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Creating and sustaining domestic violence through communication

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CREATING AND SUSTAINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

THROUGH COMMUNICATION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts

By

Nalla Sundarajan

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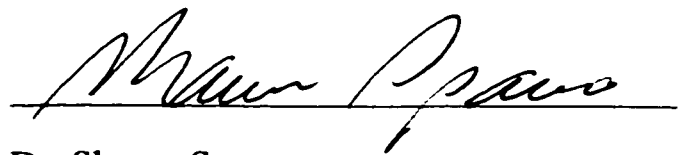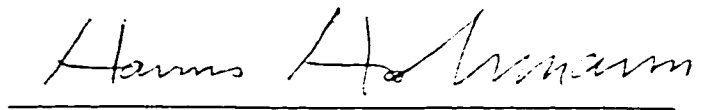
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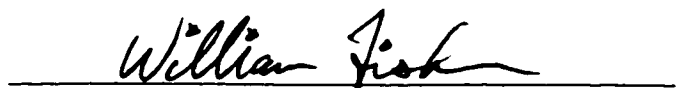
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ABSTRACT

CREATING AND SUSTAINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THROUGH

COMMUNICATION

By Nalla Sundarajan

This thesis explains the complex phenomenon of domestic violence from a social constructionist perspective. The purpose of this research was to understand the process of abuse from a communication perspective. It was found in this study that abuse was created, sustained, and terminated in intimate relationships through the process of communication.

The primary data came from interviewing five people who have personally experienced domestic violence as either victims or perpetrators. Data was analyzed using the theoretical concepts of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM). It was found that participants communicated with each other depending on their 'hierarchy of contexts' which included culture, self, relationship, episodes, and speech acts. Every episode that the partners participated in became part of their "resources," which in turn was expressed as "practices" through communication in their relationship. This study described the process by which abuse evolved, progressed, was sustained, and finally was terminated through communication.

Acknowledgments

My life would be meaningless without the love of my beloved, precious Jesus who showers me with new mercies every morning. I cannot thank Him enough for His still voice which guides me daily, and for His wisdom to do all things according to His perfect will. Thank you my precious one for your goodness and for more-than abundant blessings in my life! Your joy is my strength!

I am so grateful to my husband – the wind beneath my wings, who encourages me to soar to any heights! Thank you for your love, wisdom, and prayers that embrace me all the time like a warm "blankey" which I particularly relied upon during these last few months. You have always believed in me, and have encouraged me to pursue all my crazy dreams. Thank you for being such a wonderful life partner to me.

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I am so grateful for my brother, who fills my life with laughter. Dyno, this project would have been such a drag, and I completely crazy without your humor and mirth! Thank you for making my life so wonderful with your joy, and caring.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Statement of the problem and Literature Review

The safety and security of a home is denied to over two million women each year in the United States because of domestic violence abuse (Chaiken, 1998). The horror of home violence perpetuated by intimate partners victimizing their loved ones is as old as human history itself. In 1988, a Virginia medical college team of paleopathologists found that incidences of head fractures in women mummies were 30-50% higher than in men mummies. 2,000 to 3,000 years old, leading Dickstein (1988) to conclude that these injuries were caused by lethal blows as a result of personal violence. Continuing this unfortunate tradition, old English common law doctrines permitted wife beating for what was considered inappropriate behavior on the part of a married woman. The "rule of thumb" law practiced in early 19th century America, derived from the English common law, condescendingly restricted the instrument of wife beating to a stick no thicker than the man's thumb. Such historical circumstances have led several researchers to believe that men physically abuse women because they perceive that they are legally sanctioned to do so (Gelles, 1983). This has led many researchers to conclude that the victimization of women was pervasive throughout masculine-defined and male-dominated societies and also extended into homes (Martin, 1976). Domestic violence has several dire consequences including some that are permanent.

Negative consequences of marital violence to women have been found to include physical injury, increased risk for homicide, various psychological distress such as fear, terror, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, helplessness, shame, feelings of inferiority,

increased risk for suicide, and psychophysiological complaints such as fatigue, backache, headache, and insomnia (Arias, 1999). In addition to these symptoms, Walker (1984) suggests that abused women show many of the same symptoms that are shown to comprise a type of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that is frequently associated with soldiers who have participated in combat. The symptoms or PTSD include intense fear and anxiety that is borne from the uncertainty of being alive from one moment to the next. Since abuse is extensive, and physically and emotionally affects thousands of women each year, the process by which abuse becomes a normal part of some relationships is important to understand. The purpose of this research is to investigate how abuse is communicatively co-constructed by couples in their conversations.

Rationale

This research is significant for three reasons. First, prevailing studies are primarily based on a feminist perspective, which blames the man solely for using his society-sanctioned power to control his partner. If this premise were to be accepted as completely true, it would leave us with no solution short of changing the perspective of the entire society, which in turn would result in men and women being resocialized differently. Since this is not a feasible solution at least immediately, the only solution is to punish the batterer for his behavior in the hope that this will teach him to 'share' his power. So as a society, we render severe consequences for the man's behavior, which still, however, leaves the possibility for the woman to choose another batterer. This cycle could potentially continue forever.

2

Once arrested, the man has to either spend time in jail and / or agree to learn techniques within a year, on how to share his power with his partner. Longitudinal studies (Gondolf, 1999) have shown that the success rate of permanent changes occurring in the man to be quite low, and other forms of abuse increase as a means to compensate for the suspension of physical abuse. If, however, abuse is co-created and sustained in the interaction patterns of the couple, and the process can be identified, then couples can be taught how to avoid or alter the patterns. Understanding this co-creation process is the focus of this research.

The second point of significance for this study is the introduction of the social constructionist framework to the study of domestic violence. Thus far, research has focused on two issues: why men abuse their intimate partners, and why women continue to stay in abusive relationships. Research has tried to establish a causal relationship between some variables, such as acculturation, alcohol and substance abuse and fewer resources at the disposal of women, etc. Since the focus is on the cause of domestic violence, the research is naturally geared toward finding a solution, which perhaps explains the fact that no intervention model has had a very high success rate so far (Gondolf, 1999).

The social constructionist perspective overcomes this limitation by viewing abuse as something that is achieved in and through the process of communication. Rather than asking why abuse happens or seeking to discover the causes, the social constructionist perspective asks *how* the relationship becomes abusive. Domestic violence is viewed as an emergent property that arises out of the conversations between the man and the

woman in social contexts. This research seeks to discover how abuse is accomplished in the communication process.

The third point of significance is the proposal of an intervention model that is based on the principles of social constructionism. If abuse is a property arising out of interpersonal communication, then an intervention model based on this perspective is an appropriate context for investigation. Almost all of the existing intervention models are predicated on a feminist perspective, and the aspect of the processual nature of abuse that is co-constructed by both the participants has been neglected. The courts mandate each year thousands of batterers to go through the 52-week counseling sessions.

Currently, in the Santa Clara County alone, approximately 1,000 batterers are in court-mandated intervention programs, and the number is steadily increasing every year. All state certified batterer programs require "that batterers be held accountable for their abuse, that rationalizations for abuse be exposed, that woman battering be identified as a means of power and control, and that woman battering not be attributed to stress or substance abuse" (Gondolf, 1999, p. 58). The reassault rates within 15 months of completing the program is approximately 30%, although over 75% of the women felt safer (Gondolf, 1999). With almost a third of the men assaulting their partners even after counseling there would appear to be a need for a better intervention model. This research proposes to describe and thus understand the communication patterns of the couple that enables the emergence of abuse. By becoming cognizant of these patterns, either of the participants can refuse to participate in such a conversation, or change the conversation.

4

such that it produces a different outcome. I have been personally impacted in several ways by this phenomenon.

I grew up in a home where I witnessed domestic violence. Although physical abuse was rare. verbal abuse was very pervasive. In the last ten years I have had, and still have, many friends who live with violence in their homes. When asked for specific incidences that trigger the verbal aggression. they tell me that it is not any "one big issue." Rather, it is everyday interaction where conflicts escalate and turn to violence. Most of my friends are cognizant of patterns or topics that ultimately end up in undesirable consequences. but they continue to habitually or obsessively engage in such interactions. Young men and women of high school age who are experimenting with intimate relationships can be taught to identify such patterns before some of their conversation patterns progress to abuse. The following sections briefly outline the different chapters contained in this thesis.

In this chapter, I will first summarize relevant data about domestic violence and define the different kinds of abuse. Second, I will review previous domestic violence literature. Third, I will examine domestic violence from the feminist, intersectional, and psychological perspectives, followed by the criticisms lodged against each of these perspectives. Fourth, I will present the theoretical framework guiding this research. This chapter concludes with my research question.

Chapter 2 describes the methodology employed to answer my research question. In addition to the methodology, I describe recruitment procedures, study participants, and some of the modifications I made as a result of an earlier pilot study.

Chapter 3 details my findings. This chapter is organized around themes garnered

from in-depth interviews with the subjects and the resultant interview transcripts.

Chapter 4 addresses the implications and limitations of this research. Theoretical.

methodological, and practical implications are discussed, along with the limitations

pertaining to the scope of this project as well as the theoretical framework.

Domestic Violence

By definition. domestic violence is a "behavior pattern that occurs in physical,

emotional. psychological, sexual, and economic forms to perpetuate fear, intimidation,

power. and control" (Hampton, Jenkins, & Vandergriff-Avery, 1999, p. 168) of the

abusing partner over the abused partner. Barnett & LaViolette (1993) define each of the

areas of abuse as follows:

> Physical (slapping, pushing, kicking, restraining, using a weapon), sexual (raping.
> beating genitalia. sodomizing, forcing unusual sex acts), destruction of pets and
> property (wall beating, breaking furniture. destroying valued possessions. misusing
> pets), and psychological (making threats, taking all the money, name-calling.
> ridiculing). *Violent relationships are characterized by fear, oppression, and control*
> (p. xxi).

In addition to the above, Pence and Paymar's (1993) model of battering includes that

of economic abuse (threats or prevention of economic security), which they conclude

men use in addition to other forms of abuse to maintain power and control over their

partners. Walker, (1993, quoted in Barnett & LaViolette) a pioneer in the research of

domestic violence, asserts that,

> Battering behavior is about the abuse of power and control....Men use the techniques
> of violence in a deliberate and conscious manner to gain power and control over
> women. The more frightened and humiliated the woman becomes, the easier it is to
> control her. Physical, sexual, and psychological violence lets him get his way with
> her (p.viii).

6

According to surveys by the U. S. Department of Justice (March 1998), just over

1.800 murders in 1996 were attributable to intimates. Over 75% of the victims were

female. The same survey also indicated that women were the victims of 840,00 incidents

of rape. sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault. and simple assault at the hands of an

intimate. (Intimate relationships were defined in this survey to include spouses. ex-

spouses. boyfriends. and ex-boyfriends). Battering is the single most common cause of

emergency room treatment for women, and accounts for 25% of female suicide attempts

and 4.000 homicides each year (Holtz & Furniss, 1993, p.47).

Existing Literature

The causes of domestic violence are a subject of intense debate. and the following

three leading theories locate the causes differently: (1) In society and culture (the feminist

or profeminist model), (2) in the family (the family systems or intersectional model), and

(3) in the individual (the psychotherapeutic or cognitive-behavioral model) (Hampton, &

Gullota. 1993). Since each of the three categories of domestic violence theory locates the

causes differently. investigating these models is worthwhile in trying to understand this

phenomenon.

The feminist or profeminist model: From a feminist perspective, Breines and

Gordon (1983) assert that battering occurs within a wider context of society's permission

for men to be violent toward women and children. Dobash and Dobash (1979) conclude

that. "Men who assault their wives are actually living up to cultural prescriptions that are

cherished in Western society — aggressiveness, male dominance, and female

subordination — and they are using physical force as a means to enforce that dominance"

7

(p.24). Central to this perspective is the gender analysis of power, stating that domestic violence simply reflects the patriarchal organization of society legitimating male control (Pence & Paymar, 1993). "The institutional and societal support for the thinking that justifies the use of male privilege and control over women so permeates this country that every culture within it has felt its effects." (Pence & Paymar, 1983, p. 86). Straus (1976) identified the following cultural standards in our society that encourage the violence in relationships: (a) greater authority of men in our culture; (b) male aggressiveness (compulsive masculinity), that is, the notion that aggression is not only an acceptable tool for a man but also a way to demonstrate male identity; (c) wife/mother role as the preferred status for women; and (d) male domination and orientation of the criminal justice system, which provides little legal relief for battered women. Specifically, feminist analysis has, as its central core, "the premise that woman battering is an expression and a mechanism of the institutional oppression of women....and women are systematically and structurally controlled by men with a culture that is designed to meet the needs of and benefit men" (Kirkwood, 1993, p. 21).

Feminist programs, therefore, attempt to raise consciousness about one's conditioning by culture and society. Support for this view stems from research on batterers who, when provoked by someone more powerful than they, are able to control their anger and avoid resorting to violence, and from studies documenting the sense of power that the batterers feel in controlling their partners' behavior (Gondolf & Hanneken, 1987). Critics claim that the feminist perspective overemphasizes sociocultural factors to the exclusion of traits in the individual, such as growing up abused (Dutton, 1995). Also, intervention

8

programs based on this theory are said to be too confrontational. and as a result become

self-defeating because they alienate batterers. increase their hostility. and make them less

likely to adhere to the skills taught in these programs.

Another concern. revealed in some evaluations. is that the education central to the

feminist program may transmit information but not deter violent behavior (Healey &

Smith, 1998). Also. since programs based on the feminist theory do not require any

counseling for the victimized woman, they basically absolve her of all responsibility.

which may eventually place her in another abusive relationship with another man.

The strongest criticism for this perspective "is that it does not seem to explain why

beating is not universal in our society, but is only practiced in some relationships"

(Maertz. 1990. pp. 48-49, quoted in Barnett & LaViolette, 1993. p. 7). Dutton (1995)

concludes that,

> An assortment of large, sophisticated sample surveys of women conducted in the
> United States and Canada between 1975 and 1992 disclosed that in any given year,
> about 89 percent of male partners were not violent. Only 3 or 4 percent committed
> injurious acts, such as punching or kicking, and of these men. only two-thirds
> repeated the violence. When female interviewers asked women to complete a survey
> on conflict in the family, more than 70 percent reported their husbands were
> nonviolent throughout the marriage. Were these men just asserting domination in
> another way? Not really. Only about 9 percent reported their husbands to be
> domineering. (p. 70).

Also, research indicates that lesbian relationships are even more violent than

heterosexual relationships although studies have not concluded why that is the case (Lie,

Schilit. Bush, Montague, & Reyes, 1991). Dutton therefore concludes. based on the

above research, and based on violence in lesbian relationships. that the feminist

9

perspective makes global statements about the socialization of men, but that it fails to acknowledge or account for individual variations and beliefs (1995, p. 71).

The Intersectional model: This model regards the problem behaviors of individuals as a manifestation of a dysfunctional family, with each family member contributing to the problem (Giles-Sims, 1983). According to this perspective, both partners may contribute to the escalation of conflict, with each striving to dominate the other. According to the systems theory propagated by Buckley (1967), the most significant determinant of whether violence becomes a stabilized pattern is determined by the cybernetic control cycle. Giles-Sims (1993) asserts that any new input that is introduced - such as violence, is monitored in terms of goal states, either the actor's goals or the goals of the system to maintain itself. The systems theory approach emphasizes the concept of boundaries, positive versus negative feedback, and discusses the hierarchies of the system monitors. Intervention involves improving communication and conflict resolution skills, which both partners can develop. However, the focus is on solving the problem rather than identifying *how* violence becomes part of the relationship. Critics claim that the format of counseling that is encouraged in this model may put the victim at risk if she expresses complaints, and is conducive to victim blaming. For these reasons, couples' counseling is expressly prohibited in 20 state standards and guidelines for batterer intervention (Healey & Smith, 1998).

Psychotherapeutic approaches: This perspective holds that early traumatic life experiences predispose some people to violence. Being physically abusive is seen as symptomatic of an underlying emotional problem, which may be traced, to parental

10

abuse. and rejection as a child. According to one of its leading proponents. psychiatrist Frank Elliot (1977), explosive rage is believed to be triggered by an electronic microstorm in the limbic system that is believed to be the seat of emotion. He speculated that this condition may have occurred because of an early childhood or infancy trauma. From this perspective two forms of batterer intervention have emerged. One is individual and group psychodynamic therapy that involves uncovering the batterer's unconscious problem and resolving it consciously. The other is the cognitive-behavioral approach that focuses on helping batterers function better by modifying how they think and behave. This simply addresses the violent acts and attempts to alter them, without attempting to understand the reasons behind the acts. The psychotherapeutic approach is primarily criticized because this approach fails to explain why many batterers are not violent in other relationships.

In conclusion. existing research in this area explains how male dominance is learned from society, how the members of the family affect each other's behavior, and finally, how a physiological condition or a trauma can lead a person to become a batterer. What is missing from this research. however, are studies that ask victims and abusers how their communication interaction *co-constructed* the abuse, shifted the power from the woman to the man, and made him powerful enough to victimize her. This study will focus on how such communication patterns are established in their relationship. Studying how couples *co-construct* domestic violence in their communication with each other can reveal how their interaction creates and sustains violence in their relationship.

Theoretical Framework

Since the focus of this research is to study the interaction between abusive partners, and in the evolution of said relationship from the beginning of dating to when the abuse began and escalated, I am interested in the lived experiences and verbal descriptions of the social actors involved. Therefore, this is a descriptive case study and not a testing of law-like general theoretical propositions. The communication theory developed by Pearce, and Cronen (1980) called the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) will be utilized as the theoretical framework in this research. Cronen (1995b, p.18) identifies CMM as a constructionist theory of a particular sort. He calls it "social constructionism in the tradition of American philosophical pragmatism," and argues that if communication is the primary social process, then it is not something external to us but rather it is intrinsic to our constitution as distinctively human creatures. In the CMM tradition, individuals and society are not outside of communication, but are regarded as achievements created in communicative practices – including domestic violence. Cronen (1995b) asserts that according to this perspective it is irrelevant how people think in isolation, but the relevance emerges in their construction of social life based on the way they interact together. Therefore, we can conclude that although psychotherapeutic methods can reveal the mental state of the batterer and the victim, the relevant consequences occur when they together *construct* domestic violence in their relationship.

According to Pearce (1989), events and objects of the social world are not external found things, but they are the products of social action whose continued existence depends on their reconstruction in patterns of communication. This perspective sees all

12

forms of human activity as a recurring reflexive process in which resources are expressed in practices and in which practices (re)construct resources. The term resources here refer to a person's experiences, images, memories, and stories. Practices are actions, referring to any situated collaborative accomplishment of an event, such as a conversation, a family picnic, an abusive or a violent act. The existing resources guide the present conversation or action, and the memory of this conversation becomes a part of future resources that will guide future events and conversations.

In the matter of domestic violence, we can assume that couples bring resources into the relationship that initially sanctions the violence. For instance, most men in intimate relationships would not abuse emotionally or physically, the woman that they love, and most women would not tolerate or excuse the abuse. How did violence become a "normal" part of some relationships? Resources that a person possesses lead a person to interpret an event in a certain way, to observe certain things and overlook others, and this necessitates certain conclusions because within one's resources the event may seem unequivocal. Pearce (1989) defines this as the logical force that shapes and directs everyday events and conversations. The actions that the actors engage in are based upon their "interlocking sets of perceived moral obligations" (p. 26) of what they should do in a particular situation. "Perceived moral obligations" revolve around a "logic of meaning and action" where the conversant feels that some actions are mandatory, optional, or prohibited.

Resources implicitly define a logic of meaning that provides the framework for understanding what is legitimate, obligatory, prohibited, and so on. The concept of

13

logical force guiding one's action is particularly significant in the understanding of domestic violence. Infante, Chandler, and Rudd (1989) concluded that verbal aggression was used when more constructive skills (resources) for dealing with conflict, such as the ability to argue and verbalize feelings of frustration and anger, were lacking. Zillman (1983) found that when predisposing conditions exist, such as unexpressed anger from previous situations, verbal aggression can lead to physical violence. In CMM language, this would be a progression of abuse when past memories of abuse or familiar scripts and patterns are again expressed, or when they become (re) constructed practices of already existing resources. By examining the resources of the perpetrator and of the victim, we can understand the logical force that shapes and directs the speech acts and the ensuing episodes of abuse repeated in the relationship.

