mention in a high school health class that some participants spoke of. These young women were most influenced by messages about relationship violence from their parents and from other victims; this reinforces the idea that a prevention program must work to change norms around violence in the school and at home. A program should take an interactive approach, in which students could practice assertiveness and effective communication. An intervention should be based on a clear understanding of the research on teen dating violence. Finally, a program should not only target high school aged students. Several participants in this sample began dating in middle school, and it is at this age that they are forming their ideas about what behavior they will tolerate in relationships. Youth should begin hearing about relationship violence in middle school, and the messages should be repeated throughout high school and college.

Not mentioned in the above list of program components is the factor of the authority of the person presenting the information. It is apparent from the present study, and has been shown in previous research, that young women will be more responsive to messages from people who have been in violent relationships themselves. Deb's health teacher was highly influential because she spoke about being abused by her husband, whereas Beth and Nora were unaffected by the generic instruction they received. Similarly, it is likely that when Amber and Laura speak to students about their experiences, they are having a profound effect, as their audiences will be more receptive to them.

A remarkable finding of this study is how many of the participants have devoted energy to helping other women with relationship violence. They were all willing to tell

their painful stories to a researcher; beyond that, they are speakers to groups of teens, advocates for sexual assault victims, future therapists, and confidantes to friends. Their own experiences suggest that they may be some of the most qualified and best able to do this work.

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Appendix A

Demographics

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your race/ethnicity? _____

3. What year are you in?
   _____ Freshman _____ Sophomore _____ Junior _____ Senior

4. Are you...
   _____ Heterosexual _____ Bisexual _____ Homosexual/Lesbian

5. Are you... *(check all that apply)*

   _____ Never Married   _____ First Marriage

   _____ Remarried   _____ Separated

   _____ Divorced   _____ Widowed

   _____ Cohabiting

Appendix B

List the beginning & ending dates of significant relationships in your life.
For those that became violent, write down when the first incident happened,
whether other incidents occurred, and who decided to end the relationship.

Beth

15 y.o. Sep 95
mld

May 98 17 y.o.

18 y.o. June 98

1.5 yrs
no v.

viol. R.

excited to be single. Dated guys.

June 01

present

no viol.

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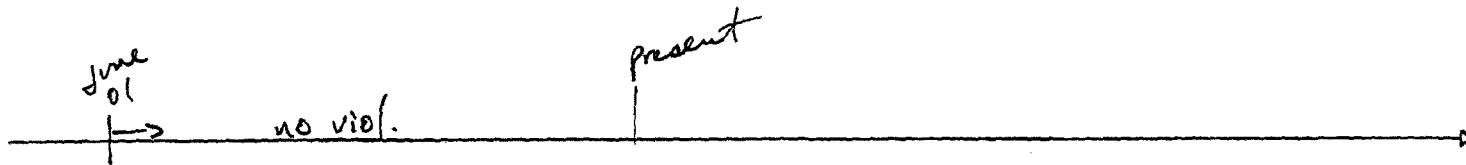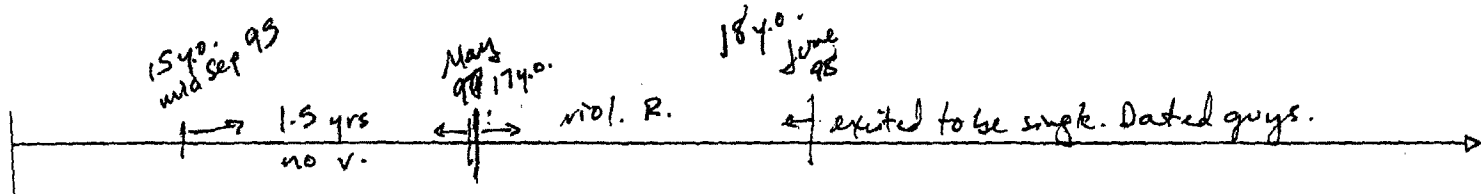
Appendix C

Interview Protocol

I.   *Consent procedure; purpose of research explained*

II.   *Warm-up questions*
How did you hear about the study? How are you feeling about talking about the relationship today? Please take your time, take a break when you need it, etc.

III.   *Timeline*
To make sure I can keep everything straight as we talk, I'd like you to help me construct a time-line of relationships in your life. You tell me what to put down and I'll write it on this pad. Then we can both refer to it during the interview.

Give instruction to participant to indicate beginning and ending of significant relationships in her life. For those that became violent, participant indicates when the first incident occurred, when the break-up occurred, and who decided to end it.

If there are several relationships that meet the study criteria, seek the participant's opinion on which one is the best to focus on.

IV.   *Interview about immediate leaving*

1) How old were you & your boyfriend during the relationship? How long did the relationship last?

2) Tell me about this relationship. What was it like before the violent incident?

3) Describe the relationship at its start.

4) Describe the relationship just before the incident.

5) How committed were you to the relationship when the incident happened?

6) Had you broken up before?

7) Why were you still with him/ why had you not broken up already?

8) Would you say you were at a time of transition in your life? Explain.

9) Describe your boyfriend. Would you say he was an angry person? jealous? controlling? did he isolate you from his friends? did he have problems with the law? did he use alcohol or drugs? to excess? was he violent toward others? was he verbally abusive?

10) Describe the incident.

11) Was he drunk or high during the incident? Were you?

12) How severe would you say this incident was, on a scale of 1-10? (1: no big deal; 10: the worst I can imagine)

13) What actions did you take?

14) What did you decide to do? Describe how and why you made that decision.

15) How did you communicate to him that you wanted to end the relationship? What happened next?

16) Did you seek/refuse help? Why?

17) How did you feel after the first incident? What were your thoughts? How were you feeling about yourself?

18) What would you say brought the incident on? (jealousy, rage, etc)

19) At the time, how much responsibility did you feel you had for the violence?

20) Did you tell anyone about the violence?

21) What did you tell other people about why you were leaving? What did you tell him?

22) Follow up on salient threads. If not already mentioned: Was this in character or a surprise? Support from others following the incident? How has your opinion of him changed over time?

---

23) When making your decision to leave, did you think about whether he might do it again?

24) Did you think about other similar situations, either your own or others? What was the situation, outcome? Did you think that might happen to you? How do you think that other situation influenced your decision?

25) Before the incident, what did you know about relationship violence?

26) Did you label it violence/abuse at the time?

27) Before it happened, did you have a sense of what kind of behavior you would not tolerate in a relationship? Where did this come from?

28) What messages did you get from your parents about what to expect in relationships? from friends?

29) How would you have described your personality at the time of the incident? Can you describe your level of personal strength/confidence at that time? Give some examples.

30) How does your sense of self now compare to before?

31) Now that you've told me all this, do you have any additional or different thoughts about what helped you leave?

32) What impact has that relationship had on your life?

V.   *Debriefing*

        Reiterate purpose of research
        Do you have any questions or concerns?
        How are you feeling right now? *(Assess for presence of distress.)*
        Give referral list, confidentiality reminder, and recruitment flier to pass on to others.
        When I start going over your interview transcript, I might have questions about details I missed or parts of your story I'm confused about. If that happens, would it be ok for me to call you to ask you some quick questions?

