MULTIPLE CONTEXTS OF VIOLENCE IN THE LIVES OF ADOLESCENT FEMALES WHO HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the multiple contexts of violence in the lives of female adolescents exposed to domestic violence. The research was guided by ecological, critical and postmodern feminist perspectives. Ecological theory embeds individual and familial experiences within the broader social and historical contexts. Critical theory questions often held assumptions and issues of power. Postmodern feminism extended this theoretical lens into a socio-political context that used gender, race, class, and marginalization as central lenses. This perspective emphasized the importance of context, processes, and the subjective experiences of girls.

Qualitative methods and a constructivist epistemology were used to understand the experiences of six female adolescents, between 14 and 19 whose mothers had experienced domestic violence. I explored how participants reflected on and made sense of their exposure to violence in their families, the multiple contexts of violence to which they were exposed, and the protective factors they had or employed. Four interviews were conducted with each participant, totaling 24 interviews. Poetry was used to gain trust and begin the process of sharing intrapersonal feelings, to externalize thoughts and expressions, and share lived experiences. Two mothers completed lengthy questionnaires. Participants were recruited through an insider’s knowledge of multiple agencies, and using snowballing. No participants ever resided in a domestic violence shelter.

This study contributed to our understanding of the lives of adolescent females exposed to domestic violence by elucidating the complexity of the experiences of participants and their families. It reminded us of the contextual importance of describing violence and the ever-
changing experience of children exposed to domestic violence. Children learned to cope in multiple ways, but felt alone and powerless. Systems developed to assist youth and families were unable to intervene in a meaningful way, thus extending the feelings of abandonment and powerlessness. Children learned to hide from their feelings and put on a mask to the world. This mask hid the child safely beneath, and ultimately served to distance her from the realities in her midst. But, at what expense? I discuss findings in terms of current resilience theory and provide suggestions for future research and intervention based on these findings.
To all the children who live in pain and fear...

Raised outside the projects  
on the south side of town  
daily life of violence  
not a chance–left to drown

We were the children thrown away  
no one seemed to care  
the cops would never come to us  
so few would even dare

At nine I was a victim  
of sex, my neighbor’s lust  
At ten I watched my brother  
beaten down into the dust

And then there was eleven  
in the schoolyard where we played  
my sister violently raped  
would we always be afraid?

And then I turned twelve  
beaten and abused  
broken back and nearly dying  
god, I felt so used

My family moved away  
in a ploy to save our lives  
for in the ghetto world  
so few of us survive...

...And somehow here I am  
Ph.D. nearly in hand  
But never will I forget  
This place where I began

–Journal, February 6, 2003
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a child, I did not expect to live to adulthood. The violence my family and I experienced was pervasive and seemingly never-ending. Yet, I did survive and have even learned to thrive. This journey was not one of isolation however. There were many mentors, friends, and teachers, each with a lesson to be shared and a new tool with which I could learn to become the person I have and will become. I thank them all. I thank my parents, especially my mother who told me nearly everyday of my childhood that “you are going to college.” I thank my sisters, Jeannie, Donna, Cindy, Marie, Kristi and my brothers, Kevin, Mike and Tim. We survived. I thank Sister Marilyn, my third grade teacher, who taught me to arm-wrestle, Judy Newman, my childhood baseball coach, and Barbara Beadle, my high school basketball coach. Without these women, I am sure that I would never have learned that girls, women could be strong.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

*I had known children who had been overcome by their fears and anxieties, striking out in self-defense against a world that for many reasons was unbearable to them. (Axline, 1964, p. 21)*

The world in which we live is a world filled with violence. Millions of children are abused every year and varying statistics reveal that as many as one in three girls and one in six boys are sexually abused prior to the age of 18 (Bass & Davis, 1988). Media exposure to violence only perpetuates the problem. Children view nearly 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence by the time they reach 18 (American Psychiatric Association, 1998). Community violence is pervasive in urban areas, with urban schools indicating that it is highly unlikely not to have children who are exposed to chronic community violence, including the use of knives, guns, severe beatings, and other weapons (Osofsky, 1999). While research is somewhat limited, millions of children are exposed to violence between their parents or adult care takers, with multiple negative effects on children’s emotional, psychological, physical and social development (Carter, Weithorn, & Behrman, 1999; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Holden, Geffner, & Jouriles, 1998; Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990; Osofsky, 1999). Carlson (1984) estimates that 3.3 million children are exposed to domestic violence, while Straus (1992) estimates as high as 10 million children exposed every year.

Exposure is many things to many people. Children may see their father or another male care taker threaten to hit or assault their mother. They may not see the events surrounding domestic violence, but may hear the behaviors from somewhere else in or outside the house. Children may also be exposed by seeing the bruises or emotional scars left by the abuse or by being directly involved by calling the police (Holden, Geffner, & Jouriles, 1998; Jaffe, Wolfe, &
Wilson, 1990). Children may also be directly involved by being perceived by the victim or perpetrator as a catalyst to the violence or becoming victims of abuse themselves (Fantuzzo, Boruch et al., 1997).

Exposure to violence can have deleterious effects for children. Family violence literature indicates impairments in children’s physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. These include a) externalizing behaviors such as aggression ranging from temper tantrums to fights and conduct problems; b) internalizing behaviors which include elevated depression, suicidal ideations, anxiety, fear, phobias, bed-wetting, and low self-esteem; c) intellectual and academic functioning, which include an inability to concentrate, difficulty with school work, and lower scores on testing measures for verbal, motor and cognitive skills; d) social development, such as peer and adult relationships and competencies such as problem-solving skills; and e) physical health and development (Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989; Kolbo, Blakely & Engleman, 1996).

Yet, not all children exposed to violence are negatively affected, as reflected by quantitative measures such as the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) or in self reports by parents (Davis & Carlson, 1987; Rosenbaum & O’Leary, 1981). Protective factors, whether they be individual characteristics or environmental conditions, assist youth in counteracting the various risks that they experience (Rutter, 1987) and offer important information for designing and implementing more effective prevention and intervention programs (Richman & Fraser, 2001). Understanding the personal experiences of children exposed to domestic violence is imperative. By understanding from the children’s own perceptions, the impacts of the exposure, we can better understand in what ways children and adolescents are affected and what protective resources they are able to access and use.

Protective factors may lead to more effective coping mechanisms, which is a primary asset in developing resilience in children. Resilience, the ability to succeed despite adversity (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990), is a child who is able to use available resources despite the many disadvantages, risk factors and threats in their lives (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999). Yet, resilience remains a somewhat elusive concept. In order to fully understand resilience and to develop practical prevention and intervention practices, researchers must identify the risk and protective factors that children exposed to domestic violence experience. In order to better
understand the impacts of exposure to domestic violence, we must understand the context of meaning and the ways in which young women process their experiences (Rutter, 2001).

Context is very important, and not only for understanding the protective mechanisms used. It is also vital to understand the multiple contexts of exposure to violence and how that exposure impacts youth. For example, when evaluating the prevalence of domestic violence, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979; Straus & Gelles, 1986) used in many research studies and in particular in The National Family Violence Survey (NFVS) decontextualizes domestic violence and wife abuse by collapsing various categories and failing to collect any information about the severity of injuries or defensive violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1988; Yllo, 1988). They state that “women are about as violent within the family as men. This highly controversial finding from the 1975 study is confirmed by the 1985 study” (Straus & Gelles, 1986). Yet, the scale does not evaluate exposure, nor the contexts with which violence occurs.

A powerful example, where context is vitally important, is the defensive nature that women commit violence, and in particular, murder their spouses. Women generally murder only after prolonged histories of abuse, fear for their lives, and a belief that all other alternatives have been exhausted (Dobash, Dobash, & Daly, 1992). Men, on the other hand, develop patterns that may include stalking, murder-suicides, family massacres, and a heated response to an infidelity (Dobash, Dobash, & Daly, 1992). Using decontextualized measures does not offer an understanding of the circumstances surrounding the use of violence, obscures the very findings of the research and most importantly to this study, does not even explore the effects of exposure on children who remain its silent and invisible victims.

Feminists and other researchers (e.g., Bograd, 1988; Dobash & Dobash, 1988; Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Ferraro, 2001; Yllo, 1988) refute the decontextualized work conducted by Straus and colleagues (Straus, 1979; Straus & Gelles, 1986). Straus and his colleagues have also spent many years attempting to explain that they did not consider context when defining violence; that much of women’s violence was in all likelihood defensive in nature, and that they did not measure the consequences of the violence experienced and expressed by partners (Yllo, 1988). Yet, the damage had already been done. The powerful impact on policymakers and the public’s view of domestic had been dramatically altered (Yllo, 1988). The idea of the “battered husband syndrome” (Steinmetz, 1978) could never be dispelled.
It was only in the mid 1990s that Johnson (1995) emphasized the need for developing categories of domestic violence, and it is during this same time that researchers began to conduct more research on the impact of the children who are the “unintended victims,” the invisible victims (Holden, Geffner, & Jouriles, 1998; Osofsky, 1995) of this violence. It is my purpose to make the invisible victims of domestic violence, visible.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the multiple contexts of violence in the lives of adolescent females who have been exposed to domestic violence, and specifically women who are abused by their partners. Noting the absence of qualitative research that draws on the contextual elements of exposure to wife abuse (Yllo, 1988), it is imperative to understand not only the prevalence of domestic violence and exposure to wife abuse as indicated in many quantitative studies, but the direct impact of violence on its unintended victims, the children who are exposed to the violence.

This study will also explore how these young women reflect on and make sense of their exposure to violence. This process will bring young females who have been exposed to wife abuse into the discourse, into the construction of meaning in their lives, and onto the research agenda. Through a feminist lens, the marginalized voices of young women can be heard and pondered (Fine, 1992). While studying and understanding different experiences, yet common experiences, and including these voices within the research agenda, an opportunity is given to more fully understand the multiple contexts of violence in the lives of female adolescents who have been exposed to domestic violence. As researchers and practitioners develop more insight into the metamorphosis of violence in these young women’s lives, we are better able to address their needs through the development of prevention and intervention programs.

Definition of Terms

There are many ways of defining domestic violence. As previously indicated, this has been and continues to be a problem in understanding the prevalence of domestic violence, and specific to this project, exposure to domestic violence. In order to develop clarity, I would like to offer working definitions of terms. For intersubjective terms, I will rely on the participants in my research to better define the ways in which they view these terms and how they would more clearly describe their experiences.
1. Violence—“rough or harmful action or treatment” (Barnhart, 1962, p. 859).
2. Domestic Violence—violence between two adult partners (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999).
3. Wife Abuse—use of physical force by a man against his female, cohabiting partner (Bograd, 1988).
4. Relational Violence—violence between two partners involved in an intimate relationship.
5. Risk Factors—“presence of one or more factors or influences that increase the probability of a negative outcome for children or youth” (Richman & Fraser, 2001, p. 2).
6. Protective Factors—individual and environmental influences that help children and youth resist or overcome risk factors to which they are exposed. Protective factors limit or counteract negative outcomes (Rutter, 1987).
7. Resilience—effective coping and adaptation in response to adversity (Richman & Fraser, 2001).
8. Exposure to Domestic Violence—any occurrence of seeing, hearing the violence, being directly involved in the abuse or experiencing the aftermath of domestic violence (Jaffé, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990).

Research Questions
1. What are the multiple contexts of violence in the lives of female adolescents who have been exposed to domestic violence?
2. In what ways do these young women perceive, interpret, understand, and communicate the circumstances surrounding their mother's experience of violence?
3. What protective factors and resources do these young women employ?

Theoretical Frameworks
My fundamental goal is to better understand the lives of young women whose mothers have experienced domestic violence. Using theoretical lenses of contextualized, ecological, critical and postmodern feminist frameworks, I hope to more fully apprehend the impacts of exposure to domestic violence on female adolescents. Ecological theory is able to incorporate critical and feminist ideas of enlightenment and emancipation to transform social structures that are oppressive in nature (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993), while developing a greater depth of
understanding the interdependence of multiple systems in developing oppressive realities. I hope
to better comprehend the protective factors and strengths available to these young women. It is
through understanding the interrelatedness of varying systems, such as families where social
development takes place, and where violence can be experienced or witnessed very early in life,
that we can understand how this violence impacts the growth and development of individuals
and families. Researchers can more fully understand the complexities involved in domestic
violence and these developmental issues as we better understand the settings exterior to the
family that ultimately impact the growth and development of family members, and in subtle
ways may support the use of violence. Researchers must analyze the social and cultural supports
for the use of violence, transitional events in the lives of individuals and families, and
cumulative effects over the life course that can impact the growth and development of families,
and the individuals that live in those families. The existence of supportive links between these
systems increases the likelihood of positive family development (McAdoo, 1993).

Ecological theory seeks to better understand the “influence of external environments on
the functioning of families as contexts of human development” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 723).
Through this framework, the focus is on humans as biological organisms and social beings that
interact with the environment to which they are exposed. People are interdependent and interact
with their natural/physical/ biological environment, human built environments, and
social/cultural milieus (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). Bronfenbrenner (1977; 1986) emphasizes a
contextualized understanding in ecological research that explores not only familial and socially-
oriented processes and contexts, but also incorporates historical contexts and life course
transitions. In essence, ecological theory embeds individual and familial experiences within the
broader social and historical contexts. For instance, given that the family is a “historically
situated social institution” (Bograd, 1988, p. 13), the very social institutions that support
marriage and family, through various processes, may cultivate, condone and support the use of
physical violence against women (Bograd, 1988). This is critical in understanding the
circumstances surrounding female adolescents whose mothers have directly experienced
domestic violence.

Feminism extends this theoretical lens into a socio-political context that uses gender,
race, class stratification and marginalization as central lenses. This perspective emphasizes not
only the importance of context and processes but of the subjective experiences of girls, women and other marginalized people. Postmodern feminists believe that only through the prism of difference can these intersections be evaluated. The experiences of girls are socially different from those of their male counterparts.

Postmodern feminism questions many tenets of the “truths” that are professed by feminist perspectives rooted in the modernist, enlightenment assumptions of one all inclusive truth (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Although feminist theories such as socialist feminism, liberalism and grand theories such as social exchange have diverse backgrounds and make very different assumptions, each are rooted in the Enlightenment tenet that all “truths” can be discovered through various reasoning mechanisms. I question these positivist beliefs that indicate one truth, a truth that can be explicicated, through the use of reason, that is separate from the body or contexts of time or history (Cheal, 1991; Osmond & Thorne, 1993). For instance, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979) or some adaptation thereof, has frequently been used to develop a composite picture of violence in relationships. The CTS measures the frequency of abuse by adding up individual incidents of violence by husbands and wives, but does not take into account the severity of violence, whether the violence was defensive in nature (Yllo, 1988), or patterns of control such as outlined by Johnson (1995). Critics of the CTS imply that “it ignores gendered power imbalances that exist within the marriage and society and excludes crucial details about motives, intentions, and consequences” (Johnson, 1996, p. 57). For instance, many studies have not found gender differences in the rates of physical assaults (e.g., Straus, 1990). By decontextualizing research using this scale, it becomes sufficiently simplistic to make assumptions regarding findings. Hamby and Sugarman (1999) and Johnson and Ferraro (2001) concur, arguing that women’s aggression could be a reactive or defensive strategy, and that researchers must develop clear distinctions or contexts of relational violence.

From a critical standpoint, deconstruction becomes a way to understand truths in a given place and time, yet always remaining cognizant of the historical contexts in which these truths are developed. As a way of remembering these varying contexts, and explaining the importance of androcentric power structures, the predominant view for most individuals is filtered through the privileged, male lens. Other personal realities are discounted or suppressed by this dominant paradigm, marginalizing those with less power (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Issues that have for
centuries been prevalent among feminist theorists, such as power, intersect with the critical theorists, rooted in Marxist ideological views of a classist society, are tremendously enhanced by the postmodern intersections of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ageism, and how these issues are inextricably interrelated. I use each of these issues to understand multiple personal truths, truths that are only evident in that specific place and time. These multiple truths reflect the varied lives of all women, girls, boys, and men, such that there is no universal truth.

The feminist constructionist view of the social construction of gender is paramount in understanding how individuals choose to interact with others and express themselves (Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1995). This postmodern feminist view borrows from other tenets of feminism. Feminists espouse the importance of gender, the intersections of marginalized groups, and that these gendered meanings involve issues of power and inequality (Peterson, Bodman, Bush, & Madden-Derdich, 2000; Fox & Murry, 2000; Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Gender stratification is a social process that is ongoing and enculturated by not only social forces, but by individuals who are acting out their own understandings of what it means to be “doing gender” (Bohan, 1993; Ferree, 1991; Fox & Murry, 2000; Thompson & Walker, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, gender becomes centrally connected to the distribution of privilege, power and resources (Fox & Murry, 2000).

Children are born every day and begin a socialization process that is fraught with “engendered” meanings and understandings (Bem, 1993). This is an ongoing process that permeates all facets of a child’s existence, and it is clear that children learn through everyday experiences as well as in a wide variety of settings. These settings include the child’s household, day care centers, schools, the neighborhoods in which they live, playgrounds, peer groups and varying affiliations such as youth and religious organizations (Peterson et al., 2000; Pollack, 1998). One of the primary settings in which children learn to value gendered realities is the family, which is a powerful force in the development and socialization of children (Ferree, 1991; Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1995).

Feminist theorists request that we step back and reevaluate issues such as gender, power, equality, and oppression (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Feminists further espouse a desire to end varying forms of subordination that are enhanced as a result of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and the multitude of other marginalized groups. Feminist scholarship embraces
gender as a unifying theme in the construction of two interrelated concepts: a) the social construction of gender and the emphasis on differences between men and women, and b) the differentiation of these gender differences to legitimize and perpetuate power dynamics and the oppression of marginalized individuals and groups (Osmond & Thorne, 1993).

Given that the socialization of gender is of paramount importance to feminist theory and that these socialized gender differences are then used to perpetuate oppressive relationships and power dynamics that legitimize the value of men over women, and adults over children, it should not be surprising that the social construction of gender is so pervasive. In 1978, Nancy Chodorow was one of many who explored this socialization process. She explained that children develop an initially strong attachment to their primary caregiver, generally the mother. As the child is developing a unique sense of self, he/she begins to differentiate gender and other familial values through this lens. The girl is able to identify with the mother, whereas the boy separates himself as something other than his mother, thus suppressing his attachment. Masculinity then becomes a process of devaluing things that are female. Thus, it is not surprising that as men and boys objectify women, girls, and others, while simultaneously devaluing them, that they would commit more acts of violence against women (Bograd, 1988).

It is not only parents who actively participate in the gender socialization of children. Martin (1998) used ethnographic work in a preschool setting to show the differential treatment of boys and girls by their teachers. Boys were allowed more freedom of movement and physical expression as well as the ability to use louder voices. Martin found that these children internalized these messages and provided a gendered perspective in subsequent interactions. Feminists would agree with this analysis, offering that children and adolescents become active participants in their own socialization process (Mead, 1934). Bem (1993) expounded on this by finding that by the ages of two to three, children develop “gender schemas” and understand the underlying implications of these dynamics.

Other researchers have found similar gendered identification in children. By the age of two, toddlers have specific gendered toy preferences; by the age of three, they are able to verbalize appropriately gendered careers; between the ages of four and six, children develop same-sex play groups with very distinctive play patterns that are based upon their gendered perceptions (Weinraub & Brown, 1983). This gendered segregation then serves to reinforce
gender stereotyping. Boys’ physical activities emphasize rough and tumble play and reward dominance, competitiveness and aggression. Girls’ play tends to revolve around domestic services, as modeled by their mothers and quickly become more cognizant of their physical appearance (Maccoby, 1990). Feminists observe how these childhood gendered activities socialize and reinforce what is expected from girls and boys. It is through this active process of socialization that the dynamics of domination and subordination come to characterize gender differences (Bohan, 1993) and how perpetuation of violence is reinforced in boys.

Gender is only one element of varying contextual processes. Power and the processes that support and sustain the legitimization of power have been an important point of study for critical feminists (Fox & Murry, 2000). Feminists have begun to develop intricate distinctions between the feelings of power and powerlessness (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Kimmel (2000), after studying men’s reactions to feelings of powerlessness found that, “most men, it seems, do not feel powerful” (p. 93). It seems this feeling of powerlessness becomes a focal point for men’s beliefs that they have become the victim of an oppressive system, the victims of reverse discrimination and affirmative action. Warner, Wellman, and Weitzman (1973) have studied the internalization process of victimology. They refer to this as the Sambo theory of oppression. The victims accept the oppressive system’s paradigm of values. Do feelings of helplessness and powerlessness become feelings of oppression, and thus become a focal point for developing dominant and power based relationships, and more importantly, committing violent acts against female partners? The ideological foundation of dominance metamorphoses into a need to be dominant which can result in physical coercion and violence (Kimmel, 2000; Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Kimmel (2000) states, “rapists see their actions in terms that express power differentials between women and men” a tenet that Brownmiller (1975) would certainly agree with. These men speak “not from a feeling of power, but from a feeling of powerlessness” (Kimmel, 2000, p. 257). Does this powerlessness metamorphose into violence?