Pearce (1989) concludes that one common structure of resources is a stable hierarchy. Persons "layer" interpretations of self, other, relationship, and episodes with the perceptions that they bring with them into the situation (p.47). According to this notion, the contextual force, which is the sense of obligation that derives from the definitions of self, other, relationship, episode, etc., that one brings into the situation, supersedes all other forces in the logic of meaning and action. This is when a person feels compelled to do or say something because he or she feels that it is the only option for that particular situation. By exploring the layers in the stable hierarchy, and the logical force of the persons involved in domestic violence, we can understand how their resources and practices work together to create and sustain the violence in the relationship.

14

Pearce (1994) examines this aspect in "the hierarchy of contexts" in communication between the actors. *Contexts* are defined by CMM as the social fabrics that are woven together by multiple actors using multiple strands of meaning, with different colors, textures and patterns of thread (Shailor, 1995). Contexts are interpretive frameworks that persons use to give meanings to their experiences. Shailor states that contexts consist of multiple levels of meaning which are created, maintained, negotiated and transformed in patterns of conversation. These meanings exist in the verbal and nonverbal expressions of persons in interaction and may include speech acts, episodes, relationships, identities, family myths, stories, and cultural narratives. Shailor (1995) recommends that researchers use the CMM concepts as a heuristic device to tease out the layers of narrative spoken by each person, and suggests posing the following questions to understand the interaction between disputants: 1) What stories about their relationship do the actors speak to each other? 2) How do they construct their identity? 3) What are the family myths, life scripting and stories that come into play? 4) How do the actors weave these narrative strands together? The actors determine which of the five contexts, speech acts, episodes, relationship, self, or culture, will take precedence in a particular context. Since the 'hierarchy of contexts' is used to analyze data in the Findings chapter of this thesis, each of the five contexts is briefly discussed below.

Speech acts are defined as "actions that we perform by speaking" and include promises, threats, and insults (Pearce, 1994, p.104). According to Wittgenstein (quoted in Pearce, 1994, p.110) the meaning of what we say is determined by the context, and by the way it fits in the ongoing process of our "language games". Therefore, speech acts

15

are never complete, but are part "of an ongoing process in which they both fit into contexts and create the contexts in which they fit, and in which they are a part of a continuing sequence of actions, each of which has the potential to reinterpret those that came before them" (Pearce, 1994, p.115). This is a "reflexive process by which speech acts make the contexts that give them meaning, and contexts make the speech acts that occur in them" (Pearce, 1994, p.114). This research will address how the reflexive process of speech acts and contexts create and sustain domestic violence.

Episodes "function as frames that define some things as 'inside and during' the episode and others as 'outside and before or after' the episode" (Pearce, 1994, p.154). Episodes are punctuated in terms of time, as having a beginning, a middle, and an end: in terms of boundaries, between what is inside a particular frame of reference versus what is outside the frame; in terms of structure, deciding what fits the pattern of the episode and what does not (Pearce, 1994). Within the context of episodes in domestic violence, this research will investigate 1) how conversants construct definitions of the episodes in which they are communicating 2) how conversants have different definitions of the episode that they are co-constructing, and 3) what happens when conversants realize that they are co-constructing an episode that they did not want or expect.

Episodes are developed as a result of *punctuation*, and are co-constructed by all the participants. Bateson (1972, quoted in Pearce, 1994) asserts that as humans we organize our activity into episodes, with distinctive rules for acting and understanding, through the process of *punctuation*. Punctuation is the ability to grasp the start and finish of an episode or change from one episode to another. By punctuating episodes differently, an

16

incident may be interpreted completely differently by the actors. In the context of domestic violence, how the two actors punctuate episodes is useful for understanding the sequence of the whole act of aggression and submission.

Relationships may be described "as the cluster of conversations that are punctuated as in it" and "the meaning of a particular relationship is determined by just those conversations that occur in it" (Pearce, 1994, p.208). Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson (1967, quoted in Pearce 1994), argue that all human communication occurs in two levels simultaneously: relationship level and content level. Furthermore, they argued many of the problems that occur in conversations happen because of the conflict between these two levels (Pearce, 1994, p. 218). Finally, Pearce asserts that although relationships are always in the process of being remade because of the different speech acts and evolving contexts, "one of the remarkable things about relationships is that they are so stable" (Pearce, 1994, p.226). Therefore, change in the relationship is an exception, and that change, when it occurs, is likely to follow familiar patterns rather than generate something unique. This particular aspect is important in explaining how violence is sustained for years within relationships.

From the communication perspective, "*self*" is produced in patterns of conversations with siblings, parents, etc. first, and later shaped by the way people act "to become the self that they want to be" (Pearce, 1994, p.252). It is important here to distinguish self as a physical entity versus self as a moral agent. Self as physical entity describes the aspect of "I" as the "cluster of abilities and molecules" (Pearce, 1994, p. 271), and self as the moral agent describes the role within a social world that is a "responsible, decision-

17

making, moral entity located within a nexus of rights and duties" (Pearce, 1994, p. 271).

Pearce asserts that self is "found in specific instances of conversation with particular

interlocutors within episodes" (Pearce, 1994, p.263), which implies that self is *co-constructed* (Pearce, 1994, p. 276). The aspect of co-constructing self is important in

domestic violence because as the abuse progresses in the relationship, the co-construction

of women's self as moral agents erode progressively, and self as an autonomous agent

diminishes as well. The women increasingly identify their selves not with an

autonomous "I" or "me," but as the nexus of a relationship, which is an "us." (Gergen,

1991, quoted in Pearce, 1994, p. 285). In couples who have the propensity to abuse, the

identity of the woman becomes one with her partner quite early on in the relationship.

Culture is another dominating context that persons bring into a relationship. *Culture*

is defined as "the context of the contexts in which we find ourselves and into which we

act; it is the usually taken-for granted background, or frame, of our actions" (Pearce,

1994, p.302). Therefore, most interpersonal communication occurs within the cultural

context, and hence determines the meaning of the conversations. In this research, culture

includes religious values and *cultural scripts.*

Script is defined as the unwritten, but widely known standard sequences of actions

that "provide instructions on what to say and do in specified social situations" (Pearce,

1994, p. 175). In every episode that is co-constructed, the actors coordinate their scripts,

and their personal goals intended to achieve the desired outcome. In addition, their rules

are also coordinated, which describe the actual process of "how what they do evokes and

responds to what their interlocutors do" (Pearce, 1994, p. 175). Cronen and Lang (1994)

define rules as the knowledge persons possess on "how to create and connect utterances in episodes of conjoint action" (p. 12). Wittgenstein calls these rules "the *grammar*" of a particular episode,- and the specific rules of the person are described as the person's "grammatical abilities" (Wittgenstein 1953 PI para 90; para 304, quoted in Cronen & Lang, 1994). The *grammatical abilities* of a person are informed by multiple stories from the past including that of parents, family, and culture and in particular moments of interaction some stories carry "greater authority" or "conviction" (Cronen & Lang, 1994). They assert that "problems emerge when the rule one uses produces problematic responses from others or creates an inability to know how to go on in the relationship on the part of others" (p.13). As we shall see in the Findings chapter, sometimes rules restrict the participants to respond in certain ways, and produces problematic responses from others. There are also instances when the actors do not know how to go on in conversation because of traumatic situations. Pearce (1994) explains that in such traumatic situations "you do not know the rules: if there is a 'script' you do not know it" (p.83). This exemplifies the case when the first one or two incidences of abuse occur in the relationship. The women in this study said that they were too "numbed" to respond in any coherent manner.

Romantic fantasies are another aspect that influence the couple's attraction to each other and which helps sustain the relationship, even through abuse. *Romantic fantasies* are fantasies based on popular fairy tales. They are romantic images or illusions that women have about what their relationships could do for them or for their boyfriends, and the expectations are in part based on reality, and in part myth (Rosen, 1996). According

19

to Rosen (1996), women enticed by romantic fantasies become "locked into fused relationships with their boyfriends" (p. 159), which typically marks the loss of self as separate from their boyfriends. Romantic fusion is described as "relationships in which their (the women's) needs and self-interests become subsumed by and, to some degree, synonymous with their relationships" (p. 163). Rosen (1996) asserts that these relationships often become intense quickly. The partners tend to become fused to each other as if their separateness had disappeared. When a woman is "touched by and drawn to her boyfriend's vulnerability" (p. 161), she becomes seduced by the illusion that she has the power to transform and heal her man, as in the story of Beauty and the Beast. When a woman becomes involved in a relationship with such a man some "beastliness" is almost expected of him, which becomes part of the context for their relationship. Women seduced by this fantasy believe that they can not only heal the deep wounds of their partners, but also transform them into warm, sensitive men.

Another common fantasy and its consequent effect is the Romeo and Juliet effect (Rosen, 1996). This effect is found in women who are attracted to certain men because their families disapprove of their choice. Women who are enticed into relationships of this nature believe that the whole world is against them, and they quickly become very isolated. As discussed later, this isolation, and the consequent dependency of the women on their partners to affirm their perceived reality, helps sustain the violence.

It is also critical to understand how from the beginning of the intimate relationship, power shifted to the man at the expense of the woman. From the social constructionist perspective, power is not found outside of the speech acts, as Pearce (1994) suggests:

The "reality" of power is not ...external trappings of inequitable access to cultural resources. but the positions in the moral order into which we are cast. The mechanism by which power is exercised consists of our being excluded from participation in the speech acts that define our lives or of our being compelled to participate in speech acts that injure or offend us. (p. 145)

As discussed later, in abusive relationships, sometimes the actors. particularly women. are 'compelled' by their logical force (moral order) to participate in speech acts that ultimately hurt them. and as the relationship progresses the man continues to become more powerful.

Morton. Alexander, & Altman (1976) suggest that "relationships can be maintained only if there is mutuality, consensus, or fit between the respective relationship definitions of the interactants"(p.111). The authors propose the concept of *individual influence potential* to account for the degree of social bonding and intensity within relationships. This individual influence potential is achieved by one or more of the following characteristics: 1) reward (monetary benefit or political influence) 2) withdrawal of reward (loss of monetary or political gain) 3) punishment (physical and psychological) 4) coercion (threat of punishment). These concepts of individual influence are extended to include "a relational concept involving mutual perception and acceptance by both parties to the relationship" (Morton. et al. 1976, p.111). When the individual influence potential is not mutually agreed upon, in some abusive relationships the man uses one or more of these characteristics to force cooperation from the partner. As discussed later, the abusive couple co-construct speech acts in which the man progressively increases his influence over multiple areas in their relationship so that he eventually becomes powerful enough to oppress and victimize his partner.

Most studies explore the phenomenon of domestic violence psychologically and sociologically. Deetz (1994), however, challenges us to "move from studying 'communication' phenomena as formed and explained psychologically (and) sociologically...and produce studies that study psychological (and) sociological .... phenomena as formed and explained communicationally" (p.568). CMM theory and its highlighted concepts are ideally suited to understanding the complexity involved in domestic violence from the communication perspective, because they explore *how our ways of communicating construct social realities.*

Research Question

How do patterns of communication create, sustain, and terminate domestic violence in intimate relationships?

Chapter 2

Method

The goal of this study is to describe how an intimate couple co-construct. sustain and

terminate domestic violence in their communication patterns. Specifically, I intend to

emphasize the contexts within which communication behavior occurs, and how these

contexts enable abuse to evolve. Beyond understanding what is said. this study probes as

to why something was said in a particular situation, and at a particular time. It is

important therefore to understand the relational contexts within which something was

said. Jorgenson (1995) explains that "in contrast to the focus on individual 'identity,'

characteristics that mark many psychological approaches, a social approach involves the

thick description of specific relational contexts. including participants' understandings of

those contexts" (p. 158). To provide a thick description of the contexts. I have chosen to

use qualitative research methods to generate data that is rich in detail and embedded in

context. Qualitative research can help us understand these patterns and the actual context

within which such communication occurs. A methodology that would help me produce

such a descriptive data is the phenomenological method.

The Phenomenological Method

To generate this information, a phenomenological approach will be utilized.

According to Lanigan (1988) this approach focuses on the lived experiences of people as

they relate it. He describes the method this way:

> Phenomenological method is a three-step process that is synergistic in nature. This is
> to say. the methodology entails each step as a part in a whole. yet the very entailment
> makes the whole larger than the sum of its parts (p. 8).

23

The first step in the phenomenological method is description. This involves in-depth interviews that are used to collect descriptions of the lived experiences of the subjects. Interviews are tape recorded in order that no details are lost from the description. The second methodological step is the reducing of data. The goal of the second step is to determine which parts of the description are essential and which are not. "This procedure consists in reflecting on the parts of the experience that have cognitive, affective, and conative meaning, and systematically imaging each part as present or absent in the experience" (Lanigan, 1988, p.10). In this step, the interviews are transcribed and analyzed to gather some common emerging themes. In the final step, the themes are interpreted in an attempt to specify the "meaning." Lanigan concludes that:

> Interpretation entails definition just as definition entails description, so the value or meaning that is the essence of conscious experience accounts for the way in which we are conscious and the way we experience. Put another way, we discover that the conscious experience that each of us knows as subjectivity in being a person is linked to the intersubjectivity of the social world – that is, interpersonal relationships define the person (p. 11).

In accordance with the above methodology, in-depth interviews were conducted to elicit descriptions of the subjects' lived experiences of domestic violence. The purpose of these interviews was to gain understanding of how communication between a couple in an intimate relationship sanctioned and sustained violence. The interview questions were open-ended such that the participants had the opportunity to give descriptive answers. For example, one of the initial questions was "How did the very first conflict in your relationship come about?" In addition to the prepared questions (Appendix A), some questions evolved through the course of conversation, in an attempt to get the participants to discuss or clarify something that was mentioned. With most of the participants, one

24

interview was conducted, which was sometimes followed by phone calls to clarify a point

or to expound on something mentioned. Interviews took place in locations where the

subjects, (particularly the victims), felt safe enough to meet with me. Interviews were

held in their homes, parking lots, and coffee shops. The participants were assured of

confidentiality and given background information about the nature of the study. All of the

interviews were audio taped to record exactly what was shared at the interview, and

transcribed. Brief notes discussing the setting, as well as the participant's attitude and

demeanor, were written for each interview.

Data Analysis

The second step in the phenomenological methodology is the reduction of data. To
reduce data, interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis
followed the steps prescribed by Peterson, Witte, Enkerlin-Hoeflich, Espericueta, Flora,
Florey, Loughran, & Stuart, (1994):

1. Search for individual themes in each transcript;
2. Develop each of the themes identified in step one;
3. Determine relative significance of themes;
4. Search for oppositions among themes, and thematic hierarchies;
5. Compare thematic hierarchies and oppositions across transcripts.
(p. 206).

Analysis of collected and transcribed data was an ongoing process. Transcribed

interviews were coded for analysis as soon as transcriptions were available. Coding and

categorizing involved five steps. First, data were labeled by the categories drawn from

existing CMM concepts, such as "resources," "episodes," "logical force," etc. After

labeling the data, the second step was established based on the "hierarchy of contexts,"

such as "culture," "self," "relationship," etc. In this step, particular speech acts were

labeled to indicate the dominating context of the participant. After labeling the contexts,

the third step involved categorizing the data into three broad stages to indicate the process

through which abuse emerged. The three stages were (1) the creation of abuse; (2) how

abuse was sustained; and, (3) the termination of abuse. Once the broad categories were

set, the fourth step was reducing the data to include only those descriptions that depicted

one of the three stages. Finally, in step five, themes were identified within each of these

categories. Themes were developed inductively during the analysis (*emic* categories),

and "taken from the conceptual structure of the people studied" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 79).

As Glaser & Straus (1967) assert, the key feature in the categorizing of data is to make

sure that it is grounded in the data, and that a particular theme is developed "in

interaction with, and is tailored to the understanding of, the particular data being

analyzed" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 79).

Finally, as prescribed by the phenomenological methodology, data were interpreted

using the social constructionist framework, and meanings were given to the descriptions

of the lived experiences of domestic violence. Chen and Pearce (1995) suggest that in

interpreting case studies, one:

> Takes the historicity of the case into account, pays attention to the nuances of the
> observed phenomenon, calls attention to the multiple perspectives of the
> interpretation, and accounts for the recursive features of the case that the process of
> communication generates. Various pieces of the stories told in a case study should
> also be interconnected; however, this does not mean they should (or can) be totally
> consistent with one another. (p. 149).

In my research interviews, I found that abuse evolved in a unique way. It was

experienced and sustained differently by my research participants, in part because no two

lived experiences are ever the same. Although there are common themes between the

stories that were told, each story and its setting within embedded contexts is unique. In

assigning 'meaning' to the data, I strived to preserve the integrity and the uniqueness of each lived experience. Chen and Pearce (1995) add that "case studies are not to predict and control but to enlighten and illuminate while acknowledging the complexity and contingency of communication...(it) should also be judged by how probable and plausible the interpretations are within the context of inquiry" (p. 149).

In the final phase of data analysis, each interview was reread and short individual summaries within CMM categories were written for my reference. This simplified the process of directly quoting specific examples of the dominant themes and emerging patterns in the results section of this study.

As suggested by Maxwell (1996), data were periodically reviewed every two to three weeks for consistency in analysis. In addition, I met with my advisor. who is knowledgeable about this research project, to summarize the status of the research and to discuss emerging themes and explanations. In addition. Maxwell (1996), suggests cross-case analysis to ensure coherence of themes. For some themes (not all) cross-case analysis was possible. Therefore, after all the data were collected, transcribed and analyzed. common themes of the women's descriptions were cross-case analyzed with that of the men's. For example, for the theme "minimization, denial, and shame," the women's account of the episodes that produced this was cross-case analyzed with the men's description of episodes that depicted this theme. Although some of the themes were analyzed using this method, cross-case analysis was not possible for all the themes because, sometimes the men and women described situations that could not be categorized under the same theme.

Validation of data was achieved by soliciting feedback primarily from my advisor, who can identify inherent flaws in the logic or methods (Maxwell, 1996). Also, I solicited feedback from people knowledgeable about the phenomenon of domestic violence, such as program directors and counselors in this field. Finally, I systematically solicited feedback from the participants themselves by first, offering them the opportunity to read the actual transcriptions (before the analysis), and second, by verifying doubtful utterances in order to preserve the integrity of the context, and to rule out the possibility of misinterpretation of the meaning of what they said.

Recruiting

My original goal was to have six participants in this research, three women and three men who have been, or are currently, involved in abusive relationships. One resource for participant recruitment was my speech trainer in the domestic violence shelter where I volunteer. Another resource was my pastor's wife in the church that I attend. They informed people who they knew to qualify as subjects for this study, and solicited their participation. Those who showed at least a mild interest in participating were given my name and telephone number. When they called me, I explained to them my research topic, and what would be required of them if they opted to participate. In addition to my recruiters, I actively solicited the participation of couples who I personally know to be in abusive relationships. Of the many who volunteered, ultimately, the selection of participants for this research was based on the following criteria:

(1) The type of information and the quality of information each could provide.

(2) Women and men who had the time and who consented to openly discuss their relationship.

(3) Women and men who verbalized effectively both past experiences and their feelings about those experiences, particularly of the abuse itself.

(4) Women and men who were willing to share life histories and experience that were substantively and theoretically important. (For instance, a history of abuse during childhood, a long-term abusive relationship with partner or multiple violent relationships, and attempts by partner or self to leave the relationship).

(5) Subjects who consented to having their life histories made public, although pseudonyms are used to protect their identity.

One of the men, who had originally agreed to participate, changed his mind. Despite my several attempts to recruit other men to replace him, I did not succeed. Therefore, the final subject pool included three women and two men.

Participants

I deliberately chose women participants who are *not* "public speakers" of their experience. Women who speak about their experience on behalf of domestic violence shelters (many volunteered for this study), not only speak to inform the public concerning domestic violence, but also to solicit financial support for the shelters. Their accounts may therefore be distorted and exaggerated to gain support. Because I am excluding this category of victims from this research, the women who shared their stories with me were doing so for the first time. Assuring them of confidentiality was of the utmost importance to evoke responses that were true from their perspective. Their only motivation to speak to me was the possibility that their stories might assist other victims in the same predicament. Since these participants had no prior experience of "telling the same old story," I am hopeful that their responses were honest and non-superficial. I mention this

29

issue only regarding women, because men usually are reluctant to speak publicly about their experience with abuse.