Appendix D

Debriefing Sheet

About this Study

Research has found that between 20 and 40 percent of dating relationships include some level of physical violence. The interview that you just completed is designed to help us understand women's experiences of leaving a violent relationship. It is hoped that through this research we will learn more about how women can keep themselves safe in relationships.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us:

Alison Cobb, Clinical Psychology Graduate Student   *or*   Jennifer Waltz, Ph.D., Faculty Supervisor
(406)243-4523 acobb@selway.umt.edu   (406)243-5750

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Referrals

24-hour Crisis Services:		*Counseling Services:*	
UM Student Assault Recovery Services	243-6559	UM Counseling and Psychological Services	243-4711
Mental Health Center	728-6817	UM Clinical Psychology Center	243-4523
YWCA Crisis Line	542-1944	YWCA Sexual Assault Services	543-6691
St. Patrick Hospital Emergency Room	329-5635		

Appendix E

Data Summary

	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
Subject demographics				
Age	19	18	22	21
race/ethnicity	caucasian	white	white/hispanic	white
year	fresh	fresh	junior	fresh
orientation	het	het	het	het
status	never married	never married	never married	never married
age started dating	15	middle school	20	sophomore
# other bfs	2, no viol	~6, no viol	0	3, no viol (1 shoving)
currently dating	-	+ casually 2 guys	-	+
Relationship description				
length of rel	1 yr total w/break	2 yr intermit	? ranges 4 months to 1.5 yr	8 months
when rel ended	May '02	2001?	Sep '01	2001
her age during rel	~17	~15-16 end of fresh year started	20-21	19-20
his age during rel	~19	~16-17		
rel at start	really good	forbidden to see him by parents, she was stubborn. He was supportive of her during her depression. He was exciting (older), the rel was passionate, Romeo & Juliet forbidden fruit	he pushed for the rel, she was enamored by his pursuit of her	
rel before incident	difficult	starting to feel used by him, had more self respect, broke up with him. Lost emotional side, just physical	he started complaining about her chastity; moved in w/o asking, stole from her, controlled her. She became depressed. pushing incident made her want to leave.	mostly good when he was there, but he often left her alone to party. Starting to realize problems. Fights over birth control & baby.

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	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
commitment	wanted to end it but couldn't	as committed as possible, considering age. a lot invested.	committed out of coercion, although didn't think of it like that then.	extremely, always waiting for him to come home, helping him out. Tied to his family b/c of baby.
commitment rating	6-7	10, or 7-8	8	10
broken up before	once, when 15	+	+	
sexual relationship		hadn't had sex w/him	hadn't had sex w/him	+
why not broken up yet	afraid for him, taking care of him	she was the only one to see his sweet side; he was a project, she trying to prove he was good	took it like her mom did; wanted to help him; he'd stop acting like a caged animal once he grew secure in her love	resolved pregnancy issue. he supplied drugs.
time of transition	+	+ in the rel	the rel caused her transition—went from a little girl to a woman p12	2 months clean b/c pregnant, beginning to see things clearly
Boyfriend description				
bf description	possessive. lived w/her family for a while	bad boy image, jerk, angry	misogynist, deadbeat. "only attributes: smart & he liked me." fits descr. of ASPD. racial self-hatred	more at my son's level
bf jealous	+		+	+
bf controlling	+		+	seems like it
bf problems with law	+	+	+	+
bf alcoholic/subst user (to excess)	+	+	+	+
bf isolated her from friends	+		+	~
bf violent but never toward her	+	mean but didn't mention viol	+	
bf verbally abusive	+		+	
bf angry person	didn't call him that but +	+	didn't call him that but +	+

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	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
Subject description				
she substance user		+ drugs & etoh	-	+
she protective of him		+ toward parents, after incident called to express concern about his coke use	I felt like I had a child who was misbehaving	
she sympathetic	he needed someone to take care of him	"throwaway child," no one cared about him	he had a hard life, felt sorry for him, closest he'd ever been to someone, couldn't believe someone could love him knowing how ugly he was, no one's ever loved him right.	mildly—angry, full of hate
she defiant during rel	either ignore or defy him	only on phone that night?	vacillated b/w fear & def	yes
personality description	easy going, excited about college	prided myself on being a confident person but not always am	don't think I have much common sense, but competent in social interactions, sensitive, joke around a lot	drug addict. Coming clean.
personal strength	weak	think of self as strong but too weak to stand up to others	zero in every area, d/t the rel	sometimes needy, sometimes strong.
assertiveness	either stick up for self or tune him out		wasn't confrontational, is more now, d/t rel. My niceness was my weakness.	wasn't self-confident: weighed 90 lbs, lived in slum
self esteem	suffering d/t things he'd say		rock bottom. I hated myself.	
sense of self suffered due to rel	+		+	
feels stronger now	+		+	+
am i assertive nor not?		+	+	+

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	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
Incident description				
bf drunk/hi during incident	+	+	-	+
jealousy precipitated incid	+	-	-	+
incid factors	left party so wouldn't cause a scene	her parents out of town. she'd been at his house for a party, during which he ignored her. He called her later, asked her to come over w/her best friend, which offended her; his friends pranked her several times before he called to threaten her.	angry at her for saying no to sex, said it wouldn't violate her morals b/c they'd marry	he didn't come home Fri. night, to teach him a lesson she didn't the next night, he was there when she got back Sun.
incident	rape	threat to kill her if she didn't have sex	gave her oral sex w/o consent; orgasmed against her w/o penetration	beat her, endangered her fetus
this was 1ˢᵗ incident	+	+	previous pushing & fear	+
verbal abuse during incident	+	threats	+	+
tried to get help	+	-	-	+
help offered, refused	-	+ from woman staying at house	+ best friend	-
severity	hard but friends helped		conflicted abt her responsib	worse for me, saw dad beat mom
severity rating	8-9	7.5	7.5 – 8	10
bf threats	to kill himself, beat up her ex; after incident, to beat up her ex, & if she told, to kill her & her family	to break her neck	no verbal threats reported. Physical threat was there— big man with karate skills. Intentionally intimidating.	

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	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
out of character for him	+ but mean to me, violent w/others	+ for me but not others	- she was used to his physical violence	? no b/c he was coming down off a meth binge
out of the blue	-	-	-	+ (?)

	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
emotions during incid	scared they'd break up in a bad way, uneasy, growing fear for safety	(not stated explicitly: fear he'd come over, disbelief, anger) terrified, wanted to go to him to hide. hardest thing in the world, huge stepping stone – good quote p 10	crying	focused on getting rid of him to get her papers done. Scared for her life, he looked like the devil.
emotions after incid	shock, growing to anger, disbelief	no sense of relief	guilty, sick, depressed, locked herself in room. Lost, miserable. Her anger dissipates quickly, replaced by fear. Now feels guilty, shame, embarrassment w/men.	didn't sink in until cops came. Sad it was over.
unrecognizable		"Who are you?" not the person I thought you were. p4		"that wasn't him" p12

	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
his actions after incid	acted like nothing happened, threatened her, her ex & her family if she told. asked her for cigarette money.	continued pranking, spread sexual rumors about her	followed her around for days, called	left house, presumably to go to other girlfriend's

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	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
her actions after incid	quiet during ride home, became defiant, threatened to go to police. told mom, who called cops	"lost it on him," yelled at him about everything, hung up on him	ran out of house. Tried to avoid him, talked by phone sometimes.	threw his stuff outside, walked to friend's house, to library, to teacher, to gas station w/friend to call cops. Started process to get restraining order.
what happened	he was arrested, she went to hospital	he & friends keep pranking her; she's threatened to call police.	kept following & calling her until he was arrested. Rape made her feel more tied to him, cdn't leave	he moved to Helena
end was: fuzzy 1–abrupt 10	abrupt 10	9	1	9
ambivalent about ending the rel	-	+	+	-
continued contact	threatening phone call that got him sent back to jail	encounter in public 1 week later (claimed not to remember it, then laughed), she called him about his coke use; there were prank phone calls, a car accident prank; he showed up at a party, she told him off. Still infatuated with him, like an addiction. They have common social circles.	when she found out he'd cheated on her she threw his things in the river; next morning he forced his way into house, left after friend threatened to call cops; he was arrested later that day.	A week after incident cops came looking for her, he'd beaten up his other girlfriend, she gave him a ride to her house to pick up his stuff. Confrontation w/baby in BiLo, called to threaten her bf.
when decided to end it	toward end of ride home; knew telling mom would end it.	phone call, still wanted to be with him but couldn't, out of pride, self respect.	told him 2 days after sexual incident, after avoiding his calls. might have continued if he hadn't been arrested	instantly/as she was throwing his stuff out. At 1st only thought was to get away from him, then began thinking more long term.