Feminism challenges how the voices of the oppressed, powerless, and marginalized are interpreted (hooks, 1984). Carol Gilligan’s (1982) classic work, In a Different Voice, uses this as a dialogue to better understand marginalized voices, and specifically the voices of girls and women. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, and Tarule (1986) expound on this by expressing women’s voices being silenced, nor listened to, and the feeling of power in being listened to and
heard. Other researchers have further explored this issue by focusing on the issue of being silenced in a patriarchal society and how giving voice becomes a source of empowerment (Davis, 1994; Fine, 1992). It is through this lens that I acknowledge my own privilege. Yet, it is through this privilege, a known privilege with great sources of power, that I choose to begin exploring the marginalized voices of girls and young women whose mothers have experienced domestic violence. Not in the hopes of gaining more power and prestige for myself, but to eclipse the status quo and to begin hearing the reverberation of the echoes of voices who have yet to be heard.

Reflexive Personal Narrative

As I think about my life and who I have become, I realize I am an amalgam of many experiences. I have come to know and understand that who I am directly impacts how I see the world and how I interpret the world. My way of being in the world (ontology), the ways in which I choose to examine and explore the world (methodology) and how I know what I know (epistemology) (Allen, 2001) are all interrelated with who I am and who I claim to be.

My Cloak

I was born of "the other"
not one of the same
a child of the ghetto
a child with no name

the invisible youngster
who yearned for so much more
was told she was different
nothing more than a whore

banished to the outskirts
often filled with rage
hatred poured within her soul
trapped within a cage

the child, a survivor
but tainted none the same
fingers curled in fists of rage
who is there to blame
and then there was a friendship
the seed became a bloom
years of perseverance
protection from the doom

a seed was firmly planted
and then began to grow
altered desperations
yet altered all I know

A tree now tall and sturdy
seasons change, and thoughts provoke
but all I knew as a child
worn daily as my cloak
–Karen S. Joest, 2001

There are many personal experiences that have guided and affected my life course and obviously continue to affect my interpretations of what exists. My familial experiences, childhood economic deprivation, the rampant sexism, abuse, violence, and my own socialization process, as well as learning to become a survivor in the midst of despair are all cloaks that are worn daily. Yet, it is through the understanding of the cloak that has shrouded my life, that I have been able to illuminate and enlighten my understanding of the experiences of others. It is through understanding and experiencing the intersections of sexism, heterosexism, and classism that I have come to understand their impact in the lives of others. I have become a survivor and it is within this essence that all other experiences are affirmed.

I grew up one of nine children in the projects of Evansville, Indiana. My family wasn’t always poor, so poor that we could only exist in a violent microcosm known as the ghetto. A place where the saying was, “a rape a day keeps the cops away,” and one of my first school encounters was watching another student stabbed. I was in kindergarten. These images have become internalized expressions of the violence that not only did I experience, but later expressed through my own fits of rage. But, we were not always poor.

My parents lost the family farm prior to my birth. I was the echo of doom, which later metamorphosed into rebellion. My parents lost their farm and all of their meager belongings when their dairy barn and surrounding buildings were enveloped in flames. They could not afford insurance and could not rebuild, and the loss catapulted an already economically deprived family into a struggle for existence.
My father, functionally illiterate, found financial salvation in a janitor’s job during the day and in the evenings cleaned restaurant floors. On the weekends, to my delight, my dad, two brothers and I piled into his old, wheel shaft truck with rusted side panels and exhaust fumes and went to mow yards for elderly women. I can vividly remember one elderly woman who would steal me away from the work and show me a world filled with books. She never failed to send me home with an old, musty prized possession that I would guard and cherish with all my existence. Even today the smell lingers in my mind.

My mother waited tables, while my brothers and sisters collected aluminum cans on the roadsides and sometimes stole bottles off the back of porches. We had to eat. My mother became a creative chef when the food supply dwindled. My favorite meal was “poor man’s gravy,” a mixture of old bacon grease, flour and peas from the backyard atop stale bread bought off the penny shelf, toasted and crumbled into pieces. There was a resilience in my mother, a spark that could not be extinguished. I never knew of her fears that tomorrow we would not eat. Our house was old and rickety, but it was home. Although we had indoor plumbing, we didn’t have a toilet for years. It broke and could not be replaced, thus we would defecate in the hole that was left in its absence. We took group showers in the basement and for years I was afraid I would drown in the sump pump, which was openly exposed and large enough for a child to fall through.

Though our home was insulated, it could not insulate us from the violence within our family and in our neighborhood. Though I cannot recall my father ever assaulting my mother, he was quick to relinquish his anger onto our fragile, young bodies. I can vividly recall being beaten by him so badly that there was blood pouring from my face as I ran away to my best friend’s house. As I slowly climbed the steps to her house, I passed out in the doorway. These fits of rage at the hands of my father were not common occurrences, but they evoked a myriad of feelings and fears inside of me.

It was not only through my father that my family experienced violence, however. Prior to the age of 12, one sister and one brother were violently beaten by other youth in the neighborhood. My other sister was raped in the school yard, while my younger sister and I were forced to bear witness. The seconds, minutes passed, days seemed to pass. The sounds, the sounds of Cindy, crying, trying to hold it in. I could not move. The sounds of his threats and
taunts that if she didn’t stop he would kill us all. The sound of her underwear being ripped from her body. His pants and grunts. I could hear her suffering, suffering in silence...and I could do nothing. I could not move. I barely breathed. I felt suffocated in the death filled dirt. And then he was calling to me, hands on my legs. I was frozen, breathing in the dirt. Do Not Move. And then there were screams. They were not my screams. Cindy was screaming, “NO, NO, NO” she yelled loudly, “don’t touch her.” I could hear him pull out his knife slicing it through the air, threats, warnings, taunts. And yet, she screamed, “No, don’t touch her” her words were no longer intelligible, just screams, shrill and piercing, never-ending–life saving, my life. Yet, she did not save herself.

At the age of 12, my own violence, like the steam from a boiling pot, began to escape. I had already broken a boy’s nose at school and culminated this violence when beating a neighborhood boy so badly that he lay unconscious as my two brothers pulled me off of him. Violence begets violence, and might does not make right. Several days later the boy’s brother and four of his friends beat me and left me for dead. Neighbors watched as I fought them off until I could physically fight no more. I was lucky to escape with only a broken back. The echoes of my mother’s screams as she ran to me, semi-conscious, tubes hanging from my body as I was whisked away in an ambulance are forever seared into my mind.

There were many other forms of violence, many different contexts. Despite those experiences, I wanted so much more. My mother, always a source of strength and courage, frustrated by life’s circumstances, was emphatic that we, I, would go to college. It was, from her perspective, the only way to escape the poverty and violence that had followed our family for many years. She was to become the ultimate role model by returning to earn a college education at the age of 42. Her oldest child, my sister, was in college and my youngest brother was but two years old. When she applied to college the registrar told her she could not do it; it had been too many years. My mother told me that grandma used to say, “if they say I can’t do it, I’ll do it just to prove them wrong.” Two years later my mother graduated with an associates degree in nursing. From my perspective, there was never a question of would I go to college, but where and what would I study. Of the nine children in my family, eight have graduated from college, three have master’s degrees and I am now completing my Ph.D.
Thus, I forged a path that included an education. I would not be functionally illiterate like my father. I would go away to college, though I was discouraged by my high school counselor to even attend college. She stated that I should never go to college; I just wasn’t the type. She never offered an alternative plan. I rebelled. The influence of my mother’s demands were too strong. As I began to study, I found a sense of belonging in the Department of Criminology. I guess there was one too many “Cagney and Lacey” episodes twirling around in my consciousness. I was going to save the world!! I would move to the ghettos of New York and save young children from themselves. I was naive. Instead, I became a Law Enforcement officer for the United States Air Force. I didn’t save children; I was lucky to save myself.

I felt plagued and uncomfortable with the power over others that I held while a police officer. I watched as others used their power to harm. I guarded my friend, my colleague, one avowed to protect and serve, after he was arrested for having sex with a one year old child. I hated myself for holding a gun to a man’s head because he MAY have been a terrorist. Terrorists don’t urinate in their pants when they’re afraid. I could not reconcile my behavior as I watched a man hanging precariously between life and death, never aiding him in his pain, because we were at war, and I could not leave my post.

This was but one level of power, the power over another’s living or dying, that I could not reconcile. As my discomfort and questions about that power over others became more self-evident, I began to explore another world, a world where I could help others to help themselves. And so, I became a counselor. I worked with child molesters and rapists, thinking I could save many, if only I could save one...then knowing I was fighting the enemy within myself. I began working with youth in gangs, kids on drugs, families living in despair, the “at-risk”. I volunteered at women’s shelters, where women would come to put emotional salve upon their gaping wounds. I was home...for awhile. Since those beginnings, I’ve continued to work with youth and families, those on the fringes of our parallel existence, pained by the violence often begotten at the hands of those who avidly exclaimed their love. After 10 years of clinical work, I learned about youth, who, like me, had witnessed and experienced violence. I began to understand how they resolved the internalized reflections of violence in their lives, how they would often “strike out in self-defense against a world that for many reasons was unbearable....” to them (Axline, 1964, p. 21).

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Yet, I have often been astounded by the courage these young people exuded. Though many of them had helplessly watched their fathers, mother’s boyfriends, and male partners batter their mothers, and often tasted the violence themselves, they had, in some small way, kept a flame burning inside. No matter how destroyed their lives and bodies had become, they became survivors in often subtle ways. Though many others saw them as troubled, emotionally immature, or referred to them as acting out, they held a resilience that could not be extinguished. It was in re-defining their strengths that they were able to kindle a flicker of hope, a desire for a world that would not judge them for who they had become or the path they had been compelled to take.

There were many others, though, who could not hold a flame inside. I remembered my own sense of sadness, futility and despair when I began to believe I could no longer make a difference in the lives of my clients. The end of my own career as a counselor came as the hopelessness flushed over me and I questioned my ability to help....

The smell of alcohol, a slight negligee
she stumbled from the bedroom-the middle of the day
‘I can’t really talk now, I just need to sleep’
she turned her back and walked away-the secret she would keep
I saw no pills or opened caps-I scanned the surface well
yet night would fall, the phone would ring-into a private hell!
I stood beside her bedside, face as though she told
the secrets of a life long gone-devoid of love and hope
Her skin was pale and lifeless-machine would now give way.
Her tortured soul would not live, to hurt another day
I stood by her grave side. Could I ever be the same?
What did I miss that fateful day-and who else is to blame?

–Field Notes, November 5, 2001

After the suicide of “L” I could only question my ability to continue working with clients. Though many clients maintained a flame inside that would continue to burn and guide them, many others simply could not heal from the childhood scars that remained.

Just as the young clients that I have spent so many years attempting to understand, I too am at a new crossroad, moving from counselor and therapist to one of researcher. There is new jargon, new inequities of power, new ways in which to reconstruct a dismal existence not of one’s own making. And I too, while researching could become a part of their existence and oppression, for I am a member of the system that works so fervently to maintain the status quo
(Hill-Collins, 1990). Yet, I will hopefully take a snapshot of their lives and hold it out for the world to see, to learn from. But mostly, I hope that, through the intersections of our lives, a seed will have been planted, a bloom will start to grow, and in the years to come I may pass by this way again, only to find a tree, tall and sturdy in a forest vast with trees.

I have come to know and understand that who I am directly impacts how I see the world and how I interpret the world. It is with this understanding that I realize my biases. It is with this realization that I share my lack of objectivity and embrace my experiences, not as unrevealed explorations of self, but as a way of knowing and understanding human experience. It is within this realm that I am able to consciously reflect on how my own life history has and will guide this study and extends the traditional bounds of empirical inquiry (Allen, 2000). It is often through shared experiences that we are able to connect and intuitively understand another’s story, while still understanding that our stories are not one in the same. Yet, I will become a mechanism, a tool for exploration, to begin to understand the multiple contexts of violence in the lives of these young women. Their story is not my story, yet we will share a story, one that will have only just begun as we move apart. My hope is that a seed may have been planted, the seed may choose to bloom, and through years of perseverance, may that seed be protect us from the doom.

Summary of Chapter One

Throughout this section, I have purposefully sought to provide background information regarding this study, the purpose of the study and research questions that will guide the study. Just as importantly, I have offered a glimpse of my own understanding of how theoretical perspectives and personal experiences are interdependent as I seek to better understand the lives of these young women. I impart this information so that others can understand that it is through the lens of my own subjective experiences, the theoretical frameworks from which I can more deeply explore, and the research questions themselves that shall guide me throughout this research process.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Overview

Today, domestic violence is seen as a serious social problem in the United States (Carter, Weithorn, & Behrman, 1999). Yet, this is really only a recent phenomenon. Historically, violence between intimate partners has been depicted repeatedly in religious and historical texts dating back to the Roman Empire (Davidson, 1978; Dobash & Dobash, 1979), yet has not been seen as a societal problem that was in need of some resolution. The issue of domestic violence was only brought to the forefront of public awareness through the women’s movement of the 1970s and 1980s (Carter, Weithorn, & Behrman, 1999; Yllo, 1988). In the ensuing three decades violence against women at the hands of their male partners has become a less hidden phenomenon (Bograd, 1988), and a growing field of research has focused on better understanding the complex issues involved in domestic violence (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). Yet, children in families in which domestic violence occurs have frequently remained invisible (Holden, Geffner & Jouriles, 1998; Osofsky, 1995). These children have been referred to as the “silent”, “forgotten” and “unintended” victims of domestic violence (Elbow, 1982; Rosenbaum & O’Leary, 1981). Studies from archived social service reports and governmental agencies provide a plethora of evidence informing us that violence has been occurring at levels similar to current statistics for a very long time, and that children have frequently been present during these incidents of familial violence (Edelson, 1991; Pleck, 1987). Domestic violence seriously threatens the physical health and emotional well-being of children and adolescents exposed to domestic violence (Chalk & King, 1998). Researchers have begun to focus more extensively on the effects of domestic violence on children (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). The conceivable harm to these children necessitate action (Carter, Weithorn, & Behrman, 1999).

Defining Domestic Violence

The term “domestic violence” usually refers to violence between intimate adult partners (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). Wife abuse is defined by Bograd (1988) “as the use of physical force by a man against his intimate cohabiting partner” (p. 12). I would extend this to say female intimate cohabiting partner, so as not to exclude gay intimate violence. Feminists, myself included, espouse that the social institutions of marriage and family are contexts that may
support and reinforce violence against women (Bograd, 1988). Though there are multiple feminist views regarding violence against women, a consensus exists that sexism in our culture and within our families is intricately intertwined with the violence perpetrated against women (Yllo, 1988). Thus, I agree with Bograd (1988) that when referring to wife abuse as “domestic violence”, “family violence” or “spouse abuse” and collapsing these variables confound such issues as child abuse, intrafamilial sexual victimization and elder abuse. Generic terms tend to ignore the contextualized elements of violence against women, its consequences and the roles that family members play in maintaining violence against wives (Bograd, 1988). Feminists argue that such generic terms conceal the very real gender and power issues that are critical to understanding wife abuse (Breines & Gordon, 1983). Unfortunately, most mainstream researchers are not writing from within a feminist framework and more often than not, use domestic violence as a generic term for domestic violence and wife abuse. Since I cannot be clear about the meaning of authors when referring to “domestic violence”, I will continue to use the mainstream author’s language, and will hopefully not reinforce the very sociological phenomenon in which I am hoping to further explore.

The range of behaviors included under the rubric of domestic violence varies within the context with which it is used (Crowell & Burgess, 1996). Definitions used within a clinical setting are much broader than those used within the legal system (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). For example, one clinical study defines domestic violence as “a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion, that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners” (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999, p. 22). Legal definitions or codes may include only acts of physical harm, including involuntary sexual acts or threats of physical harm (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1994). Johnson’s (1995; Johnson & Ferraro, 2001) seminal work on domestic violence, suggests the centrality of distinguishing between the types and contexts of relational violence. He implies that these distinctions are central to a theoretical and practical understanding of partner violence. He also suggests that issues of control (not always including physical violence), a tenet of feminist theorizing around partner violence and wife abuse, can be seen in other relational contexts, “calling for more general analyses of the interplay of violence, power, and control in relationships.” (Johnson & Ferraro, 2001, p. 167)
Although the field is still in the early stages of formulating common definitions of domestic violence, and many studies do not give a specific definition of domestic violence (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999), in general, domestic violence refers to men beating women (Johnson & Ferraro, 2001). Spousal abuse is typically perpetrated by men, with women accounting for approximately 95% of all reported spousal violence victims (Tilden & Shepher, 1987). Women who are physically abused often suffer physically and psychologically and may require medical assistance or hospitalization (Rosenbaum & O’Leary, 1981). Yet, it is the “silent”, “forgotten”, and “unintended victims” of domestic violence, those that have frequently remained invisible (Osofsky, 1995), the children and adolescents, grown up before their time, that we must more clearly understand, with the goal of making visible those from whom we have yet to hear.

Prevalence of Exposure to Domestic Violence

Only in the last decade have researchers and theorists studied the impacts on the indirect victims of domestic violence, the children who actually witness or are exposed to their mothers being physically abused by an intimate partner (Fantuzzo, Boruch, Beriama, Atkins & Marcus, 1997). A credible body of research regarding the prevalence and effects of exposure to domestic violence is necessary to promote the development of effective intervention and prevention programs and to facilitate policy implementation and funding source promotion (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). Shelter programs and similar services emerged from the battered women’s movement and continue to support children exposed to domestic violence despite funding difficulties (Carter, Weithorn, & Behrman, 1999). These programs offer a wide array of services to these children and adolescents. Despite the vast array of services offered through shelter programs, most youth exposed to domestic violence do not have access to these services (Carter, Weithorn, & Behrman, 1999). Other available resources, such as court services, health care, child welfare and mental health, reach only a small percentage of the children impacted by domestic violence (Peled, 1996).

One reason for the limited availability and access to services is the absence of accurate and reliable information regarding the prevalence and nature of children’s exposure to domestic violence (Carter, Weithorn, & Behrman, 1999; Fantuzzo, et al., 1997; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). Initial research conducted was based upon primarily indirect, unscientific speculation. Critical public policy documents such as the yearbook of the Children’s Defense Fund, the National...
Crime Victimization Survey conducted by the National Institute of Justice and the U.S. Attorney General’s Task Force on Domestic Violence do not even address the impacts of domestic violence on children (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999).

There are many gaps and deficiencies in studying the prevalence of exposure to domestic violence (Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989). There are no specific definitions, no systematic ways of substantiating accounts of witnessing and no scientifically credible national prevalence studies (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Geffner, Rosenbaum & Hughes, 1988; Peled, 1993). Researchers agree that there are millions of children exposed to domestic violence every year. According to Carter, Weithorn and Behrman (1999) there really are no credible national statistics. However, depending upon the definitions used and the samples studied, estimates range from 3.3 million (Carlson, 1984) to 10 million (Straus, 1992) children exposed annually to women battering.

Despite this need for necessary research, it is woefully inadequate. Research exploring the impacts of childhood exposure to domestic violence is limited by a number of methodological issues (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Yllo, 1988). National data sources such as Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and large population surveys are limited in a number of ways. First, crime reports are subject to local interpretations of reporting procedures, definitions of domestic violence, and training of individual police officers within varying districts. They do not contextualize information or provide necessary demographics; they merely count numbers of 911 calls that could possibly involve a domestic dispute. More importantly, they do not provide any information about the exposure of children to domestic violence (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999).

Second, large population surveys such as The National Family Violence Survey (NFVS) and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) use telephone surveys to conduct nationally representative studies on violence between intimate partners. By using telephones, they are already decreasing the likelihood of reaching many possible victims of domestic violence. Further, many large national surveys, and in particular the NFVS, conducted in 1979 and 1987, use the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus & Gelles, 1979), an 18-item questionnaire that asks respondents to indicate the number of times a specific behavior or action has occurred in the previous year. The CTS measures physical and verbal violence, but does not measure psychological and sexual violence, which have been found to be important components
of domestic violence (Fantuzzo & Mohr), particularly intimate terrorism as depicted by Johnson (1995; Johnson & Ferraro, 2001).