I will briefly describe each of the women and men who participated in this research. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants. The three women participants are Judy, Yvonne, and Kumari.

Judy

Judy is a 45-year-old Caucasian woman. She has been married for almost 21 years to her husband Neil. They have three sons ranging from 10 to 17 years old. Judy grew up in an upper middle class family in Palo Alto, where her father was a professor at Stanford University. Her father, she recalled, was an alcoholic and was very abusive to her mother. She described herself thus:

> I was very bright; I had straight As; and they (her parents) were always saying about how smart I was. I skipped 2nd grade and they wanted me to skip 4th grade because I always learned everything so fast....When I got older I got noticed because of my looks. So my big thing was looking like a model everyday and getting straight As. So, I really dressed up for school. I went to modeling school when I was a sophomore. I never wore the same outfit twice in a month, 'cause I had so many clothes. I made my own clothes.

After graduating from school, Judy explained, "Here I have all these brains, and straight As, but no guidance, no goals." So she dropped out of college and began doing odd jobs like waitressing, etc. After several failed relationships, at 23, while waitressing, she met Neil who was the chef at the restaurant. Her parents disapproved of him because he was not educated and came from a poor family. However, Judy and Neil became intimate very quickly, and married within a year.

30

Judy is passionate about sewing. She has been a seamstress for almost the whole 21

years of her marriage. She makes clothes for all occasions, including wedding dresses.

She still continues to pursue this from her home, and earns a modest income. Judy

became a Christian a few years ago, and attends church regularly. Although physical

assault has occurred just twice in all these years, her relationship is very psychologically

and sexually abusive.

At the conclusion of our interview, I asked her if under any circumstance she would

leave Neil. After reflecting a few moments she said, "I don't know. Isn't that weird?"

Yvonne

Yvonne is a Caucasian women, 42 years old, married, divorced and separated three

times. She has three children from her three different relationships, and is currently in

the process of divorcing her third husband from whom she has been separated for the past

five years. Yvonne grew up in a middle class family where she describes her father as "a

very brilliant man, a very hardworking person with a lot of anger." He was verbally

abusive, and controlling to her mother who "complied with whatever he wanted trying

keep the peace – the peacemaker."

Yvonne is very religious. During her last year in college an older woman influenced

her, and she explains how through her she met and married her first husband Elonte.

> Because of her influence, and I listened to her – she was telling me God wants you to
> do this and God wants you to do that and she was really manipulating and controlling
> for her own benefit....I just had faith. I'm doing what God wants and God will
> replace it, and I ended up in a church that was (an) all black church, because that's
> where she was going...That's where I met my husband. And this so-called friend of
> mine kept saying God had a husband for me in this church. I had never considered
> marrying out of my race; I didn't want to get married at age 21. I wanted to complete

31

college...I wanted to experience life, before I got married and I was being brainwashed with this.

Yvonne married Elonte, despite her family's disapproval. Soon after the birth of their first child, she divorced her husband because he was very abusive – physically and emotionally. Several years later, she married another man who became ultimately more abusive than her first husband. Fearing for her life, Yvonne left him soon after the birth of her second child. After the divorce, Yvonne went back to college and earned her Bachelor's Degree in dance. She has been a dance instructor ever since. Five years after her second divorce, Yvonne married again. Adam is Caucasian (unlike the previous two husbands), and is seven years younger than she is. He too was abusive, but Yvonne explained that he never physically abused her. So she stayed in the marriage for approximately six years, and had a third child. After several failed attempts at counseling, and tolerating his mistreatment of her two children from the other relationships, Yvonne finally separated from him. Until recently, she refused to proceed with the divorce because she said that without physical abuse she would be sinning against God if she divorced him. She continues to teach dance, and lives with her two younger children, (her first son recently moved away to college).

Kumari

Kumari is 39 years old. She was born and brought up in India, and she has lived in America for almost 20 years. Kumari described the events that led to her marriage:

> After my oldest sister got married, immediately they started looking around for (a husband for) me. Within two months of her wedding they saw a boy for me, who lived in a village. They are financially very low, substandard, compared to my parents. The only thing my parents saw was just as long as he is educated, we will give you to that boy. I did not get a chance to talk to him....But they mentioned,

32

okay, that's the boy it's going to be. You are going to marry (him). It was a real shock for me. I was too young. Eighteen (years) completed and like two months less, or something like that (when) I got married....The difference between him and me was 12 years. I was too young. I was not even twenty. He was already into his thirties...But still I (agreed) for the wedding. I told my parents in the last minute, like a week or so before, "Mummy please. I don't want this wedding. I feel like I should (commit) suicide." That's the time I told my parents. My mom said, "If you do that, I will do that first and then you can do that later. It is impossible. You cannot do it. Whatever we do for you, it is for your good fate." So, that's it. I got married.

Kumari continued to live with her parents after her marriage and completed college.

About three years later, her husband came to America to pursue his Masters degree. Her

parents paid for all his expenses. Kumari joined him in a year and a half, and she

described the events soon after she arrived in America.

Immediately, as soon as we entered the apartment there were eight bachelors living in a two bedroom apartment....It was a shock for me. It was a terrible shock.... Where did I sleep with these eight men (living in the same apartment)? I used to sleep on the floor downstairs while all the eight bachelors used to sleep in the bedrooms and I was out sleeping on the floor, because they didn't have any furniture. This was not a furnished apartment. I was sleeping on the floor on whatever my parents gave me – saris and such. And even for food, I was the one who didn't eat meat.... After I came here, I told all those eight people that from now on don't worry about cooking. I will cook and clean and do all that. I used to cook meat for everyone. Shakur (husband), used to yell at me, "You are not eating meat and the vegetables are very expensive. Groceries are becoming very expensive for me to afford for you. I cannot afford all these things." It was so hard. I was hardly cooking anything (for myself)...So I used to eat only baked potatoes. I did that for six months....I was 85 pounds. I was so sick, because I was cooking, cleaning, and sleeping on the floor like that, and had no relationship with my husband. He is sleeping upstairs, only with the boys. There is no relationship between him and me. We never went out anywhere....He told me, "You are good for nothing."... After six months, in front of the friends he said, "You got sick now. I cannot handle you. I don't have a single penny now. You cannot study here, you cannot work here. I don't have money." That's the time he started hitting me again (since the time in India). He used to hit me when everyone was gone to college."

During the process of going through her abusive marriage, Kumari fell in love with a

man next door, Jay, who was helping her survive the abuse. One day, particularly after a

severe physical abuse, she swallowed all the Tylenol tablets she could find in the apartment and ended up in the hospital. When she regained consciousness she refused to go back home to her husband. She filed for divorce soon after and married Jay. Kumari went back to college again, and earned two Masters degrees in engineering and computer science. Currently, she has a successful career, two children, and has been married to Jay for over 15 years.

Marcos

Marcos is an Hispanic man, 45 years old. He grew up here in San Jose. When I asked him about the relationship between his parents he said:

> My memories of my father are not a lot of good ones. He was an alcoholic. I constantly remember them fighting. He had other relationships on the side.... One time, which is paramount in my mind, my dad...was taking a bath. He hadn't given my mom any money. She went into the bathroom and took his pants...(He got out) and chased her around the house. As she was going out the front door with the money, he grabbed her hair....She managed to get away, but he had a handful of hair.

When Marcos was a teenager, his father divorced his mother and left home. His mother had to go on Welfare to support her six children. Marcos graduated from college, and currently works for the County. Although he has never been married, he has a 14-year old son from a relationship. Several years ago he voluntarily went through the 52-week counseling program "to become a better man." When I met him several years ago, he explained to me, "I have this long hair to identify with the woman in me that I have purposely strived to cultivate – to be nurturing, and compassionate." He is a volunteer for a domestic violence shelter, and is very actively involved in a support group for men.

Siva

Siva was born in India, but grew up in South Africa. He is 33 years old, and has been married to Rita for approximately five years. They have a three-year old son, and are expecting their second child in a few months. Siva grew up in a home where his father made all of the decisions, and his mother "sort of respected him in a really great way: always obeyed him, and sort of bowed down to him." When Siva was in college in India, he fell in love with one of his classmates. He described his relationship this way:

> We seemed to have some kind of understanding. She always knew what I wanted before I even told her. She somehow instinctively knew about (that)...I didn't even have to tell her what to do. So, she made me happy that way.

Siva then explained how he came to marry someone else:

> I told my father many times how much I loved the girl and how much she meant to me....but the final say was really his, because, he somehow instinctively thought that they were not from our caste. He thought there was no future in the marriage. There was something in him that prophetically told him that, that she was not the right person for me....In fact, my wife was totally his choice. He weighed things based on family background, caste, family status, and some other things like that....He probably rejected 10 or 15 girls before he decided on my wife.

Siva then continued to describe his relationship with his wife:

> The person I actually got married to was totally different from the person that I had had in mind for so long. When I married my wife she wasn't at all like the person I was with. She didn't know what I wanted. She could not predict what would make me happy. She could not predict what I wanted. Instead, she challenged me all the time.

Siva and Rita have been living in the United States for the last couple of years. He was arrested on a domestic violence offense a few months ago, and is currently going through the mandatory, 52-week counseling program. Rita is afraid that if the law ever got involved again, he might be deported from the country.

Pilot Study Findings

A pilot study was conducted (1) to identify if a research study that would foreground communication in domestic violence was warranted, and (2) to determine the feasibility of such a study. Informal in-depth interviews were conducted with four victims, three counseling program directors/facilitators and three counselors.

Responses from the victim-participants indicated that there were almost obsessive patterns of interaction that intimate partners frequently found themselves in despite being cognizant at some level of their undesirable ultimate consequences. However, they lacked the knowledge or the tools to either avoid these interactions or to change course before they escalated to violence.

Two of the three directors/facilitators expressed frustration over the low success rate of the Duluth model that is currently used by the intervention programs. (I have discussed this aspect in detail in the final chapter of this study). The directors/facilitators felt that the focus of this court-mandated counseling confronting the men's violent behavior made most of them resentful, and it contributed to their lack of enthusiasm and effective learning of the presented skills. They mourned the fact that the Duluth model focused only on the man's behavior and ignored other complex reasons behind the violence. In fact, they termed it a "Band-Aid method".

Marriage counselors typically seem to use a psychotherapeutic method of intervention that blames the abuse on some known or unknown childhood trauma. The abusive behavior is thus seen as an expression of rage over unfulfilled infant-needs. All three of the participants (counselors) agreed that a communication-based model would be useful

in this field of study, either to be applied for counseling by itself or in combination with the other models that they currently use. However, since the pilot study, I have decided to change a few aspects for this study.

First, at the time of the pilot study, counselors were included to offer their insight on the communication patterns between abusive couples. However, this did not provide the actual context in which the conversations took place. Even if they had offered a description of the conversation it would have been from a third person's perspective. Therefore, I decided to discard this aspect from this research study.

Second, at the time of the pilot study, I intended to critique the Duluth model of intervention and propose a communication based intervention model in its place. This focus changed because recently (December 1998) a lawsuit challenged the county of Santa Clara to certify other programs as well, as long as they followed certain guidelines. Although these guidelines are still predicated on a feminist theory, and on the Duluth model, some models now combine psycho-education, parenting skills, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, etc. In addition, my focus changed from actually proposing an alternate model to solely understanding the process of domestic violence from a social constructionist perspective. I have contrasted this perspective with that of the Duluth model in the final chapter. Therefore, instead of the original two research questions, I now have one: How is domestic violence created, sustained, and terminated in the communication patterns of an intimate couple?

Chapter 3

Findings

My research question – How does communication in an intimate relationship create,

sustain, and finally terminate the abuse? – is answered by the thematic analysis of the

interviews with the victims and the perpetrators. I will present themes identified in the

interviews to describe the social construction of abuse. The following CMM concepts

were used in the interpretation of data: *resources* that the couple brought into the

relationship; the *logical force* that directed and shaped their episodes; the *rules* or their

grammatical abilities; the *episodes* that they construct together; and the *contexts* or

frameworks that the couple acts into and out of.

Interpreting data within a social constructionist model

Social constructionism "is a way of looking at communication as the site where the

identities of the communicators are fashioned in interaction with other people, as the

process in which purposes emerge, and as the means by which the events and objects of

our social worlds are created" (Pearce, 1994, p. 22). From the social constructionist

perspective, events like domestic violence are not "objective realities" but are

"achievements" that are brought forth and sustained by patterns of interactions (Pearce,

1994, p. 23). The meanings that emerge from a conversation depend not only on the

organization of the elements in the conversation, but also on the entire context within

which the conversation takes place.

When two individuals agree to be involved in an intimate relationship, *how* do their

interactions fashion their identities as selves, and *how* does abuse emerge in this

interaction: in other words, *how* does abuse become part of their relationship? To understand *how* in the couple's interaction abuse was created, sustained, and finally terminated, the 'hierarchy of contexts' that was discussed in Chapter 1 will be utilized. As was stated, contexts are interpretive frameworks that persons use to give meanings to their lived experiences (Shailor, 1995). Contexts consist of multiple levels of meaning which are created, maintained, negotiated and transformed in patterns of conversation. These meanings exist in the verbal and nonverbal expressions of persons in interaction and may include speech acts, episodes, relationships, identities, family myths, stories, and cultural narratives. Persons "layer" their interpretations of self, other, relationship, and episode with the perceptions that they bring with them into the situation (Pearce, 1989). The sense of obligation that derives from the definitions of self, other, relationship, episode etc., supersedes all other forces in the logic of meaning and action. By exploring the layers in the hierarchical contexts and the logical force of the actors involved in domestic violence, we can understand how the participants' resources and practices work together to create and sustain the violence in the relationship.

This chapter identifies the hierarchy of contexts that the participants have, and *how* it influences the speech acts in which they participate and the meanings that are produced. I shall first discuss the resources that the participants bring into the relationship, and the extent to which these might influence the propensity to abuse. I shall then discuss the three phases of abuse, and the common themes that were identified within each of the phases.

Resources of abuse

According to Pearce (1989), resources refer to a person's experiences, images, memories and stories. The existing resources guide the present conversation or action, and the memory of this conversation becomes part of future resources that will guide future events and conversations. Consistently, past research (Walker, 1984; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Patterson, 1982) on abuse and domestic violence has found that the majority of victims and abusers grew up in homes where abuse existed. The research reported here confirms these findings: individuals who possess memories and stories (resources) of abuse have a high propensity to practice these resources in their own relationships. This was the case with all five of the research participants.

One victim's description of the relationship between her parents typified the pattern that was expressed by all of the subjects. Yvonne, described the relationship between her own parents as follows:

> My father was very verbally abusive to my mother – very controlling. My mother was the person to pacify him always – comply with whatever he wanted, trying to keep the peace – the peacemaker. Very easy going person, very loving, kind woman. (My father) had a lot of problems with anger and rage and control so their relationship was not very loving.

Yvonne has been married and divorced from three abusive husbands. Her resources included memories of an aggressive, controlling father and a pacifying mother who kept the peace in the family. All of the subjects had parents who exhibited a similar pattern in their relationship. It is also significant that all of the subjects were either married or intimately involved with partners who had grown up in homes where the father was very controlling and abusive to their mothers. Not all individuals who grow up to possess

40

such resources express them in practices. What are the communication factors that prompt some people to act on those resources that recreates the abuse?

This chapter analyzes how. in the conversations between the couple, abuse is created, sustained, and finally terminates in the relationship. I have broadly categorized these three aspects of abuse into three phases: (1) the creation phase, (2) the sustaining phase, and (3) the termination phase. I will first discuss the creation phase of abuse, then how this phase progresses into sustaining the abuse, and finally the phase in which some couples manage to terminate the abuse.

In the creation phase of abuse, two common themes were identified: (1) Women submerged "self" below the context of their relationship or culture, and (2) The submerged self created the conditions for fear and intimidation. In the sustaining phase of abuse, three common themes were identified: (1) Confusion because of non-confirmation of perceived reality, (2) Minimization. denial. and shame, and (3) Hope of restoration. Two themes were identified in the termination phase of abuse: (1) Intense fear and. (2) Intense anger that forced one of the partners to either block, reframe, or exit the episode. Each of these phases and their themes are discussed in the following sections beginning with the first phase, the creation of abuse.

Phase I: The creation of abuse

When a couple form an intimate relationship, with resources consisting of memories and stories of abuse from their own families, the propensity for abuse increases. For example. Siva who grew up in South Africa, described his father as:

> The one who made all the decisions. Even in my case, he made the decisions for me. what I should do, to the point where he even decided whom I should get married to.

41

In fact, he decided what I should graduate in, what I should post-graduate in, and whom I should get married to. Literally, it was a one-man show, but we always thought he was right. ...(My mother) respected him in a really great way, always obeyed him, and sort of bowed down to him as is the custom in India. They had a totally different relationship. My mother was always submissive in more than one way, in every way she was.

Siva's marriage to Rita was arranged by their families, and from the beginning he wanted to make all the decisions just as his father had done. He expected his wife to submit just as his mother had. Rita opposed him, wanting a more equitable relationship, and her refusal to submit inevitably led to conflict and subsequent abuse. Rita is the exception because her "self" was in the context above her new relationship to Siva, who was virtually a stranger to her even after their arranged marriage. All the other women in my study gave higher priority to the context of their relationships and thus submerged their "selves." Women who already possessed resources of abuse from their original families, from the initial stages of the dating period, willingly gave priority to their relationship over all other contexts. As we shall see in the following sections, couples who already have the propensity to abuse negotiated the abuse into being in their interaction. Specifically, two common themes were identified in relationships in which abuse eventually emerged.

Theme 1 – The submersion of self: When couples already have the propensity to abuse, they co-construct episodes where the women let the context of their relationship or culture dominate over self. This pattern started early in the relationship, and the enacted episodes became the context (frame) for the emerging relationship. The following discussion will describe some of the interactions of the subjects and will analyze the emerging meanings.

42

Judy met Neil at work and described what happened soon after they met.

It was really intense. He was really like obsessed with me almost – he was madly in love with me really early on. He wanted to be with me all the time. I guess he just mooned over me – I don't know how to really explain it – we were together all the time.

Judy explained that after several failed relationships in the past where she felt

devalued by her partners, she "was so desperate to be loved." With Neil she felt swept

off her feet. His constant attentions were affirmations of his love and devotion for her.

They spent all of their free time together, and became sexually intimate a few weeks after

meeting each other. Neil particularly wanted to be with Judy all the time. Although, at

some level she liked the attention, she did not share his enthusiasm, and his "obsession"

made her feel "suffocated" and "smothered". Despite this, Judy did not say anything to

Neil for fear of jeopardizing their relationship. To the contrary, she increasingly felt

responsible for Neil's feelings. She explained to me, "He had this really tragic

background where his mom committed suicide when he was 16 and I guess I had this

feeling that I was just going to make it all better for him".

The above sentiment indicates that Judy was also seduced by the romantic fantasy

(discussed earlier) of Beauty and the Beast, where according to Rosen (1996), a woman is

"touched and drawn to her boyfriend's vulnerability" (p. 161). After approximately three

months of dating Neil, Judy said this of their relationship:

I felt like I knew that he was going to ask me to marry him. I knew that it wasn't going to work out, but I knew I couldn't say no because I couldn't deal with the pain of rejecting him. I couldn't have dealt with his pain of being rejected by me.

Increasingly, Judy found herself "going along" with what Neil wanted even at the

expense of her personal desires and needs, particularly because she felt that she was

43

"going to make it all better for him." The *relationship* became the dominant context, subsuming her self, and also her self came to be identified within the fantasy image of the tamer of the beast in Neil. For Judy, self became to be identified not with a singular, autonomous "I" or "me," but as the nexus of her relationship "us" with Neil. Changes in the perception of self affected the relationship and Judy was "forced" to respond in a way that confirmed the dominating position of the relationship. The following example from Judy and Neil illustrates this point:

> Neil: I love you so much, and I want to be with you always.
> Judy: I love being with you too.
> Neil: I miss you when you're in your flute lessons honey.

Judy enjoyed her flute lessons and looked forward to them every week. Also, this was one of the few times that she had for herself away from Neil. In this conversation, Neil expresses a problem – he misses her when she is at her flute lessons. According to Pearce (1994), speech acts are "configurations in the logic of meaning and action of conversations, and these configurations are co-constructed" and, they are "combinations of *your* act followed by *my* act followed by *your* act yet again" (p. 119). These combinations unfortunately sometimes produce outcomes that were not intended when the conversation began.