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	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
labeled it	+	+	- blamed self. Still not sure how to label it.	+
who told	family & friends & cops (in paper)	friends & parents	best friend	close friends spread word to everyone
when told	immediately	close friends, eventually parents & others to prove what a jerk he was	when best friend was raped a year later	immediately
emotions about telling	embarrassed that everyone knew	hard to tell parents b/c admitting she was wrong about him	at the time, minimized it to friend, aunt who heard him banging on the door	worried for him, mob of angry friends looking for him.
Decision to end it				
biggest factors in decision	if he could do that, what else was he capable of?	pride, self respect, save face, dignity. Always knew it was unhealthy, but satisfying her craving; got to a point where would be insane to continue, d/t value system	I have to do something before I completely lose my self. If you do this to me now, what about when things are hard? Shadow of self. Physical stress, eating disorder; he makes you feel like you don't wanna live, violent. Mother & spirituality. Disrespecting God to give up His blessings. spirituality gave her strength to leave.	didn't want son to grow up in that life, didn't want to live it myself. p8-9 I don't want to live like that, I won't live like that, I don't have to. I always said I would never let that happen to me. Instantly Get out, I don't want you here.

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	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
other factors	scared of threat to little sister; scared of gun & choking; worried about his anger & his attempts to reconcile; worried about seeing him out with common friends; knew I wasn't going to marry him so couldn't stay with him	parents had begun allowing her to see him, so allure fading. I wasn't meeting my own standards, & I was suicidally depressed. Friends & therapist.	so tired of it, future w/him looked dim (single mom). Too early in the rel to have these kinds of problems. hit threshold.	protect son. he tried to kill daughter. rel wasn't ideal anyway.
worry about him trying to get her back	+	-		
worry about getting involved with him again	- (not stated explicitly)	+	+	
expectation of apology	+	-	+	+
expectation of recurrence	+	+ felt safe as long as I could stay away from him, but scared I'd go back	+	+
"this isn't who I want to be"		+	I started wondering who I was p17	+ This isn't where you want to be! p11
spirituality			+	didn't enter into decision, but believes God saved her baby
"not in the plans"/aspirations		p11 putting up w/him wasn't in plans of who aspires to be	single mom	Butte not in the plans
Support				
police support	+	threatened to call	friend threatened to call	+
friends' support	+	+	+	+
friends didn't like him	+	+	+ called him Satan	after the incident, didn't
problems w/friends b/c of him	+		+	

	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
parents' support	+ mom called cops	+ Mom smotheringly protective. Telling her she deserved better.	mom may/may not know	- not really there for her. but more supportive now.
parents didn't like him		+ hated him		
problems w/parents b/c of him		+		
Historical factors in decision				
models of violent Rs	-	-	+ dad verbally/emotionally abusive of mom. No phys-ly viol rel came to mind, felt alone.	+ dad abusive alcoholic, beat mom; she remembered it via dreams. Friends in long abusive rels
models of healthy Rs		+ parents	considers parents healthy & unhealthy	never saw anyone leave immediately.
models influenced decision	movies of women who don't tell immediately & get harassed, disbelieved, turn friends against her	I'd be another statistic if I didn't stick up for myself, I hear about women… This didn't fit idealized model of woman I wanted to be, strong indep business woman, my grandmother	what would my mom do? but also was angry @ parents for being poor models, made it more acceptable. Always knew it was wrong.	said she didn't think of any when decided. But learned from friends, parents that once it happens, 2nd time will come soon. Mom left after 8 years.
uncrossable line	+ already starting to cross it w/jealousy, smothering	+ already crossed. high standards but hard to maintain for herself	+ always had attitude, not taking any crap like my mom; reality was opposite.	+ already crossed. no woman should have to stay p8; once they hit you, 2nd time soon. I knew I'd never let anybody put hands on me p17
how developed the boundary	mother: don't let anyone take advantage of you, self respect. society.	(not explicit: messages from parents & grandmother)	watching dad mistreat mom, who she glorified	watching friends & parents. from 1st bf's meanness, developed standards.

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	Heather	Tamara	Carmen	Amber
historical factors		raped @ 14; "i have a hard time saying no to men". Institutionalized for depression.		1st bf (she 15, he 18) verbally abusive, mean, jailed for assault w/deadly weapon. Current bf jailed
Present				
how she sees him now		symbolic of her depression; addicted to him; jerk	dirtbag. Sees more now, before didn't know as much, he knew how to push her buttons. Learned what love *isn't*.	"huge piece of shit"
moved from anger/blaming him to blaming his problems			takes some blame for teaching him to treat her like that	used to hate dad, now blames alcohol. doesn't hate J either, blames drug addiction. he's not a bad person—just filled w/hate, anger.
how changed you		ruined sexual reputation in small town; dreaming about him now; standing up for myself was huge stepping stone p10; trying to figure out what it means for her assertiveness; helped her recover from depression	lots of good info on how it changed her; career interest, lack of trust in rels	does talks in high schools, chose major to do this work, made me stronger
got therapy		in ther during rel	+	+

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	Beth	Deb	Emily	Laura
Subject demographics				
age	22	20	19	18
race/ethnicity	caucasian	white	white	white
year	senior	sophomore	freshman	freshman
orientation	het	heterosexual	bisexual	heterosexual
status	never married	never married	left blank	never married
age started dating	15	9th grade—1996	9th grade—1996? (b 2/84)	10th grade—99 (the 1st incident)
# other bfs	2, no viol	6	5	2 plus casual dating ~1 yr
currently dating	+	+	-	+
Relationship description				
length of rel	1 yr	3-4 months	1 month	9 months
when rel ended	June 98	Mar '01	July 99	Feb 00
her age during rel	17-18	18	17	15 —10th grade
his age during rel	17-18	18	19	16 or 17
rel at start	great for 1st few months, romantic; trip to CO was cool, being in high school	"my pillar of something;" casual; "liked him a lot when I wasn't his girlfriend"	"pretty normal"; a status bf	1st 6 months were great, he treated me great; a lot of alcohol in our relationship; 1st time they had sex, it was borderline consensual
rel before incident	lots of arguments; flowers only as apologies	he was getting weird; she was getting tired of him; it was convenient; "sexually weird"	started forgetting dates, so she was ending it	"just bad." He changed, started acting weird, verbal abuse, eventually fighting every time together.
commitment	planned to marry & divorce him, only way to get rid of him	casual dating, but monogamous; living together temporarily	"not very committed;" physical R, dating, but not bf/gf	fully committed, in denial about his infidelity
commitment rating	7	6 (relative: low)	3 (relative: low)	7-8 (relative: high)