Critics of the CTS imply that “it ignores gendered power imbalances that exist within the marriage and society and excludes crucial details about motives, intentions, and consequences” (Johnson, 1996, p. 57). For instance, many studies have not found gender differences in the rates of physical assaults (Straus, 1990). By decontextualizing research using this scale, it becomes sufficiently simplistic to make assumptions regarding findings. Hamby and Sugarman (1999) concur, suggesting that women’s aggression could be a reactive or defensive strategy. In using the Conflict Tactics Scale, without some form of adaptation to address power imbalances and how we view violence in heterosexual relationships, there is an even deeper lack of contextualization and understanding of how those imbalances of power contribute to how we conceptualize relational violence.

For instance, Hamby and Sugarman (1999) explore the association between psychological and physical aggression. This work builds on Johnson’s (1995) work depicting two forms of relational violence by illustrating how psychological aggression is used as a means of gaining control through patriarchal victimization of female partners. Using an adaptation of the CTS (Straus, 1979), the authors found that undergraduate men are more likely to use multiple forms of aggression, which can further lead to developing a syndrome of battering as defined by Walker (1984) and further delineated by Johnson. Yet, as previously stated, the use of the CTS does not incorporate many issues of gendered power and decontextualizes experiences. The very use of language in the instrument can determine how respondents score an item. For example, I am curious to know if men would refer to themselves as “sulking.” They may be disengaging or ignoring, which may both be distancing behaviors that may actually indicate less severe forms of psychological aggression. Yet, in a woman, this tactic could be seen as a form of psychological aggression. I do not believe that we can disconnect these things from the social, political and historical contexts within which they are imbedded. Finally, and most important to this study, most national surveys and in particular those that use the CTS, do not inquire directly about children’s exposure to violence (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999).
Exposure to Violence

There are a number of different labels and definitions used by researchers when referring to children living in families where they are exposed to domestic violence. Early researchers referred to these youth as “witnesses” or “observers” of the violence. More recently researchers are referring to “exposure” to domestic violence, which is much more inclusive and does not allude to the specifics of children’s exposure (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999).

The phenomenon of children witnessing violence against their mothers, or being exposed to domestic violence or wife abuse consists of a wide range of experiences (Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, 1990):

Children may observe this violence directly by seeing their father (or another intimate partner of their mother) threaten or hit their mother. They may overhear this behavior from another part of the residence, such as their own bedroom. Children may be exposed to the results of this violence without hearing or seeing the commission of any aggressive act. For example, children may see the bruises or other injuries clearly visible on their mother or the emotional consequences of fear, hurt, and intimidation that may be very apparent to them. (p. 16)

The phenomenon of children witnessing wife abuse covers a wide range of behaviors, from hearing the violence occurring to being forced to watch the violence as a lesson in fear and control (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, 1990). It can also include direct involvement, such as calling the police, or more indirect means such as experiencing the aftermath as described above or living with a mother who suffers from depression (Holden, Geffner & Jouriles, 1998).

Fantuzzo et al., (1997) state that direct involvement can include more than just calling 911 for assistance, which occurs in approximately 10% of police calls for domestic violence. There are other ways that children can be directly involved in the violence. For example, when interviewing adult victims of domestic violence, 20% of the respondents indicated that a child was somehow involved in the escalation of events that led to a physical assault. Second, in two cities that logged child physical abuse during a domestic violence assault, 6% of the cases involved an incidence of child abuse. Children in homes where domestic violence occurs are not
merely witnessing violence, they are frequently a part of, or at least perceived by the adults involved, to be a part of the violence (Fantuzzo, et al, 1997).

Domestic violence does not occur in a vacuum. There are a plethora of messages in our society that encourage and reinforce violence, validating the occurrence of domestic violence and violence against women. Many children, especially those living in low-income housing, or pockets of poverty, may be exposed to chronic community violence, that is, “frequent and continual use of guns, knives, drugs and random violence in their neighborhoods” (Osofsky, 1999, p. 34). Some of the most formative events in my own life included witnessing a stabbing my first day of kindergarten. The violence did not end there. It continued, chronically, until my family decided to move after my sister was raped in our schoolyard, and I was beaten so severely that my back was broken. I was only 12. In my world, as in many other children’s lives, the violence that is witnessed in our neighborhoods is so pervasive that in urban areas it is highly unlikely to find children not exposed to such violence. Children interviewed in studies all across the country describe violence such as beatings and shootings as regular, ordinary events (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Osofsky, 1999). Violence is rampant on many of the streets of this country (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992).

Children living in more affluent neighborhoods are less likely to witness such violence, but they are certainly not free from the many other forms of violence that surround them. Children in today’s society are inundated daily with media, internet and video game violence. The American Psychiatric Association (1998) reports that the average American child views 28 hours of television per week, and by the age of 18 will have witnessed 16,000 simulated homicides, and 200,000 acts of violence. It is not only prime time television that exposes children to such violence. Commercial television for children is 50 to 60 times more violent than adult programming, and cartoons expose children to approximately 80 acts of violence every hour (Osofsky, 1999). Violence is a major focus of television shows, theatre movies, news, music, sports and children’s toys (Miedzian, 1991). With the evolution of various technologies and accessability to theatre movies, videocassettes, DVD’s, pay per view television, cable tv, music, video games, and interactive online games more and more children and adolescents are being exposed to multiple forms of violence every day. Exposure to violence can have
significant impacts on children and their development, especially as they begin formative intimate relationships of their own (Osofsky, 1999).

Effects of Exposure to Violence

Exposure to violence can have many negative effects on children. As indicated in chapter one, family violence literature suggest that children’s physical, cognitive, emotional and social development can be impaired through the exposure to domestic violence (Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989; Kolbo, Blakely & Engleman, 1996).

Anecdotal reports offer the most revealing and vivid effects of exposure to violence for children:

Children are the most pathetic victims of conjugal crime because their childhood conditioning will color their entire lives. All other input will be processed through the mire of the first marriage they ever saw and their earliest role models of husband and wife, father and mother. Daddy is cruel to mommy, who can’t do anything to change it. No one seems to care, neither in the house nor out in society. The nightmare apparently is to be regarded as natural - or nonexistent- since it is neither acknowledged nor alleviated. To the child growing up in this environment, it seems as if all power is on the side of the wrongdoer. Nice people finish last. Perhaps wrong is right, after all. (Davidson, 1978, p. 117)

Exposure to media violence produces primarily increased levels of negative behaviors (Paik & Comstock, 1994). Even when violence is fictionalized, it is often depicted as dramatic and glorified. When this occurs, the propensity for increased levels of violence is enhanced (Osofsky, 1999). According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (1995) depictions of violence, when sensationalized, can lead children to feelings of being overwhelmed and a numbing of the senses.

Like media violence, the effects of exposure to community violence can be deleterious. Feelings of depression, anxiety and aggressive behaviors are indicated when children are exposed to chronic levels of community violence (Gormon-Smith & Tolan, 1998). School-aged children have increased levels of sleep disturbances and are less trusting of their environment and have less motivation to master their environment. In extreme cases, children develop symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (Osofsky, 1995).
Exposure to violence produces varying developmental difficulties in child functioning based upon their own developmental milestones. Thus, children are impacted differently at different ages, and accumulated risk factors impair children in developmentally different ways (Carlson, 1984; Osofsky, 1999). Carlson further noted that children at various stages of development understand and cope with their experiences of being exposed to family violence as a function of their cognitive abilities and ability to tap into available resources. Coping and tapping into resources is imperative to the livelihood of all children when exposed to violence, particularly family violence.

Coping with Exposure to Violence

Not all children who are exposed to violence suffer profound harmful effects. Protective factors, whether they be individual characteristics or environmental conditions, assist youth in counteracting the various risks that they experience (Rutter, 1987) and offer important information for designing and implementing more effective prevention and intervention programs (Richman & Fraser, 2001). Protective factors can help children and adolescents develop vital coping mechanisms when they have been exposed to violence. Protective factors may also assist in the development of resilience in children. The resilient child is one who is able to access and use resources that are available, despite risk factors present in the child’s life (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

Osofsky (1999) indicates that the most crucial element for children who suffer from chronic community violence and war is a positive relationship with a competent and caring adult. Children must be able to discuss their experiences in an open and supportive environment. Most children rely on their parents to be a nurturer, and provide a supportive environment in which to grow. Unfortunately, when children are exposed to ongoing violence, parents’ ability to meet these needs become somewhat hampered. Parents who live with chronic violence may become emotionally numb, depressed, irritable and less communicative, thus being less responsive to their children’s needs (Osofsky & Fenichel, 1994).

When one parent is the victim of violence at the hands of another parent or care giver, children may be even less able to turn to one or the other of their parents (Carter, Weithorn & Behrman, 1999). Holden, Geffner, and Jouriles (1998) indicate that maternal functioning is key to children’s ability to cope when a father figure perpetrates violence against the mother.
However, mothers who are victims of domestic violence may be less responsive to their children’s needs since they could become preoccupied with the violence and remaining safe or are experiencing depression (Hilton, 1992). Fathers who batter may also be less emotionally available to their children, less likely to discuss issues and less affectionate. Parenting practices may also be compromised as well (Holden & Ritchie, 1992).

Yet, when parents are not able to be emotionally or physically available as a result of domestic violence, there may be the possibility of developing a positive and supportive relationship with another caring adult (Carter, Weithorn & Behrman, 1999). Community safe havens can also shield children from the effects of violence. Protected areas for children include schools, community centers, and churches (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992).

Individual characteristics of children may also play an important role in using positive coping skills to deal with exposure to violence, and in particular domestic violence. Internal resources increase the likelihood not only of being able to cope, but also reaching out to others for support (Carter, Weithorn & Behrman, 1999). According to Marans and Cohen (1993), average or above-average intellectual development, good attention and interpersonal skills are the most significant personal qualities a child has in coping with violence. Other important protective factors include self-efficacy and self-esteem, personal and social attractiveness, personal talents, some form of religious affiliation, socioeconomic advantage, positive opportunities for both school and employment and positive contacts with people and environments that are conducive to growth (Carter, Weithorn & Behrman, 1999). Yet, the research remains somewhat lacking in developing a more thorough understanding of how these protective factors impact children’s ability to cope (Osofsky, 1999).

Limitations of Research

I sat on the couch, angrily fuming, beneath my sulking demeanor. We continued to try to work through this issue, but our conversation became more and more heated as I very passionately tried to get my partner to understand my position. My voice grew louder and louder. I stood up and began pacing about the room. My partner refused to engage me any longer. This made me even more furious. I sat back on the couch, trying to contain myself. “I don’t want to talk about this anymore,” she asserted. I became blind with rage. She focused her eyes on the television and ignored me. I wanted to scream. I probably did. I stood up, angrily flung the
remote near her onto the couch. Was it thrown at her? I yelled, “don’t bother with anything, anymore, I’m leaving...for good.” I stomped across the room and slammed the front door as I left.

As I began reading articles about domestic violence, this scenario came to mind and would not fade from my memory. During the time of my readings, I received a phone call requesting that I participate in a short survey. I agreed, but quickly became frustrated at my inability to fit into the neat little boxes of the survey. I had a strong need to not only explain and justify my answers, but wanted to help the interviewer to understand that “my answer” simply wasn’t in the questionnaire. I did answer the questions and hoped that I had helped, but believed that my answers to the survey were misleading at best, and certainly did not accurately reflect my beliefs or actions. I returned to my reading.

These two experiences as well as my own position as a constructivist feminist has guided me throughout this process. They cannot be extracted from the process, nor ignored. They are there, subtly lying beneath the surface, impacting the way that I think, and guiding me to almost pre-determined conclusions. This is not to say that I am not open to new information; it is simply to state, what few of the authors stated, that I am not bias-free, and that my epistemological and ontological underpinnings both reflect and influence the ways in which I see the world, and research, no matter what theoretical position is guiding my research (Allen, 2000).

There are essentially three limitations, in addition to those already outlined, that I wish to address. First, is the lack of historically, socially and personally contextualized representations in research. In particular, most of the articles represented, used the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979) or some adaptation thereof. More generally, most surveys that are attempting to tap into relational violence are using some adaptation of the CTS (Straus, 1990). Critics of the CTS imply that “it ignores gendered power imbalances that exist within the marriage and society and excludes crucial details about motives, intentions, and consequences” (Johnson, 1996, p. 57). For instance, many studies have not found gender differences in the rates of physical assaults (Straus, 1990). I would further argue that by decontextualizing research using this scale, it becomes sufficiently simplistic to make assumptions regarding findings. Hamby and Sugarman (1999) concur, suggesting that women’s aggression could be a reactive or defensive strategy.
Second, there is a negligible lack of qualitative research in the area of domestic and relational violence, and specifically the effects of for children of exposure to wife abuse. The idea that objective, quantitative research, rooted in enlightenment assumptions of rationality and the perception that there is one equivocal truth, appears to be firmly entrenched, at least in the family studies and family violence literature. Only one author, of the research articles I perused, even insinuated that qualitative methods could be useful in further exploring gender differences in relational violence (Umberson, Anderson, Glick, & Shapiro, 1998).

Third, and interrelated with the lack of contextualization and qualitative research, is the notion of objectivity. This goes much beyond the qualitative/quantitative debate. The deductive, alleged objective and value-free stance of positivistic science dictates a naive realism that discounts the inseparability between knower and known. It further discounts the idea that empirical truths are by-products of the social context. As a constructivist, I would posit that logic, objectivity and truth are social constructions. Gergen (1999) states that with this view in mind, “science could not make claims to universal truth, as all truth claims would be specific to particular traditions - lodged in culture and history” (p. 14). Gergen goes on to say that: their interests lead them to select certain accounts and not others. What has been left out, what descriptions are they suppressing? Further, given the distinct possibility of self-interest, we are encouraged to ask how the authorities gain by way of their particular accounts? Who is being silenced, exploited, or erased? (p. 22)

It is through positivistic science that individuals and groups are easily marginalized, misrepresented, discounted or overtly silenced. Within research, there is a choice. But positivistic science, the dominant and accepted paradigm for most research, models an androcentric, rationalistic logic that belies the truths of oppressed and marginalized groups and perpetuates an atmosphere of suspicion, claims of bias, and a mythology of one truth.

Though most of the research that I have reviewed would not necessarily adhere to rigid, positivistic notions, there is an element of positivism that remains. It is in what is not said, and in what is left out, that each paper is moving closer and closer to the truth. It is in the language, though often implicit, that these notions of truth are valued. As Daly (1997) argued and Allen (2000) has reinforced, we do not need to throw the baby out with the bath water when it comes
to scientific rigor. Rather, the “postmodern challenge requires us to be more honest and realistic about where our ideas and analyses come from. Otherwise, we create false oppositions and sustain these constructions as if they were real things that could be categorized and prioritized” (Allen, 2000, p. 6).

Summary of Chapter Two

This chapter has reviewed the historical contexts in which children who are exposed to domestic violence, and other forms of violence are embedded. I have offered varying definitions of domestic violence, pointing out that the majority of researchers in the field of violence do not adhere to feminist theories, thus compromising the language with which we explain and describe wife abuse. Though I have chosen to use the language of other researchers, since I cannot be clear how they define domestic violence, I am cognizant of this irony and inconsistency in my writing.

In exploring the effects of exposure to domestic violence, I have outlined the limitations of research in understanding the prevalence of domestic violence and the exposure of children to domestic and other forms of violence. I have explored how authors view exposure and how they define exposure to violence as well as the quantifiable impacts of violence on children.

Though many children suffer as a result of their exposure, many children also learn to effectively cope, showing fewer symptoms from their experiences. Using an ecological perspective, I formulated an impression of the coping and protective factors associated with children who are exposed to domestic violence.

Finally, the limitations in the current research are underscored as a strength in using ecological, feminist and critical theories to guide the contextual and subjective experiences of young women who have been exposed to domestic violence.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the multiple contexts of violence in the lives of adolescent girls whose mothers experienced domestic violence. This study has assisted in developing an appreciation of how these young women perceive, interpret, understand and communicate about the circumstances surrounding their mother’s experience of violence and their own exposure to that violence. This design explored what protective factors and resources these young women employed, and the myriad of ways in which they coped with their experiences of intrafamilial violence, be it physical or verbal violence. A major thrust of this research process has been to understand the multiple contexts of violence, as they were perceived by young women. If we, as researchers, are better able to ascertain the risk factors these young women experience, we may be more effective at developing treatment regimens for female adolescents exposed to familial violence. We will also be better informed about the contexts with which they experienced domestic violence, protective mechanisms available to them, and the ways in which youth in this study were able to access and utilize resources, and develop vital coping mechanisms to deal with violence (Osofsky, 1999).

In addition, many public and private organizations serving families where domestic violence occurs, including local mental health agencies, social service and child welfare agencies, health care professionals, court workers, and attorneys do not have domestic violence protocols that could serve to guide and inform them through the provision of services. It is through the development of a more in-depth picture of the multiple contexts in which violence flourishes that counselors, therapists, social workers and policy makers can better evaluate how to proceed with prevention, intervention and treatment programs (Behrman, 1999; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999). Prevention and intervention programs, as well as research, can be augmented by more systematic efforts to study these youth and families in the contexts in which they live, experience, and express violence.

Working within an ecological, contextualized, critical and postmodern feminist framework, I posit that sexism in our culture and within our families is intricately intertwined with violence perpetrated against women (Yllo, 1988). Using a contextualized and
constructionist framework, I desired to establish links between contemporary and historical contexts that evaluate systemic and sociocultural processes revolving around the abuse of women (Dobash & Dobash, 1988), and in particular, the ways in which their teen daughters witnessed and gave meaning to that violence.

Qualitative methods and a constructivist epistemology were particularly effective as a way to understand the meaning and multiple contexts that experiences have for girls who were exposed to their mother’s victimization at the hands of an intimate partner. Typically, when men are studied, it is assumed that this can be generalized to all human behavior. When girls and women are studied alone, they “produce barely credible data” (Fine, 1992, p. 10). In order to better understand how life events and circumstances compound to direct the paths and the ways in which participants chose to navigate life experiences, it was important to delve deeply into the lives of these young women.

Interviewing offered an opportunity to develop a more trusting relationship, and through multiple interviews, a depth “compelling evocation of an individual’s experience” (Seidman, 1998, p. 44) that replaced the representativeness and generalizeability of random sampling. Using a constructivist way of developing understanding has been well described by Crotty (1998):

There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. (p. 8)

It was important for me to remember this throughout the interviewing process. A reflexive and contextual theoretical framework guided me throughout that process (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; 1983; Walker, 1985). Based on 10 years of clinical experience working with many young women who have experienced, been exposed to, and expressed violence, and based on my own childhood experiences of violence, I came to understand and believe that these experiences could be more deeply understood through the use of qualitative measures. Though national surveys have been especially vital in understanding the breadth of children exposed to domestic violence, qualitative methods gave the depth necessary to more fully understand the varying contexts
associated with violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1988). Naturalistic and ethnographic researchers have used these techniques and found them more able to provide a thorough portrayal and understanding of violence than can be achieved through survey techniques (Cicourel, 1968; Faulkner, 1973; Garbarino, 1999). Further, giving voice to one’s own being has become not only a way of constructing knowledge, but of a healing process that has far-reaching benefits. A feminist perspective validates women’s and girls’ experiences as sources of knowledge and discovers that through the process, the seed for empowerment has been planted (Thompson, 1992). It is for these reasons that qualitative methodology appropriately served the purposes of this study.

Though no two experiences can ever be alike, there were commonalities among those experiences (Patton, 1990), risk factors that were explored, strengths and protective mechanisms that were more fully understood, and resources that could be expanded and developed. In-depth interviews provided a mechanism with which to begin that process (Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Walker, 1985). Dobash and Dobash (1988) sites “Historical and concrete analysis is a necessary aspect of our efforts to explain and understand recurrent social patterns such as violence against wives” (p. 56). Through an ecological, feminist perspective, studying these young women’s lives from a qualitative and contextualized process has broadened that scope of understanding.