In order to co-construct a conversation that was consistent of their relationship, and to coordinate a meaningful interaction, Judy was left with two solutions to solve the problem: to either let Neil accompany her, or to quit the class. She perceived these to be the only solutions to preserve their budding relationship. She chose the former and asked Neil to go with her despite not really wanting him there. In this speech act she placed her

44

relationship in the predominant position of the context under which the episode, and her self was subsumed. She said that within a couple of weeks his presence "suffocated" her. Instead of telling Neil how she really felt (which would be placing self over the relationship and the episode), she discontinued her lessons, telling him that she was bored with the classes. This implicitly suggested to Neil that she preferred being with him and spending time with him. Also, in this context, had he asked her explicitly as to why she was bored with the classes (after having had years of lessons), she would almost have no option except to say that she wanted to be with him more often.

Ironically, in the process of co-constructing, Judy found herself becoming more enmeshed with the relationship at the expense of her personal desires and needs. Pearce (1994) would suggest that Judy's decisions were not entirely a product of free choice because they were enmeshed in a logic of meaning and action that made it appear as though her actions were mandatory and required of her. Giving their relationship the dominating position in this episode, and perhaps in other previous contexts, Judy *had* to let Neil accompany her to the flute classes. The significance of this episode that took place early on in the relationship lies in the fact that her "self" was becoming subservient to the relationship, and this definition set the context (frame) for their entire relationship, and for all the future episodes that would emerge.

Another significant aspect of the previous episode is the issue of power. *How* do men in abusive relationships become so powerful and oppressive, while the women become powerless victims? To answer this, I examined the preceding episode between Judy and Neil, and interpreted their interaction using the concept of 'power' in CMM. According

45

to Pearce, the "reality" of power is found in the quality of our participation, in the speech acts that pertain to us, and "of our being compelled to participate in speech acts that injure or offend us" (1994, p. 145). This suggests that in some speech acts we are denied participation, and in some we are forced to continue in the conversation despite its undesirable consequences. In the episode between Judy and Neil, Judy was "compelled" to co-construct a speech act that injured her emotionally. Consequently, this "restriction" resulted in Neil gaining an advantage, power, at her expense. Unfortunately, this context not only set the stage in their relationship, but also became part of both of their resources, which would be inevitably expressed in their future practices.

In the preceding example Judy placed her relationship over self and was forced to participate in interactions that were consistent with this hierarchy, and consequently, Neil became more powerful in their relationship. The following example illustrates how a woman places her culture (religion) over her self. As we shall see episodes were co-constructed and enacted to be consistent with this particular hierarchy.

Yvonne, who was and is very religious, believed that God told her (through other people in the church) to marry the man that she did. She explained how this episode evolved:

> I just embraced it all, whatever they told me, I just wanted to please God with my whole heart....I had never considered marrying out of my race; I didn't want to get married at age 21......I was being brainwashed with this. ..(The) pastor's wife (Edith) thought that God had sent me there to be her son's wife.

Yvonne's culture (religious beliefs) was dominant over self. Her culture demanded that she trust the people in church to make the most significant decisions of her life.

Even had she expressed doubts about these decisions, the speech acts that she was participating in might have gone this way:

> Yvonne: I love God and I want to please Him in all that I do, but I'm not sure about what you're saying.
> Edith: We are your spiritual leaders. You ought to trust and submit to us if you love God.

Yvonne's perceived moral obligation "forced" her to accept the decisions that were made by her "spiritual leaders" in church. This included decisions about her dropping out of college and marrying out of her race when she was 21 years old, without the consent of her parents. Pearce (1994) asserts that "If your culture requires you to act in a manner incompatible with the requirements of your relationship with your interlocutor, you will act consistently with the one that is the context for the other" (p.347). In Yvonne's case, her culture was the dominating context. The following conversation exemplifies this:

> I trusted that other people (in the church) knew what was best for me, better than I did. They heard God better than I did, they were more mature (and) they were more experienced. So even though something didn't quite feel right to me, I would override those feelings to trust what they were saying. And so, I just embraced it all, whatever they told me I just wanted to please God with my whole heart. That's where I met my husband.

Yvonne and the pastor's son (Elonte) were told that their uniting was "the will of God." She explains,

> So you don't date because of course you could fall into sin if you date so you just wait for God to tell you who your partner is. And they're all telling me this and they're all telling him that and so (you think), oh yeah, this would work.

Yvonne was involved in a radical church that her parents opposed and she was marrying a Black man who was outside of her race. Since she wanted to please God

above all else. and since this premise included obeying her church leaders. she perceived that she had to marry Elonte. although she barely knew him. In this situation. she would be acting consistently with her dominating context of culture, and the submersion of self.

In addition to interpreting this from the hierarchy of contexts. it is interesting to note that Yvonne is also enacting a romantic fantasy. Specifically, the Romeo and Juliet fantasy or *effect* "in which romantic love was intensified by parental opposition and interference" Rosen (1996. p. 171). For Yvonne this effect was extended beyond just her relationship – it was "she and the church and her man against the whole world". Rosen (1996.) goes on to say that in such relationships the women become dependent on their boyfriends "for validating their sense of self and defining their relationship, thus strengthening the ties that bind them to their boyfriends" (p. 171). The combination of the dominating context. and the Romeo and Juliet fantasy, compelled Yvonne to abandon the desires of self and of her parents in order to marry Elonte.

From the beginning of their relationship, both Yvonne and Elonte were very much aware of the prevailing dominant context. Both of their resources included obeying the church elders, and following the "rules" that were dictated by the church, which included "rules" for the household and the position of the husband and wife in the relationship. In this context neither had the autonomous "I" for identifying self, and with Yvonne it was practically non-existent because the "rules" automatically placed her husband above her and "required" her to be submissive to him. This became obvious within two weeks of their marriage.

> It was terrible. We've been married for two weeks and he left for days. I didn't know where he was. I thought something happened to him. He was just stepping out

48

and he was going with other women. This would happen every month where he would go out for days and I was by this time pregnant....He wouldn't tell me what he was doing or why he was always gone.

The implication here is that Elonte, being the head of the family, could do whatever pleased him and he didn't have to tell Yvonne anything. Although she struggled with these issues, Yvonne felt "obligated" to accept these episodes and their relationship in these terms because of her dominating context – culture. This particular church culture dictated that she be submissive to her husband in all circumstances. This sentiment was expressed by his parents when she approached them for help. Yvonne explained,

> I went to his parents who were the pastors and they did nothing. It was almost like "This is not an unusual thing that he's going out" and they didn't do anything to help. Nothing at all. I felt very alone and helpless because I couldn't turn to my parents because they were not believers (Christians).

It is interesting to note that although this church prohibited its young people from dating each other before marriage for fear they would fall into sin, a married man being the 'head of the household' could not be questioned or his behavior condemned for having extra marital affairs. Clearly, for Yvonne, self was submerged beneath culture and the resulting consequences were painful. Within this premise, obviously Elonte had more power than Yvonne, and by acting within her hierarchy of contexts, she continued to *give* him more power in the relationship. Despite the emerging undesirable consequences, she could not alter the episodes while still continuing to stay within her stable hierarchy.

The following example depicts a situation where the woman was forced against her wishes to place her culture and her relationship over her self. Kumari, who is of Indian origin, was in a relationship where her parents had arranged her marriage. Customarily, after the wedding, the bride leaves her own family to join either her husband's family, or

49

the newlyweds move into their own home together. If for any reason she is left behind with her family, others will automatically view the situation as if something were wrong with her. The most common reason cited under the circumstance is that she was not found to be a virgin and her husband had therefore refused to "take her in". On the first night with her husband, Shakur, Kumari describes the following episode:

> He told me "I'm not going to take you to my house. I want you to finish school. If you come to my house you will not concentrate and I want you to study here. So, you will be with your parents for three more years, and I will be with my parents." When that happened, I got scared and I screamed inside the room, and I ran out of my bedroom... I couldn't believe it. I had two younger sisters to be married after me, and can you imagine what people would have said?

Kumari's family was the wealthiest in their urban town in South India and "people looked up to them and held them in high respect." Despite the dominant context of culture, and what is "required" of her, Kumari fled the room sobbing and slept with her maid in the kitchen area. This act clearly depicts some autonomy of self where "as a moral agent (she) makes decisions, takes into account and is affected by the consequences of those decisions" (Pearce, 1994, p. 277), although the dire consequences that followed would forever efface her autonomy in this relationship.

The following morning Shakur informed Kumari's parents that Kumari had "abandoned" him by running away last night and implied that he was perhaps rejected for someone else. Shakur *punctuated* this episode such that he became the victim of his wife's alleged illicit affair. In effect, he left out the entire episode that had taken place in the bedroom and related only Kumari's reaction to it. With this announcement, he stormed out of the house. After two weeks of silence from Shakur, and not believing their daughter's version of the said episode, her parents begged him to come back. After

waiting for another week, Shakur returned. To receive him back "the proper way."

Kumari had to fall on his feet and beg Shakur's forgiveness for abandoning him on their

wedding night. This illustrates common *cultural narratives*, and Hindu myths where the

women are expected to revere their husbands above all else, even above themselves. In

terms of Kumari's self, this episode co-constructed early on in the relationship, rendered

her virtually powerless, and set the context (frame) for future episodes.

Women participants related in all of the three examples where the self was submerged

beneath other contexts. In the following discussion, a man describes his relationship with

his girlfriend where the same theme emerged. Marcos, in the following narration, depicts

the relationship that he and his girl friend (Tania) had for over two years, and explains the

reason why they stayed in the relationship.

> The whole time that we were dating, off and on, I wasn't sure if I wanted to stay with
> her. When she told me she was pregnant, I asked her to get an abortion and she
> didn't. I knew she wanted children.....She was looking globally, longitudinally - she
> was looking at the relationship. I was thinking more about myself than about
> satisfying her – more of a short-term thing....She may have a couple of times made
> statements about us getting married. But, I didn't want to do that. Plus, I didn't want
> to do that because I knew that then I couldn't go out and see other women, and that
> happened a couple of times. I was committed to her only as far as I knew I could be
> committed to her, but I didn't want my wings clipped. I didn't want to stay with one
> woman....She felt that she was going to give me whatever worked to keep me in the
> relationship. She wasn't going to confine me.

This narration clearly identifies Marcos' higher level context as "self" and Tania's as

"relationship." Within this context they were involved in speech acts, and episodes (her

pregnancy, his affairs) that were consistent to their stable hierarchy, and this narration

also describes how they were both co-constructing this together. For Tania, the price for

having this relationship was sharing him with other women, and although this bothered

51

her. her hierarchy of contexts compelled her to accept this. It is as if she agreed implicitly "I want to have you in my life at any cost - this relationship is important for me," and he said "Sure, as long as you don't clip my wings I want this relationship too." For Marcos, with self as the dominating context, this relationship was fine as long as he was not restricted in any way. To this extent, Tania becoming pregnant was perceived as losing some of his freedom, which was why he wanted her to have the abortion.

The above discussion explores how in the early stages of a relationship between an intimate couple, the women placed their relationship and culture as the dominating contexts over self and episode. According to Shailor (1995), contexts are interpretive frameworks that persons use to give meanings to their experiences. In each of the episodes described above, the women's self as an autonomous moral agent was subsumed, which in turn increased the power of their partners.

The next theme that will be discussed results from the women becoming fearful of their partners. This theme, which is still part of the creation phase of abuse, is clearly not independent of the first theme, but rather a progression, or a consequence of the submerged self of the women. As we have seen in the previous section, the women's self is beneath other contexts in the hierarchy, and the men progressively become more powerful in the relationship. Eventually, episodes are enacted that further subsume the self of the women, and increases the power of the men at the expense of the women. In these following examples, men became powerful enough to 'show' their anger with intent to intimidate their partners, and the women reciprocated the men's actions by 'showing' fear.

Theme 2 – The co-construction of fear: In this phase, the couple co-construct speech acts that reinforce the subservient position of the women and diminish their power as autonomous selves. The term "reflexivity" is useful to understand the connection between conversations and the impact the conversations have on the relationships. In the conversations between couples with the propensity to abuse the woman's position in the relationship becomes progressively lower as the man's simultaneously becomes higher. This, in turn, affects their conversational patterns (reflexivity), and in order to "go on" in the construction of an episode, she is "compelled" to apologize for situations that do not warrant an apology, or which actually warrant an apology from her partner. Judy described an episode that took place soon after their marriage:

> I went out for dinner with a friend, a girl friend and met her for dinner – her husband too I think, and he (Neil) was working nights and so I went by myself. When I got home he was upset. I think, because he was just jealous 'cause I was out with somebody else you know. That was about maybe a year – and he had just taken my jewelry box and thrown it all over the room – thrown it, all my jewelry. But before I got home he had picked it all up and put it back in, even though I found like beads and stuff. That was a sign to me of his temper – he had just lost it.

This episode took place approximately a year after their marriage. Judy recognized the beads and trinkets as belonging to her necklace in the jewelry box, and realized that Neil had thrown all of the contents out and later had picked it all up. To have a meaningful interaction within this context where the relationship dominates the episode and self, Judy is "compelled" by her logical force to apologize for "abandoning" Neil. Moreover, she "had to" promise him that she would never do it again, to "prove" to him that she cared about him.

53

Another interesting aspect in the preceding episode is the *enactment* of the Beauty and the Beast fantasy. Rosen (1996) asserts that women who are initially drawn into relationships because of the man's vulnerability (Judy was attracted to Neil's tragic background), and of her belief to transform (tame) him, excuse their partner's "beastliness" or at least "understand it at some level." I asked Judy why she did not consider leaving her husband after the first incident. She replied,

> I was afraid — I just felt that I couldn't abandon him, like he was such a hurt person — it would destroy him if I did, and I felt like I couldn't do that....I also felt that so early into the relationship he was so dependent on me, that I felt responsible for him. I felt like I would destroy him if I rejected him.

It is obvious from this narration that relationships that have an element of this fantasy, some of the emerging episodes have to be logically co-constructed this way. Implicit in the preceding episode is Neil's violent temper (beastliness) that he made sure was noticed by Judy when she found the scattered beads. As Pearce (1994) argues, nobody is "overcome" by an emotion including that of anger, but rather persons engage in these roles with a purpose to achieving a specific response from the other conversant(s) (p.178). Based on this notion, there cannot be a Beauty — the rescuer, without the Beast (and vise versa), and no need for "taming" without the "beastliness."

This also implies that neither of the participants can act independently as the autonomous self to produce the desired outcomes. They have to rely on each other to co-construct the desired outcomes. Neil "showed" his temper to Judy so that she understood the extent of his anger and would apologize for going out without him. In engaging in an episode of damaging Judy's jewelry and discretely leaving some on the floor, Neil "required" Judy to "discover" the beads in order to achieve his desired outcome. At the

54

conclusion of this episode. after the discovery of the beads. Judy concedes that she

became aware of his "temper" and how "he had just lost it." Consequently. Judy

responds with fear to "placate" him. and her promise never to go out by herself is made to

evoke the desired outcome to not make him "lose his temper" again. This particular

episode was followed by many similar episodes that further diminished her self and her

power. while simultaneously Neil became more intimidating. Judy described the state of

affairs thus:

> I don't know how many times he would phone me at work and just yell at me over the
> phone. Like about something – I can't even remember what – something I did wrong,
> or didn't do or something he was mad at me about 'cause I hadn't done this. or hadn't
> done that. And, so I just lived with this fear of him yelling at me. being mad at me,
> saying horrible, hurtful things to me and, it's like I lived my life on eggshells trying to
> make him happy. trying to please him..... I mean the yelling wasn't just about
> volume. it was about telling me everything that was wrong with me. Why I was such
> a horrible person you know, and I believed him – and I thought I was a horrible
> person too. If I could just do it right. if I could just get it right. if I could just do this
> right. then maybe he'll be okay. then he wouldn't yell any more – then I could. if I
> could just get it perfectly right.

Since Judy's stable hierarchy remained constant where the relationship was the

dominating context, she constantly tried to please Neil. Instead of reacting with anger or

devising a plan to leave him. she was afraid of him and only tried to placate him. Within

this context of a submerged self, she also believed that she was a horrible person. In

other words. because Judy perceived that she was a horrible person, she deserved to be ill

treated by her husband. Neil was justified. The fear that was created in Judy was a

condition for the abuse that followed. In conclusion, abuse has been created in Judy and

Neil's relationship. and justified by both of them.

In the following episode that was related by Yvonne, her husband lost his temper and used derogatory names to address her and verbally abused her. The unexpected conclusion of this episode, and the resultant verbal abuse, made Yvonne fearful of her husband. This episode occurred soon after their marriage, and Yvonne described it thus:

> I would have dreams about things…There was a dream that he had proposed to another woman and I knew this young woman (in the church). I shared this dream with him because it kind of puzzled me. He got so angry. He got so mad, and he just told me how awful I was and how dare I say something like this and I said it was just a dream. I think I was afraid because he was so angry. Fear was a big factor. I was very afraid of him. It's the first time that I remember – that real anger 'cause he put on a pretty good show.

In the dream the other woman declined marriage, and Elonte chose Yvonne. Since it was only a dream, and quite absurd under the circumstances, Yvonne had casually shared this with her husband. His reaction, however, was shocking and evoked fear and confusion in her. The episode that Yvonne had anticipated while relating her dream was that of "kidding around." The emergent episode was unexpected and Yvonne did not know "how to go on" in the conversation. This was the first time that Elonte had called her by a derogatory name (verbal abuse) and "had shown his anger." As was mentioned earlier, in such traumatic situations one does not know the rules, and if there is a "script," one is not aware of it, which makes it impossible to continue the conversation in a coherent way.

In the episode between Yvonne and Elonte, the particular speech act creates a situation where the actors are not able to coordinate their scripts, goals, and the rules to bring about a smooth episode. However, this episode makes perfect sense when the

meaning of this episode is interpreted from their dominant context – culture, and the consequent *grammatical abilities* that they possess.

Elonte grew up in a conservative church where his parents were pastors. As was mentioned earlier, this church even prohibited dating and courtship before marriage. In the dream that Yvonne related to him, the "other" woman was not a fictitious character, but a young woman who attended the same church. Even though it was "just a dream," the rules that Elonte operates within "prohibits" him from accepting the dream at its face value. He is "compelled" by his logical force, derived from his grammatical abilities, to interpret this episode as "accusatory," which accounts for his angry but appropriate response within this context. Yvonne, on the other hand, is a newcomer to the church and the rules that she operates with say, "a dream is just a dream, what's the big deal?" Since the actors were interacting in this episode with different rules, both of them did not know "how to go on" in the conversation.

Until this incident Yvonne said that Elonte was "very aloof and distant and kind of the quiet type." His name-calling and the corresponding "show of emotions" made her "very afraid of him." From Elonte's point of view this might have been the episode that altered his vision of the "sweet wife" that "God selected for him." This episode produced confusion in both, and evoked fear in Yvonne. Unfortunately, this incident became part of both their resources, and was in all likelihood expressed as practices in future episodes.

In the following section, Kumari described an episode that ultimately produced unexpected and undesirable consequences. About three months after their marriage, Kumari was still living at her parents' home and going to school while Shakur was

staying approximately 100 miles away and working. Every weekend he visited Kumari

and spent Saturday night with her. This particular weekend, at her parents' insistence,

Kumari asked her husband for some spending money since her parents had continued to

financially support and pay for all of her other expenses. Shakur obliged and gave her

50 Rupees (a little over $10), which was approximately what her servant made in a week.

Although Kumari was shocked by this amount (for she was expecting at least ten times as

much), she accepted it hoping that gradually he would increase the amount he gave her.

The following week, however, Shakur wanted the money back. First Kumari thought

that he was teasing her and laughed. When she realized that he was serious, she

explained to him that she had spent it. Shakur continued to insist that she return the

money to him right then. Kumari was too ashamed to ask her parents for the money and

instead borrowed it from her maid (Devi). Kumari "felt closer to Devi than to her own

mother," for she had been with the family over 20 years. When Shakur received the

money he demanded an explanation from her as to how she "produced the money after

having spent it." The following conversation took place:

Kumari: I borrowed the money from Devi.
Shakur: You slut! How dare you humiliate me to your servant!

Traditionally, in the Indian culture, servants are looked down on and the language

used to address them inherently devalues and maintains their lowly position in society.