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	Beth	Deb	Emily	Laura
broken up before	+ all the time	- had discussed it	decided she didn't want to see him; but not really her boyfriend so hadn't really "broken up"	-
sexual relationship	+	+	- were sexual but had not had sex	+
why not broken up yet	"felt natural"; thought he was exception to abusive personality type; didn't know how to leave so trying to deny	attached to his family; expected things to get better with work	he showed up at the party, after she'd decided not to see him	attached to him; some days were good
time of transition	+	+ moved away from home state, coming into own identity	+ but not particularly relevant— she said, "of course, I was in hs, I was 17"	becoming more distant from friends, family
Boyfriend description				
bf description	fits all descriptors of abusive personality type	smart, insane, so fucking charming	cute boy who did a lot of drugs; "seemed nice", charming, funny, intelligent	Mormon, a cowboy, slept around, adopted, liar, you either liked the kid or you hated him.
bf jealous	+	+	+ not of her, b/c such a short r	+
bf controlling	+	+ tried but I wasn't gonna be controlled	+ " " " " heard he was in another rel	+
bf problems with law		-	- kicked out of private sch for pot	+ fighting, drinking
bf alcoholic/subst user (to excess)	+	+ cocaine & etoh	+ a lot of drugs; dealer	+ drank every night. no drugs
bf isolated her from friends	+	+	- maybe only b/c a short r	+

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	Beth	Deb	Emily	Laura
bf violent but never toward her	+	+	IDK	+
bf verbally abusive	+	+	-	+
bf angry person		+	-	+
Subject description				
she substance user		+	+	+ drank
she protective of him	+	-	-	-
she sympathetic	blames his problems not him	- acknowledges his problems but not sympathetically	- acknowledges his problems but not sympathetically	- acknowledges his problems but not sympathetically
she defiant during rel	not until last day?	+		
personality description	cheerleader, popular, outgoing but reclusive during rel	superficially social, defensively violent with men, tactless, hippie chick, norm breaker	social, outgoing, independent	
personal strength	strong before, from parents, declining during rel	independent, I need to do this for me, high personal strength, loses self esteem in bad Rs	at the time, low; had been feeling depressed & insecure	at the time, wrapped up in him; I think I'm a pretty strong person, especially after that, but he can find my weaknesses
assertiveness		+	+ able to stand up for myself; indep	+ rebel with parents
self esteem	suffering d/t things he'd say	strong but dropping in R	depressed; this boy was an ego boost but then he didn't treat her well	I didn't like myself, wasn't happy, he made me have really low self esteem
sense of self suffered due to rel	+	+	- (brief R)	+
feels stronger now	+	+	+	+ I'm really independent, for myself & not anybody else
am i assertive nor not?		+	+	

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	Beth	Deb	Emily	Laura
Incident description				
bf drunk/hi during incident	+	+ etoh & coke	+ probably both	+ drunk
jealousy precipitated incid	-	+	-	-
incid factors	he picking on her driving, she crying uncontrollably b/c knew bigger fight to come.	she went out of town to visit a guy, so he was already jealous; he took her to a party to get drunk & high; he got jealous abt her friendship w/host; started to drive home	Party @ her house, parents out of town; was being friendly, kissed him, but said no to sex	they'd been drinking all day; got into a "last straw" fight about a mundane frustration
incident	grabbed hair & slammed her face into steering wheel	in car, he threatened her that a friend would beat her up; started to punch & kick her as she drove; she ran into house to get her things; he followed & punched her in the face; she snuck to her house & hid; he got in, pushed her, spent several hours verbally abusing her	doesn't remember actual rape, suspects Rohypnol; remembers fragmented scenes; woke up next to him the next morning; didn't figure it out for ~6 months.	standing @ top of stairs screaming at each other, he pushed her down 2 flights of stairs, kicked her in ribs & face with steel toe boots
this was 1st incident	+	+	+	+
verbal abuse during incident	+	+	-	+ yelling at me
tried to get help	-	+ ...and she fought back.	-	- friends came in, pulled him away, choked him, took her to hosp
help offered, refused	+ police	-	-	-

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	Beth	**Deb**	**Emily**	**Laura**
severity	didn't hurt me, but…	one of the scarier things happened to me, but I've seen lots of bad stuff	hard to say b/c don't remember; worse if I did rmbr? or better b/c wouldn't question so much?	badly bruised ribs, cracked cheekbone
severity rating	6-7	5-6 (relatively, medium)	7-8 (relatively, high)	9 (relatively, high)
bf threats	to kill himself, her, her family	to kill her, himself; to ruin her reputation	-	-
out of character for him	- somewhat expected it	+	- in char	-
out of the blue	-	- had been building to more aggressive tantrums	+	- had been building, getting worse & worse with each fight.
Subject reaction to incident				
emotions during incid	very upset anticipating horrible fight later, never cried so hard. Angry at him, no self-blame.	surprised, scared, freaked out, feelings hurt by verbal abuse	none reported	
emotions after incid	shock, disbelief, scared about what would happen when alone, trying to tell herself she was overreacting, freaking out inside	self-blame/regret for what she didn't do to avoid it; worried about the veracity of the mean things he said	did I lead him on? Felt cheap, used, out of control, confused about validity of memories. shocked, distrusting, denial, trying not to think about it. Later, disgust @ him, relief at having figured it out.	angry @ him, doubting self, we can get through this, he'll change; hated him. "It's so hard when you're not only questioning him, you're questioning yourself too."
unrecognizable				
Incident outcome				
his actions after incid	he said he was trying to calm her down	called her—hey what's up	didn't call her, which she thought suspicious	apologized, cried, blamed her; slept with another woman; harrassed her & her sister for months

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	Beth	Deb	Emily	Laura
her actions after incid	told police she was ok (afraid of ramifications if he got involved); doesn't remember rest of the night; minimized it to mom, afraid she'd make them break up	angry with him on phone; told him she'd call when she wanted to talk to him	didn't know what had happened so decided easiest to pretend nothing happened. felt alone. maybe i'm a crazy person who had a nightmare about being raped. still questioning now.	lied about injuries; eventually got restraining order; "went wild," flunked school
what happened	tried to avoid him/pretend nothing was wrong during Bozeman weekend; tried for a month to end it, but he'd threaten suicide etc & she'd give in. Got spt from friends & finally ended it, on day when feeling strong & defiant.	she never called; eventually she moved away	they worked together later; she warned people away from him	system was lenient until he violated restrictions too many times, then he was kicked out of town. He joined the military, has to notify her lawyer whenever he comes around. Hasn't bothered her for 3 months.
end was: fuzzy 1–abrupt 10	1	9	9	4
ambivalent about ending the rel	+	-	-	+
continued contact	He came to party w/gun,put it in his mouth, aimed it at a friend. still calls her	saw him months later, realized couldn't be friends. I'm so past you, I'm done with you.	scared to talk to him b/c didn't wanna have to realize what happened. worked w/him.	+ he apologized, she avoided him; she asked to come over, he said no, she did anyway, found him having sex, she ended it, he stalked her & her sister, vandalized car, arrested, continued to harass her.

	Beth	Deb	Emily	Laura
when decided to end it	no definitive moment; incident told her she needed to, couldn't put it off or hope it would improve	next day, broke contact with him; over time, decided not to resume	next day?	avoided him & leaning toward ending it, then found him having sex, ended it that night
labeled it	- knew it but didn't label. labeled the emotional abuse	+	- not for 6 months	- not until he was arrested
who told	friends present, friend told her mom who told B's mom	everyone; her mom (but didn't tell abt hitting) & his, friends	one friend, who blew it off	witnesses knew; then told sister, dad, police when he was arrested
when told	immediately	next day	6 months after	~6 mo's later (b/u in Feb, arrested in Aug)
emotions about telling	guilty to affect T so much; minimized it to mom, cop; people in school knew he was bad to her but not physical, they were glad it was over	my word against his, but I had a puffy cheek & black lip	hoping for relief, support; she blew it off, which made E feel like it wasn't a big deal after all.	helped but didn't relieve all the pain. Had wanted to protect him, believe it would be ok.
Decision to end it				
biggest factors in decision	friends & family—knowing they'd be glad when she left.	parents' msg of deserving better; support system. Dad's joke of slapping mom; friend took her to dinner if she stayed away 1 week; other friend 'do you value hitting?'	I felt really belittled & that was not ok. And I didn't want him thinking it was ok.	learned to focus on myself; the right thing to do, even though I loved him.