Central to a feminist perspective is the desire to empower women and girls. Although feminist researchers are cognizant to issues of methods, agenda, and epistemology as we complete research (Thompson, 1992), we must also be extremely attentive to our own use of self, reflexivity (Allen, 2000). The use of reflexive writing and my understanding of how violence is interwoven into the threads of these young women’s lives was always apparent. As I followed the guidelines of qualitative research, I rigorously guarded against my own biases. In order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, I used prolonged and varied field experiences, triangulation of methods, member checking, thick description and peer examination through my dissertation support group (Merriam, 1998). As I followed these precepts I was able to ensure that my story did not become the story.
Participant Selection

I interviewed six female adolescents, between the ages of 14 and 19, whose mothers had experienced domestic violence. Four separate interviews were conducted with each adolescent participant, totaling 24 interviews. Participants and I explored contexts of violence in their lives, becoming co-constructors of the knowledge we explored (Thompson, 1992). Two mothers completed lengthy qualitative questionnaires and participated in several informal conversations with me beginning in August, 2002. This study was approved by the Internal Review Board, IRB # 02-425, on January 6, 2003. Though no formal data were collected, the informal conversations that I had with participants ultimately informed my thinking throughout the research process.

I began the process of selecting participants based on an “insider’s knowledge” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) of the mental health system and counselors, local school counselors, various community resources such as attorneys, and community members. I contacted counselors and other community members who ultimately referred participants to me. Through initial contacts with members of the community, I used a snowballing technique where I asked participants to refer me to other possible participants (Bertaux, 1981; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). Possible participants then contacted me to get further information, discuss the project and determine if they were eligible to participate. Patton (1990) referred to snowballing as “cases of interest from people who know people who know people who know what cases are information-rich, that is, good examples for study, good interview subjects” (p. 182).

As I received phone calls from possible participants (either mothers who had experienced domestic violence or adult adolescents who had witnessed their mother’s abuse), I provided each participant and their parent/guardian when necessary, due to the adolescent’s minor status, a brief overview of the study, its purpose, my theoretical and personal framework and the process of how we (the participants and I) would conduct the study. I also gave each participant–both parents and adolescents–a copy of resources that they could use (Appendix F). After initial phone calls with two mothers, we agreed to meet for a casual lunch to further discuss the project. During lunch we discussed the parameters with which they would be eligible for the study: a) the mother had experienced some form of domestic violence; b) adolescent minors who would be participants no longer resided with the abuser; c) chronological age of the adolescent participant was between the ages of 13-22; d) adolescent witnessed violence toward mother at least once-
“witnessed” was defined as seeing, hearing, or exposed to the results of this violence without hearing or seeing the violence. For example, children may have seen the bruises or other injuries clearly visible on their mother or the emotional consequences of fear, hurt, and intimidation that may be apparent to them (Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, 1990). “Violence” was defined as verbal or physical abuse of the mother by her male partner or spouse, as reported by the mother or adolescent participant. Each of these mothers ultimately agreed to participate in the project. Four adolescents were the children of these two mothers.

Two other adult adolescent (adolescents of the age of majority) participants contacted me after being referred by counselors. Initial phone conversations were held to discuss an overview of the study, its purpose, my theoretical and personal framework and the procedures of the study. We also discussed the parameters of their eligibility, which were the same as above. These two adult adolescent participants also agreed to participate in the study.

There were an additional six possible referrals from counselors, attorneys, and community members. As part of the IRB process, it was agreed that I would not know possible participant names and that participants must contact me. Several counselors wanted to refer adolescent/mother participants with whom they had been working, but I did not receive phone calls. Three other possible participants were involved in a court process, which would not necessarily preclude their participation in the study, but was of enough concern to me that I chose not to use them. Being exposed to domestic violence is a sensitive research topic, and the additional emotional and physical burden of a court process could prove to be overwhelming to adolescents and their mothers given the sensitive nature of this research project. Sensitive research is in some ways threatening to those who are participating in a study, and the research process itself involves potential costs to the participants (Lee & Renzetti, 1993). Lee and Renzetti define it as:

a sensitive research topic is one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding, and/or dissemination of research data (p. 5).
Given the life circumstances of these three adolescents and their families, I did not believe it would be in their best interests to participate in this project. However, we agreed that, should stability become more evident, it would be possible that I could interview them at a later date.

I scheduled interviews with youth and parents (when applicable) who agreed to participate in the study and ensured that all participant assent forms (Appendix A) and parental/guardian consent forms (Appendix B) and adult participant consent forms (Appendix C) were clearly described and signed. Each participant (both parent and adolescent) chose a pseudonym that was to be used to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. When all consent and assent forms were completed and any and all questions were answered, we began the process, our journey of co-constructing knowledge, and exploring the ways that young women whose mothers have experienced domestic violence interpret, understand and communicate meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Participant Overview

Participants consisted of six female adolescents between the ages of 14 and 19 and two mothers. All participants lived in small cities, towns or rural areas in Southwest Virginia. Both mothers worked in full-time professional positions allowing for a lower-middle class income. Both mothers were Caucasian. Four adolescent participants were white, and two self-identified bi-racial (Caucasian and African American). All six adolescent participants were currently involved in heterosexual relationships ranging in time from three months to three years. One mother, Claire, was involved in a long-term heterosexual relationship and had recently moved in with her boyfriend, while the second mother, Maggie, chose not to be intimately involved saying, “it only complicates things”. One adolescent participant, Victoria, though currently involved in a three-year heterosexual relationship, had previously been involved in a lesbian relationship and stated that she was bi-sexual. One adolescent participant, Danielle, had a two-year-old child. Four adolescent participants lived with their mothers in varying living situations, while one lived with her boyfriend in the former home of her parents, and the final participant lived on the Virginia Tech campus.

None of the mothers reported being physically or emotionally abused during the times of our conversations or at the time of the completion of their questionnaires. Both mothers reported being in former relationships with their children’s fathers that could be considered intimate
terrorism (IT) (Johnson, 2001). “The distinguishing feature of IT is a pattern of violent and nonviolent behaviors that indicates a general motive to control” (Johnson, p. 168). The complexity and continuum of intimate terrorism was evident even in this very small population, with one mother suffering horrific physical brutality, while the second mother stated she was never physically assaulted, but continuously “threatened” as her husband broke things “such as remotes and other electronic devices or cut wires when very angry to let her know he didn’t like what she was saying” (Field Notes, Aug 27, 2002).

All six adolescent participants were exposed to their mother’s experience of violence. Two adolescents were the children of each of the mothers discussed above for a total of four children. Five children, in all were exposed to patterns of intimate terrorism (Johnson, 2001), while one youth was exposed to periods of intimate terrorism and common couple violence (Johnson). Three of the six children were also physically abused themselves as children by their biological fathers, or mother’s boyfriends. This resulted in multiple reports to social services, with no removals from the home in any case. One adolescent participant was involved in a relationship that I would consider common couple violence (Johnson). Though we had several discussions that revolved around this relationship, she was not willing to seek help and given that she was a legal adult, there was no intervention that I could make beyond ensuring she had a plan of escape should it be necessary.

**Procedures**

I conducted a series of four in-depth interviews exploring the multiple contexts of violence in the lives of adolescent females whose mothers had experienced domestic violence. Through a constructivist framework, I wanted to elucidate in what ways these young women perceive, interpret, understand, and communicate the circumstances surrounding their mother’s experience of violence. Through multiple in-depth interviews with these six young women between the ages of 14 and 19, I examined the protective factors and resources they were able to access and employ given their experiences. As Patton (1990) exemplifies, we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe...we cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how
people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. (p. 196)

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted from 45 minutes to two hours. Seidman (1998) generally recommends 90-minute interviews to allow enough time for the interview process to unfold and to decrease fatigue factors that could be associated with longer interviews. Given the purpose of interviewing (ie., for participants to reconstruct the meanings of their experiences within the contexts of their lives and then to reflect upon meaning) 90 minutes allowed an optimal amount of time to explore that process. Since the majority of participants were adolescents, 90 minutes may have been too much time for an adolescent to remain focused and attentive. Seidman (1998) concurs with this, offering that for “younger participants, a shorter period may be appropriate” (p. 14). Though this ultimately did not pose a problem for the participants in this study, I believe that I was always cognizant of each participants’ individuality and needs during interviews. Thus, as indicated interviews ranged from 45 minutes to two hours, depending on what was happening in the interview, my perception of participant needs, both emotional and physical, and my own time constraints.

It should also be noted that interview times were not strictly formal, and not entirely audio-taped. Each meeting would begin and end with a period of time in which we could reconnect and build more trust and rapport, discuss important issues that had occurred in the time since we had met last, and most importantly, time to ensure that the adolescent was coping well with what she was sharing and experiencing as a result of participating in the research process. As indicated, participating in a research project revolving around exposure to domestic violence was a very sensitive topic, bringing up many issues that these young participants had to deal with in my absence. The information shared during this check-in period was able to guide our discussion once the recorder was on, and I could go back to those discussions during the formal/tape recorded part of our interview. On two occasions, the issues that had come up were so disturbing to the participants that we agreed to simply talk together and reschedule the formal interview. Was this engaging in a counseling relationship, or simply being cognizant of the complexity and difficulty of this research process for these young participants? I believe the
latter, yet I must say that issues of my own, as a counselor, were intermingled throughout the process. After one brief telephone conversation with Victoria, I wrote the following poem:

I cannot protect you
as you slowly die inside...
I cannot protect you
as you fade and try to hide...

I cannot watch
as you hold your breath...
silently waiting
for some internal death...

I cannot do this
I have nothing left to give...
As you look to the past
and you don’t want to live...

For no one would protect you
we all closed our eyes...
and listened to the story
of our own pathetic lies
—Field Notes February 3, 2003

This poem was referring to the suicide of a former client. Obviously, though I don’t believe I had engaged in a counseling relationship with participants, issues and painful memories became apparent in the methodology I chose to use. In my attempt to establish a trusting relationship, it somehow grew to be much more than simply talking to research participants.

As participants shared their experiences of being exposed to domestic violence, there was a formal interview process which was audio-taped and transcribed. While interview guides were used to direct each session, they were only meant to be a guide. Through 10 years of clinical experience, I have learned that many paths lead to the same destination or different and more important places. Each youth, through our new and tentative relationship was allowed to explore and illuminate the path that was of primary importance to her. Although my research questions, interview guides, theoretical framework and personal ontology guided me throughout this study, ultimately, it was to be the participants’ journey, that lead us to the illumination of what we were to understand together. The essence of qualitative interviewing is to understand the perspectives of the participants’ lives, their experiences, their circumstances as they choose to express them
(Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Formalized, though semi-structured in-depth interviews provided a mechanism with which to begin that process (Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Walker, 1985).

The initial interview (see Appendix D) focused on demographic variables such as familial associations and composition, family income, neighborhood demographics and various interests in which the adolescent frequently engaged. The specific focus of the interview was to establish initial rapport and begin the process of developing trust. Given the research (Artz, 1998; Koroki & Chesney-Lind, 1998) and my own clinical experience, I anticipated that this could be a slow, yet integral part of the process.

I used poetry to gain trust and begin the process of sharing intrapersonal feelings, to externalize thoughts and expressions and share lived experiences. Through years of counseling female adolescents, poetry had often been a powerful tool for expression and healing. Thus, it seemed to be a positive starting place in which participants could express, through a less formal avenue, many of the feelings that they had held inside for many years. It was “a means by which to understand and make sense of the world that cannot be articulated through traditional research practice or venues” (Percer, 2002). Audre Lorde (1984) refers to poetry as an illumination. It is through poetry that “we give name to those ideas which are–until the poem–nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt” (p. 36). Poetry is about living and experiencing and interacting with life and the fusion of these experiences that make us most powerful and potent. Poetry is used to tap into the feelings and beliefs beneath those experiences and re-experiencing them once again through poetry. It is about thinking and feeling, and revealing one’s self to oneself. It is, in essence, about setting ourselves free. Poetry was used throughout the process and within the final three interviews as a means of expressing and illuminating understanding (Lorde, 1984). Poems were interpreted by the participant and discussed as part of the interviewing process, and was an important means of triangulating the data. Each participant wrote a series of three poems, generally being asked to write a poem prior to our next meeting, regarding personal experiences in their families, violence, and violence in their families. Subsequent interviews (see Appendix D) built upon one another to develop a more integral understanding of the multiple contexts of violence from an individual, familial and socio-cultural perspective in each young woman’s life.
Interviews were generally held at the participant’s home, the local library meeting room or another place of the participant and/or parent’s choosing that would provide an environment conducive to confidentiality. One interview was held in my home because the library had a special event, and even though we had reserved a private room, there were many children playing outside of the room and we agreed it would be more appropriate to have the interview at my home, which was only a few blocks away. Interviews were generally spaced approximately one week apart, though some were held as close as four days and others as long as two weeks apart. During one of the final interviews with each adolescent participant, with the exception of Natalie, I discussed a poem that I had written about each of them, in an attempt to capture something about them that described how I saw them. I read the poem to each of them, and asked each participant what the poem meant to them. I then clarified confusing stanzas and we discussed the poem and my views of them, and that this poem would be used to ultimately help describe them for the project. Each participant agreed that the poem described a part of her. For some participants this was a very positive experience. For others, it was wrought with much sadness and even some fear about what their lives had become or would become. I believe, for each participant, there was an element of empowerment that they held their futures in their own hands, and could make a difference, if they so chose.

Participant Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sibling in Study</th>
<th>Mother in Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>19 years old with a two year old daughter. Lives with daughter, mom, mom’s boyfriend, sister, and boyfriend in a small two bedroom duplex in a lower-middle-class neighborhood. Left school at 16 and worked at a fast food restaurant.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>19 years old, living with her boyfriend of three years, Sabastian, two dogs and five cats in a rural area in southwest Virginia. She graduated from high school at 16 and currently works at a local pizzaria.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>19-year-old college student and varsity athlete at a large university. She lives on campus, but visits with both parents. She has dated her boyfriend for three years, and believes they’ll get married after college.</td>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Claire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Named</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Background Information</td>
<td>Other Named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18 years old and currently attends a Christian high school in southwest Virginia. She takes turns living with her mother and father, one week at a time. She plays varsity sports and intends to play at the collegiate level.</td>
<td>Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machenzie</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16-year-old high school honor roll student, cheerleader and varsity athlete in a high school in southwest Virginia. She recently began her first paid employment. She plans to attend a small college and would like to participate in collegiate sports.</td>
<td>Mariah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariah</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14-year-old high school student. She doesn’t really like school, and at times has been known to be truant. She has run away from home on several occasions. She enjoys spending time with friends, who she describes as “bad ass people”, going to movies, and shopping.</td>
<td>Machenzie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Danielle_

Danielle, 19 years old, was living with her two-year old daughter, Sue, her live-in boyfriend of eight months, Brad, her mother, her mother’s male partner, and her 14 year-old sister in a working class neighborhood. Another sister, though only 17, lived with her boyfriend and two year old son in a neighboring community. During the seven weeks of our interviews, her mother’s boyfriend’s son also moved in after being released from incarceration. This added burden was particularly difficult given this young man’s history of criminal activity and community violence. He had been incarcerated for Breaking and Entering and Assault and Battery, according to Danielle. She was very concerned about the impact that this family addition would have on her young daughter.

Danielle dropped out of high school when she was 16 after becoming pregnant, though she was clear that she was dropping out little by little since she was a young girl. When we began our interviews, she was working at a local fast food restaurant, though mid-way through our interviews she quit her job, stating transportation had become too difficult and she was tired of being the only one at work doing anything. She described her working environment as very negative, and hostile with little personal respect for employees. At the time of our last interview, she had not yet found another job.
Danielle stated that her mother had not been working for over a year, and had always relied on her boyfriends financially and emotionally. Danielle was indignant and confused that her mother would want to rely on her boyfriends so much. It seemed to be a matter of pride for Danielle that she was not like her mother. It was this dependence, from Danielle’s perspective, that allowed her mother to become the physical and emotional victim of the men in her life. She stated that her mother was involved in several long-term heterosexual relationships as she was growing up, and that all but one was violent. Danielle implied that she was, at times, physically abused by her mother while growing up and that she, at times, became a target of her mother’s boyfriends. She quickly learned that what happened in the family, stayed in the family. Though the police were contacted on numerous occasions, and at least one social service investigation ensued, the children were never removed from the home, and the family never received any services with the exception of occasional food stamps.

Danielle and her boyfriend, Brad, appeared to have a conflictual relationship. She described his chronic addiction to pain pills and difficulty maintaining ongoing employment. She also described, from my perspective, what appeared to be common couple violence (Johnson, 2001) in her relationship. She described several shoving matches, many verbal fights and one instance where he threw a necklace at her and bruised her leg. She showed this to me during one of our interviews, but stated that he didn’t mean to do it. I struggled with this denial, fearful that Danielle had embarked on a very similar journey as her mother:

Can she see her life as different
had she never been exposed

to all she shouldn’t see
and all the doors that closed

Though she says that she has learned
the lessons she was taught
to never be the model
of the violence that was wrought

Yet, here she sits before me
I can see it in her eyes
the dreams that were futilely shattered
the secrets and the lies
The burdens she still carries
as a child in her arms
coddled and confused
just inches from the harm

I wonder where she’ll be
in years that yet we know
Will she still believe the lessons?
or will the lessons have taken hold??

–Field Notes, January 8, 2003

Victoria

The drive to Victoria’s house was slightly frightening, yet quite beautiful. Her house was on a small hill, overlooking a vast wooded area in rural Southwest Virginia. To get to her house, I had to drive through a variety of back roads and onto gravel and then a dirt road. Though there were neighbors nearby, several of whom had rebel flags hanging in their windows or from their flag poles, her home seemed very remote and distant. “As I parked my jeep, I was mesmerized by the beauty surrounding me. There was a small deck on the front of the house and bird feeders throughout the yard and into the woods. I knocked on the door and Victoria, her two dogs (one of which was large enough to be a small horse), and four cats answered. Apparently, the fifth cat and the fish chose not to come” (Field Notes, January 16, 2003). The house was small, but very cozy. Victoria described that in addition to the pets, she and her boyfriend of three years, Sebastian, lived in the house. Sebastian seemed to be a real strength in her life, very easy going, yet quite stable. The house belonged to her parents, but they were currently living out of the area and had asked her to maintain the house in their absence. Victoria had one older brother, with whom she described a distant relationship.

Victoria, now 19, graduated from high school at the age of 16. She briefly attended community college, but quickly found that she wasn’t ready to partake in an advanced education and decided to withdraw. She has been working for a local pizzeria for several years and has been asked to become a manager, but decided that it was too much responsibility and additional work for the limited amount of financial resources it would offer.

Victoria initially struck me as a super-responsible young woman who pretty much had the world tamed, but this was somewhat illusory. Even in our first interview, as we began to talk,
even remotely, about her parents, she began to visibly shake. We took things slowly, and though I knew she had a support system in the counselor who had referred her to me, I was still cautious knowing that this strong exterior, was just that, an exterior:

I wonder where she keeps it
this pain she feels inside
masked from all who see her
or does it simply hide...

I fear that I will harm her
veiled balance of her life
opening the salted wounds
questions, a dangerous knife...

Will I force the wounds wide open
will I pour the salt myself
then leave with all my data
here, then mighty stealth??

I’ll be gone and left the baggage
marked simply as goodbye,
we tend to call it science
the guise behind the lie...

Be true to what I’ve stated
don’t leave the gaping hole...
Be sure the salve is sticking
before the time to go!!!

–Field Notes, January 16, 2003

Approximately one month after we met, Victoria’s parents showed up at her house, unannounced. This seemed to spiral Victoria into a place of confusion, fear and almost desperation. We sat for two hours on one occasion, not interviewing, just talking, because she was so visibly shaken from her circumstances. At our next interview, her parents had left, just as suddenly as they had arrived, but Victoria was still anxious. This, our final interview, did not have the substance nor depth that previous interviews had. I felt guilty for even being there, yet concerned that I couldn’t just cut things off. During initial interviews, Victoria had reported that it felt really good, though difficult, to talk about these things. But, in this final interview, it was apparent that this was a much more difficult and burdensome process. I offered that she could
call me at any time, ensuring she had my phone number and email address. I did not want to be invasive, yet she had also been pretty clear that she needed this to be finished, so she could let it go. I left, wondering if I’d done more harm than good, yet knowing that there was a resilience inside of Victoria that would not fail her:

You are strength
You are courage
You have hope,
and yet you worry...

You have grown,
You have learned
You are all
that child yearned...

You are everything you wanted
You are so much more
despite the many losses,
the lack of a bright red door

Though you lacked the home conventions
as you say, a family of norm,
You’ve become your own true person
despite the daily storm...