Devi had been in the family even before the birth of Kumari, and had cared for her since

the first day of her life. This accounted for their very close, loving relationship, and why

Kumari felt quite at ease to ask her the favor, in spite of the somewhat awkward

situation. In this particular episode, Kumari is dictated by the seriousness of the episode

itself – to repay Shakur at whatever cost to her personal respect. Within this dominant context it makes perfect sense for her to ask Devi. Also, in the context of her relationship to her husband who was virtually still a stranger, she "had to save face with him." Brown and Levinson (1979, quoted in Pearce, 1994, p. 286) define "face" as "a non-technical description of a self's location within the moral order" and add that some speech acts threaten the autonomy of one or more of the participants.

In the episode between Kumari and Shakur, the context of her husband demanding to be paid back threatens her "face" and "compels" her to borrow the money. Had she asked her parents for the money, she would have again faced the prospects of "losing face" with them. Her "saving face" in this episode was in a higher context than the culture (cultural narratives) and her relationship. Shakur, however, was clearly operating with culture and self as the dominating context of the episode. In this context, Kumari has shamed him by borrowing the money from her servant presumably after explaining the compelling circumstances. Consequently, he "lost face" with the servant, which "compelled" him to respond in anger. From Kumari's perspective, Shakur asking for the money back would have been humiliating, because her parents had wanted her to ask for the money, for her financial support.

After the initial shock, when she realized that he was serious, she was not only humiliated, but afraid enough to borrow the money from her servant. Under the hurtful circumstances, she least expected him to verbally abuse her and accuse her of shaming him. This incident made Kumari fearful of Shakur and made him suspicious of her loyalty for him and their relationship. When the episode began, neither of the actors

59

would have anticipated the unfortunate conclusion, that it submerged Kumari's self lower, deeming her virtually powerless, while making Shakur more powerful in their relationship.

As was mentioned earlier, Siva was brought up in a family where the father was dictatorial, and virtually no one else was consulted for *any* decisions. Siva soon discovered that in his own marriage (arranged by his father) his wife was "very different from mom." To emphasize the fact that his wife provoked him to lose his temper, thus justifying his abuse, Siva offered the following narration. At the conclusion of this episode he lost his temper, and hit Rita because she challenged him. He described his disappointment in the following conversation:

> She (Rita) didn't know what I wanted. She could not predict what I wanted. Instead, she challenged me.....She had so many elements in her that was totally contrary to what I wanted. For example, I would say do this and she would not. In fact, the very first conflict started when I told her to do something.

The following episode was their first conflict.

> When my son was a baby, he was about 7 months old and he was crying and we were on the bed. He was in between us. I knew his diapers were wet because it was all soggy and smelly. I got up in the middle of the night and told her to change him. That is all I told her. There was something in her that she didn't want to do it or she didn't like to do it. She just didn't want to get up and change the diapers. She revolted and she fell back at me and said, "Why don't you do it?" She kind of challenged me. At that moment I saw the other side of her. When I married her I thought I was marrying a very innocent person, but later on I found out she would use all sorts of words and provoke my anger.

For Siva the dominating context is "family myth." Cronen, Pearce, and Tomm, (1985), refer to family myth as the "high order general conceptions of how society, personal roles, and family relationships work" (p. 203) and these conceptions are typically passed down from previous generations and are likely to be "intensified in the

60

new nuclear family." The above conversation exemplifies this aspect in Siva. The incident. however. indicates that Rita has "self" above all else. which was why she asked Siva to change the diapers. From the beginning of their marriage, conflicts abounded because Siva perceived Rita to be "challenging his authority." His higher context of "family myth" prohibits him from operating at any level except as a "dictator," and he is "compelled" by his logical force to "quell" any "challenge" to this position.

Siva and Rita's relationship is unique from the other couples discussed in this section. When "family myth" is the higher context for one of the participants, unless the other has "relationship" as the higher context, as Siva's mother did. it is impossible "to go on" without conflict. Conflict occurs because one of the participants is not following the script of how relationships *ought* to be, as prescribed by the family myth. Rita, unlike the other women. in this study, has self as the dominating context, and Siva, finding it impossible to gain her compliance, justifies hitting her to 'make' her compliant to his authority. She is "compelled" to submerge self for fear of physically getting hurt. As Morton, et al.. (1976) propose, in such relationships, mutual acceptance is reached by either punishment, or by the threat of punishment. In India, where the preceding episode occurred. Rita had no option except to comply to Siva's physical threats and punishment. Siva confirmed this aspect: "Many times she's called me Hitler because I have this dictatorship over the five years of our marriage." Siva explained to me what he had to do to stop arguments from continuing.

> I have to....I would hit her. I would really shut her up physically, and say shut up, and try to forcibly keep her mouth closed. ...When she starts she doesn't stop. It is a kind of weakness in her and she has admitted that to me many times. She's told me she's got a problem with her mouth, with her emotions, and the combined effect of

her anger. her emotions, and her non-stop language... Basically. she's got a very stubborn attitude of maintaining her state. I cannot challenge that. She has a very stubborn. I'll say, point of view. I don't see the kind of humility in her that my mother had. That kind of beauty in a woman is not there with my wife. My mother was a very special person.

As this narration indicates, abuse was created in this relationship because Siva's family myth did not allow him to accept Rita on an equitable level. Rita was compelled to be compliant to Siva and submerge her self, because she was afraid of being physically hurt by him. She perceived no other available options such as divorce because the Indian culture virtually prohibits divorce, and the social stigma attached to divorced women is unbearable.

The purpose of the preceding section was to answer *how* abuse was co-constructed and initiated in an intimate relationship. The episodes that are described in this "initiation phase" of abuse in the relationship have two common themes that explain from the social constructionist perspective how actors co-construct abuse. The themes are namely: 1) The submersion of self: In the initial stages of the relationship, the women coordinated episodes that submerged self below the dominating contexts of their relationship or their culture. Consequently, in the emerging episodes the women were "compelled" to respond in ways consistent to this dominating context that effaced their power to act as autonomous agents. 2) The co-construction of fear: This theme is a progression from the previous theme, and here the outcomes of the episodes were inconsistent to the expectations of the participants and they "could not go on" to complete the episode smoothly. The participants were engaged in speech acts that made sense within their own dominating context. Since the participants were operating from

62

differing contexts, the emerging outcome of the episode was unanticipated and undesirable. The men had gained enough power in the relationship and they "showed their anger" with the intent to intimidate their partners, who in turn, responded with fear. The women were compelled to co-construct episodes that jeopardized their status further as autonomous selves, as a consequence of which they became fearful of their partners.

The episodes described previously concluded with the men verbally abusing their partners and set the stage for the *progression* of abuse in subsequent episodes. Within a few months of the mentioned episodes, each of the women said that they were slapped, beaten, or kicked by their partners. The following section will describe episodes and common themes that sustain the abuse in the relationship.

Phase II: Sustaining abuse

This section will attempt to answer the question *how* speech acts sustain the abuse, and will explain the dynamics in an abusive relationship. To understand this phase of abuse, I have identified three common themes. (1) The co-construction of confusion, (2) minimization of the abuse, and (3) hope for restoration. A concept of CMM that is very useful in examining the sustaining phase of abuse is the *strange loop*. This concept "offers a way of putting together the connections and contradictions between the contexts giving meaning to experience" (Oliver, 1996, p. 254). As the participant becomes coherent with one context, the opposite emerges to be true. This "on again," "off again" pattern is depicted like the figure eight, in which the loops do not have an obvious "exit" to end the pattern. Cronen, et. al (1985) explain that in this "paradox" contexts are looped such that treating one as "higher" leads to different and contradictory

63

interpretations than if the other is "higher." This paradox can occur between any two

contexts, such as "relationship" and "culture." "self" and "relationship," etc. The

following section will describe how this paradox occurs and how it "traps" the actors in

the abusive pattern of the relationship.

Theme 1: Co-construction of confusion: Judy was married for over a year, during

which time several of the episodes concluded by Neil blaming her for something. She

described a typical episode that occurred almost daily.

> He would say, you're a terrible housekeeper. You are a slob. I would feel bad
> because I haven't been exercising and I've gained weight. He would pick on all the
> stuff he knows is already a weak spot for me. During a good time when things are
> okay and I think he's my friend. I would share some personal thing about God, share
> some vulnerability about something. Later when he is mad he would use that against
> me. I still do that. I still share things with and expect him to be my friend, instead of
> him turning around and telling me I am being stupid because of that. He knows my
> weak points and he just goes for them.

She then continued to explain how she would react to the above episode.

> One of the things about it is there's this confusion that would come when he would
> start with these accusations against me for whatever. This confusion would come to
> my mind – it was like "wait a minute, wait a minute, is that, is that right.... Is that
> what I said"....I would just get to where I didn't know what was true – I would be so
> confused, just mentally confused. I can see how someone could just really go
> crazy.....absolutely, totally doubt myself. I would get to where I would believe what
> he was saying was true. "Yeah you're right, it's all my fault. I see, I'm doing that.
> I'm doing this, it's got to be all me." ....that confusion was very, very real.

All of the subjects in this study described a state of mind very similar to Judy's

account above. In what follows, I will attempt to offer a description of *how* this process

emerges in the relationship and progresses to become as oppressive as Judy describes.

The first part of this discussion will briefly focus on the aspect of confusion that results

from non-confirmation, and the second part on "hope" that helps sustain the relationship.

Confirmation involves the "process through which people are 'endorsed' by others, implying a recognition and acknowledgment of them in their personness" (Cissna & Sieburg. 1981. quoted in Cissna. & Anderson, 1994. p. 23). Watzlawick. Beavin. and Jackson (1967, p.84. quoted in Cissna. & Anderson, 1994. p.23) state that confirmation is "the greatest single factor ensuring mental development and stability that has so far emerged from our study of communication." What we perceive as being real is received through our senses. and that reality is confirmed when someone else acknowledges that. Most of the time with the usual objects around us, blue sky, hot stove. loud noise. etc. we receive the stimulus. and since we have been conditioned to perceive and interpret in a certain way we, as adults, do not particularly need another person's confirmation. In a new relationship. however. since two adults who are conditioned differently get together, certain unfamiliar stimulus has to be confirmed for clarification. For instance, the smell of cigarette smoke on the woman could mean that she is a smoker. or that she works in an environment that is filled with smoke.

Especially in the early stages of a relationship, affirmation is essential. At this stage, the receiver and observer, by actively processing the information presented by the other, attempts to make shaky but supportable assumptions about the other's personality and attitude on the basis of social cues and communicative actions (Duck. 1976). Duck asserts that this inference "of assumption about the invisible on the basis of the visible – could clearly be a motive force in the progression from one level of information to another in acquaintance" (p.142). So, confirmation is essential for the very progression of the relationship. As the following discussion depicts. the act of confirmation seems to

65

be absent in some relationships which then leads to questioning of reality as one perceives it to be.

Judy described the following incident, which took place when she and Neil joined some of his family members to watch wrestling together:

> So we are watching this fight and the guy that he had bet on lost, and I was sitting on the floor with (others) and he just threw a tantrum over it and I was so embarrassed that I just laughed, just laughed and he kicked me. I mean it was just one kick, and I just was stunned. I don't know there's just a numb, a numbing, a numbness – I don't know where I got to be so numb.

This was the first time that Neil had physically assaulted her, and the most humiliating thing for Judy was that this incident happened in front of his family members. However, none of them said anything, either to condemn Neil's behavior, or to comfort Judy. The incident was simply ignored by the family, and later by Neil who never acknowledged or apologized for it.

A few weeks later, Judy herself wondered if this incident ever took place, and brought up the subject to Neil to force an acknowledgment. He said that he vaguely recalled something (not his kicking), but that it was not a big deal and Judy was perhaps a little too drunk to remember accurately. Judy described the details to him and insisted that it was quite serious. Neil continued to deny it, and called her a nag who liked to exaggerate things to feel sorry for herself, and to get him to feel sorry for her. Beyond this point, Judy did not know "how to go on in the conversation" and she described her reaction thus:

> I think I was just focused on trying to be where I thought he wanted me to be....I was just trying to make him be okay...I probably thought I was wrong – I shouldn't have laughed – I ridiculed him in front of his friends. So I just took the blame on myself. I deserved that because I did a wrong thing. So that was really a pattern.

66

Had Neil at least acknowledged that he had indeed kicked her it would have confirmed Judy's reality. But since he and his family never acknowledged the incident, she was placed in a position where she had to stay true to her "feelings," which implies that everyone else is wrong, or deny her "self" to believe Neil. Anxious to placate Neil, and continue in the relationship, she conceded that perhaps she did deserve it for ridiculing him. By "giving in," however, she has conceded that (a) she is incompetent, (b) that her feelings are not to be trusted (self denied), and (c) when in doubt, Neil must be right. This incident would also become the reference point for other future episodes, and would only reinforce the above three sentiments.

I asked Judy if and how this incident changed her relationship, and she replied, "Oh yeah – yeah it's like I died. I just went into hiding (crying). It was really hard for my family to see me sort of disappear."

All of the women subjects in this study opted to deny their perceptions and accept the version of their partners, even though it was contradictory. Consequently, this created doubt in their "selves" and in their perception of reality. This is particularly significant because as the relationship progresses, men with propensity to abuse (discussed earlier) isolate the women, such that the women have no other frame of reference except their abusive partner, which further undermines their confidence in their perceived reality. It is useful to understand the above episode in terms of the strange loop, because it helps depict how the relationship is sustained. The two contexts in contradiction here are "self" and the "relationship."

When "self" is in the higher context. the woman is confident of her perceptions and that her feelings are true: she knows it because she saw. heard. smelt. tasted. or felt the stimulus. However, when her reality is not confirmed by her partner she feels incompetent, and is almost forced to believe and rely on her partner's version. When she begins to trust him. and feel good about the relationship, the abusive incident occurs, which is typically followed by the honeymoon period. After the abusive incident. and his ensuing apologies and promises never to repeat the abuse. she anxiously forgives him. and feels competent again to trust in her perceptions of reality. Also. since her self is in a subsumed context within the relationship. she is 'compelled' to stay on in the relationship. And the whole cycle repeats itself again.

One of the women described "the childish things" that her partner would do to challenge her perception of what was "real."

> He would do things like disable my car, hide the phone, hide my purse, just really childish things. One time my brand new jeans had bleach stains on them, and the phone — I couldn't find the phone and he to this day will say he didn't do it.

In all of the above incidences she was blamed. When she complained that for some reason the car would not start, he challenged her perception and quickly "fixed" the problem that he had created, thus disproving her and undermining her sense that something was wrong with the car. He hid the phone and complained that she lost things easily and forgot about them, which made her wonder if it was true. Her purse was "lost" many times to prove his point. Spots were "placed" on her jeans and she was accused of being careless. Worst of all. she was accused of not even aware of things happening around her. At times. however, she was sure of her perceptions, or was even able to

prove that he was lying by some physical evidence that proved contradictory to his story. This was when she confronted his behavior, and attempted to draw some boundary lines of what was acceptable and what was not in their relationship. However when he aggressively challenged her perceptions, and she had no other point of reference to affirm her "self," she questioned her sense of reality by wondering if what she perceived was true.

Yvonne's explanation of why she stayed in her second abusive relationship exemplifies the above sentiments:

> Oh. he'd have the cycle – the classic abuse cycle. He'd scream, yell, do crazy things, try to control me, imprison me in my own home, then he would be so sorry, and repentant. He would cook dinner and he'd clean up the house, and he'd cater to me until he thought I might be thinking about another man. He'd go ballistic, absolutely nuts and tell me these horrible, horrible things to the point where I'd start wondering. Am I going crazy or insane?

Most women involved in abusive relationships where the "self" is typically subsumed under other higher contexts (as discussed earlier), concede to their partner's version of what was perceived. When Yvonne questions "self," then she has to agree that he is right, his perceptions are trustworthy, and the relationship is worth salvaging. Inevitably, the next abusive incident happens, at which time she begins to wonder about the relationship and her partner, and locates "self" above the other contexts to survive day to day. And the whole cycle begins again. Pearce (1989) asserts that "an oscillation between two 'opposite' forms of behavior is the characteristic practice that reconstructs a strange loop" (p.47). The strange loop that depicts this phenomenon looks like this:

69

Self	Relationship
I am loved	My partner is right
↓	↓
I am competent	He's trustworthy
↓	↓
I trust in my feelings	Great marriage
↓	↓
(But no confirmation)	(Abusive incident happens)
↓	↓
I'm incompetent	Terrible relationship
↓	↓
My feelings can't be trusted	Honeymoon period
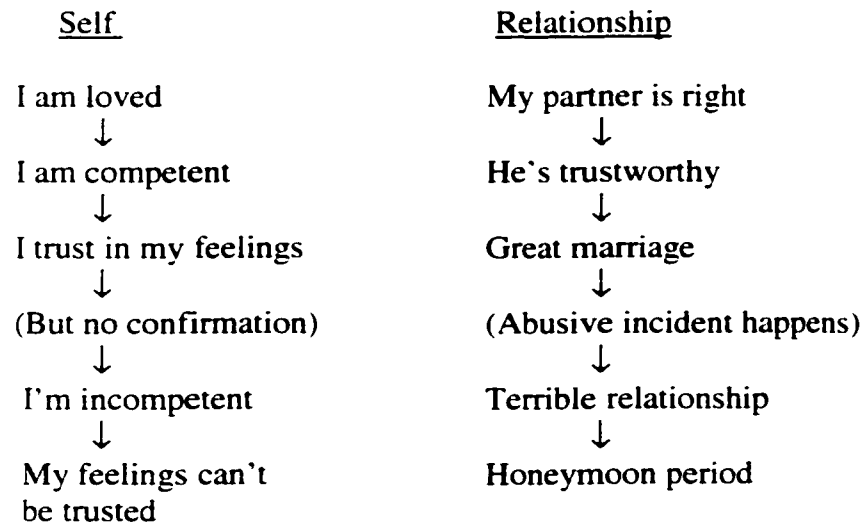
Oliver (1996) concludes that "there is no way out (of the strange loop) unless there is a story change at a higher level of context" (p. 255). This implies that unless the woman comes to believe that since he is abusive the relationship is not worth salvaging, she will probably doubt that she is competent enough to "go on" without him, and thus will continue in the relationship. Ironically, the women did not speak about the abuse to others, or seek help either to terminate the abuse, or to help them leave the relationship, because they felt ashamed, and helpless.

Theme 2: Minimization and denial; shame and helplessness: Related to non-confirmation and confusion, is the aspect in which abuse is minimized and or denied by the men. Consequently, this creates a sense of shame and helplessness on the part of the women. The women are not sure if they are really being abused as intensely as they emotionally and physically feel it because their partners minimize and or deny the abuse. In addition to this, abusive men frequently isolate their partners. When close family or

friends who are aware of the abuse do not acknowledge this (as in Judy's case). the abuse

is sustained in the relationship. Rosen (1996) explains the connection this way:

> Family or friends may inadvertently collude with the violence by accepting the woman's minimizations or denials without question, by witnessing or learning about the abuse and not expressing outrage or concern. by keeping the abuse secret, or by directly aligning with or failing to censor the abuser.

Judy explained Neil's attitude about the abuse, and described how the 'minimization

of abuse' was co-constructed in their relationship:

> Every time, he always minimized whatever he had done. Even today if I talk about abuse he will say I was abusive to him....He has always tried to put the blame on me. He will turn it around and minimize whatever he has done. Whatever he did was only in response to what I did to him. He never instigated anything bad. It was only his responding to what I had done to him every time, like pushing him away in my sleep. Because, if I really loved him deep down inside, I wouldn't do it, even in my sleep. Of course, there is nothing he has done to warrant that kind of rejection.

On the other hand. Marcos related the following incident to illustrate the time when

he lost his temper with Tania. He assured me that this incident did not make his girlfriend

afraid of him, or change their relationship in any way. I have included his narration in

this section, to depict how men minimize, and or deny the abuse.

> I wanted her to do something, she didn't. She wanted to leave. At night I parked right behind her. I didn't think she could get out. She got out. I parked my car (behind hers) and she still managed to get out. That pissed me off even more. I thought, how could she get out? How could she do something I told her not to do? So....I chased her in my car. We were going down the road. She stopped at a light and rolled up the window. I got out of my car and started telling her to open the door, "Open the door." She wouldn't open the door. There was a green light and she left."