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	Beth	Deb	Emily	Laura
other factors	saw increasing aggressiveness; his touching her made her "wake up & see that spiral;" just really really sick of it & ready to move on. Realizing she was changing & he wasn't, she wasn't in love with him. Personal strength, from how she was raised	teacher; knowing she was losing s.est. in the R; a friend wouldn't do this to me; personal strength	helped her avoid thinking about/dealing with it. Didn't trust him.	will I hurt more in or out of the R? thought of friend's mom who left. infidelity was last straw
worry about him trying to get her back		-	-	-
worry about getting involved with him again		- maybe—friend helped her not call	-	-
expectation of apology		-	-	- knew he'd cry & apol. & not change
expectation of recurrence	+	+	+ didn't trust him	+ I didn't doubt he'd do it again
"this isn't who I want to be"		-	-	- 6 mo's later, "I don't want him to do this to my life," so stopped being so wild, "I took a 360"
spirituality		-	-	- except belief in signs
"not in the plans"/aspirations		-	-	-
Support				
police support	+	- previous bad experience, so didn't call them	-	- system was lenient with him; she'd go to station when he was harassing her & they'd take his word over hers

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	Beth	Deb	Emily	Laura
friends' support	+	+	- until started @ SARS	+ except felt pushed by them to leave, made her resistant
friends didn't like him	+	-	-	+
problems w/friends b/c of him	+	-	-	+
parents' support	+ Mom said she could find someone to treat her better	+	-	+ although didn't talk to them
parents didn't like him	+ liked him but not the rel		-	+
problems w/parents b/c of him	+	-	-	-? rebellious
Historical factors in decision				
models of violent Rs	-	+ friends	+ had left a bf who tried to force her to have oral sex. Didn't know any rape victims.	+ friend's mom left; movies show women leaving & their lives are peachy; a friend's w/abusive guy
models of healthy Rs	+ parents & extended family	+ parents	-	+ parents; learned respect
models influenced decision	seems that healthy rel models surrounding her didn't help her get out.	+ both	-	+ friend's parents & movies
uncrossable line	+ physical.	+ (mentioned spontaneously)	+ not controlling, mutually respectful	+ if a guy ever hit me… Easier in the abstract
how developed the boundary	no violence in home, taboo	parents: hitting is not ok, is not the way to solve problems. previous bf	always been that way. I was always the kid who threatened to call Child Protective Svcs	IDK; hearing about violence b/w couples, maybe
historical factors		left a guy who raised a fist to her.	had left a bf who tried to force her to have oral sex. mother abused her	when in 9th grade, she & 2 friends driven out of town—a rape scare

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	Beth	Deb	Emily	Laura
Present				
how she sees him now	was in denial about how bad it was, sees now it was worse; blames him less, blames his problems more	learned more about him: he read her journals, was questioning sexuality. dick, insane, a drunk	nasty. can understand him more now.	now knows he cheated on her; he still knows my weaknesses & can play on them
moved from anger/blaming him to blaming his problems	+	- "Fuck you, J, I'm walking. And I'm not looking back, and I'm not trying to hear your story."	+ I think I can see where he's coming from & it's not a very pretty picture but I can understand more, the type of person he is & why he'd do that to me.	- sounds like she acknowledged throughout the role of his family problems (I was just there, he could take it out on me, I just wanted to be there for him); doesn't sound angry at him now
how changed you		happier, stronger, works for SARS. "One of the most empowering things I've done." More watchful. Stays away from alcoholics.	depressed, drank & drugged to numb feelings. Works @ SARS. More distrustful/safe (gets her own beer)	made me stronger; taught me so much about my life; more indep; learned not to lose herself in a R; huge impact on outlook on life—a different answer now for every ?, values life more now.
got therapy		-	-	-

	Mandy	Nora
Subject demographics		
age	18	24
race/ethnicity	white	white
year	freshman	senior
orientation	heterosexual	heterosexual
status	never married	never married; engaged
age started dating	9th grade—1998—14 y.o.	11th grade—1996—15 y.o.
# other bfs	5	2
currently dating	-	+
Relationship description		
length of rel	2 months	5 years
when rel ended	Aug 02	2001
her age during rel	17	15 @ start
his age during rel	25 (didn't know that)	17 @ start
rel at start	normal couples things, boring, pretty happy, I didn't take it as serious as he did, we were busy but had fun when we had time	good friends; my 1st physical R; held together by glue of friends; moved twice together
rel before incident	1 wk before, he was angry @ her for not seeing him, so she ended it; he apologized so they smoothed it over & things were back to normal	rocky. She always wanted to break up, he always wanted more; he was getting into heavier drugs & getting mean; she was getting sober for a job
commitment	half-hearted committed, I was leaving, but not dating others	wanting to break up all the time, but he was pushy, renting a place together, planned marriage & kids, attached to his family
commitment rating	4 (relative: low)	8 (relative: medium)
broken up before	+ week prior	+ usually for about a week, more of a threat than real
sexual relationship		+

	Mandy	Nora
why not broken up yet	it was convenient	1st love; he was pushy; didn't know how to end it; renting a place together, planned marriage & kids, attached to his family; fear he'd sleep w/someone else; gfs said he was a good guy
time of transition	calm b/f storm; getting ready for college, happy	+ starting to be more serious about planning career, school, family; stopping pot
Boyfriend description		
bf description	charming, fun, charismatic, liar, blamed others for everything	nice, good heart, no ambition, pushy, manipulative, outgoing, well-liked; high energy
bf jealous	+ only twice	+ both were
bf controlling	-	+ possessive in public, made decisions for both, pushed her to get high/drunk
bf problems with law	+	+ dui, speeding
bf alcoholic/subst user (to excess)	+ etoh & coke, meth; rumors he deals	+ every night was party night. getting into coke & other hard drugs; also prescriptions for migraines
bf isolated her from friends	-	+
bf violent but never toward her	+	- although physically intimidating
bf verbally abusive	-	+? he would say hurtful stuff when he was messed up
bf angry person	- ambivalent—when on drugs?	- let big things slide, but threw tantrums over small things
Subject description		
she substance user	+ drank?	+ stopped using pot
she protective of him	- (was of a previous bf)	-
she sympathetic	-	- at 1st attracted to his broken wing nature, but it got old.
she defiant during rel	+ broke up w/him: I don't need you, I don't need to be controlled	