I look at who you are now
I know what I can see
You have so many choices
to become who you will be

I see the strength within you
and wonder if you know,
this wonderful young woman
will only continue to grow
–Field Notes, January 30, 2003

Mary

Mary was a 19-year-old Virginia Tech student and varsity athlete, living in a dormitory with a roommate. Though living away from home for the first time, she remained in frequent contact with her mother, sister and father. Her mother and father divorced, from her standpoint, after her father had an extramarital affair and they mutually chose to divorce. A graduate of a
local Christian high school, Mary was very committed to not only her religious beliefs, but to the biological members of her family. Her mother, having recently moved in with her long-term boyfriend was a source of support to Mary. Though this relationship was somewhat vexing to Mary, based on her Christian foundation, she also understood that this relationship was important to her mother. Mary’s younger sister, Natalie, also a participant in this study, was also a strong source of emotional support. As Mary explained it, they were still very close, even if they didn’t see each other as frequently. Mary remained in frequent contact with her father as well. She described having a close and personal relationship with him, and saw him as one of the most important people in her life. Her father had remarried since her parents’ divorce when she was about 14. Her father’s wife was considered to be kind, but very quiet and somewhat distant. Her step-sister, 14 years old, was also thought to be quiet and distant. There was an obvious allegiance to her biological family. One brother, markedly older, and from Mary’s perspective the center of most family fights, was still close, though living far away had only remote contact. During the time of our interviews, Mary’s boyfriend of three years also appeared to be a strong support. Her face brightened, and her eyes glowed whenever she discussed him.

Despite the many strong people in Mary’s life, there was a sense of sadness that she carried with her. It was not overtly evident, but appeared in her lack of eye contact, her reticence to engage or trust, and later as we got to know each other better, in the tears as she described the losses she had experienced in her life. It seemed, based on what I understood from Mary’s mother and what Mary had reported, that she knew very little or acknowledged only a bit of the verbal violence experienced in the family. I often got the impression that if we were to spend much more time together, the many pieces of the puzzle would begin to fit and make sense. I often wondered if the religious beliefs that Mary held were in stark contrast to what she knew her family to be. As our interviews progressed, I continuously got the impression that there was so much more to Mary’s story, that we had only scratched the surface of what she understood:

Bright eyed, yet shy
quiet, care-free
athletic, studious,
these are what I see...

A child of God
deployed held belief
protects her from the world
a sense of daily relief...

A father who has been there
at times it has been hard
they’ve strived to deeply strengthen
together have resolved....

A mother who has loved her
even as a child
held her tight and closely
protected, yet beguiled...

Pain has split her family
some things she’ll never know,
what really ever happened,
some things she wasn’t told
–Field Notes, February 5, 2003

Natalie

Natalie, an 18-year-old high school senior in a local Christian high school, split her time between her mother and her mother’s live-in boyfriend who lived in rural Southwest Virginia and her father, step-mother and step-sister, who lived in a small city in Southwest Virginia. Natalie’s older sister, Mary, also a participant in this study, was away in college. Though they have remained close, the physical separation has precluded their spending much time together. An older brother, likewise, has remained close, but proximity has not been optimal for time spent together.

Natalie has described two very different worlds, the world of her mother and the world of her father. There seemed to be an underlying resentment toward her mother that became particularly difficult since she moved in with her long-time male partner. Natalie strongly disagreed with this living arrangement and appeared to be somewhat embarrassed by the contradiction between her own life and that of her friends from school. Though she stated she believed this man made her mother happy, she could not reconcile the contrast between her mother’s evolving life changes and those of her father.

When Natalie spoke of her father, it was with evident admiration. She stated that he had shared a great deal about why her parents had divorced and that they had held many open discussions. From her point of view her father’s subsequent remarriage was much more in
keeping with the value system of her church, and the way in which she was brought up. At one point, Natalie went so far as to say she didn’t know that her mom would tell her the truth about what had happened. I happened to run into Natalie’s mother, Claire, after this conversation.

She [Claire] had been concerned about how this would impact her kids, since they had not seen a counselor. So, I reassured her that things were going well and that I was not believing that they were having a difficult time....and that it was not uncommon for kids not to remember much.

(Field Notes, February 4, 2003)

Natalie’s mom quickly responded, “it just tells you what a good job I did protecting them.”

(Field Notes, February 4, 2003) Yet, I wondered, given what Natalie had told me and the disdain she currently exhibited toward her mother to me, if, in protecting Natalie and Mary, she didn’t also withhold from them a possible understanding of what happened in their parents’ relationship. Would there be implications in her children’s adult lives and in their relationships?

Did they understand the depth of fear and pain their mother had known:

She doesn’t seem to know
the pain her mother’s felt
she doesn’t seem to see
the sadness she was dealt...

The distance that they feel
that doesn’t go away
breeching into their daily lives
grows without delay...

Her father, brave and daring
does she even dare to know?
What illusions would it shatter
what seeds would it sow?

Is it that she can’t remember?
Or that time has changed her mind?
What won’t she ask her mother
about another place and time
–Field Notes, February 4, 2003

–This poem was NOT shared with Natalie, given the difficulties it could have caused in her life

49
Machenzie

Filled with such compassion
for all she grows to know
giving all a piece of self
feelings held in tow...

Reaching out to others
who have some special need
embracing them and knowing
some hunger she could feed...

And yet it could be harmful,
in how she treats herself
does she put ahead the others
to the demise of her own health?

But yet the world is better
for having her to speak
and fill a certain void
giving voice to those more meek...

So filled with such compassion
in a world that doesn’t trust
a model to us all
to teach us to be just
–Field Notes, February 7, 2003

Machenzie was a 16 year old high school cheerleader and varsity athlete. She lived with her mother and two younger sisters, Mariah, age 14 who has also participated in this study, and Mia, age 12, in a middle-class subdivision in a small city in Southwest Virginia. Machenzie considered herself bi-racial, her mother being White and her father, African American. The daily violence that she was exposed to could have made Machenzie embittered about the world, feeling unsafe and angry. Yet, she was filled with such compassion for so many others and stood as a daily model of resilience.

Machenzie’s mother worked as a professional in the community in which they lived. Though financial circumstances were very good by today’s standards, Machenzie was clear that it was not always that way. She described her mother’s hard work and going back to school to get an education to better provide for the family. She described periods of desperate poverty and
fear that the family could not survive on the meager makings of her mother after she divorced Machenzie’s father. Machenzie’s mother finally left her husband after a final beating that was directly in front of the children. Machenzie’s mom had tried to hide the abuse by locking them in their bedroom, but this was one too many times. Machenzie described, in a poem, how they left:

When the violence occurs,
it leads to bad turns

no matter the situation,
it echoes in my mind.

Watching her being behind the evil’s thrust,
I know in my heart, I will never trust!

Sooner or later evil will haunt again,
but she never had the nerve to hide within.

Within the chamber walls it so seemed
sometimes evil moved on, looking for me.

I was stronger and sometimes stood up,
but quickly learned that made it burn more

Finally one day, it all ended
we left like thieves in the night,
ever to return to the ugly fights.

Violence is evil, find other ways
I no longer live, a part of that dismay

who’s not to say when violence will show,
I’m always standing strong, ready for the show.
—Machenzie, February 12, 2003

Machenzie had strong recollections of the violence, all prior to the age of eight.

After the initial separation, the family stayed with friends of her mother’s. Machenzie was initially forced to spend time with her father, but this was stopped after Machenzie revealed she was being physically abused, to the point of leaving bruises on her legs, by her father. Machenzie has some contact with her father today, and explained that he was really trying, but that he had a lot to make up for in their lives.
Mariah

Mariah was a 14-year-old high school student in the same school as her older sister Machenzie. Where Machenzie was filled with self-confidence and compassion, Mariah appeared to be filled with self-doubt, mistrust, and anguish. I had been told by her mother that Mariah and she had a rather conflictual relationship, and that Mariah had, over time, participated in some rather negative behaviors, such as running away, being truant, stealing, and some substance use. Mariah, by her own report and her mother’s, had been to see many counselors, yet none had been able to connect with her over any length of time. Mariah’s mother felt like it may actually do her some good to be able to finally talk about things, but we agreed that if either of us saw negative changes in her behavior or were otherwise led to believe that participation in this study was having a negative impact on Mariah, we would discuss ending her participation. Mariah was aware of our agreement and our concerns, though she said she didn’t think it would really bother her.

Mariah had a tough, rough exterior, but I quickly learned that she just wanted someone to love and believe in her. She was very typical of the kinds of kids I had been working with over the last decade. I was, however, always keenly aware of the fragile line between researcher and counselor. On one occasion, Mariah was upset about some things happening in her life, and we agreed to simply take a walk that day rather than have a formal interview. It was during this walk that Mariah shared with me her one experience of being struck by an intimate partner, and the family’s subsequent reaction to that incident. She said she told her father, and then described her conflicted feelings about her father defending her by calling a cousin several hours drive away to take care of things. Mariah described that the cousin threatened, beat up, and pulled a gun on this former boyfriend, and that he had treated her respectfully since then. Mariah was not witness to any of these events, but was told what happened by a family member. Yet, it struck her as odd that her father, who had violently beaten her mother for so long, defended his daughter. (Given that I am an obligated reporter, this was reported to her mother.)

Despite Mariah’s tough exterior that she showed to others, we quickly developed a strong relationship. During our third, formal interview, I shared this poem with her. I shared with her that I had grown to admire her deeply, and I believed that she was a child who *had* to learn to fight:
Who is this child, the fighter
Who’s anger fills the place
Who hides behind her smile
the cheerful, brightened face

But knows that there is danger
She doesn’t understand
at times it overwhelms her
comes pulsing through the hand

As it reaches out to punish
those lying in her path
spieling words of hatred
A fire filled with wrath

Yet this child is a fighter
in a very different way
Refusing to forsake herself
nor holding life at bay

She seeks for something hidden
and knows not where to find
but won’t give up the search
understanding of the mind

–Field Notes, January 15, 2003

Analysis of the Data

As indicated, interviews were transcribed verbatim, including pauses, but excluding paralanguage such as uh, um, and like. Tapes were transcribed by a friend in Indiana who could not possibly know any participants. She agreed to maintain all confidentiality regarding anything she transcribed. Prior to transcribing audiotapes, they were copied to ensure that data was not lost due to destruction or loss of an audio tape. Tapes were mailed to Indiana and transcripts were sent to me via email attachment. After audiotapes were transcribed, they were reviewed while listening to the audiotape to ensure that the transcription was accurate. At times, there was inaudible data that could not be transcribed. Data were analyzed when initially collected to allow it to inform later data collection and analysis. This was difficult at times given the time constraints and lag time in mailing, having the tapes transcribed and receiving them, via email attachment.
Poetry was interpreted by the participants and became part of the transcript, but was also coded separately by me, in order to ultimately develop themes that cut across the data. All data was analyzed in order to construct categories or themes that captured a recurring pattern (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). This process was used in accordance with the methods outlined by Allen (1989). This is an adaptation of Taylor and Bogdan’s (1985) process of discovering themes in the data. This intuitive process included reading and rereading the data in a careful and thorough manner. Secondly, a tracking process of themes, hunches, interpretations and ideas was used. Theoretical memos and observer comments were written regarding discoveries that I made with the data and throughout the data collection process. Third, I looked for emerging themes and patterns in the data. Themes were underscored using original vernacular that participants used during the interviewing process. Fourth, I developed classification schemes based on the data and theoretical perspectives that guided the study, and my process throughout the study. Fifth, I developed theoretical concepts and propositions. Sixth, I reviewed the literature in more depth to better understand previous research and findings. Finally, I developed an “analytic thread that unites and integrates the major themes in the data” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1985, p. 136). All data, to include transcripts, poetry, and any other written material provided by participants, as well as field notes, process notes and observations were analyzed using this method. All data, including field notes, theoretical memos, interview transcripts, written poetry and my own experiences as a participant observer. These themes that were ultimately revealed as a story, were “concepts indicated by the data” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 36) and were informed by the purpose of the study, the meanings of the participants, my orientation (ontology) and understanding of knowledge (epistemology) (Merriam, 1998).

It was important for me to remember that the participants, whose lives I briefly entered, were not my former clients, current clients, and they were not shadows of my childhood. They had their own story to tell, and I consistently remembered to listen, to attempt to understand. For this reason, building trustworthiness was a priority. The following chart exemplifies this process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Term</th>
<th>Qualitative Term</th>
<th>Strategies Employed</th>
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Throughout the research process, I wrote theoretical memos, poetry, and process field notes that allowed me to reflect on my own experiences within the process as well as how I was interpreting experiences and observations. This was ultimately an important process in better understanding not only the impact of exposure to domestic violence on adolescent participants, but also on how the research process impacted participants, and ultimately myself.

Though this project is officially concluded, I have not completely exited from the lives of the participants. I continue to receive phone calls from both adolescent participants, in particular Danielle, and from one of the mothers, Maggie. Participants continue to share their lives, and I continue to listen. Though I am cognizant that I am not their counselor, I have often reflected on
my views of ethical research and that I have become a source of assistance to those whose lives I so briefly entered.

**Summary of Chapter Three**

Chapter Three has provided a basic overview of the proposed study, a description of the participants, procedures and how the data were analyzed. Through this process, I have developed a better understanding of the multiple contexts of violence in the lives of adolescent females whose mothers have experienced domestic violence. Though I know this was only a snapshot in an album of many snapshots, I hopefully will have revealed this snapshot of their lives and held it out for the world to see, to learn from. But mostly, I hope that, through the intersections of our lives, a seed was planted, and that a bloom will start to grow, and in the years to come I may pass by this way again, only to find a tree, tall and sturdy in a forest vast with trees.

As I stand beside the mirror
   Eyes cast to the floor
   Looking to the future
   Could I ever ask for more

As I see the things that could have been
   The things forever gone
   Will I ever fix this puzzle
   Could I ever become one?

   Oh, I never looked so deeply
   ‘Cause I never thought I could
   There’s so many items displaced
   So I never thought I should

But I’ve grown a broken wing now
   I know that I can mend
   All I ever really needed
   Was a single helping hand

   –Karen S. Joest, as an adolescent
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Overview

There are many types of violence—
It’s done in many different ways—
by so many different people

It’s covered by sunglasses, smiles and excuses—
but the real truth is...

A child awaiting the next school day,
dreading when the school day ends—
too scared to go home—
for what he fears awaits him...

A desperate mother, working long and hard—
greeting each customer with a warm and gentle smile—
Then she weeps for what she fears awaits her at home...

A father working hard to support his family—
A real “ideal father” in the public’s eye—
putting the bad men in jail—
and helping the innocent go free...

But when the work day ends—
Our “all around wonderful guy” turns into the drunken monster...

...the child fears
and the mother regrets...

So, as you see, even the highest of society can be monsters too.
—Danielle, January 27, 2003

Estimates of exposure to domestic violence range from 3.3 million (Carlson, 1984) to 10 million (Straus, 1992) children every year. Exposure is defined in multiple ways. Children may see their father or another male caretaker threaten to hit or assault their mother or verbally batter her. Children may not necessarily see the events surrounding domestic violence, but may hear the fighting from somewhere else in or outside the house. Children may also be exposed by seeing the bruises or emotional scars left by the abuse or by being directly involved by calling
the police (Holden, Geffner, & Jouriles, 1998; Jaffè, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990). Children may also be directly involved by being perceived by the victim or perpetrator as a catalyst to the violence or becoming victims of abuse themselves (Fantuzzo, Boruch et al., 1997).

For the six female adolescent participants in this study, exposure meant seeing the violence occurring in the family, hearing the fights from bedrooms or outside, seeing the bruises, cuts and stabbings, or the emotional and physical aftermath of the fighting. Participants became confidants to their mothers, ignored what was happening, or watched, feeling hopeless about being able to stop the violence or ever having, at least from their perspectives, a normal family. Exposure meant being involved as a participant in the fighting or in three cases, becoming victims of violence by family members themselves. Three participants later became involved in a romantic relationship with at least one instance of physical violence. Some participants attempted to actively intervene in the violence either by pulling their fathers away from their mothers, standing up to their fathers or male caretakers, calling the police, or telling someone, either a friend or an adult, about the violence in the family. But, when nothing happened, the violence escalated, or the participant became a victim of the violence, there was a great sense of despair that nothing would ever change, “that’s when I kind of realized that I’m not suppose to do that because it hurt me too. And, so I kind of stopped and hoped she’d learn on her own.” (Machenzie, February 13, 2003)

One common thread in each of these young women’s lives was exposure, often in multiple ways, to the violence in their families; fathers or male caretakers physically and/or emotionally abused their mothers, and they became witnesses to that experience. Yet, each of the participants was dramatically different. Machenzie, 16 years old and a popular high school cheerleader and honor roll student; Victoria, now 19, but at the age of 16 had already graduated from high school; At the age of 16, Danielle dropped out of high school and gave birth to her daughter. Now, 19, her daughter will soon be three. There was the college varsity athlete, Mary, and her sister, Natalie, a prominent high school athlete at a local Christian school and soon also on her way to college. And, there was Mariah, 14 years old, described as a truant, runaway and behavior problem at home and school. “[I] like to hang out with the bad ass people at school and the....kids that get in trouble or do drugs.” (Mariah, January 8, 2003)
One might be hasty to say that four of the six participants appeared to be somewhat resilient. After all, socially we tend to admire cheerleaders, athletes, good students and youth who are high achievers. We tend, as a society, to view girls who have children so young, drop out of high school or become truant, runaways, or spend time with trouble makers or drug users, as less resilient. Resilience is the ability to succeed despite adversity (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990) is how we describe a child who uses available resources, despite the many disadvantages, risk factors and threats in her life (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999). “Resiliency is the child’s capacity to bounce back from [or not succumb to] traumatic childhood events and develop into a sane, integrated, and socially responsible adult” (Apfel & Simon, 1996, p. 1). Yet, resilience remains a somewhat elusive concept. Who gets to decide what is or isn’t resilient? Are these ideas socially constructed and determined from a male, white, middle-class, heterosexual set of values and imposed upon youth who are in the midst of surviving unthinkable experiences? In order for adaptations to be considered resilient, must they be considered highly successful or merely at the level of social competence and functionality (Richman & Fraser, 2001)? Even by these definitions, Danielle, a high school drop out and mother at the age of 16 and Mariah, a 14-year-old high school student who runs away from home and hangs out with “bad asses” would not be considered resilient. And yet, I wonder.

In looking at each of these young women, the experiences that they have been exposed to and the lives they’ve been compelled to live, I would like to say that even four of the six seem to be resilient. Yet, I am not confident that even one will survive, unscathed. Each of these young women face an uncertain future. Each participant, in her own way, attempted to cope with or intervene in the familial violence. Some fought back, some ignored what was happening or normalized it, others called out for help. One lesson they surely learned- adults could not or would not help or protect them.

Adults in their lives, be they family members, coaches, friends, or adults in systems and institutions were not effective in stopping the violence or intervening in these children’s lives. Even when the violence or abuse against the participants themselves was reported, either to the police, a school counselor or social services, these institutions failed to intervene in a meaningful way. Though each of the participants attended school, several were involved in court processes, most were members of churches or religious organizations, some used social service case
management, all were entitled to police protection, and all had grandparents or extended family members who knew of the violence. Yet, not even one institution effectively intervened. The burden, the only way to safety, was in the hands of mothers and their batterers or abusers. In all six cases, living relationships between mothers who experienced violence at the hands of their husbands or male partners, were severed. In one case, Victoria’s parents re-united. In other cases, new relationships formed, some abusive, continuing the legacy of violence, such as Danielle’s mother, and in other cases violence-free (Claire, Mary and Natalie’s mother). One mother, Maggie, would not trust in the process, choosing not to date again.

In learning to cope with what was happening in their lives, participants were emphatic that they would not be victims themselves, that they had learned from their parents about what they did not want in their relationships: “I think I basically learned from my parents’ mistakes and learned what I didn’t want to be and how I didn’t want to act. It will just set [for] me, it will set an example of what I don’t want; how I don’t want shit to be” (Victoria, February 10, 2003). Yet, already, three of the six have experienced relational violence. I am not optimistic these young women understand that verbal and physical violence can begin in courtship where fully one-third of young adults who participated in studies had experienced or perpetrated physical violence in a dating relationship the previous year (Lloyd, 1995).

I am not certain that these young women, all of whom are currently involved in heterosexual relationships ranging from three months to three years, can distinguish between a courtship of control, where it’s considered “loving” for boyfriends to be jealous or needing to know where their girlfriend is at all times, and the very fine line of one that is potentially violent. Each of these young women seemed oblivious to the possibility, even when she had previously been assaulted, that controlling behavior was or could be a precursor to violence. When asked about her previous boyfriends, Mariah stated, “I guess since they were older….some of them were mean, not really mean, but just different, in a controlling way.” (January 8, 2003) In response to this behavior, Mariah’s strategy was compelling, “I’d go off. Scream, yell, cuss at him, leave.”