Marcos told me he was sure that Tania was not afraid of him, and nothing in their

relationship changed, even after this incident. The other male participant, Siva explained

his predicament this way:

Finally, they (Rita's parents) came to a conclusion that they should advise their daughter to control her mouth and really start respecting her husband....So they did advise her. But, like I said, it is hard for my wife to change. She cannot make that transition. That is something that is going to take time to change and to see things at a higher level, with different eyes, with more maturity. If she understood my feelings, what I did, and the pressures in my work, if she made adjustments to all those things and really looked at things from a high level – If she got to that level of mental maturity there would be no problem in the house at all.

I asked Siva if Rita was afraid of him, and if the abuse changed their relationship. He said,

No, she was not fearful of me. She continued to use the same (abusive) language. She was the same person. She would continue to live the same life. She would be one person at one time, a different person the next. She has the Jekyll and Hyde personality. She continues to be that way.

Since the men blame their partners for the abuse, or minimize the incidents, the women blame themselves for the predicament they are in, and they are ashamed to seek help. It is as though they fear that their perceptions of the abuse itself would be minimized or denied by others as well, just as their partners do. This, in essence, helps them co-construct the minimization of the abuse. When I asked the women why they did not tell anyone of the abuse, or seek help, all of them mentioned being ashamed. Judy replied:

Oh no, no. It was a shame, I mean, why would you tell somebody that? What does that say about you. What kind of a person are you if you let somebody hit you, I mean, I don't know. It's like so much shame, and that's such a feeling of being worthless, so worthless. (A long pause followed this narration).

In the second interview I had with her, Judy shared the following from her notes that she had written to inform me why she continued in the relationship.

Denial: God is going to make everything okay...I thought that God wanted me to stay in this relationship. I thought I was doing what God wanted by staying in the relationship. That's denial. And then there is the sense of powerlessness and

72

hopelessness. I had no power to change the situation. I had no power to get out, to leave, just that sense of why try. It is hopeless. Just like a zombie feeling....I felt that I got to the place of extreme neglect of myself. My health, my teeth, everything, my clothes, my shoes. I never bought anything for myself. It was always for the kids. Whatever money I had it was spent on the kids or on Neil. I was always going everywhere in shabby underwear. I thought I couldn't buy anything for myself. I really thought I couldn't...I didn't even know how to do that because there was such a sense of worthlessness. (And finally) self pity. It was like a constant companion through that whole process was self-pity. Feeling like a victim. Just feeling so victimized and powerless and poor me....That poor me (is) a really powerless place, that sense of I can't do anything.

Here is how Yvonne described her state of mind during her abusive third

relationship:

God how can I be in this place again? Third marriage, third baby, same situation, how did I get here? What do I do? I don't want to displease you. I want to work it out. I really want to do whatever I can, you know. I really didn't want to – I just felt like, again, how can I do this three times. So this one has to work. So this is take three – three strikes and you're out. You've blown it, you've destroyed your life, destroyed my children. (But) I made a covenant, a promise, and I don't know if I have scriptural grounds for this (divorce). So somehow we're going to have to work this out...

All of the incidents described in this section show how abuse is minimized by both

the men and the women, the shame that the women feel, and the consequent feeling of

helplessness. These factors help sustain the abuse, sometimes even for years.

Ironically, despite the apparent hopelessness and the shame reflected in these

narratives, all of the women mentioned the aspect of hope. The women hoped to have a

"normal" relationship with the partner that they fell in love with (or arrange-married).

Since many of the participants in this study mentioned this, hope is one of the common

themes that sustain the relationship despite the abuse and the hopelessness.

Theme 3: Hope for restoration: Judy said of her abusive husband of 21 years:

73

When I moved out of the bedroom (3 weeks ago) he quit smoking marijuana. He wants to be a Godly dad. He wants to be a good husband and dad, it's just that he doesn't really know how to get there. (The last couple of months) he has been a lot more tender and supportive.... So, he has really changed.....

Within the higher context of relationship over self, episode, and culture, this is consistent. We can only speculate as to how many times he had quit smoking marijuana in 21 years, or how many times she has redefined his behavior as "tender and supportive." The relevance of the above narration lies in the fact that this relationship is sustained through countless episodes of abuse, and yet there is still hope that "he is changing."

When I asked Yvonne why she continued in the relationship, she said:

I just so believed he was the man God has chosen that it would work out. That magical thinking that somehow all this will be okay. He's going to change and probably part of me thought that I'd be the one to help – I have a purpose here.

Her hope in the relationship and in her "destiny" with this man made perfect sense when defined from her dominating religious / cultural context (discussed earlier). She also alludes to the Beauty and the Beast fantasy where she would be the one to help him change to become a better person. Yvonne explained why she continued in the second relationship:

I just wanted my dream. I wanted the Christian family with a godly man, and to have a lovely home, and to be a testimony for the Lord to my unbelieving parents who had this horrible marriage. I just had this dream, so when somebody paid attention to me after the first relationship, it just felt so wonderful. I just sort of threw caution to the wind. Again, somehow God will work it all out by faith, if I have enough faith.

Kumari explained that to sustain her relationship with Shakur, her parents spent thousands of dollars to send him to America where he graduated from college and

74

secured a well-paying job. They had to do this so "he wouldn't feel inferior to them financially," which they supposed was the reason why he was lashing out at Kumari. In the dominating context of cultural narratives where the husband "should" earn more than the wife (or her family), their wisdom makes sense.

Hope is also derived from the messages that are often mutually spoken in the relationship, such as "I love you," "I can't live without you," etc. In the context of abusive relationships, this is significant because the actors co-construct an episode of "forgiving" and "forgetting" that sustains the relationship. Almost all of the research in domestic violence describes a period of time called the "honeymoon period" (Straus, et al. 1980, Walker, 1984) that immediately follows violent episodes (discussed earlier). During this period the abuser is despondent about his actions, and promises never to repeat them again. To appease his mate, he sends flowers and cards, and for a time "becomes a sweet, charming person" (Yvonne, personal interview). His remorse and promises kindles the hope in women for having a normal relationship with a loving partner that they originally fell in love with. For a while the relationship is violence-free, and then the patterns begin to repeat themselves. Steier (1995, p.67) concludes that "in a history of interaction where one is hierarchically subjected to the authority of another, being placed in such a situation ......can be paralyzing." It is paralyzing enough to not exit the relationship, and paralyzing enough to continue to hope that ultimately helps sustain the abuse and the relationship.

Siva hopes to change Rita "to become more like his mother." He cited four reasons for why their relationship was not working out.

(1) On many occasions her parents have come into our marriage. On many occasions. Not just one. They would interfere in every aspect, which is not what I want. I would say the tensions started between me and my wife basically because of her parents. Her parents, to this day, their presence seems to disrupt our peace. Absolutely, just shatters the peace between us. (2) The other thing is her very nature of disrespecting people. My wife has this strange habit of combining words to make them so disgusting that it would hurt you to the point where it makes you think, why do I have to have anything to do with this woman. So, it seems to be in her, the way of her anger and emotions, and the way she projects them by nature. That's her personality, that is who she is....(3) She would get upset in a fraction of second. She would turn into a different person than she is normally. It's like the Jekyll and Hyde personality. So, one minute she would be a very nice person, the other she would be totally different....(4) In many ways I sense some kind of immaturity in her over the years. I just sense that she cannot get to a level where she can think in a broad-minded way...If she understood my feelings, what I did, and the pressures in my work, if she made adjustments to all those things and really looked at things from a high level - if she got to that level of mental maturity there would be no problem in the house at all.

This is a variation from the other relationships, in that, unlike the others where women were hopeful, here the man is hopeful. Siva and Rita's relationship is also sustained by culture. They both perceive from the higher level context of "culture," that divorce is not a feasible solution. The "cultural narrative" of India explicitly prohibits divorce. Marriages are primarily arranged based on family reputations and a divorce would most certainly affect the future prospects of almost all the young people in the entire family. Rita has two younger sisters, and divorce or separation from the abusive relationship with Siva is unthinkable for her because of the imposed restrictions. Therefore, this relationship is sustained by not only Siva's hope to change her, but also because Rita is motivated to stay in the relationship for other reasons.

As was discussed in this section, in the sustaining phase of abuse, women's perception of reality was not confirmed by their partners and this progressed to confusion because other contexts were above "selves." The strange loop depicts the aspect from

76

which there seemingly is no way out, except to continue in the abusive patterns. This

aspect of "no escape" compelled the women to minimize the extent of abuse, while

feeling shameful and hopeless in the relationship. Finally, this section discussed the

aspect of hope and how it is kept alive in the relationships, an important factor that

continues to sustain the abuse. The following section will discuss episodes that "forced"

the actors to reframe their contexts, or block the episodes that consequently changed the

outcomes of the episodes, and eventually the relationship

Phase III: Termination of abuse

Although abuse may seem like a "permanent" part of the relationship, the preceding

discussion described how it was actually co-constructed over time. Similarly, the actors

can "deconstruct" abuse by becoming aware primarily of *how* they are co-constructing

abuse in their relationship. The following excerpt from Sigman (1995) describes how the

meaning of someone's behavior is derived, interpreted, and co-constructed together with

other participants such that not one participant can control the ultimate outcome of a

particular episode.

Persons act so that the meaning of their behavior is, in part, derived from the rules,
the morally binding logic, but his behavior-as-performed-in-real-time is distinct from any
a priori set of rules. When a husband acts in a certain way toward his wife, he is doing
so not because he *is* the latter's husband, and not simply because there are rules that
impose themselves on him, but rather because he is structuring and producing messages
whose meanings *at that moment* are interpretable as the behavior of a husband (or, of that
"kind" of husband). He is acting to be a husband in this situation, and a particular
husband at that. The husband acts "out of" rules-based knowledge and "into" the
ongoing behavioral stream contributed to by himself and others (p. 196).

Since the ongoing behavior is *co-contributed* by the wife, she can certainly attempt to

alter the outcomes of undesirable episodes. However, Sigman (1995) warns that

behaviors are patterns that are "coherent with and predictable" to ongoing patterns, which

obligates the actors to "semantically align with the ongoing stream of behavior" (p.197).

So long as the hierarchical contexts remain unchanged, it is likely that the couple will

continue to participate in speech acts and in episodes that sometimes conclude with

abuse. This explains why abusive relationships continue in the same destructive pattern,

sometimes for years. Pearce (1994) offers three solutions to the question on *how* to avoid

participating in an unwanted episode? These are (1) Exiting the situation (2) Blocking

the performance of the episode, and (3) Reframing the episode within a different context

by introducing "a sequence of subsequent acts that make those changes in the frame real"

(p.189). This is a complex task to achieve, particularly when the actors are involved in

paradoxes such as the strange loop previously discussed. However, as the following

section indicates, there are some circumstances that compel the participants to re-arrange

their hierarchical contexts that leads them to either terminate the abuse or the relationship

itself.

The termination phase can have two outcomes. Either abuse can be terminated from

the relationship, or the relationship itself maybe terminated. In relationships where there

was abuse, but the women did not feel that their lives were threatened, or about the lives

of their children, or their partners' lives (those who threaten suicide), relationships

seemed to be sustained over many years for reasons discussed in Phase II. In such

relationships, the hierarchical contexts remained relatively stable, and it is likely that the

couple will continue to participate in episodes that sometimes conclude with abuse.

However, when abuse was severe, two themes were identified that forced the women to

change their stable hierarchy of contexts. (1) When women became intensely fearful for

their lives. or for the lives of their children. or for the lives of their partners. they were

forced then to change the hierarchical position of the contexts. and either attempted to

terminate the abuse. or to terminate the relationship. (2) When women became intensely

angry over their predicament that forced a change in their stable hierarchy. they

spearheaded the termination of either the abuse, or the relationship. The first theme that I

have discussed here is intense fear. and the second theme is intense anger. Each of the

themes is discussed with descriptions from the participants' experiences. When the

participants became intensely fearful. or angry, they utilized any of the three solutions

offered by Pearce (1994): exiting. blocking, reframing. The following descriptions depict

the aspect of intense fear that forced a change in the hierarchy of contexts. The

discussion will focus on *how* subjects blocked. reframed. or exited from undesirable

episodes.

Theme 1: Intense Fear: The kind of fear that is discussed in this theme is different

from the fear that was discussed in Phase I. In Phase I, the women became fearful of

their partners' verbal abuse – the derogatory name-calling, accusations, and implied

threats. Also. the women became fearful because it was the first time that the men had

"shown" their anger to their partners. The aspect of fear that is discussed in this Phase

(III) may be labeled as "intense." The couple typically has been together for several

months or years, the abuse has progressed and the man has become powerful and very

oppressive towards his partner. Kirkwood (1993) explains that:

> In these cases. women knew exactly what they were attempting to preserve
> themselves from and why they had to act immediately. Women felt the need to leave

their relationships because of their deep fear that the violence was potentially permanently injurious or fatal to themselves or their children (p. 82).

Gelles suggests that "Once the cost of living in a violent relationship begins to escalate. paralleling the escalation of the seriousness of the abusiveness and injuries. women's help-seeking behavior breaks through the privacy of the home, if they perceive actual help is available" (quoted in Walker, 1984, p. 103). In other words. when women realized that the propensity for being hurt or permanently injured was high, they were compelled to reorganize the hierarchy of contexts. Reorganizing the hierarchy changes the logical force. which then offers the participant the opportunity to step out of the strange loop. According to the CMM perspective. change happens when the participants become aware of *how* not to participate in undesirable episodes. or *how* to alter the outcomes. or *how* to exit from undesirable episodes.

After abusive patterns became part of the relationship, and the participants felt trapped (strange loop), some participants became intensely fearful and were forced to reframe their contexts. Reframing "forced" unexpected outcomes in the speech acts that were usually "scripted." following very predictable patterns. Judy described an episode that determined one major milestone in her relationship.

Quite frequently. Neil would say "That's it, I'm going to kill myself. I can't take it anymore." She explained that this threat posed "a very real concern because of his parents." both of whom had committed suicide. Since Judy was very afraid of this outcome. she usually responded with a great deal of anxiety, including pleading with him not to do so for the sake of her and the children and "gave in" to his demands. Her

response typically included a "script" of apologies for things that she was accused of doing. and a "script" of promises denouncing her privileges.

After keeping "her secret" of the abuse for years from everyone else. Judy was invited to church by a friend who became quite close to her. In the church. Judy also became close to some women – women who had either survived abuse in their own relationships or women in non-abusive. peaceful relationships. Through the ensuing months and years. Judy felt confident enough to talk to them. particularly after "very bad episodes." These women would "confirm" Judy's perception of reality when she described episodes that were confusing to her. After one such episode, and Neil's ensuing "script" of threat. she spoke with one of the women, Lisa (the pastor's wife):

> Judy: I'm so afraid that he would kill himself just as his parents did.
> Lisa: Honey, his life is not in your hands, but it's in God's. God knows the timing. and you shouldn't feel responsible for his life or death.

In this conversation. Judy is "compelled" to agree to "go on" in the conversation with Lisa. If she does not agree. then she in effect would be saying. "No, Neil's life is in my hands. not God's." which would be untrue under any circumstance. This "forced" a shift in the hierarchy of the contexts that Judy was operating under. Usually. the "relationship" reigned supreme in almost all episodes. but in this emerging conversation. "culture" became the predominant context under which the "relationship" and other contexts were subsumed. This episode fortunately became part of her resources as well. which she would express in practices over and over. Consequently. the next "scripted" threat episode with Neil went this way:

> Neil: That's it. I'm going to kill myself. I can't take it anymore.

Judy: Honey. your life is not in my hands. It's in God's. I'm not responsible for your life or death.

Neil could not "go on" in this conversation, but protested that she didn't care about him anymore if he lived or died. Judy could only reassure him that his life was in God's hands. and because she cared about him, she was secure in the thought that his life was in God's hands! The threats almost ceased altogether, and when they were mentioned Judy enacted the same "script." This episode depicts how by *reframing* the contexts. outcomes can be altered. As was discussed earlier, because conversations and relationships are *reflexive*, this reframed conversation would surely impact their relationship as well. Judy's intense fear of Neil committing suicide led her into confiding to friends who compelled her to reframe the hierarchical contexts. Although this single act of reframing will not discontinue abusive patterns that have been co-constructed for years. it is a step "out" of the strange loop and produces possibilities and hope for future changes in the relational pattern.

Yvonne explained that because she believed that it was God's will for her to be in the relationship "until death do us part." she resolved to enduring and "submitting" to her husband. Elonte. When their son was approximately a month old, Elonte decided that she should stop nursing him. Yvonne described it this way:

> It was some stigma about nursing and he was going to control that. He was going to tell me what I could and couldn't do. Because I was determined that this was the best thing for the baby. I really wanted to do this. I almost didn't because he was so controlling about that, and I thought "No this is my child, and you can't deny me this. This is only going to happen for so many months in this child's life and I'll never get this opportunity again and I want to do this for the baby".

The implied stigma was that she was white. and he didn't want "his son" to be nursed by a white woman. Yvonne was intensely fearful of depriving her son the nutrition he needed as a baby, and being deprived as a mother from nursing her baby. This episode "compelled" Yvonne to reframe her contexts - from a dominating "culture" (religion) context to "motherhood." When her husband persisted she did not concede. but instead left the relationship for good. Sometimes, as Pearce (1994) has suggested. "exiting the situation" is the only viable option that is available to a participant who finds no way to 'go on' in the episode.

When Kumari joined her husband here in America. Shakur refused to provide her vegetarian food even though she did not eat meat. She told me that she lived on baked potatoes for six months. Her neighbor and husband's friend, Jay, tried to help her by occasionally buying other vegetables for her. In the following months, Kumari's health began to fail, and she weighed just over eighty pounds. She was also secretly in love with Jay who was the "only one who cared about her." Once when Shakur was hitting her. Jay intervened and begged him to stop, but did not call the police for the sake of his friendship with Shakur. After an abusive episode with her husband, Kumari swallowed over one hundred Tylenol tablets and ended up in the hospital. She confided to the doctors about the abuse. but the law did not require them as it does now to inform the police. In the hospital. with the prospect of being compelled to return home again to her abusive husband. Kumari was finally "forced" to step out of the strange loop. At this ultimate point of despair, she was forced to reframe her contexts from the dominating "cultural

83

narratives" to "self" and to "another relationship." She described this dramatic episode that concluded her marriage:

> When I opened my eyes, there they were – my husband, and Jay, the one I loved. Believe me or not, that is the time I said Jay is my husband. To protect myself...I thought I had to get out of (the marriage). If I tell it this way they would send me with him (Jay). I lied to the doctors that the other one was my husband, so I didn't have to go back home to that hell. Shakur said, "If you want to see the records, passports and everything, she is my wife." That is when the fight started. I don't even know what happened between Shakur and Jay. They had a very big fight, later I found out....So, Jay is the one. He dared to take me to his apartment. He took me to his apartment and that is where my parents also came.

Kumari's intense fear of the prospect of returning to her husband forced her to reframe the contexts and to terminate the abusive relationship. In the turn of events, her husband could not 'go on' and was compelled to agree to a divorce even though his dominating context "cultural narratives" dictated otherwise. The other theme that was identified in some relationships that helped in the termination of the abuse or the relationship was anger.

Theme 2: Intense Anger: When anger was discussed in the creation phase of abuse (phase I), it was in relation with the men 'showing' their anger with the intention of intimidating their partners. In this phase, however, anger is depicted as something that the women 'showed' with the intent to terminating the abuse or the relationship. When the women became angry enough about their predicament, they either tried to block, reframe, or exit the episode, or they attempted to exit the relationship. In this context, anger may be viewed as the women *rebelling* against the abuse. Kirkwood (1993), describes the aspect of anger this way:

> First, the expression of anger, whether in thought or action, significantly altered the power dynamics of the relationship. Anger was the expression of self and self-

84

worth...It was a statement that women felt they did not deserve abuse and would act to stop the abuse. Second, anger also signaled change to abusers, that the women did possess a powerful resource upon which they may draw to combat the control their partner exerted....The deep and real intensity of their hate and their determination to protect themselves was expressed in a way that could not be ignored by their abusers, and this affirmation contributed to women's sense of their own power (p. 84).