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	Mandy	Nora
personality description	happy, fun-loving, carefree, ready for whatever's coming next	striving for something. quiet but social, private, bookworm, good student, active
personal strength	pretty good	not high
assertiveness		- had a hard time staying strong in arguments
self esteem	good, no change; v. supportive parents, w/pressure to succeed	lower b/c of losing arguments; this kept her passive. Prepubescent, she was a pack leader among friends.
sense of self suffered due to rel	-	+
feels stronger now	-	+ I am *fine* on my own
am i assertive nor not?		+
Incident description		
bf drunk/hi during incident	+ drinking; probably on drugs	+ he'd been drinking, as always
jealousy precipitated incid	+	-
incid factors	my last night in town; met at his house; he jealous that a guy had dropped her off; she angry that a woman was @ his house; they fought, she decided to leave	fight earlier in day, so she went to bed early & pretended to be asleep so she wouldn't have to talk to him; he started masturbating; she got up to sleep elsewhere
incident	he carried her back to the house by her arms; she ran off again; he picked her up but she held on to the fence, tried to climb it; he pulled her back and she slid off fence, gouged her legs	he pulled her back to bed, she resisted, started to cry, he sat on her shoulders & tried to put his penis in her mouth; she bit, screamed; roommate's knocking got him to let her up; she went into another room for the night, left in the morning.
this was 1st incident	+	+
verbal abuse during incident	-	-
tried to get help	? screamed during incident, maybe for help	+ screamed for roommates
help offered, refused	+ but eventually accepted	+ after incident
severity	ripped jeans, gouges in legs; I know others have had it worse, but for me was the worst I've experienced	I can imagine worse. Could have been worse, w/o roommates' interference
severity rating	6-7 (relatively, low)	6 (relatively, medium)
bf threats		-

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	Mandy	Nora
out of character for him	+	+
out of the blue	+	+
Subject reaction to incident		
emotions during incid	so scared, didn't feel pain; panicked, frazzled, like a movie, dissociative; just wanted to go home & get in bed	when he sat on my shoulders, that was the turning pt, there was no going back after that, for him.
emotions after incid	scared to deal w/it b/c thought she'd get depressed/PTSD; pretended she was fine but was preoccupied w/it; didn't want to tell anyone b/c would make it bigger; took up her friend's problems to avoid her own; angry	regret, anger, wanted it to go away; ashamed
unrecognizable		
Incident outcome		
his actions after incid	called her frequently	never contacted her
her actions after incid	accepted offer of help; called friend; they called cops to get her purse from his house. Pretended to family, friends that nothing had happened	locked herself in another rm w/the cats, thought through the night; in the morning, waited until he'd left, called her mom for a ride (left her car), packed a bag, took the cats, & left.
what happened	she went to college, didn't accept his calls; the time his call got through, she hung up on him.	no contact until 6 mo's later, he called, they met in a park, she curious about being friends, saw that she couldn't, he was the same old guy
end was: fuzzy 1–abrupt 10	10	10
ambivalent about ending the rel	-	-
continued contact	she didn't answer his calls except once, by accident; hung up on him.	6 mo's later, he called, they met in a park, she curious about being friends, saw that she couldn't, he was the same old guy
when decided to end it	that night?	when he sat on my shoulders
labeled it	- not until interview	- not until her next serious R, or until told sister
who told	her friend who later confronted him; Laura	best friend & sister, in process of telling fiance

	Mandy	Nora
when told	friend J, some time fall semester; Laura, 1 month b/f interview	~ 1 month later
emotions about telling	scared to tell b/c becomes more concrete, has to deal w/it; scared father would overreact; relief; therapeutic	told sister to warn her, felt awful that she cried; ... Expected mom to be judgmental but she wasn't, so relief.
Decision to end it		
biggest factors in decision	so much anger, didn't know how to talk to him; it was easier not to deal with it. And distance helped not have to deal with it.	anger & shame. It was a great big sign that he doesn't care. I'd rather be alone than with him.
other factors	previous experience: this is what happened to me before, I'm not gonna deal w/this any more.	I knew right off the bat that I had to leave, & I just had to get my reasons
worry about him trying to get her back	-	-
worry about getting involved with him again	-	-
expectation of apology	-	- I didn't care if he was sorry
expectation of recurrence	-	+ I was never gonna give him a chance to do that ever again; even if he never did that again physically, he was still doing it to me mentally, day in & day out
"this isn't who I want to be"	-	-
spirituality	-	-
"not in the plans"/aspirations	-	I could tell my friend wasn't gonna make it in life, & I didn't wanna end up like that.
Support		
police support	+ friend's dad, a cop, told me that anything he could get him in trouble for he'd get it to the fullest extent	-
friends' support	+ one friend (male) was protective of her	- made it harder to leave b/c lost his friends, family; best friend was supportive
friends didn't like him	+	-
problems w/friends b/c of him	-	-
parents' support	-	+ helped her leave; never knew details

	Mandy	Nora
parents didn't like him		+
problems w/parents b/c of him		+ mom restricted time she could spend w/him
Historical factors in decision		
models of violent Rs	+ Lifetime movies of women with extreme emotional reactions afterwards. Otherwise, rumors	+? friend's stepdads hurt her
models of healthy Rs	+ parents; learned respect, compromise	+ parents: how to show you really care. But also a bad example; mother martyred herself to the R; love is a trap
models influenced decision	-	- not immediately, but had influenced her thinking about the R in general
uncrossable line	+ (mentioned spontaneously) not controlling	+ if he doesn't love me, shows that by violence, infidelity
how developed the boundary	previous relationships	parents, how you show you care
historical factors	in a scary rel, stalking & grabbing; she ended it d/t jealousy	learned in school, commercials about violence, abusive Rs
Present		
how she sees him now	turns things around to blame her—you pushed me to this point. Angry. Doesn't see his charm anymore.	messed up person; controlling bhvr wasn't showing love; she wasn't in control after all; now sees it as all his fault
moved from anger/blaming him to blaming his problems	-	- moved from blaming self to blaming him.
how changed you	prospect of dating is scary. tend to push people away.	mistrustful of men; took a self-defense class; a learning experience: I don't think love traps you any more, I think that it sets you free; helped me clarify what I want out of life, realize that I'm ok by myself; not always a matter of blame/fault.
got therapy	-	-

Appendix F

Participants' Accounts

Amber is a 21-year-old Caucasian freshman at UM. When her boyfriend beat her up, she was 19 years old, pregnant with her second child, and recovering from a drug addiction. One night when they were at a party, he sent her home early and never came home himself, which angered her. The next day, "to teach him a lesson," she went out with friends and stayed away until the following morning. When she came home, he was furious and accused her of sleeping with someone else. She tried to leave the house so she could go to the library to do schoolwork, but he pulled her back, saying he knew she was going back to a lover. He then beat her up. He punched her in the stomach, which she said "was totally intended to kill his daughter." She ended the relationship during the fight, telling him to leave and throwing his possessions onto the lawn. She fled the house, and while she was gone he broke several pieces of her furniture, gathered up his things, and left.

Amber was frightened while her boyfriend was beating her, but her mind was fixed on getting her homework done:

> I think the part that scared me the most, when I can actually say yeah, I was
>
> scared for my life, was when I was standing next to the fridge and he was
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> standing by the front door, and he just, the look on his face, and the whole, the
>
> way he was holding his body, and just everything about him, it was scary. He
>
> looked like the devil. … The main thing I could think about was, I'm like,
>
> "Ok, I just got beat up, but I have to hold myself together because I have to

finish these papers,"...the whole time, even when he was pushing me around and punching me, it was, "I have to get these papers done, how am I gonna get out of this situation so I can go get these papers done?" ...And then, like after the papers were done, and turned in, it was finally like, "Holy shit, I just got the shit kicked out of me!" ... I was sad because I knew it was over between us, I would never have taken him back, just cause I knew, you know, I knew that it would come again, it would be like that again. I mean it might only be a matter of time, but I knew it would happen, and next time my son could've been sitting there.