I fear that these girls are not equipped to ultimately avoid violence in their own relationships. Though most of them would seem to be the very essence of resilience, I am not confident that even one will be able to avoid the pain and suffering that their own mothers
endured. There is a saying that I have often used in working with girls and women who have been involved in violent or otherwise unhealthy relationships, “if it feels familiar, run like hell.” It is my concern that these young women have not learned this vital lesson; that they do not, despite their lifetime of learning, have the necessary tools to avoid the mistakes of those who came before them.

I have learned from each of these young women in so many different ways. Participating in interviews, listening to tapes and analyzing transcripts led me to develop multiple themes, organized into families and codes (see Appendix G) in the data. Themes are described throughout the findings. Assertions, or declarations, are used after describing each theme to point at the specific summarization of how themes seemed to impact participants. At times the process seemed to propel more questions than in fostering understanding. I’ve learned about and questioned how I view resilience. I’ve learned of the lack of trust participants felt, how they learned to cope, their process of making meaning of their experiences and their hopes for the future. They have taught me to question everything I see, hear, experience, and to understand that everything is forever evolving and changing.

I have developed a new understanding of what violence is, to a few of those living in its inner core; the multiple contexts of violence in the lives of these young women; responses to the violence, and the effects and aftermath of violence. I’ve learned about resilience, what it is and what it could be, should be. These too are ever-changing. Finally, I have developed an understanding of how my use of methodology could help, becoming a process of healing, yet haunt those who chose to share. This is their story; our story; and then again, their story; I hope I tell it well.

Expanding Perspectives on Violence

My family is not normal
But I love it anyway
There are two different houses
But maybe it’s better that way

I really love my sister
It’s good to have her here
She helps me in some hard times
When the family began to tear

–Natalie, February 4, 2003
Johnson (2001) states that, “In everyday speech and even in most social science discourse, ‘domestic violence’ is about men beating women” (p. 167). In 1995, Johnson offered a paradigm shift of how we view violence, domestic violence. He argued that there were two distinct forms of violence that occurred in families, common couple violence and patriarchal terrorism, “a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation and other control tactics” (p. 284). This form of what Johnson (2001) now refers to as intimate terrorism, grew from qualitative studies in women’s shelters and feminist literature (Kurz, 1989) and is the essence of the cycle of violence (Walker, 1984).

Common couple violence (Johnson, 1995; 2001) grew from family violence literature guided in large part by Straus (1971) and Gelles (1974). These large, survey style, quantitative studies analyzed the prevalence of domestic violence and focused on the similarities of family violence, developing a better understanding of stress, varying forms of violence and normative behaviors in regard to violence (Johnson, 1995). Common couple violence (CCV) is when “conflict occasionally gets ‘out of hand,’ leading usually to ‘minor’ forms of violence, and more rarely escalating into serious, sometimes even life-threatening, forms of violence” (Johnson, p. 285).

Johnson (2001) clarified this paradigm shift more succinctly in the decade review and added that intimate terrorism (IT) is not just serious violence. Rather, there is much variability in IT and CCV, with quite severe CCV, including homicides, and some IT involving a low amount of violence. He also added two categories of violence, violent resistance (VR), when a woman (in general) defends herself through the use of violence against her battering partner, and mutual violent control (MVC) in which both partners are controlling and violent “that could be viewed as two intimate terrorists battling for control” (Johnson, 2001, p. 169).

There are two concerns that I have regarding even these diverse definitions of family violence and the multiple contexts in which family violence exists. First, that violence seems to imply being physically battered as a prerequisite, without distinctions that violence is not simply being beaten. Even though definitions tend to include patterns of control and threats, without an act of physical violence, is it domestic violence? Second, even in this small sample, Danielle’s mother simply didn’t fit anywhere, and interestingly enough, fit everywhere. Other mothers’
experience of violence, as depicted by their children, followed similar patterns of ever-changing. Two issues then, intertwine: does violence necessarily comprise physical violence to be called violence, and is that violence ever-changing, moving and flowing, revolving through intimate terrorism, common couple violence, violent resistance and mutual violent control, depending upon the circumstances and contexts?

What is violence?

*Violence-* “rough or harmful action or treatment” (Barnhart, 1962, p. 859).

Violence is the feeling of nothingness...
   Complete and utter nothing.

Once you get bruised, battered, broken, smacked, cracked so many times...
You’ve allowed them to make you feel...
   ...It just starts to feel like nothing.

And your heart lets this cold, lonely, hateful shield down where...
   No matter how hard you’re hit
   No matter how loud you’ve been screamed at
   No matter how deep the wound
   No matter how long you bleed
   No matter how hurt

You *almost* wished you feel...

   **You Feel Nothing!!**

The heart, mind, and soul can only be fucked with so many times before it just shuts down. Totally.
   No Emotion...In or Out
   –Victoria, February 10, 2003

Danielle (January 8, 2003) states that, “violence is verbal abuse, physical abuse, mental abuse. Nobody deserves to be treated like crap....like they’re nothing; beat on and....sexual abuse....Family violence, yelling, screaming, fighting, both physical and emotional, verbal.” Danielle, just as every other participant stated that verbal abuse was violent. There was no question to them that violence was much more than being beaten. Victoria said, “Violence is either mental or physical abuse toward a person....[A] crappy way of life....It looks like hell. It
looks like, I don’t know, like the devil standing, in the left hand corner of the room.” (January 30, 2003)

Machenzie added,

physical abuse, mental abuse. More mental. I don’t know, it is physical abuse, but when people get beat up on, and stuff, I don’t know, you never forget something like that. Everything that happens to you from that point on, you always think about it, and it messes with your head, literally, mentally....I just think that it messes with your mind and makes you not so good of a person. (February 6, 2003)

Victoria agreed that emotional abuse derived from physical abuse:

I’ll give you an example of emotionally abusing somebody else. I guess it derives from what happens physically from the other person, emotionally inside. You just start to die.... I used to get so depressed about not having a good father and not having what I wanted. I’d go to Wal-Mart or somewhere with him and I’d just start bawling if I saw a daughter and her dad just walking and talking. I’d just start bawling, and he could never understand that. (January 30, 2003)

The definition of violence was further extended by Natalie, who stated, “just talking about someone....I don’t really know the definition of violence....yelling....just anything you do to be mean or hurtful.” (February 4, 2003) “I guess anger that’s built up inside of someone....I mean I think it can come from a lot of things. It could be something that you’ve held inside of you for a long time, maybe, and all of a sudden, you just, you’ve had enough and you’re fed up with it....but I think it’s the way you react.” (Mary, January 30, 2003)

Claire, the mother of Mary and Natalie told me that her husband never physically assaulted her. Rather, he would break things, punch holes in the walls, or cut wires when angry or to let her know he didn’t like what she was saying. On one occasion, he subtly threatened her with a knife. Claire described other periods of “verbal violence and attempts to control and silence her.” (Field Notes, August 27, 2002)

No physical violence. I often had the fear of it. My ex-husband had a temper. He would get so upset that his whole body language would be
shouting out that he wanted to hit me....every place we ever lived he punched a hole in the wall at some point....his temper got the best of him and he punched a hole in our living room wall about the size of a football.... Early on in the marriage it was electronic items- he would break remote controls, TV’s, etc.... A lot of ‘control’ issues- he would be angry and frustrated over finances mostly.... A lot of emotional abuse directed at me to [make me] feel bad over parenting, finances, sex, etc....

(Claire, questionnaire)

**Assertion:** Participants overwhelmingly agreed that violence was much more than being physically battered. It was about emotional battering, being beaten down mentally, intellectually. It was about intent. It was about the experience of pain. These issues were inseparable for these young women and their mothers, and their experience of violence was ever-changing, yet somehow remaining the same.

*Violence as Ever-Changing*

I’ve heard it all
I’ve seen it all
I’ve seen them come
I’ve seen them go

From good times to bad
through the yelling and screaming
to the tears and laughter

From the name-calling
to “I love you”

From the glass breaking
to the family outings

From the fists
to the kisses

From “I hate you”
to “I can’t live without you”

Its an endless pattern
an endless cycle
nothing ever changes
nothing ever goes away
–Danielle, February 5, 2003

For several of the participants, and Danielle and her family in particular, violence was always present, in many forms, ever-changing.

In Mom’s little run about with all her different boyfriends I’ve heard a lot of fighting. I’ve seen a lot of fighting, seen mom come out on top and her boyfriends come out on top. But mom’s had quite a bit of bruises, and her boyfriends have too. Mom’s busted hair dryers over a boyfriend’s head. She’s been grabbed by the throat and [been] pushed into a wall. I’ve been in-between it. It’s been over me, for me, and my sisters. Just whenever...the fighting going on till all hours of the night. The cops being called, and one time, B’s Daddy, mom and him had split up...and B’s daddy come down to her house, starting stuff over a female’s bike, and B’s dad ended up getting shot in the leg. (Danielle, January 8, 2003)

From an initial examination, this sounds a lot like Johnson’s (2001) mutual violent control (MVC). Yet, in talking with Danielle and other participants, it was not so simplistic. The patterns of behavior ranged from CCV through each of Johnson’s types of violence. This may further question assumptions that women are merely victims of violence or that they respond with one violent episode, as in violent resistance (VR). Johnson explains that

the distinctions are based not on behavior in a single incident, but on more general patterns of control exercised across the many encounters that comprise a relationship, patterns that are rooted in the motivations of the perpetrator and his or her partner (p. 168).

From the children’s perspectives, however, these patterns of violence were ever-changing and ambiguous, making it difficult to understand what was happening:

Well, when my mom was drinking and stuff like that. I didn’t want to come home because I didn’t know who was going to be there, what kind of mood she was gonna’ be in or what kind of mood her boyfriend would be in....My mom and dad quit trying to be together when I was probably
about 2. It was right after T was born; they quit trying to be together. But mom would tell me about when dad would spit in her face and she’d smack him in his mouth and dad put black eyes on her, busted mouth and all that stuff.

(Danielle, January 27, 2003)

It was confusing for participants to watch, often in horror as their parents battled against each other:

With my parents, when my dad would get mad and my mom would scream at him and verbally abuse him, he would physically abuse her and then she’d come back the next time ten times harder and he’d hit ten times harder, ya’ know. And each time they got in a fight it’d get worse and worse and worse, and I mean he, he just wouldn’t care like he’d do it in front of kids and that’s, that’s not like killing, at all, but in a way that’s a similarity because you’re actually beating the life out of your wife in front of your kids and that is a horrible thing to see. (Machenzie, January 13, 2003)

Danielle described many other examples of mutual violent control (MVC), at times involving violence against the children:

I might have been about 6 or 7. They was arguing about something and D come in and grabbed her by the throat and pushed her up against the wall. Mom busted his head with a hair dryer. It kept on, and kept on, and mom told me to go call the law and I went. I went to go out the door and he [mom’s boyfriend] slammed my arm in the door.... When I was about 13, 14 maybe, mom and her boyfriend G. were fighting and I was in between. He reach[ed] around me and smacked mama up side the head, and it got them into a shovin’ argument. I don’t think like he ever beat, beat mom. He smacked her around, but [didn’t] actually leave black eyes and stuff.

(Danielle, January 27, 2003)

But defending one’s self did not mean that you had developed patterns of MVC. There were many stories that depicted mothers’ defending themselves, using violence, but having not
developed ongoing patterns of mutual violent control. These instances of violent resistance were woven throughout lengthy periods of both MVC and intimate terrorism (IT). Mariah described one such incident:

I don’t really remember, really, what led up to it, but I do remember one night me and my sister [Machenzie] shared a bedroom, and we heard my mom yelling. So we got up and went into the kitchen and my dad was hitting on my mom, and my mom hit him in the face with a frying pan, and he had to get stitches and stuff. (Mariah, February 5, 2003)

Ironically, Maggie was charged with assault and battery for this incident. This was not the end of violence, however. There were many similar stories that were more consonant with IT, and little ability to defend against the brutality:

Just about every day, little petty things, like arguing sometimes, and then gradually it got bigger to actual physical beating, where he would start hitting her, and calling her bad names and saying that she made him this way, because she made him mad and–I remember one time he put her head through the wall and crazy things like that. Things that you’d never think that a five year old kid would remember today– Just crazy things. (Machenzie, February 13, 2003)

Danielle added, “mom dread[ed] what’s going to happen to her...[because she] didn’t do something right or they [the children] done something wrong” (January 27, 2003). Machenzie offered many other stories of witnessing her mother’s abuse, intimate terrorism:

He’d come home or something. She’d be like, go to your room. She wouldn’t try to, you know, make him stop, but she knew it was coming. And he’d come home already on a rampage before he got in the door....He just threw her across the room, got on top of her and started hitting her, while the three of us [were] sitting here watching a movie.” (February, 13, 2003)

Danielle described another scenario:

Every time my mom and her boyfriends fought, mom always said just don’t tell anybody....Mom always makes excuses for her boyfriends no
matter what it is. They can be in the wrong, but in her eyes they’re right. Mom would say ‘I slipped and fell or I hit the door or something’, but I knew it was one of ‘em. (January 27, 2003)

Even in relationships that were, to me, clearly MVC or IT, the ever-changing experience of violence was evident:

Well, my dad can still chop my mom down to any size he wants her to, and my mom, just still a little, weak, fragile thing that does whatever my father says. That’s it, nothing really changed there except he doesn’t hit her anymore. (Victoria, February 10, 2003)

Though physical violence may have extinguished, at least from participant perspectives, other patterns of IT continued to exist. Other times, there would be obvious decreases in the violence, no matter if it were MVC, IT, or another category of violence:

He’d smack mom; mom [would] smack him and she’d... bust him in the head [and] break stuff....The last couple of years they were together it seemed like things started slowing down; mom [and he], they weren’t fighting as much. (Danielle, January 8, 2003)

Danielle, having described a previous relationship of her mother’s, describes her mother’s current relationship. “The arguing is getting worse, but that’s just arguing. But as in the shoven’, I don’t know, it’s more or less calmed down.” (Danielle, January 27, 2003) Though participants believed that the violence continuously metamorphosed, they all believed, as young children, that there would be no end to the violence. Victoria shared the sentiment that other participants had felt and expressed at one time or another, “I figure one day they’ll figure it out...or kill each other.” (February, 10, 2003)

Assertion: Violence is ever-changing. Though it may be helpful to categorize violence, it is imperative that we understand that violence is not a stagnant process; it is dynamic, which makes it all the more dangerous. Participants were often confused by this ever-changing process and it had an impact on how they understood and gave meaning to the violence with which they were exposed.
Multiple Contexts of Violence

It’s hard to go on...
when no one loves you.

Witnessing, fearing things, never wanting to close your eyes,
afraid of what you see when the lights go out...

Fearing your daddy yelling
and your mama crying...
–Mariah, February 5, 2003

The pain of witnessing domestic violence was poignantly offered by Mariah. In her world, nighttime was synonymous with the possibility of violence. I often wondered, in talking to Mariah, Machenzie, Mary, Natalie, Victoria, and Danielle, how many nights went sleepless, wondering if the fighting would begin, listening for the frantic fear in their mother’s voices and crashing outside their bedroom doors. Machenzie described it as “pins and needles.” Violence threaded through their lives, some more than others, but each child, young woman, looked behind at the carnage left behind, her childhood.

There were many facets to the violence in their lives. Exploring multiple contexts of violence meant attempting to understand the circumstances surrounding the violence that the participants in this study were exposed to. Though researchers such as Garbarino (1982; 1999; 2001) are particularly interested in socially toxic environments, which include families, but extend well beyond the familial parameters, context is also understanding the background in which circumstances are able to thrive. Mothers experienced verbal and physical abuse. For adolescent participants, it was not only witnessing their mothers being verbally or physically battered; seeing and hearing the violence, becoming involved, trying to stop the violence; for three, becoming a victim of violence, themselves. Several watched in horror or learned later that friends of the family exhibited and were victims of violence, and then the aunts, uncles, grandparents. They too exposed their nieces or grandchildren to family violence. Most participants were financially fortunate to have been able to live in housing which did not further expose them to violence. Others were not so fortunate. Movies, a form of escape for many, became a horrid reminder of the violence at home, and showed them further avenues and possibilities for what could happen in their lives. For three, the violence would, in some way,
follow them into their own intimate relationships. At least one, Mariah, would express violence in the face of adversity. But, I believe, I hope, she has learned a new lesson...that she is loved. I only hope she will remember.

_Mothers’ Experience of Violence_

Claire, 43-year-old mother of Mary and Natalie described primarily threatening behavior by her former husband. The verbal and physical threats began early in their marriage and consisted of breaking electronic devices, such as TV’s and remote controls, cutting wires and punching holes in the walls. His controlling behaviors continued throughout the marriage. His final incident, from Claire’s perspective, was an extramarital affair. Mary described an incident in which she too was exposed to the affair:

"This lady, I was outside playing with my sister and sorry [began crying] I’m kind of getting [emotional]. This white truck comes and drops this lady off and she’s a mess, you know, and she grabs her suitcases out of the back of his truck, and he’s yelling at her, and I’m like, I run to the house, ‘dad this lady needs help outside.’ She goes running across the street and my dad, you know, that, that was the lady he’d been with and I didn’t know, you know. And that guy [the woman’s husband] came to our house. Sorry [crying], and he was yelling at my dad and my dad had to call the police. I’m sorry [crying]. And nobody had told me anything about what was going on. And, I just didn’t know what was going on, you know, cause I was so young and then when my parents finally told me....That was hard, seeing that and then, I remember that very vividly what happened [crying]. And it just, to, to know that I saw a part of it, and I remember it, but I didn’t know what it was until later, you know. It’s just hard finding out things like that, you know. I don’t know. I think, if I could have just let my mom know that, you know, that it wasn’t something about her. (February 11, 2003)"

This was not the only affair that youth were exposed to and mothers experienced in their relationships with violent male partners. Though Claire’s experience did not lead to a violent reaction, other’s experiences did. Machenzie described one such incident:
He came in really drunk and there was this big ole smudge of red pink on his collar, on his shirt, and my mom got really mad at him. She’s like, what’s this? And he’s just, he was just standing next to the wall and was just like, ‘leave me alone Maggie, leave me alone.’ And she’s just in his face, yelling at him, and I woke up on the couch, look over and they’re standing there arguing, and I just sat there and watched, and he like, just slammed her head into the wall. She collapsed onto the ground and he just walked back out the door. (February 13, 2003)

Danielle described another incident where her mother, rather than her mother’s boyfriend, reacted violently:

I remember one time, me and mom and T and B [sisters] had been out. B [mother’s boyfriend] was at the house by himself, and when we got back, and B was in bed with another woman, and mom beat the hell out of both of them. (January 27, 2003)

Throughout my conversations with these young women and their mothers, I came to understand that violence came in so many different ways and at so many different times. Maggie’s experience of violence was much more physically brutal than Claire’s, but the pain inflicted was none the greater. Maggie, 41 at the time of completing her questionnaire, had three children, Machenzie, Mariah, and the youngest, Elaine, age 11. Maggie described horrific physical violence in her marriage. Over a 14 year period, beginning prior to any of the children being born, and ending (though she described ongoing verbal abuse and occasional physical abuse because of contact and discussions revolving around the children) when Machenzie was seven and Mariah was six.

Maggie described being hit, choked, and raped. On one occasion her husband held a gun to her head. Maggie was hospitalized twice, once for a dislocated shoulder, prior to any children being born, and a second time for a broken tail bone, prior to her decision to leave her husband. The emotional and verbal abuse consisted of threats, taunts, cursing, and name-calling, all of which escalated over time to being nearly daily. When these tactics were insufficient, he would terrorize Maggie by driving excessively fast and erratically. On one occasion, he took the kids and filed a court petition claiming Maggie to be an unfit mother.
Neither Maggie nor Claire ever reported the violence they were experiencing, and in fact, both women went to great lengths to hide the abuse, as did other mothers as reported by their daughters. Claire reported the weekly contradiction between her life and fellow church goers, knowing that as they sat in church, this was not the life she and her family should be living, yet feeling helpless to make changes. Maggie wrote, “I never spoke to anyone, [and] always hid the bruises.” (Questionnaire)

Just as Claire and Maggie hid their experience of abuse from people outside of the family, they also tried to hide it from their children. This was a protective measure, so that their children would be less exposed to the violence they were experiencing and the aftermath of that violence. Parents would send children to their rooms, lock them into their rooms and themselves into rooms. When things got really bad, mothers would call aunts or grandparents to come get the kids. But mostly, mothers tried to protect their children, by ensuring they did not see what was happening. Claire wrote, “mostly the children were in bed at night when our ‘discussions’ took place....We tried to have them away, in their room during these confrontations.” (Questionnaire) Claire’s daughter, Mary, confirmed that she and her sister were usually in their shared room during confrontations. She said,

my bedroom was right above the dining room, and they were usually in there. But I knew that my mom would send us up to our room, you know, when they were fighting....I would maybe be trying to go to the kitchen to get a snack or something, you know, cause you know, it’s right by the dining room, and my mom would be, ‘you girls need to go to bed.’