From the CMM perspective, unless the hierarchy of contexts has "self" in the dominating context, this show of rebellion is not likely. Therefore, early in the relationship, when women who had "self" in the dominating context perceived their new partner as saying or doing something inappropriate they were likely to rebel immediately and block the episode, or perhaps even exit the relationship. When women rebelled early on in the relationship, they blocked certain episodes that might have had undesirable outcomes. The following incident, shared by Marcos, describes an episode that was blocked, and set the stage for him to evaluate his new relationship with Carmen immediately. They were visiting his sister's home, and he was "just kidding around" with Carmen. She was walking ahead of him and playfully he kicked her in her bottoms. This exchange followed:

Carmen: Did you just kick me?
Marcos: Yes, I was coaxing you to move faster! (laughing).
Carmen: Don't you *ever* do that to me again – *ever*! If you *ever* do that to me again. I will most certainly leave you the same moment. Do you understand this clearly?
Marcos: Yes. I'm sorry, I was just kidding around.

This conversation describes where an episode was blocked – permanently from occurring. Marcos said that Carmen was so serious that this incident forced him to respect her, which was a big transformation from his previous relationship with Tania (discussed earlier). This depicts a woman whose dominant context was "self" over her

85

new "relationship," and consistent with this context, she drew the boundary lines and informed her partner decisively that his "playful" kicking would not be tolerated. For Marcos too. "self" was the usual dominating context, but in this episode his relationship with his new girl friend took precedence, and "to go on" in the conversation and in the relationship itself he "had" to agree to her terms.

However, when the relationship already had patterns and episodes with predictable undesirable outcomes, anger forced a re-arranging of the hierarchy of contexts such that "self" became the dominating context. When "self" became the dominating context, women either reframed the episode to produce a different outcome or exited the episodes, thus terminating the relationship. Kumari described what happened after her parents, who knew nothing of the abuse in her marriage, came from India when Jay called them soon after her attempted suicide.

> My parents again went and (tried to) put me back in the house (with Shakur). That was the time I rebelled back and I was so courageous. I think I thought, "I don't care about this God. God is not also helping. I see only Jay as God." I just decided. I told my parents, "Mummy. I really love him (Jay) a lot. I don't know whether he'll marry me or not. I don't even know. But, I love him so much. What I'll do now is I am going to live with him. Even if he doesn't like me, I'll just live with him as (my) protector until he gets married. I'll live with him and I'll go to school, but I want to get divorced. I don't want Shakur as a husband." My parents were shocked. This was a real shock. It took a week for my parents to talk and think about it.

Kumari followed this conversation with details of the abuse she had endured with Shakur, even in India. Her parents responded with much regret and remorse over her predicament. They then invited Jay to talk things over, and only then Jay revealed that he too loved Kumari very much and intended to marry her. Soon after, Kumari filed for divorce.

86

The conversation above is not one of fear, but of anger. When her parents attempted to "patch things up," Kumari rebelled. Although this reaction is very contrary to the "cultural narratives" that prohibit divorce, her desperate situation forced "self" in the dominating context that propelled her to rebel against her parents and her husband and to terminate the abusive relationship.

The above discussion depicts how intense fear and anger compels participants to reframe, block, or exit from episodes. The shift in contexts forced different outcomes from the "scripted" episodes. Although Judy remained in the relationship, the change in conversation patterns that were instigated by the reframing, would alter their relationship permanently. As was discussed earlier, this has to occur because of the reflexive quality that exists between conversations and relationships. Yvonne and Kumari "had to" terminate their relationships because reframing permanently changed their lives. As was discussed earlier, Yvonne was forced to reframe her context from culture to self when Elonte wanted her to abruptly stop nursing their son. She placed the needs of her baby beyond the dominating context, and had to leave the relationship to protect her son. Kumari, after surviving the suicide attempt, refused to return home with her husband. Jay called her parents in India to inform them of what had been happening and of the abuse itself. Fortunately for Kumari, Jay too had fallen in love with her and the two were married soon after the divorce was finalized. Marcos and Carmen had only a very brief relationship, perhaps because for both the "self" was the dominating context, and with the resources that Marcos brought to the relationship it was perhaps too much of an effort to go on in the relationship. Marcos complained that although Carmen tolerated his affairs

87

outside their relationship, when he finally asked her to marry him she refused, and

subsequently terminated the relationship. His first relationship with Tania lasted until

their son was born (obviously she did not abort), after which she terminated the

relationship.

Summary of findings

At the outset of this chapter my research question – How abuse was created,

sustained, and finally terminated in the relationship? – was answered by interviewing five

subjects – Judy, Yvonne, Kumari, Siva and Marcos and by interpreting what they said. In

the first phase, creating abuse in the relationship, two common themes were identified.

One, women placed other contexts such as "relationship" and / or "culture" over their

"self" in the hierarchy of contexts, and the first theme progressed to a second theme: the

co-construction of fearing their partners. In the second phase, the sustaining phase of

abuse in the relationship, three common themes were identified. (1) Co-construction of

confusion, (2) Minimizing of abuse, and (3) Hope of restoring their relationship. In the

final phase of terminating the abuse, the two common themes were (1) Intense fear, and

(2) Intense anger. When participants were intensely fearful, or angry, they were forced to

change the hierarchical contexts and either attempted to terminate the abuse, or the

relationship. They successfully blocked, reframed, or exited from episodes with

undesirable consequences.

The social constructionist perspective and CMM concepts provide unique insights

into the process of domestic violence. It describes how domestic violence is co-

constructed, sustained, and terminated in the speech acts that are enacted within the

context of an intimate relationship. This research demonstrates that abuse is initiated in the communication patterns of the couple, and not simply *caused* by the male-dominated culture. Culture and the family background of the actors do matter, but not as a linear causal force of abuse, but rather as resources that people bring into the relationship. To what extent those resources are expressed in practice, and are reflexively co-constructed by the couple, will determine whether abuse will emerge in their intimate relationship.

As this chapter described, the process of domestic violence is initiated very early in the relationship. The woman places the "relationship" as the dominant context, whereas the man has the "self" as the dominating context. As a consequence of their particular dominating contexts, when they enact speech acts together, the woman's "self" suffers erosion while the man's "self" gains further importance. Consequently, the woman is "forced" to oblige in certain situations at the expense of her well being to sustain the relationship. As was discussed in this chapter, in these episodes the woman gradually abdicates her power as an autonomous agent to the man's benefit. Every episode adds to the resources of the couple, and the couple, slowly but surely, co-constructs episodes that set a pattern where he becomes more powerful than she.

The progression from this stage happens when the couple enacts speech acts that allow the man to show his anger, thus evoking fear in the woman. Typically, in such episodes the previously established pattern is reinstated, fortified, and develops into aggression. Therefore, these episodes conclude with the man verbally calling the woman abusive names, or accusing her of something that she did or did not do. By now the relationship has evolved to where their speech acts almost "demand" her submission to

him. and she finds herself with no option except to concede to his demands. which further undermines her position in the relationship. From this point it is just a tiny step away from actual physical abuse, which happens within a few months. When the incident occurs. the woman typically feels that she "deserved" the treatment because the couple is still acting out of the context that "legitimizes" the abuse.

As the relationship continues, the woman's "self" is moved down further in her hierarchy of contexts. both by herself as well as by her partner. She is typically isolated from her family and friends at this stage and relies solely on her partner for affirmations of self and for her perceptions of reality. When her partner denies confirmation of her perceptions. she begins to doubt her very "sanity." and is forced to acknowledge her partner's reality at the expense of hers. Women are often in a state of confusion and shock because their partner either denies or minimizes the actual abuses that are consistently enacted. Since the actual abusive act is followed by the "honeymoon" period. she eagerly forgives her partner, and continues to hope that he will change and that the relationship will become "normal." Episodes that continue to minimize her "self." the denial of confirmation of her reality, the abusive act. and the ongoing hope of restoration sustains the vicious cycle of abuse in the relationship. Unless the hierarchical order of the contexts change for the woman, it is almost impossible to end the abuse. This change in contexts happens when the woman becomes intensely fearful, or intensely angry. When the hierarchy changes, the women block, reframe. or exit from undesired episodes.

Two of the three subjects who participated in this study ended the abuse by terminating the relationship with their partner. Another woman managed to reframe her context and is in the process of "recovering her self." which includes contradicting her partner, and not being intimidated into conceding to his demands at her expense. From the above discussion we can see that this is possible only when the woman's dominating context "relationship" ceases to occupy the highest position.

Chapter 4

Implications, Limitations, and Conclusion

In this chapter, I will discuss the theoretical, practical, and methodological implications of my research study. I will also discuss some of the limitations of this research and offer suggestions for future research.

Theoretical Implications

One of the woman participants in this study used this analogy to describe her state of fear in the relationship with her husband: "When an elephant is young, they train it with a chain and by the time he's old, they can just put a string around it and even though it's not big enough to hold it, the elephant is trained."

The specific context within which this is spoken is rich with details. It paints for us a picture that depicts the reality of living with domestic violence. Chen and Pearce (1995) assert that the goal for social constructionist research "is not a search for factual and theoretical information about an event but is a way of understanding or approaching practical wisdom of life's experiences..." (p.143). In this study, I have attempted to provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of men and women involved in domestic violence. Chen and Pearce (1995) propose several criteria for interpreting and evaluating case study research. In the following section I discuss those criteria that are relevant to this study.

Chen and Pearce (1995) assert that the intention of doing case studies is "not to predict and control but to enlighten and illuminate while acknowledging the complexity and contingency of communication" (p. 149). They also add that case studies "should be

judged on how probable and plausible the interpretations are within the context of inquiry" (p. 149). Domestic violence is a multifaceted, complex activity and this research study has attempted to shed light on this phenomenon from a social constructionist perspective. The meanings that I have offered for the lived experiences of the participants helps us to understand how abuse was created, sustained, and terminated in their relationships. Within this particular context of inquiry, which is to understand the *process* of abuse from a communication perspective, the interpretation given is plausible and probable. However, this interpretation may not be applicable for all the lived experiences of people enduring abuse, or if this phenomenon were viewed from a different context of inquiry. This aspect leads us to the last criterion for evaluating case studies.

The final criterion for evaluating case studies is the aspect of "open-endedness." Denzin (1989, quoted in Chen & Pearce, 1995, p. 150) claims that "all interpretations are unfinished, provisional and incomplete." Case studies must be "open" enough to invite other interpretations than the one offered by the researcher. The interpretation is never final, but an incomplete, ongoing process (p.150). Therefore, it is possible for another researcher to read the lived experiences of the participants in this study and come up with different phases and themes, and offer other interpretations. The major implication of the social constructionist research is that it is impossible to reduce data to confine to just one interpretation. There is no single, definitive conclusion. Virtually, every person who scrutinizes the results could potentially offer another interpretation. However, the major theoretical implication of this specific study is that it offers a rich description and an

interpretation of the *process* of domestic violence as it is created and maintained communicatively. For example, the concepts of CMM were successfully used to understand this process of abuse from its inception to its demise. So, while different interpretations of the process might be rendered, all interpretations based in the social constructionist perspective will approach domestic violence as a co-constructed communication activity. This is the major theoretical implication of this research.

The criteria offered by Chen and Pearce (1995) for "doing case studies" and for evaluating case studies have important implications for the research I conducted here. The mode of operation for conducting research in the social constructionist paradigm includes "depicting the richness and particularities of unique cases" (p. 142), which is what this study has strived to do. Specifically, each of the five relationships presented here is unique, and the interpretations of the participants' descriptions and portrayals of the "abuse story" afford us a unique glimpse into their lives as they interpret it. And, "case studies are *not intended* to be (although could be) used as a "sample" of something else; the end of our research is to treat any case study as *the* study in and of itself" (p. 141). This study may be used to understand the process of abuse in other relationships provided that participants have a similar hierarchical structure of contexts. If actors have other 'hierarchy of contexts,' then by applying the concepts of CMM, the researcher can map the 'layers' to understand their logical force that compels (or prohibits) the actors to respond in a certain way. In conclusion, I would venture to say that since people have different structures of 'hierarchy of contexts,' the generalizability of this study is

questionable although the emergent themes may be applied to understand the abuse process in most relationships.

The following section discusses several methodological implications of this research.

Methodological implications

In addition to the theoretical implications discussed in the previous section. this study has methodological implications for the understanding of domestic violence. Past research has provided a variety of methodological models appropriate to sociological and psychological perspectives of abuse. There are no models, however. that describes the emerging process of violence from a social constructionist perspective. The phenomenological research method was utilized to understand the lived experiences of people who live with abuse. This research involved three stages (Lanigan, 1988). First. in-depth interviews were conducted to collect descriptions of lived experiences. Second. data were transcribed and analyzed to draw some common themes. Third. the themes were interpreted utilizing CMM concepts.

Interviewing men and women who have been or who are in abusive relationships was appropriate to depict the social constructionist perspective of abuse. Interviews served as an ideal method to gather rich details that are crucial to describing the gradual emergence of abuse. Although I used some pre-established questions as guidelines, many of the questions emerged in my conversations with the participants during the interviews. This afforded an opportunity for the participants to expound on details and provide descriptions quite freely. I was also able to clarify and ask additional questions in several follow up interviews. Fortunately, all of the participants willingly offered to do this.

95

The major implication of the phenomenological methodology is that the participants are viewed as co-researchers. They are not simply participants, but are actively engaged in the research process in meaningful ways (Lanigan, 1988). The researcher merely guides the flow of the emerging conversation toward specific topics, to facilitate a discussion with the participants. This was ideally suited to gain data that are rich in detail and description - details that may have been lost in other methods of data collection. The following section discusses the practical implications of this study.

Practical Implications

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, abuse is processual and is co-created in the speech acts of the couple involved in an intimate relationship. Understanding this communication process from the social constructionist perspective is critical for three groups of people: (1) the couple, to end this vicious cycle, (2) the counselors who work with abusive couples, and (3) agencies who develop an intervention model. In the following sections I briefly discuss the first two categories, and offer a more thorough discussion of the last category. This is because understanding the co-construction of domestic violence from a social constructionist perspective has major implications in developing intervention models that focus on a co-constructed communication approach, and not on changing the man's behavior alone. Since almost all of the current intervention models strive to do this, I have discussed this aspect thoroughly.

I. Implications for the couple

Unless the participants understand how they co-construct the abuse in speech acts and in episodes that they enact together, it is impossible for them to break out of the cycle.

Previous studies (Walker. 1984; Hofeller, 1982) on domestic violence have all indicated that abusive patterns continue to escalate until the couple seek professional help, are forced to call authorities to interfere, or one of them is killed by the other. Therefore, it is extremely beneficial for the participants to understand their hierarchical contexts, which justify and give meaning to their speech acts and the episodes in which they participate. As was discussed earlier, understanding the reflexivity that exists between the speech acts and the relationship is crucial in this process as well, because speech acts and relationships continue to evolve and change each other in the emerging episodes. Without understanding the process of how they are both participating in the pattern to sustain the abuse, they cannot stop the pattern from recurring.

II. Implications for counselors

A "counselor" as defined for the purposes of this study, is that person who the abusive couple or either of the participants reaches out to for help. Therefore, this role can be assumed by pastors, priests, family, and close friends. Typically, professional marriage counselors who work with abusive couples utilize a psycho-educational model. This model primarily focuses on identifying and healing the "inner wounds" of the abusive man (or, rarely the woman). The assumption here is that the man is abusive because of the childhood traumas he endured and thus acts them out on his partner. So, the focus in counseling is to change his abusive behavior toward his partner. From this perspective the question still remains why she is the sole target of his abuse and why she is willing to endure his abuse. Counselors can benefit by understanding the process of how abuse is *co-constructed* by the participants and integrate this in their counseling.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Pearce (1994) suggests that to break a destructive pattern, a participant in this cycle must: (1) refuse to participate in an episode (2) block the episode from occurring, and / or (3) reframe the context. To accomplish any one of these is a deliberate choice, and a participant has to have an understanding of the process of co-construction to do so. It is very difficult for a participant immersed in the relationship to become cognizant of the embedded contexts and the subsequent process. Cronen, et al. (1985) conclude that relationships are embedded in contexts and therefore, a counselor would be in an excellent position to offer a description of the contexts and of the emerging process. A counselor, who is familiar with the three options suggested by Pearce, can help one or both of the participants to break out of the undesirable patterns. In what follows, I discuss a recent conversation I had with a friend that helped her reframe her context.

Claire is a 45-year-old woman, married for over 20 years, and has two teenage children. She has not been working outside the home, and earns a little by doing odd jobs from home. She wanted to speak to me because she felt depressed and "useless." She feels that her husband, who is emotionally abusive, would not understand her feelings, and that he might even take undue advantage of her depression. The following is an excerpt from our conversation:

> Claire: I'm so dumb! Look at my life it's such a mess.
> Nalla: Why do you feel you're dumb?
> Claire: Because, I can't do anything. I'm just dumb, and a lousy mom. And, my kids, they just don't respect me, or anything.
> Nalla: Claire, you're a very loving, caring person and you stayed home to be there for your kids. It's just that you haven't had an opportunity to prove to yourself how smart you really are. You didn't stay home because you're dumb, but because you chose to be a wonderful mom to them.

98

Claire: You really think so? You know. I was a straight A student in school.
Nalla: Of course. I'm not surprised at all. I bet you can do anything you want. and succeed in it.
Claire: I've always wanted to be a doctor. Do you think it's too late for me to think about that?
Nalla: No, not at all. Look at me. You're just a few years older than I am.
Claire: That's true. You know that would be such a positive role modeling for my kids. They would definitely see a stronger woman and all. So, how did you get started?

We continued to speak and make plans for her to get started towards a medical degree. Claire returned to school last spring, and is focused on transferring ultimately to Stanford.

For Claire, the dominating context is her relationship with her children. She has continued to stay in the marriage despite the abuse because she wants to provide a two-parent. Christian home for the children. When she called me that morning she was depressed because recently her children were speaking to her disrespectfully. and she felt that they were treating her contemptuously. This aspect was particularly painful for her because she had tried her best to protect her children from the negative consequences of growing up in a dysfunctional home, and felt that because of this she deserved to be appreciated and respected by them. Claire said that they were losing respect for her because of her passive attitude towards her abusive husband.

Within the dominating context of a "Christian mother," Claire had to stay in the abusive relationship as a sacrifice for her children, and felt that she deserved their respect for the sacrifice. As long as they treated her with respect, she felt good about herself. However, within this premise, when she did not get the respect, she was compelled to interpret their actions to mean that she was a "dumb," bad, mother. By reframing the

"dumb" to a "caring, loving" mother who had in the process of sacrificing for her children been denied the opportunity to prove her smartness. Claire was able to interpret the situation differently. By acknowledging that she was indeed a caring, loving mother who had not had a chance to prove herself, the dominating context becomes "self." Within this premise, Claire was anxious to prove to herself that she was not dumb, and realized that this would be a positive role modeling for her children as well. Operating with the "self" as the dominating context, she believes that she can "earn" the respect of her children, thus satisfying her needs to be acknowledged as a good mother.

As this example illustrates, reframing is a powerful tool that helps participants to step out of their set patterns, and interpret things differently. Claire truly believed that she was "dumb" and did not deserve the respect of her children. So, in our initial part of the conversation, she had to accept the premise that she was not dumb, but really a very caring, loving mother. After this step, she "had to agree" to prove to herself how smart she was, and was eager to earn the respect of her children, which to her is the strongest motive to make any changes. Reframing forced Claire to interpret her situation differently.

These same concepts can be applied in the mandatory counseling sessions that abusers must attend by court order. Currently, however, all the intervention models are primarily based on the Duluth model, which is predicated on feminist theory. One of the major implications of this study is to question the effectiveness of the current intervention model. The following section contrasts the social constructionist perspective with the Duluth model. The purpose is to not only understand the inherent differences, but also to

provide a skeletal guideline for an intervention model that would be based on CMM

concepts and principles.

III. Implications for agencies

Since domestic violence has been recognized as a crime against women, government

agencies have implemented mandatory counseling for abusive men. As was discussed

earlier, most of these counseling centers that are certified by the County, have a program

that is based on the Duluth model of intervention. This model is a combination of

feminist theory and cognitive-behavioral theories.

In 1980, when this model was developed, its primary purpose was to "hold offenders

accountable and place the onus of intervention on the community, not on the individual

woman being beaten" (Pence & Paymar, 1993, p. xiii). Almost all of the state standards

for batterer programs require "that batterers be held accountable for their abuse, that

rationalizations for abuse be exposed, that woman battering be identified as a means of

power and control..." (Gondolf, 1999, p. 58). Consequently, policies regarding the issue

of domestic violence were drastically changed to protect the women. These changes

increased the arrests and prosecution of abusive men. The Duluth model was developed

to rehabilitate these offenders.