Beth is a 22-year-old Caucasian senior. The relationship that became violent was her second; it began when she was 17 and lasted a year. Beth said that this relationship began very well: it was romantic and exciting, with dinners, flowers, and a vacation with his family. With time, however, her boyfriend became jealous and controlling, and they began to argue frequently. Because he did not like her to spend time with her friends, she withdrew from them. Around the time that she was applying to colleges, she began to realize that she wanted out of the relationship, but he was willing to move with her and she did not know how to end it. She stated that she imagined that she would marry him and then divorce him.

They planned a trip to visit a nearby college with another couple. The night before they left, they went bowling. Beth was the only one of the group who did not drink that night, so she drove them home. Her boyfriend started to criticize how quickly she was switching her headlights from high to low beams, which upset her.

I mean, it wasn't such a big deal that he was just irritating to me about the brights, it was that I knew that later we were gonna fight worse, cause he was in one of those moods where he just wanted to. And um, that's why I was so upset. And I don't know if I've ever cried so hard. ... He finally just grabbed me by the hair...he um, slammed my face into the steering wheel. I remember that it didn't hurt at all, because, I dunno, it was too much shock I think, but I just couldn't believe that he actually did it. ... I was really afraid of what was gonna happen after that... I think I was just trying to tell myself that it really wasn't a big deal, what had just happened, and that I was overreacting, and that I needed to just calm down...but then, at the same time I was thinking this *is* a big deal, and I was freaking out inside, not knowing what to think, and I was scared... I was angry at him. I never blamed [it] on myself.

A policeman saw the stopped car and came over to investigate. She refused his persistent offers of help: she was "scared, and wanting him to help, but not knowing what to tell him, and thinking it wasn't a big deal."

Beth's friend, who was in the car during the fight, told her own mother about it; the next morning her friend's mother related the story to Beth's mother. Worried about getting into trouble or creating a rift between her parents and boyfriend, Beth downplayed the incident and said her friend was overreacting. That weekend the foursome visited the college, but they did not drive together and Beth avoided her boyfriend as much as possible. Following the incident her parents began to limit her contact with him, giving her a strict curfew and not allowing him to visit the house; she said this came as a

welcomed relief to her. At that time she knew she needed to end the relationship, but still was not sure how. When she tried to, he threatened to kill himself, her, and her family, or to burn down her house. About a month passed before she was able to end it for good. She said that the incident clarified for her that she *had* to end it, that she could not marry him. She also indicated that the support of friends and family, as well as her personal strength, helped her resolve to end it.

On the day she finally ended the relationship, she was feeling strong and liberated after defying him. She wanted to go swimming with some friends, but he did not want her to because she would be in her bathing suit around other men. She went anyway, "and I realized the whole time, I'm defying him and it's ok, and I feel ok about it, and I feel *good*." She asked a friend to stay with her for three days after ending it, "and I can honestly say it was really, really helpful, I mean, she may be the only reason that it actually worked that time."

Carmen, a 22-year-old Caucasian/Hispanic junior, began dating her first boyfriend when she was 20 and a freshman in college. She had not had sex yet with him, although they spent nights together. One morning they became more intimate than they had previously, and she began to feel nervous about it. He consoled her by telling her they would get married, so having sex would not violate her morals. He forced oral sex and briefly penetrated her, as she cried and tried to hold him off. For two days after the sexual incident, Carmen attempted to avoid him, and then she told him the relationship was over. They had one more fight, with physical intimidation, after which he was

arrested for a separate incident. Carmen speculated that the relationship may have continued if he had not been arrested.

Carmen mentioned flashes of anger toward her boyfriend, but mostly described the incident as triggering a deep depression:

> It was mostly by um, by friction that he satisfied himself, you know, and I just was devastated, and then he just got up and you know, I just couldn't believe that someone I had just taken care of...you know, I felt like I had a child who was misbehaving, you know?...I hated myself. ... I did [hate him] but not more than me. ... I can't imagine feeling worse than I felt that night. I felt, like, bewildered...nothing mattered to me, I just kinda lost track of space and time, I just was, like, in misery. I couldn't see two feet in front of my face. I just knew that I was in misery....I just felt very alone, very ashamed, very confused....And I went home and I was so depressed, I locked myself in my room, I felt so guilty and I felt just sick to my stomach....I went through a depression for a long, long time...I had to go to therapy...I dropped out of school, and um, I dropped out of life, pretty much, you know, everything fell apart.

Deb is a 20-year-old Caucasian sophomore. When she was 18 and had graduated from high school, she moved from her home state and began a casual relationship with a boy of the same age. About her relationship, she said "it wasn't ever like a boyfriend-girlfriend sort of relationship, we never really held hands or, I don't know, do what boyfriends and girlfriends do, but I still wasn't going to date someone else, and neither

was he." They were living together temporarily, but their relationship was deteriorating. They had been dating monogamously for three months when she went out of town to visit a male friend overnight. When she got back, she and her boyfriend went to a party; she decided to stay sober because she knew that he planned to drink a lot. When he began to act jealous, Deb told him they needed to leave. While Deb drove, they began arguing about a mutual friend, and from the passenger's seat he began punching and kicking her. She pulled over and they swung at each other ("sort of like cartoon fighting") until he retreated in a defensive posture with his arms over his head. She drove to his apartment, ordered him to get out of her car, and left him sitting outside while she ran into the house to get her things. He followed her up the stairs, and in front of their roommate he "haymakered" her—punched her in the face with a flailing fist. In response, she picked him up and threw him: "he just flew, and hit the wall, and hit the television."

She fled to her truck and drove around for awhile. When she went home, she locked the doors and began trying to figure out what to do. She left messages for his mother telling her to come get him, and as she was sitting in the dark trying to decide whether to call the police, he broke in. A fight ensued, in which he badgered her for several hours, saying things like, "I hope you get raped." He threatened to kill himself on the drive home by steering the car over an embankment, saying "when everybody finds out I died, it's your fault, you're the reason I'm dead." To this she replied "Buckle your seatbelt, man!" She had to be at work about half an hour after he left, and she spent the day feeling exhausted, remorseful, embarrassed about the bruise on her face, and sad. He called her that afternoon, and instead of giving the apology she expected, he acted as

though nothing had happened. This infuriated her. She told him she would call him when she was ready to talk to him, and she never did. She said that leaving "was one of the most empowering things that I've done, was just really being like, Fuck you, I'm walking. And I'm not looking back, and I'm not trying to hear your story."

Emily is a 19-year-old Caucasian bisexual woman in her freshman year. She casually dated a boy two years older than she for a month when she was 17, during the summer after her high school graduation. While in the process of ending the relationship with him, he showed up at a party at her house. They were friendly, and she kissed him, but refused to have sex with him when he asked. She believes he slipped Rohypnol or GHB into her drink. She woke up the next morning to find him beside her in the bed, and only spotty memories of what had happened. She remembered that he tried to take her clothes off, and that she continued to refuse sex; she also remembers him on top of her. In the morning, she didn't think she had been drugged; she thought, "Uh oh, I didn't mean to do that."

Avoiding contact with him was the easiest thing to do, she said, to keep from thinking about what might have happened. She described numbing herself with drugs and alcohol so she would not have to think about it. They had no contact until six months later when she took a job where he was the manager. She heard from coworkers that he was telling them that she was a "weird girl that makes up stories;" she feels that this may have been to reduce her credibility in case she told anyone about the rape. It was around this time that she began to sort out what had happened and to suspect that she had been drugged. She told a friend, who minimized it; this made her start to question herself

again on the validity of her memories and her distress. It was not until she came to college that she found support and validation from others.