(February 5, 2003)

Danielle’s mother also sent her and her sisters to their rooms when the arguing began. “We’ze always told, ‘go to your room.’” (January 27, 2003) Yet, this didn’t protect Danielle or other participants from the exposure; they simply didn’t see as much. For, as Danielle explained, she couldn’t help but hear what was happening, “you fucking bitch; you lazy whore; you son of a bitch.”

Not only did mothers send their children to their rooms, but also went to great lengths to keep the children out of the fights and from seeing too much. “When he would come home from wherever he’d been, and we’d be in bed already, and mom would lock the door....cause when all
the times we had walked out there and seen them, our dad hitting on our mom.” (Mariah, February 5, 2003) Mariah’s sister, Machenzie understood that this had actually been planned. Their parents had intentionally turned the doorknob around in order to lock the girls into their room. But, it didn’t protect them from hearing the violence just outside their door.

[Mariah] and I had a lock, on the outside of our door; they switched the doorknobs....When they started arguing, she’d say go to your room. She’d shut the door on us, and just because we use to get really upset; I mean [Mariah] and [Elaine], and when I was a little bit older, they use to get really, like hysterically upset, and so she’d say, you know, girls go play in your room. When my dad would come home and we’d be watching a movie or something, and she’d be like, go to your room; I’ve got to talk to your dad; the next thing you know, we’d hear breaking glasses and screaming and [Elaine] and [Mariah would] be in there crying and I’d be trying to calm my two sisters down....I knew what was happening and knew that she wasn’t going to do anything to change it, and she’d try to cover it up all the time. (February 13, 2003)

Other mothers attempted to minimize exposure by locking themselves into rooms. But, this was also futile, for children could not ignore what was happening behind those doors; at times this was more terrifying than actually knowing what was happening:

My parents, they got in a fight or something, and they used to get in fights, they used to lock themselves into [a room]....Well, I’m freaking out cause my dad’s in there yelling and [I] can hear shit, ya’ know, smashing around and like slaps going on....I’d sit there and bang on the door and be like ‘dad let me in’, and ya’ know. I guess the reason they did that, they just didn’t want to do it in front of the kids or something; I don’t know.

(Victoria, February 10, 2003)

**Assertion:** Hiding the violence is not necessarily good. Mothers of these participants had a strong desire to protect their children from viewing the violence they were experiencing. This protection could participate in children’s misinterpretations of the violence being expressed in their families and even create more trauma for them.
Although mothers tried to hide the abuse from their children, children nonetheless knew and understood what was happening. Even though the children were four to 11 (most were five to seven) years old at the time of the abuse, they deeply understood that their fathers or male caretakers were violently abusing their mothers; and, at times, their mothers were responding in kind.

Have you ever laid in bed  
and heard the screaming in your head

Listening to mommy and daddy fighting  
Things crashing on the floor like lightening

Mommy screams and daddy yells  
but I’m always told never to tell

mommy says daddy’s just mad  
with work and [the] bad day he had

But all of that is just excuses  
But excuses don’t cover the bruises

– Danielle, January 8, 2003

Children were exposed to a wide variety of violence in their families and in many different ways. Children most often heard the violence, when mothers would send them off to their rooms to hopefully avoid being exposed to the violence. This was somewhat effective, given that the verbal fighting tended to blur into one ongoing family fight for most participants. Danielle said,

I guess just certain things that I actually see stay in my head. As to what I just hear, the arguing or the smack or something....things that I see, I can remember better, other than hearing, like ‘you stupid bitch and a smack or something.’ (January 27, 2003)

Victoria agreed that the violence was usually heard, though she thought that there was more to it than her mother trying to protect the children. “Most of the time I would hear it. I think he [was] scared to hit mom in front of us.” (February 10, 2003)
Children usually heard the violence in their bedrooms, and usually at night; but, at times, even their play routines were halted. “We’d be outside playing or what ever, then we’d hear my mom and dad yelling and stuff, and all this stuff breaking, being thrown around, and my mom would be throwing stuff outside.” (Mariah, February 5, 2003)

Though children heard the fighting, they often didn’t know how the fights began or what they were even about. “I couldn’t tell you what they were fighting about now. I just know there was a lot of yelling going on.” (Mary, February 5, 2003) Natalie didn’t even remember her parents fighting. “All I remember is just them fighting with my brother. I mean maybe some of those times it really was just them, and I thought they were fighting over [Evan], so I mean I don’t really remember any of that. (February 4, 2003)

Children not only heard the fighting, arguing and physical violence. They also saw a great deal of the violence, despite mothers’ best efforts to protect them from that exposure. And, when they did see the violence, it had a profound impact on each child. Each child saw a great deal of verbal battering, name-calling, threatening and physical battering. Physical battering included hitting, choking, kicking, punching, smashing, things being thrown, heads being slammed into walls or through walls. Mothers were knocked unconscious, and thrown down stairs. There were many other forms of violence that children didn’t see, including being raped and threatened with guns and knives. Danielle shared, very nonchalantly, the extent of the violence she saw. “I’ve seen my mom get into verbal arguments with her boyfriends, physical arguments. I’ve seen heads getting busted with hair dryers, heads going through walls.” (January 1, 2003) Many of the participants were fairly casual and detached as they shared their exposure. I often wondered if there was some recording playing in their heads, a common phenomenon I had experienced when working with traumatized youth. Machenzie actually used this metaphor on three separate occasions. Like most other participants, Mariah was dispassionate as she shared her experiences:

My dad would always come home late, and if my mom didn’t have stuff ready [or] how he wanted it, or have anything that he wanted, then he’d start hitting on my mom and screaming and stuff....hitting her in the face, pulling her hair, all that. (February 5, 2003)
Participants vividly remembered the first time they witnessed their mother being assaulted. Denzin (1989) indicated that the first violent event that a child observed was a sort of epiphany. This epiphany left marks on children’s lives and seemed to be transformational in the child’s life. Peled (1993) implied that in witnessing that first experience of violence, the child’s world was forever changed. It marked a break in the family routine and introduced an awareness of their father’s capability to be violent, and the possibility of further violence. Machenzie described her first experience of seeing her father abuse her mother. “He’d get mad at her and push and she’d fall and he’d just jump on top of her and start hitting her and socking her.” (February 13, 2003) The memory was even more vivid to Victoria:

The first time I’d ever been exposed to it... my dad came storming out the door and there’s my mom just crawled up in the corner in the room ya’ know, and she’s got a little bit of bruises and stuff on her face. That was like the first time, ya’ know, that I’d ever known that my father was, I guess, should I say an asshole? (February 10, 2003)

As horrific as that first experience was, it was not the end. Violence continued, in many ways, and the exposure to that violence continued for each of the participants. To participants, exposure wasn’t merely hearing or seeing the violence. It became a pervasive part of their existence, and somewhat normalized. Participants were further exposed by seeing the many bruises, picking their mothers up off the floor and in other ways dealing with the aftermath of violence. Participants described understanding their mother’s depression and withdrawal, and at times were left at home with their father for days at a time.

Participants were much more emotional as they described their mother’s emotional and physical reactions to the violence. I could hear the ache in Danielle’s voice as she described the general aftermath of a violent episode, “she’d cry. Oh, God, she’d cry.” (February 5, 2003) Children were also exposed by becoming, at times, confidants to their mothers or in other ways hearing about violence that occurred in the child’s absence. Once again, Danielle was very pained as she described one such episode when she was a teenager. “Danielle when you comin’ home; I need somebody to talk to; when you comin’ home; when you comin’ home?” (January 27, 2003)
Assertion: Participants experienced violence by being exposed to it. They could hear and see the violence and were able to see the bruises on their mothers, sense their mother’s depression and feel the effects of their mother’s withdrawal. Participants became confidants and participated in normalizing the violence. The violence, ever-pervasive, ever-changing, never went away. At times the violence was not merely exposure, but the children themselves became inadvertent victims of the violence.

*Participant Roles in the Violence*

There were a variety of ways in which children and adolescents became directly involved in the family fighting and violence. Fantuzzo et al., (1997) stated that direct involvement included children calling the police, becoming involved in the escalation of violence or being victims of abuse either through an attempt to stop their fathers or becoming the brunt of the violence itself. Participants in this study became involved in the violence in several ways. They were blamed by either their father or male caretaker for something they had done, or hadn’t done, or by their mothers after the violence had ended. Danielle described one such incident: “She takes it out on us. Not necessarily physically, but yelling at us, ‘if you wouldn’t have done this, he wouldn’t have gotten mad.’” (January 27, 2003) Children may have also just been physically between their mothers and fathers or male caretakers, as previously described by Danielle when her mother’s boyfriend reached around her to physically assault her mother.

Children also became active participants when they would call, or attempt to call the police. However, children had to be somewhat creative as Danielle was:

Mom told me to go call the law and I went. I went to go out the door, and he slammed my arm in the door, and I went up the steps out my bedroom door, cause I had a door that went outside my bedroom. I went out that way and called the law....next door [at my] neighbor’s house. (January 27, 2003)

Mariah and Machenzie were not so fortunate. “My sister tried [to call the police] one time, then my dad pulled the phone out of the wall and started screaming at my sister.” (Mariah, February 5, 2003) Machenzie stated that she never attempted to call the police again and, in fact, became afraid to even trust that the police could stop her father at all.

The fourth way that children became involved was to actively intervene with their
father’s behavior. Machenzie tried this in two different ways, by standing up to him and trying to physically pull her father off her mother when he was beating her. Her perspective was, just as when she attempted to call the police, things only got worse:

She never had the nerve to hide from him or say, or stand up to [him] or something, and I realized the times that I tried to stand up to him, I just made it 10 times worse. You know, I kept trying to stand up to him and kept trying to tell him, that you’re a mean man, you don’t have to be like this, but that just, I realized after, not a very long time, that that made it 10 times worse. And it’d make him more mad... I use to piss him off to the point where he just went flat out on me. (February 13, 2003)

Machenzie did, however, try to stop her father numerous times by pulling him off of her mother. She quickly learned though, that this was ineffective:

I’d try to pull him off of her and he’d throw me back and I’d hit my head or something, and my two little sisters would stand in the doorway, screaming and crying and standing there, like ghosts. I’d be, like, what’s going on? (February 13, 2003)

Machenzie and other participants continued to try to intervene in the violence, but these were futile attempts. Machenzie was very sad as she described her decision to no longer involve herself in the violence. “When I did say something, it would always turn toward me and then I started to be the problem.” (February 18, 2003)

**Assertion:** Children’s exposure to family violence extended beyond mere witnessing. Children became active participants in the violence, either voluntarily or because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Participants were used as scapegoats, or excuses for the violence by both mothers and fathers. Children may have found themselves physically between their parents during a verbal or physical fight. They attempted to contact the police or other agencies or attempted to actually stop the violence by becoming a physical barrier between their mothers and fathers or male caretakers. Participants found that each of these strategies were ultimately futile in decreasing the violence.

**Becoming a Victim of Violence**

Exposure to family violence, in any form, can be considered emotionally distressing if
emotionally and psychologically abusive to children, since the terrorizing experience can be traumatizing (Cummings, 1998; Garbarino, Guttman, & Seely, 1986). Children who became active participants in family violence, as we have seen, at times become inadvertent victims of their caretakers. Not all violence directed at the children was inadvertent, however. Three participants described being victims of physical violence at the hands of their fathers or male caretakers, even when they were not attempting to intervene in their mother’s abuse. Mary, though never a victim of physical violence, was frustrated as she described several situations where she became the target of her father’s unprovoked anger and verbal violence:

My dad would come home from work, and maybe he had a bad day, and like I didn’t do anything, ya’ know, but he just like, like [would] get aggravated at something little, and just yell at me or something just because he’s taking it out on me, ya know....Sometimes he just blew up at me and it wasn’t my fault, but he just did; that...that happened a lot. (February 5, 2003)

In other situations, fathers and male caretakers were abusive by locking kids, such as Machenzie and Mariah, in their room all day without food or a bathroom. At times, fathers or male caretakers were just cruel. Victoria described one such incident when she fell from her bike as a young girl and went to her dad with a bloody knee. “I’m crying my eyes out and I swear it doesn’t hurt, and he’s like ‘shmack’ on my knee. He [says] ‘does that hurt now?’ I was like no, and he went ‘shmack’ and he [says] ‘does that hurt now?’” (February 10, 2003)

For the three participants who were physically abused, it wasn’t just cruelty, however. Victoria, Danielle and Machenzie described several times where they became the brunt of their father’s or mother’s boyfriend’s violence. Machenzie was beaten with a dog collar. Her father continued to abuse her even after her parents separated. During her father’s visitation he would hit her hard enough to bruise her on several occasions. She would make up excuses for the bruises to her mother, saying someone at school had “knocked me up against the wall or something.” Victoria suffered unspeakable abuse by her father. She described many times where she was left bloody and battered, being kicked when she fell to the ground, smacked and punched in the face, blood pouring from her nose onto her sweatshirt...all before school.
Assertion: Participants became both inadvertent and intentional victims of family violence. This abuse could not be distinguished from the violence they were exposed to. For participants, it simply could not be separated.

Extended Family Violence

Family violence included much more than exposure to parental fighting and abuse, becoming involved in the fighting and being a victim of child abuse. For most of the participants, their exposure to family violence included extended family members. Four of the six participants reported extensive violence between siblings, other family members living in the home, and family members living outside the home, such as grandparents and uncles and aunts. These levels of exposure only convinced participants of the pervasiveness of violence in their lives, which led to feelings of exasperation, that there was no escape. For instance, during the time I was interviewing Danielle, her mother’s boyfriend’s son moved in with the family. Already, there were six family members living in the two bedroom duplex. This additional burden was even more difficult, given this young man was just being released from incarceration for assault, and breaking and entering. Danielle verbalized great concern about how this would impact her young daughter.

There seemed to be an understanding among participants that their experiences of abuse and violence in their families was nothing new to their parents. Victoria stated, “well, my dad’s dad use to beat the shit [out] of him and yeah, my mom’s dad was pretty much heartless.” (February 10, 2003) Danielle mimicked this sentiment saying, “yeah, and from the way I’ve heard, mom and them grew up pretty bad with abuse.” Though they didn’t see these experiences, the verbal stories, handed down, were just one more example of violence that seemed to be never ending.

Though much of their exposure to extended family member violence was through storytelling, there were some occasions where participants did witness their grandparents abusing their parents or other relatives. Danielle excitedly described her grandmother’s response to a cousin who was hiding from her grandmother in the house:

Granny come up there and was beatin on the doors because my cousin,...she was staying over at the house. She was drunk, and my Mawmaw was trying to get [in] the house and mom went to open the
doors to let her in, and Mawmaw was beating on all them doors, front
door, back door, beating on the windows and everything. (January 27,
2003)
Participants saw or were also exposed to many stories about violence between their
grandparents. For Danielle, Machenzie and Mariah, these stories of relational violence between
grandparents were common events. Danielle said, “I heard that mawmaw tried to throw pawpaw
off the porch, about pawpaw hittin’ mawmaw, and then mawmaw backhanding him. Let’s see,
mawmaw laid his hand on a hot oven one time.” (January 27, 2003)

Machenzie and Mariah both described stories about male family friends beating their
wives in front of everyone and no one attempting to stop the violence. They shared many stories
of violence between aunts and uncles and other family members. On one occasion they were
witnesses to a particularly violent fight between their aunt and uncle:

My uncle and his wife actually got into a fight, and he, she was hitting
him, and he tried to get her off of [him], I guess, and I don’t know,
strangled her, and she stabbed him three times. [The family was driving
and] my sister happened to turn around, and she’s like ‘oh my gosh’, ya’
know, ‘Uncle [Johnny’s] stumbling up the hill’, and my dad... looked and
my uncle was holding himself, and just falls and collapses. He ran up the
hill, trying to get somebody, and I didn’t actually see it, but I saw him like
laying in mom’s car like bleeding all over the place, and seeing him in the
emergency room and all our fam[ily], everyone that was there basically in
the room, and we went back and saw my aunt, and she’s sitting there
shaking and reading a bible. (Machenzie, February 5, 2003)

**Assertion:** Family violence was not a one-time event, or limited to the family of
procreation, but a pervasive, multi-generational culture within the family. Exposure to
family violence was a constant barrage, a constant reinforcement, and a constant reminder
to keep the family secret.

*School, Neighborhood and Entertainment Violence*

All six participants were exposed to school violence in some fashion. All six reported
seeing physical fights and witnessing much of the verbal abuse that is so often expressed in
middle and high schools. None of the six expressed that they were frequent victims of verbal abuse, though all reported being made-fun-of, put-down or teased at times. Danielle expressed that this was one reason she didn’t like going to school. However, she expressed that her estrangement from school was really more about feeling different from others than being teased for being different. Though several participants had been involved in school fights, these were seldom more than shoving exhibitions. Mariah was the only participant who indicated that she had been exposed to many fights in school, and had been a participant in several of these. She implied that this was probably due to the friends that she previously chose to spend time with (the “bad asses”).

Like school violence, neighborhood violence was not a major issue for any participant. Three participants, Danielle, Machenzie and Mariah were exposed to some neighborhood violence. This consisted mostly of property theft, substance abuse and domestic violence calls for other families. However, Machenzie and Mariah indicated that they developed friendships with kids that lived in neighborhood environments which exposed them to much more violence than the neighborhoods in which they typically lived.

When I was a rebelling child myself, I used to hang out with bad kids and got to see where they lived. [It] wasn’t too good, and I just thought that, ya’ know, many I’m glad I don’t live here. Ya’, know, people driving by and trying to kill somebody or seeing people get stabbed. (February 6, 2003)

Maggie, Machenzie and Mariah’s mother, indicated that the family moved a lot since her separation from her ex-husband in October, 1992, and that the housing was often substandard and crime-ridden. She often rented apartments, dilapidated houses or stayed with friends. It wasn’t until 2001 that she was able to afford to buy a house in a neighborhood where she thought there were few negative influences. I often wondered, in comparison to participant families, if neighborhood environments simply couldn’t match what was happening in their own homes. Victoria suggested this very sentiment:

I didn’t have a crappy neighborhood, or anything. We were the violence in the neighborhood. My family was the violent neighbors. We were the ones
fighting at 4:00 in the morning. There wasn’t like violence in the neighborhood; we were the violence. (January 30, 2003)

Though school and neighborhood violence was not a major drawback for participants, entertainment violence, in particular horror movies were. The American Psychiatric Association (1998) reported that the average American child viewed 28 hours of TV per week and by the age of 18 will have witnessed 16,000 simulated homicides and 200,000 acts of violence—all in the name of entertainment. All six participants indicated that they watched TV and movies as a major source of entertainment. For most participants, viewing horror movies had a deleterious affect on them and seemed to be not only a constant reminder of their own family violence, but of what could possibly happen to them if they set off their mother, father or mother’s boyfriend:

I was scared. Sometimes of mom, and a lot of times of whoever it was that she was with, cause I wouldn’t know what was going to happen. Cause you see, a lot of these movies the boyfriends just go psycho and they go off and kill everybody....I don’t want to do nothing to set this guy off.

(Danielle, January 27, 2003)

Graham-Berman (1998) indicated that television could revictimize children by reminding them of the violence they had been exposed to in their families. For participants, this rang true. Machenzie made this connection as she was explaining why she had not told her mother that her father was physically abusing her after their separation:

I was scared. I guess, I don’t know, because I figured I made him mad enough by trying to stand up to him. If I tried to get him [in] trouble and getting him more mad. (pause, laugh) I use to watch a lot of horror movies when I was a kid; I’m a horror movie fanatic. And I would always think, if I made somebody mad, I’d wake up, and they’d be standing outside the bedroom door, in the thunder and lightening in the rain, and they’d be like, it would freak me out. So, [that’s] probably why, because I was always afraid of him, like kidnapping me or something. (February 13, 2003)

Assertion: Media exposure was a constant reminder about how bad the violence could become. It served to not only revictimize participants, but constantly reinforced the pervasiveness and indiscrimination of violence. In essence, no one could ever be safe.
Danielle began talking about her relationship in our very first meeting. Each time we met, she shared more information and I was astounded at her ability to disconnect from what I perceived to be a violent relationship. The parallels between the things she shared about her mother’s experience of violence, her exposure to that violence, and her current relationship was clear and evident to me. Yet, to Danielle, there was absolutely nothing in common at all. Danielle often blamed her mother for the violence in her relationship, and I could see her blaming herself in her relationship: “maybe I done pushed him to that point that he’s gonna’ snap.” From Danielle’s perspective, the men get out of control and it’s the woman’s job to keep him in line...and her fault if she complains too much or pushes him into violence.