The Duluth curriculum is based on the theory that "violence is used to control

people's behavior" and is designed to "diminish the power of batterers over their victims"

(Pence & Paymar, 1993, p.1). It states that men learn tactics of power and control in both

their families of origin and gain experience being immersed in a culture that teaches them

to dominate. "Most batterers are informed by cultural messages justifying dominance

and vigorously defend their beliefs as absolute truths....." (Pence & Paymar, 1993, p. 4). The model is also based on the premise that men occupy the top layer of a power hierarchy and women the bottom, which enables the men to objectify their partners and abuse them. Abuse and violence in the relationship is seen as being "part of a pattern of behaviors rather than isolated incidents of abuse or cyclical explosions of pent-up anger, frustration, or painful feelings" (Pence & Paymar, 1993, p.2). In essence, this model states that because the pattern of abuse is so ingrained in men's history and cultural experience, it becomes second nature to them. The Power and Control Wheel is utilized in class to teach the different control tactics used by the abuser (refer Appendix C). It is emphasized that the purpose of the Duluth curriculum is to explore with each abusive man the *intent* and *source* of his violence and the possibilities for change through seeking a different kind of relationship with women.

The following five questions guided the authors to develop this curriculum – Why is she (the intimate partner) the target of his violence? How does his violence impact the balance of power in their relationship? What did he think could change by hitting her? Why does he assume he is entitled to have power in the relationship? How does the community support his use of violence against her? The textbook is intended to help us understand "the complex nature of battering and of the man who batters – his thinking, the intent of his actions, and the impact of his violent behavior on the woman he batters, on his children and ultimately on himself" (Pence & Paymar, 1993, p.xiv). "At the core of the curriculum is the attempt to structure a process by which each man can examine his actions in light of his concept of himself as a man" (Pence & Paymar, 1993, p.15).

102

Cognitive-behavioral approaches are focused on "restructuring thought patterns.

including rationalization. minimization, justification. and on teaching self-talk and other

techniques to interrupt specific behaviors" (Gondolf, 1999. p. 44).

As the above discussion indicates, the Duluth model holds the culturally conditioned

batterer solely responsible for the violence in the relationship. Therefore. the entire focus

of the program is to change his abusive behavior and to de-socialize him.

The communication model: A communication model based on social

constructionism and CMM contrasts sharply with the Duluth model. The communication

perspective states that "communicative behavior is not just the mechanism through which

predetermined actions are exhibited. but that it is a 'formative process in its own right'

(Blumer. 1969:53: quoted in Millar & Rogers. 1976. p.89). The communication

perspective focuses on the relationship and on the interaction between the dyad rather

than on the individual. "Functionally. the communication process is largely a negotiation

process whereby persons reciprocally define their relationships and themselves" (Millar

& Rogers. 1976, p.88). A transactional perspective "tries to look directly at the

combinatorial rules characterizing the system's message-exchange process and not at the

individual characteristics brought to the situation by the individual participants" (Millar

& Rogers. 1976, p.90). This perspective emphasizes a "dynamic. emergent, holistic

approach" and requires researchers to look for multiple causes and multiplicative effects

for the social behavior of the participants. The implication in domestic violence is that

although culture socializes and influences our behavior patterns culture alone cannot be

the *cause* for the man's abusive behavior. Also, no single factor, or a single individual

can be responsible for the violence. Rather we have to look at the kind of interactions that the couple participates in that sanctions the abuse. Predicated on their hierarchical contexts (discussed in the Findings chapter), speech acts emerge that sometimes have undesirable consequences in creating and sustaining abuse.

One of the relational variables in the communication model is control, which is particularly significant in the area of power and dominance in an abusive relationship. "The control dimension is concerned with who has the right to direct, delimit, and define the actions of the interpersonal system in the presently experienced spatial-temporal situation" (Millar & Rogers, 1976, p.91). This implies that this dimension is limited to the *present* and to the *context*, and that the emerging pattern of control is continually negotiated by the interaction of the couple. How one responds to a message is unpredictable, for "people can choose and change, there is no certainty that desired behavior will, in fact, occur" (Millar & Rogers, 1976, p.92). Therefore, one person cannot "control" the entire outcome of a specific episode. As was discussed in the previous chapter, both the participants co-construct to "give" the right to one (the man) to "direct, delimit, and define the actions of the interpersonal system" (Millar & Rogers, 1976, p. 91).

Conversely, a social constructionist approach to communication focuses on the *how* and describes events occurring between people in "the process of interacting rather than reporting how events are perceived through a single person's understanding" (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995, p.6). The Duluth model focuses primarily on the aspect of *why* (cognitive question), and not on the aspect of *how* (interactional question) abuse happens. The

104

communication approach emphasizes the visible rather than the cognitive. The question *why* attempts to find causes, while the question *how* describes the process. When the focus is on causes, then the emphasis is on the remedy – a desired change in the final outcome (abusive behavior), which Duluth attempts to instill in abusers. But when the focus is on the *how*, which involves a process, the attempt is to understand the complexity of the issues involved in the relationship system.

In the social constructionist approach, communication is defined as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (Carey, 1975, p. 17, quoted in Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995, p. 7). Reality, including that of violence in the relationship, is therefore "produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" by communication (as was discussed). According to the Duluth model, the reality of abuse is inculcated by the dominant culture that teaches men to control women. The Duluth textbook states that "Most batterers are informed by cultural messages justifying dominance and vigorously defend their beliefs as absolute truths..." (Pence & Paymar, 1993, p. 4). Clearly, communication within the relationship is less significant, with the primary reality being the socialized, controlling, abusive behavior of the batterer.

Therefore, the prescribed solution states "If the nature of the relationship is to change, the system and the beliefs that support it must change" (Pence & Paymar, 1993, p.43). The solution here exclusively focuses on the aspect of acculturation, and the aspect of how the process becomes a reality within the specific relationship is ignored. Domestic violence is clearly a process, and the findings of this research demonstrate how participants enact speech acts that gradually initiate and sustain abuse in their

105

relationship. What the participants bring into the relationship. the values gathered from the culture and families. increases the propensity for abuse to emerge. but it does not *cause* the abuse. As discussed. the values become part of their resources, and what part if any is expressed as practices is controlled by both of the participants in the communication process in which the couple is engaged.

Social approaches "view people as active rather than passive agents" (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995, p. 8). From the social constructionist perspective. power is socially constructed by the actors in the relationship (Pearce, 1994). "The "reality" of power is not these external trappings of inequitable access to cultural resources (Pearce, 1994, p.145). Since power is defined as the ability "to perform certain speech acts...it is clear that none of us have absolute power" (Pearce, 1994, p. 149). This implies that both the participants have to coordinate their speech acts in order to "make" one powerful and the other powerless. Both are active agents, actively engaged in creating and recreating power. This process was discussed in detail in the Findings chapter.

However, the Duluth model is predicated on the assumption that men are the only active agents and women are passive recipients of their power and control tactics. "Why is she the target of his violence?" is one of the five main questions that directed the authors of the curriculum. A target implies a "sitting duck" with no power to make decisions or changes. A director of a facility here in San Jose was quite upset with me for asking her opinion on how men became so powerful in intimate relationships that involved abuse. She declared "Men do not *become* powerful, they are powerful. Women do not give away their power, they are powerless."

106

The solution proposed by the Duluth model, as well as by proponents of this model, state that to end the violence the man has to first examine his use of violence and make "a commitment to give up the power he holds over her" (Pence & Paymar, 1993, p. 83). Historically, it would be almost impossible to find precedence to support this statement – no group that was powerful made a "commitment to give up the power." This proposed suggestion also begs the question "Why should he?" The only answer is perhaps because he is forced to by the legal system, which would imply that this is not a solution, but rather a punishment – a consequence for his abusive behavior. This "solution" also means that women will never have power in personal relationships unless the system forces him to give up his power. Ironically, it is implications such as these that "make" women powerless, for if a woman believes this to be true, when she enters a relationship she has no resources to inform her that she has the power even to terminate the undesirable relationship.

The social constructionist model indicates that speech acts and relationships share a reflexive quality with each other. As was discussed, the speech acts that the couple is engaged in will influence the relationship, which in turn will affect and influence the kind of speech acts in which they are engaged. Speech acts, in turn, are influenced by the hierarchical contexts and by the resources that the participants bring into the relationship. When both participate as autonomous agents, the man and the woman have power over the outcome of the episodes. It is imperative that they are both aware of this power, so that one is not automatically labeled as "powerful" and the other as "powerless." The implication here is significant, and an intervention model based on these concepts will be

more effective in bringing about an equitable relationship rather than "punishing" one and "rescuing" the other.

As a final note, Gondolf (1999) evaluated the long-term effectiveness of the four leading existing batterer intervention programs and found the following: The re-assault rate (within 15 months of completion) for the participants were between 32% to 39%. Women (victim partners) reported that 70% of the men continued to be verbally abusive, and nearly 45% of the men used controlling behaviors, and physically threatened their partners. Studies have also shown that in relationships where the physical abuse seized, other forms of abuse escalated. A study that examined the behavior of men through a five-year period following the 52-week counseling, found that 40-70% were again cited or arrested for domestic violence (Shepard, 1992). Obviously there is a need for a better intervention model, and since this study has shown that abuse is co-constructed in the speech acts of the couple, a model that integrates CMM concepts may prove to be more successful than the one that is currently used.

An intervention model that is CMM based would include raising the awareness of the participants' contexts and would offer an understanding of the *process* in which they are both taking part and enacting into because of their hierarchical contexts. This would involve an understanding of their "logical force" and the nature of "reflexivity" of the emerging episodes with their relationship. Having given that understanding, this model would stress that (1) participants refuse to re-enact in episodes with predictable, undesirable consequences (2) block such episodes and (3) reframe their contexts to interpret the situation differently.

108

The first two aspects, non participation and blocking, are most effective in the initial stages of the relationship when the boundaries for what is acceptable and what is not, are set in place. For this purpose, young men and women should be taught perhaps at Junior High school age level how their resources will be expressed in their practices, and raise their awareness to their stable hierarchical contexts. This would equip them to avoid undesirable episodes, or to block such episodes immediately, as Carmen did with Marcos when he kicked her and she reacted strongly against the kicking. It is imperative that teenagers learn these aspects as they begin to experiment with romantic relationships. Young people must also become aware of how power is negotiated in the speech acts in which they participate. This knowledge is empowering because they realize that not one person is responsible for what happens in the emerging relationship. Both the actors in an intimate relationship are autonomous agents who, being aware of their contexts, can decide to an extent how the patterns are going to emerge in their relationship together. This autonomy would also "permit" them to either continue in the relationship, or terminate it.

The final aspect of reframing is useful when abusive patterns are already set in place, and the participants feel "unable" to break out of the vicious cycle of events (as was the case with Yvonne, Judy, and Kumari). More often than not, either impossible circumstances "forced" the actors to reframe, or an outside "counselor" helped them to reframe a context. As was discussed earlier, reframing is an important tool to help participants break out of strange loops that keep them "imprisoned," for years at times.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is in the small number of participants who shared their stories of domestic violence. Even from the proposed six participants, one declined to share his story. With a greater number of participants, common themes may have been easier to establish between the different case studies. Although generalizability is not the primary intention of this study (discussed in the theoretical implication), coherence among the different stories may have been enhanced with a larger number of participants.

The second limitation is the aspect of deciding on the particular themes in the different phases of abuse. Although the first theme, other contexts over "self" for the women, is an obvious one, the other themes were not so obvious. For instance, whether or not "fear" definitively emerges before "confusion" cannot be answered with certainty. One of the reasons is that frequently participants frequently talked about episodes that had taken place years before, and they themselves were not sure at times the order of these episodes.

The third limitation is the inherent interpretive aspect of this research. I am actively interpreting this data, and affecting the very "emergence" of the related episodes. For instance, the participants deliberately "chose" to relate to me certain episodes in their lives, and not others. In long, intimate relationships several incidents may have happened that could potentially describe a certain aspect of abuse and affection. It is, of course, impossible to recall or relate all the incidents, and how participants chose the ones they shared with me, is anyone's speculation. Likewise, I as a researcher, am not entirely objective either. I asked the participants certain questions, in a certain way that will

evoke certain kinds of answers and not others. Here too, the possibilities are virtually endless. Therefore, as this discussion depicts, both the participants and I are affecting what is described, how it is described, and consequently, the results of the study itself.

Finally, CMM is focused primarily on the embedded contexts within which participants enact speech acts and episodes. This is certainly an important aspect, but not an exclusive way to understand the complexities involved in domestic violence. For instance, some men may be prone to abuse simply because they perceived no negative consequences for their actions. Giving them severe consequences, such as time in jail, may immediately alter their behavior, irrelevant of higher level contexts. Also, alcohol and drug abuse has been cited as important aspects in abuse. Studies (Leonard, 1999; Dutton, 1995; Walker, 1984) have shown that majority of the men are intoxicated at the time of abuse. Although this is not the cause, CMM does not account for such nuances either, which leads me to the future direction for this research.

A comprehensive study that includes different variables including that of contexts, the role of substance abuse, and the factors that increase the propensity to abuse can offer a wider and deeper perspective on domestic violence. This phenomenon has so many dimensions and has no easy or quick solutions to "fix the problem." Consequently, a single intervention model may not be able to address all the issues involved. A better solution would be to educate young people and raise their awareness so that before abuse emerges in the relationship, they are able to terminate or block it permanently. Towards this end, a comprehensive workshop could be utilized to educate teenagers to raise their awareness of how communication *forms* their relationship, and how communication

111

defines the power they possess in the relationship. This aspect is particularly important for young women who must learn how *not* to abdicate their power to their partner when they become involved in a relationship.

Conclusion

A home is supposed to be the safest haven for its dwellers, but instead it becomes the most dangerous place for some women and their children. Domestic violence is a horrible crime because acts of cruelty and senselessness are more bearable from a stranger than from the person one loves and promises to love for the rest of one's life. Why domestic violence emerges in some relationships and not in others is important to understand in order to find a way either to prevent it from occurring, or to immediately stop it from becoming a pattern. The understanding of this complex phenomenon from the social constructionist perspective offers an explanation of *how* abuse emerges and is sustained in the interaction of the intimate couple.

Resources that participants possess, such as their memories, stories, and experiences, are expressed as practices, which in turn become part of the resources again. Couples enact speech acts that propagate this reflexive relationship between resources and practices. Speech acts are unpredictable because neither one of the participants has sole control over their outcome. Speech acts are enacted in episodes, which are interpreted from "layers of context" that the participant brings into the situation. These layers include "self," "relationship," "culture," "episodes," "life-scripts," "family myths," and numerous others through which every speech act is interpreted. So the emergent meaning of the speech act depends on the context within which it is interpreted, and how it

connects to the higher level contexts that are held by the participant. According to this study, abuse emerges when women place "relationship" over "self," while men have "self" over "relationship."

Both the participants "go on" in conversations consistent to their higher level context, and gradually this results in the man becoming more and more powerful in the relationship at the expense of the woman. This progresses to men "showing their tempers" which intimidates the women and makes them fearful of their partners. This progresses to women questioning their perception of reality, for typically they are isolated and completely depend on the man to confirm their "self" and their reality. When this is denied, the women are confused and question their very sanity. Yet the relationship is sustained by constant hope that they could be a normal family again. The abuse is terminated only when the higher level contexts change, and / or the participant is forced to reframe the context.

The social constructionist perspective that this research is based on describes the process, and also offers a solution out of the vicious cycle of abuse. All of the participants in this study shared their stories in the hope that understanding the process of abuse might help them personally, or help someone else caught-up in the vicious cycle to break free. The first step to breaking free is in the understanding of how abuse is co-constructed together by both of the participants in their conversations. This understanding can then empower participants to change their speech acts such that the speech acts do not conclude in undesirable outcomes.

This study illustrates in the examples offered in the lives of some participants that there really is hope – to either stop the abuse or to altogether terminate the relationship. Women who are abused do not have to be bound, for unlike the elephant that cannot realize or intelligently process the changes enough to break free, a woman can, but only after she *knows* for a fact that the "bindings" are only strings and not chains. Only then can she break free!

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118

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121

Appendix A

Questions to intimate partners

Ethnographic interviews would be utilized to gain insight into the background of the actors of domestic violence, which would help us understand what 'resources' they bring into the relationship. Specific questions will be asked about the couple's interaction during courtship that would have created and defined their 'roles' in the relationship – "controller" or "victim" or "partners". Questions will be asked to elucidate what interaction preceded and succeeded some of the violent acts – a description of the communication pattern that is at the heart of this research. The interview questions are not limited to the following list but would definitely be part of the interview:

(1) Describe the relationship between your parents.

(2) Describe your relationship with your family.

(3) Describe a typical conversation around your dinner table.

(4) Describe your best date with your partner.

(5) How did the very first conflict in your relationship come about?

(6) What is your earliest experience with violence?

(7) Why were you attracted to your partner?

(8) Describe the first fight that you had.

(9) How was the issue resolved or not resolved?

(10) What are the issues that most often ended in arguments?

(11) How did one of you win/lose the argument?

(12) Describe the first time the argument ended in a physically violent act.

(13) What made you stay in the relationship? (Victim specific).

(14) How did this incident change (if any) your relationship?

(15) Describe how issues were left after this incident.

(16) How did your feelings of fear of being hit (after this incident) change the way you argued over issues? (Victim specific).

(17) Why did/didn't you speak about this incident to your best friend/family/pastor?

(18) Describe the second incidence of violence.

(19) Why did/didn't you believe this would be an ongoing pattern in your relationship?

(20) Why were you willing to continue in this relationship?

Appendix B

The following two letters were signed by every participant before the interview.

I have been asked to participate in a research study investigating domestic violence among intimate couples. The purpose of this research is to understand how domestic violence is created, and becomes part of the relationship through the interaction of the couple. To this end, I will be asked detailed questions about the relationship, and particularly about the emotional and physical abuse that I experience (cause), or have experienced (caused) in the relationship. I am aware that to recall such memories may cause me some emotional discomfort or distress. I am willing to participate in this study because this research may help me or other couples identify and break the established patterns and create a relationship that is violence free. I am aware that my interview will be audio taped. I am assured of the following to participate in this research:

a) My identity and any other personal information that could be linked to me will be altered sufficiently to protect my family and me in the event that this study is published.

b) I am aware that I am free to withdraw from this study any time that I wish to without any undesirable consequences to me, or my family.

c) I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

d) The investigator, Nalla Sundarajan, (408) 945-9442, will answer any questions that I may have about the research. Dr. Jaehne (Dept. Chair) will answer any complaints about the research at (408) 924-5360. Dr. Ibrahim (Associate VP for Graduate Studies & Research) will address any questions about my rights, or research-related injury at (408) 924-2480.

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Participant's signature   Date

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Investigator's signature   Date

124

Dear Participant,

Since you have decided to share with me some very painful and unpleasant memories from your past (or present), you may experience a period of reflecting on these past incidences well beyond the study. This is to inform you that what you will be experiencing is quite normal. You don't have to be concerned or anxious that these reflections will lead you into any past undesirable patterns of behavior that you have chosen to abandon.

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me.

Yours truly,

Nalla Sundarajan.

VIOLENCE — PHYSICAL — SEXUAL

USING COERCION AND THREATS
Making and or carrying out threats to do something to hurt her • threatening to leave her to commit suicide. to report her to welfare • making her drop charges • making her do illegal things

USING INTIMIDATION
Making her afraid by using looks. actions. gestures • smashing things • destroying her property • abusing pets • displaying weapons

USING EMOTIONAL ABUSE
Putting her down • making her feel bad about herself • calling her names • making her think she's crazy • playing mind games • humiliating her • making her feel guilty

USING ECONOMIC ABUSE
Preventing her from getting or keeping a job • making her ask for money • giving her an allowance • taking her money • not letting her know about or have access to family income

POWER AND CONTROL

USING ISOLATION
Controlling what she does. who she sees and talks to. what she reads. where she goes • limiting her outside involvement • using jealousy to justify actions.

USING MALE PRIVILEGE
Treating her like a servant • making all the big decisions • acting like the "master of the castle" • being the one to define men s and women s roles

USING CHILDREN
Making her feel guilty about the children • using the children to relay messages • using visitation to harass her • threatening to take the children away

MINIMIZING, DENYING AND BLAMING
Making light of the abuse and not taking her concerns about it seriously • saying the abuse didn't happen • shifting responsibility for abusive behavior • saying she caused it.

VIOLENCE — PHYSICAL — SEXUAL