Heather, a 19-year-old Caucasian freshman, dated her first boyfriend for a few months when she was 15 years old. He broke up with her, and over the next year she dated two other boys. When she was a senior in high school, she renewed her relationship with her first boyfriend. She was troubled by how aggressive he would get with others when he was drinking, so she did not invite him to her high school graduation party: she thought he would get drunk and into a fight. He came to the party, however, around 6 a.m. He was angry because an old boyfriend of Heather's was there, and he started to cause a scene. She left with him to prevent things from getting worse. They went for a drive into the mountains, and he pulled over to a camp spot and raped her. Heather described her emotions immediately before, during and after the rape as fear, shock, anger and disbelief:

> My biggest worry was we were gonna break up right there...I didn't want it to be when he was drunk and everything ... When he started to talk crazier I got a little worried about my safety. When he pulled into the camp spot I was in shock, because he was demanding me to take my clothes off. I was trying to get out of the car, it was kinda like shock in a way, I was just scared, I didn't really think it was gonna happen. ... All through while it was happening I was just kinda like in denial. ...On the way home...I was quiet, until we got closer to town. I was getting angrier, I was starting telling him to shut up, take me home and don't talk to me, don't look at me!

When they arrived at Heather's house, they found Heather's mother sitting on the front stoop waiting for her, worried that something was wrong. As soon as her boyfriend drove off, Heather told her mother what had happened. Her mother called the police, and then took Heather to the hospital. Her boyfriend was arrested that night, and she had no further contact with him (except when he called her after getting out of jail; she hung up on him and called her lawyer, as the phone call violated the conditions of his probation, and he was subsequently sent back to prison).

Laura is an 18-year-old Caucasian freshman whose relationship began in her sophomore year of high school, when she was 15. Her boyfriend was a year older than she, and they dated for nine months. Although friends told her that he was unfaithful to her, she ignored them and felt fully committed to him. After about six good months together, he became verbally abusive, especially when he was drinking. Around the time of the incident they were fighting every time they saw each other. The violence took place toward the end of a day of drinking. As they were getting ready to go out with some friends, they began to argue. She described the fight as "almost the last straw of the relationship...we were just *screaming* at each other." They were standing on a second floor landing, and he pushed her down two flights of stairs. As she lay on the floor he kicked her in the ribs and face with his steel-toed boots. The friends they were planning to meet came in at that point, pulled him off of her, "choked him out" until he was unconscious, and drove her to the hospital. She told the staff there that she had been beaten by a girl she did not know. The following day he apologized. She generally avoided him and ignored his attempts to repair the relationship, without telling him

whether it was on or off. About a week later she called him and asked him to get together, but he said she should not come over. She drove to his house and found him in bed with another girl. At that point she ended it.

Laura did not tell anyone about the violence until about six months later, when he was arrested for harassing her and her sister and vandalizing her sister's car. They obtained restraining orders and testified against him in court, as did some of Laura's friends and the two boys who witnessed the beating. Although he was sentenced to three years in jail, he got out in ten days, and continued to harass her until a judge ordered him to leave the city. Currently he is ordered to notify her lawyer if he is in Missoula or her home town, and if he violates the restraining order again he will be sent to jail for the remainder of his sentence.

Mandy is an 18-year-old Caucasian freshman whose casual dating relationship took place during two months last summer. She stated that she did not take the relationship as seriously as he may have, as she was intending to go away to college in the fall. A few weeks before she was to leave, he became very angry with her, jealous of how she was spending her time, and she told him she wanted to end the relationship; she accepted his apology, however, and they continued dating. On the last night she was in town, they arranged to get together at his house, but when she arrived she found another girl there. She ordered the girl to leave the house, which angered him; he was also angry that she had been dropped off by a male friend. They fought for a while before she decided she had had enough and left to walk home. He followed her out, grabbed her by the arms and carried her back into the house. She ran from the house again, and this time

he caught up to her as she tried to scale the chain link fence surrounding the house. When he grabbed her, she fought to get away. As he continued to pull her, she fell, scraping herself on the fence: "my jeans got all cut, like ripped completely to shreds...and then I had big gouges in back of my leg." She got away from him and over the fence.

A neighbor who heard them fighting came out and offered to help her. She was terrified, and just wanted to go home and be alone, but the neighbor insisted that she accept his help. He gave her a pair of pajama bottoms to replace her torn jeans, and encouraged her to use his phone to call a friend. She and her friend called the police to go back to her boyfriend's house with them, so that she could get her purse. With the police standing behind her, she said to him, "I hope you think you're tough…. I'm 98 pounds and you're this big tough guy, and I hope you think you're cool for being able to do this to me." She went home, ignored his many phone calls, "and then I left for school the next day, and never looked back."

Nora is a 24-year-old Caucasian senior who began dating when she was 15 and a junior in high school. Her boyfriend was two years older than she. Their relationship was rocky, although they were good friends: she said that she was always wanting to be friends and he was always wanting more. After graduation they moved together to another state, and then returned to their home town, where they rented an apartment. They planned to get married and have children, although she wanted to break up "all the time." As he began getting into heavy drugs, she began to cut down on her own use of marijuana; she also began to think more seriously about her future.

One night she went to bed angry because of a fight they had had earlier in the day. When he came to bed and tried to kiss her, she angrily turned from him and moved to go sleep on the couch. He grabbed her, sat on her shoulders and tried to force his penis into her mouth. She screamed and bit down. Their roommates came to the door asking if everything was ok; eventually he let her up and she ran out into the living room. She told her roommates that "everything was fine" and locked herself into another room where she spent the night. The next morning she waited until she heard him leave and called her mother for a ride; "I just grabbed the cats and a suitcase and took off." He did not try to contact her, which she interprets as a sign of his being ashamed.

Tamara, an 18-year-old Caucasian freshman, was a junior in high school when her boyfriend of two years threatened to kill her. She had been at a party at his house on the night of the incident. She felt he was ignoring her during the party. She went home, and he called her and her best friend to ask them to come back. She was upset with him for wanting her friend to come. He and his friends made prank phone calls to her for awhile, and then he called back to insist that she come over to have sex (they had never had sex together). When she refused, he said, "Do you have any idea how easy it would be for me to kill you? I could just, like, snap your neck in two." She broke up with him before hanging up.

Tamara described a reaction of deep ambivalence to her boyfriend's threats to break her neck:

> I hid in him, before; that kind of was my thing, when everything would get
>
> really bad I would just *hide*, I would go to him. ...And so I was really

uncomfortable, and my natural reaction was to go, "Oh, stop it," like, "Just

hold me"…cause I was terrified. And I'm like, "*No*, I can't do that, he's

what's causing me to be terrified." … I knew that, you know, if I had any

dignity at all, I had to be like, "*Listen,* jackass, this is not going any

further"…but at the same time I just wanted to cling to him. So it was like the

hardest thing in the world for me to say that. But at the same time it was like a

huge stepping stone. And I didn't feel any sense of relief once I said it, or

anything like that, but I knew that I had to do it.

Appendix G

Participant Summary

There are so many parallels and similarities among the participants in this study

that keeping track of their individual stories can be difficult. Their assault experiences,

however, are unique and quite vivid. Therefore, this list of participants and assault types,

while gruesome in its brevity, can be helpful in triggering memories of the participants'

contexts and experiences.   It is provided to assist the reader in matching names to stories.

Amber	Pregnant mother; beaten, including a punch in the stomach
Beth	Face slammed down on steering wheel
Tamara	Telephone threat
Carmen	Forced oral sex to lubricate her, and penetration
Deb	"Haymakered"—punched in the face; house broken into
Emily	Given Rohypnol or GHB and apparently raped
Heather	Raped at a campground
Laura	Pushed down stairs and kicked in the ribs and face
Mandy	Pulled off a fence
Nora	Sodomized