Mariah and Victoria, the other two participants who had been assaulted on at least one occasion by their boyfriends, were somewhat similar in their perspectives. Victoria, in a three year relationship, rationalized her boyfriend hitting her two years ago, because they had been separated and she had an affair with another woman. “There’s been one incident when we first got [back] together. It was probably two years ago. Alright, I fucked up; I cheated on him. I told him, right. He freaks out, he smacks me.” (February 10, 2003) This episode of common couple violence seemed to be situational and not an ongoing pattern of behavior. Victoria was convinced that it would never happen again, and perhaps she was right. I met Sabastian, her boyfriend, several times when I came to the house. I did not sense the tension between them that I felt when I met Danielle’s boyfriend. And yet, there was a nagging concern as I listened to her share her feelings about that event and hearing many of the themes of isolation and desperation that participants had shared about their mother’s experience of violence:

That was a really, really fucking hard time for me. I mean seriously, that’s like the hardest shit I’ve ever been through. I mean like I felt so low, so little; I felt this small next to him. He would just, I had no friends; I didn’t talk to anybody; my world revolved around him, and just, there for awhile ya’ know, we were at a very, very low point in our relationship because ya’ know, he couldn’t trust me, and I didn’t want to lose him. So I’d do
whatever I could ya’ know, no matter if it made [me] go, like shit, I mean seriously, I felt like shit, I was depressed all the time. (February 10, 2003)

My hope was that it was one isolated event. But I also knew that even two years later, Victoria had not developed any friendships and relied on her boyfriend for all of her emotional support. She didn’t have her own car and worked at a minimum wage job, with very little hope for advancement. She had dreams of returning to college, but little hope that she was ready or what she could do. Her confidence seemed to depleted, and she seemed to be a caged bird, wanting to be free and not having a way out.

Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires...you could look at that one wire...and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire anytime it wanted and go somewhere...it is only when you step back...and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere (Frye, 1983, p.4).

As I spent more time with Victoria and the other participants, I began to see the other wires, and wondered if they’d be able to fly away.

This feeling of isolation and not having a way out was definitely indicative of Danielle’s relationship. As indicated, the patterns in her relationship with her boyfriend, Brad, were strikingly similar to what Danielle had described about her mother. The violence consisted of nearly daily arguments, shoving matches, grabbing, Brad cornering Danielle, and frequent put-downs. Brad was also addicted to oxycontin, a painkiller, averaging around $40 per day. There was, in the very brief time that Danielle and I met, one instance of Brad throwing something at Danielle. Danielle stated, “Saturday, when he got mad, he jerked my necklace off of his neck and threw it at me. (January 8, 2003) The necklace, as she described it was thick chained with almost points on it that made it sharp. She pulled up her pant leg and showed me where it had hit her. There was bruising and scabs from the cut marks about two inches by one inch. She later rationalized this behavior, indicating that it wasn’t violence because he didn’t mean to do it:

I really don’t think he meant to throw it at me. I think he really did mean to hit the chair, cause I mean, I [was] sitting down in the chair and it hit
the very bottom of my legs. I didn’t think he was aiming for [me].

(February 4, 2003)

I checked in with Danielle during each interview, empowering and questioning, in the hope that she could see this as a destructive and violent relationship. We did discuss (my need) an escape plan and what it would take for her to leave him. She was also given numerous resources as well as permission to contact me should the need arise.

Mariah, the third participant who experienced a physical assault at the hands of her boyfriend, did not rationalize the violence. She described the event: “Yeah, we were just arguing, and then I started cussing at him and I walked away and he turned around and hit me in the face.” (February 5, 2003) She described the aftermath of that fight:

Well I wasn’t over there when it happened, but my cousin had just came over to our house before he went over there and asked me why, why we were fighting and I was just like I don’t know. Then he told me he knew that [John] had hit me, and he said he was going to go over there and fix it and then two days later I still didn’t hear from him and then [John] called me and told me what my cousin did and he apologized to me. (February 5, 2003)

What Mariah and her sister, Machenzie, both described to me was that their cousin drove from Richmond when he was told by Mariah’s father about what happened and went over to see John. He beat him up and then pulled a gun on him as a final threat. It was confusing to Mariah. From her perspective her father had orchestrated this series of events after she had told him what happened. She said, “my dad [and I] do get along, but I was, he’d always [said] ‘oh, I’ll kill anybody who ever puts their hands on [you]’, when he did that to my mom.” (February 5, 2003)

Assertion: Violence was ever-changing, ever-evolving. Through the rationalization and normalization of family violence, participants did not develop appropriate coping skills to decrease the likelihood that their relationships could become violent. They did not have the tools to avoid their mother’s fate.
Responses to Violence

Should I run and hide or stand up for my feelings?
I knew I’d never get by, the tempers and steam heating.

People used to always say, ‘it will be just fine, ok!’
Except the one deep inside me, always knew what not to say.

Don’t get too comfortable now, for it will be but a short while
‘give it a day or two, my sweet innocent child.’

I always felt scared and never expected it at all.
Sometimes she would fall, and I had no one to call...
– Machenzie, February 18, 2003

The responses to family violence for these women and children were varied, yet similar.
Mothers responded in ways to protect themselves, and their families. Children, quite similarly,
felt compelled to protect their family, their mother and themselves. Systemic responses to the
violence were homeostatic in nature, leaving the children, and I’m sure mothers, wondering if
things could ever change.

Mother Responses to Family Violence

Mothers’ general responses to violence seemed to be protective. Mothers would send
their children to their rooms, lock them inside their rooms or lock themselves in rooms to avoid
children’s overt exposure to the violence occurring in their relationships. Beyond this protective
measure, mothers would attempt to normalize the violence by hiding it, implying that it wasn’t a
big deal or ignoring that anything was really even happening. As a final resort the mother would
simply leave the home, in the midst of violence, or just after, from the children’s perspectives, in
order to protect herself and the children. Though children were angry and fearful about their
mothers leaving, and at times even resentful, they seemed to understand that it was only in
leaving that mothers could control the violence. “I’d get really mad at my mom for leaving us
there with my dad, but, I don’t know, I kind of understand because, I mean she just couldn’t deal
with that.” (Mariah, February 5, 2003)

It was difficult for children to see their mothers being verbally battered and physically
beaten. When mothers could not get kids out of the room or when the violence ended, mothers were protective by pretending that what had just occurred was not a big deal to them. Machenzie described one such scenario:

He would leave and then my mom would try to act like nothing happened....she’d go to the bathroom and present herself well again, and then come out and (in happy voice) ‘what do you guys want for dinner,’ you know, and she, I know she was just trying to make it better, but, me, all the time, I was just depressed about it and upset. (February 13, 2003)

Mothers seldom discussed the violence with their kids. Their need to comfort them or to normalize the situation overwhelmed their responses. Claire’s words, as previously reported, “it just tells you what a good job I did of protecting them” (Field Notes, February 4, 2003) were ominous to me, in light of how her daughter, Natalie perceived things. Natalie was discussing how her father had always been very open with her about discussing the reasons for the divorce. He had been very open about his affair and acknowledged that he had been wrong to do that. Natalie had, over time, not only repaired her relationship with her father, but had become very close to him. He had never told her about the verbal battering and physical threats he had made to Claire. Likewise, Claire has never discussed what happened with her daughters. This was, to Claire, protective, even as Natalie and Mary grew older. Yet, Natalie saw things quite differently:

He has been the one to tell me those things and not her, and I feel like if I talk to her about it she wouldn’t be honest about it because I have asked her and she doesn’t tell me so I just stayed away from talking about it to her. (February 4, 2003)

During our next interview, Natalie stated that she thought her mother would lie to her about what happened. She fully trusted her father, and I was left wondering whether the protective measures that Claire was so proud of actually protected Natalie or whether they hindered her ability to fully understand the violence, albeit primarily verbal in nature, in her family. How might this then impact Natalie’s future relationship(s)?

**Assertion:** Mothers responded to the violence by attempting to protect their children from exposure to it and through normalization. These responses were not only futile in many
regards, but may have actually reinforced the violence through a lack of social exposure. This appeared to inhibit participants’ comprehension of the breadth and depth of violence.

Children’s Responses to Family Violence

There were two needs for children who had witnessed their fathers’ or male caretaker’s violence toward their mothers. The first was to develop responses to the immediate situation of violence that often occurred in their families. The second, was learning to cope with the emotional feelings that surrounded the violence, the aftermath of ongoing violence. There were four ways in which children dealt with the immediate situation of violence. They sought help, somehow interfered with the violence, became a calming force for their mothers, fathers and siblings, and learned to keep the family secret. These problem-focused strategies (Folkman & Lazurus, 1980) were the first responses for several participants, particularly first born children, but learning to cope was something that each participant struggled with.

Learning to cope with the violence was very difficult for children. It was much less action-oriented and contained many aspects of internalizing their feelings. They often denied that anything was happening, ignored what was happening, stuffed their feelings or forgot the abuse. They often rationalized, minimized, normalized or otherwise emotionally disengaged. Action-oriented coping mechanisms included distracting themselves through TV, music or friendships. Some children chose to completely detach, though temporarily, by leaving. Becoming an emotional gauge and family moderator was necessary for several kids. Machenzie simply described, “I just tried to avoid anything that would make him boil over on her.” (February 13, 2003) Machenzie didn’t only gauge her father’s emotionality, but felt responsible, as did other children, for their mother’s emotional well-being. “I use to not be happy and I use to always see my mom sad, and so I figured I should try to make her happy, because it’s not always good to be sad and it’s, I don’t know, hurtful.”

Though several children became emotional gauges for other family members, each child, in her own way, learned to distance herself from her own feelings:

Back then I was pretty quiet and if I, if I had a problem with something or anything I was just quiet, ya know. I didn’t talk about it and...[Mary] would get in trouble cause she’d say too much, so I learned to just be quiet cause [Mary] would always go too far and it would get my dad mad...so I
was always just quiet and didn’t really tell them what I was thinking even
if I did agree with [Mary] cause I didn’t want to get in trouble. (Natalie,
January 30, 2003)

Learning to not talk about things was a common theme with most participants. Machenzie stated
that:

I’d just go in my room and lock myself in and just sit in there, and, I don’t
want to talk to anybody; I wouldn’t talk to her, I just...when I’m upset I
don’t want to talk about it and I don’t want people to cheer me up. I just
want everybody to leave me alone and I never talk about anything that’s
bothering me. (February 6, 2003)

This coping mechanism became destructive for children because it did not allow them to discuss
what was happening in their lives, and it certainly inhibited their ability to talk with others who
may have been able to help them:

When I was little and growing up I never talked about anything just ‘cause
I didn’t want people to think that I didn’t have it good, or I didn’t have a
family that didn’t beat each other. So I never talked about it, but that
would have been something that would have really helped in the long run
and not really taken as long to get over it. I could have talked to teachers
and stuff, but I was always afraid that if I mentioned it to somebody I
would get in trouble because he would get in trouble and get mad at me.
And then, she [her mother] would get mad at me because I ruined it, and
then, of course, I would think that it’s all my fault that everything was
going wrong. So I just kind of kept everything to myself and tried
everything I could do to not think about it. But the times I did think about
I thought about it a lot and [it] just bothered me and ate a hole in me, and I
just figured oh whatever don’t worry about it. And I just tried to do
something else to get my mind off of it. (Machenzie, February 18, 2003)

When shoving feelings down didn’t work, participants became more active and either pushed the
feelings away or attempted to block it. Danielle said, “I just block[ed] it out, kind of. It’s not that
I forgot, I mean you can’t really....” (February 11, 2003) Victoria was somewhat ashamed that
Sometimes, most of the time, I just, I know this sounds pretty crude, or whatever, but sometimes I just [got] so sick of hearing the same shit over and over again. I’m just, I’m just, I just don’t want to hear, just shut up, I just don’t want to hear it right now. (February 10, 2003)

Yet, many memories were vague and blurred. Though children would shove feelings away, or would block things out, many other memories were simply gone. This was particularly potent for Mary, Natalie and Victoria. Victoria, was very upset that she couldn’t remember details of much the violence: “I don’t even know, I don’t know uuuuuuhhh I don’t know, he just started, just started in on, I don’t, I don’t even know how to say, ya know, how something started and something end[ed], I don’t, I don’t know.” (February 10, 2003)

Danielle, as other participants had, chose to rationalize the violence. “P, well, he ain’t hit mom or nothin’, but he’s thrown things at her, not, and not necessarily at her, like to the wall right beside her.” (January 8, 2003) When these things didn’t work, and when participants understood that they could not intercede, children could also try to ignore the abuse that they were witnessing. Machenzie discussed her move from problem-focused strategies to self-protection and more emotion-focused strategies of distancing herself from the violence:

After awhile I never tried to do anything to stop it; I just ignored it and went away to my friends house and stayed there, not knowing what was going on. I was the little prime source of peace in our house, and would just run away from it and not want to deal with it. Just because it upset me too much and hurt me too much. I’d just want to be in a happy place. And my happy place was away from home. (February 13, 2003)

Coping with the emotional aftermath of the violence was obviously difficult for every participant, but coping with the immediate situation was not only difficult, but at times dangerous and very stressful. As previously indicated, children would intervene by trying to get help or trying to stop their fathers from hurting their mothers. Thus, children such as Machenzie decided they couldn’t help the situation, they withdrew from it, and completely disengaged from the situation. This was a useful coping mechanism for participants. Mariah stated that she would just leave until her father was gone. Others would understand that things were about to happen.
and would go to their rooms, without being told, or go watch TV where they could be distracted from the violence.

Three participants could not always distract themselves so easily. As the oldest children they felt a sense of responsibility to take care of their family. Machenzie said, “with me being the oldest, I didn’t have an older sister to look up to and act like, so I kind of learned how to act like my mom and my dad.” (February 6, 2003) At times, participants would have to tend to their mothers either in the midst of or in the direct aftermath of the violence. Machenzie described one such scenario:

> He just came in one day on a rampage and hurt her really bad, and I was, [Mariah], was asleep, and I woke up, and just talked, I just slept with her and she was just crying. I was really little, so, I was playing with her hair. I was trying to calm her down and I don’t know, show her that I loved her even though she can’t (pause) get herself out of it. You know, because she doesn’t have the nerve to go. (February 13, 2003)

On another occasion Machenzie had to care for her mother when she was knocked unconscious after Machenzie’s dad slammed Maggie’s head into the wall:

> I went and got a washcloth and cleaned up her head and just put a blanket on her, because I guess she was unconscious, and I was too young to know what that was, so I just put a blanket on her and a pillow under her head and she just slept there. And I thought it was because she didn’t want to get up. (February 13, 2003)

On other occasions Machenzie cared for her two sisters, knowing that outside of the bedroom her mother was being beaten:

> We’d hear breaking glasses and screaming and [Mariah] and [Elaine would] be in there crying and I’d be trying to calm my two sisters down.... I’d have to give them hugs and say it’s ok, lay down with those two in bed and read them a story or something so they’d calm down. Just cause, I’d seen it for a while, so I knew what was happening and knew that she wasn’t going to do anything to change it and she’d try to cover it up all the time.
But Machenzie was not the only participant that felt the responsibility to care for her parents or siblings. Victoria too had to care for her brother.

I would have to take care of my brother, or I’d have to do his laundry. I’d have [to] make him dinner; I’d have to clean the house; I’d have to do all this shit that I’m not suppose to do that young, but I’d always have to be taking care of everyone else because that’s just the way shit was...growing up in some ways you had to be the mom instead of your mom being the mom, and the dad being the dad. [I] had to take care of the brother, doing everything that mom and dad should have been doing. (January 30, 2003)

Danielle also felt like she had to grow up before she should have. “I’m the mother and she’s the teenager. I’ve done that for a long time....It’s hard to explain, but it made me feel old and I wasn’t being a kid myself.” (January 27, 2003)

**Assertion:** Children coped with violence in a variety of ways, some healthier than others. Internalizing behaviors, such as denial, rationalization, minimization, normalization, stuffing feelings, and forgetting the violence helped children cope with the emotional aftermath of family violence, but the long-term impacts were debilitating and may have even led to violence in participants’ own intimate relationships. Internalizing feelings seemed to increase the likelihood that children could declare having learned many lessons of what they didn’t want their relationships to be, but they did not have the tools to decrease the likelihood of becoming victims themselves. Dealing with the immediate situation could also be dangerous. Interfering with the fighting could potentially result in violence toward the child. Seeking help also proved to be somewhat physically dangerous. The real destruction for children, however, was in the lack of response they received when they did seek help. The message was clear; they were alone.

**Systemic Responses to Family Violence**

Mothers and children found many ways to cope with the family violence they were experiencing and being exposed to. Listening to their stories was often difficult and I often felt as though I could feel their pain as they shared the most intimate of details about their families and the violence to which they were exposed and experienced. However, nothing was more difficult to hear than the stories of hopelessness and how people in their lives and varying
institutions that could have intervened ultimately responded. Family members did more than just stand by and allow the abuse to continue. Participants, children, were chastised when they did not willingly maintain the family secret, not by their parents, but by family friends, uncles, aunts, and even grandparents. Though Mary and Natalie were never compelled by their families to maintain the secret, they often felt guilty when they were with friends from school and church. Machenzie, Mariah, Danielle and Victoria experienced much more than guilt. Machenzie learned that if it’s not you, stay out of it:

One of my dad’s friends, he, ya know, would get mad cause he lost his money and his wife would say, ‘oh honey it’s okay don’t worry about it,’ ya know. That’d just piss him off and he’d just start beating the living crap out of her right there and no one would do anything.

Machenzie added that others would direct her to keep the secret. When I asked her who would do this, she stated, “other family members. People, like grandparents, his parents. We’d get upset and they would go, ‘It’s ok, you know, it’s ok’....just kind of shut it up and not make it a big deal, so nobody would really dwell on it. It didn’t matter to them.” (February 18, 2003)

It wasn’t only family members that would reinforce keeping the secret. Law enforcement agencies and social services sent a very clear message to participants that they were alone and that little could be done to protect them or their mothers. Osofsky (1998) states, “Law enforcement’s response to these situations can teach children a variety of lessons. With an appropriate response, children can learn that someone in authority cares about their welfare.” This was not, however, the message that participants received. They developed an understanding that they were not important and that the police didn’t care to do anything to protect them. Indeed, in the surveys conducted in Osofsky’s study, only about one in three experienced (five or more years experience) police officers who thought that exposure to domestic violence was serious. Victoria expressed this very sentiment after calling the police. She stated, “cops can’t really do shit about that ...that was the only time I really tried to do anything; that was probably the shittiest, most traumatizing thing for me. But cops didn’t help me; cops don’t ever help.” (February 10, 2003) However, that was not the only time Victoria asked for help and received none. The message was clear. You are on your own. Victoria stated,
my dad [and I] got in this huge fight, you know. My brother’s in his room trying to get ready for school, and I’m in my room you know trying to get my stuff together...My dad starts hitting me; I’m down on my floor, and I get back up and I go out in the hallway, and my dad’s over the top of me beating the shit out of me. My brother comes out of his room, which now is behind my father, the door he comes out of, my brother straight up tackles the mother fucker; he tackled this mother fucker, and they started rumbling around the hallway....Finally my dad just got up and punched me in the fucking nose, gave me a bloody nose, fucking had my brother with a black eye, fucking scratches and shit all over him and then took me to school with blood pouring out of my fucking nose, and I was wearing a Miami Dolphin green sweatshirt that was covered in fucking blood. So I went to S [the counselor] and I told her what happened and nothing really happened to them, just me....I just got the shit beat out of me and had to go to school, the fucking blood pouring out of my fucking nose and all over my clothes. Nothing happened to them though....Nothing ever came of that. Nothing ever happened to help me or my brother in that situation. (January 30, 2003)

**Assertion:** Police, social service agencies and other adults were ineffective in stopping family violence. Children learned that neither they, nor their mothers, could be protected.

**Effects and Aftermath of Violence**

Wonder what my life would have been like if I had that traditional red door. Perfect, traditional, family. Damned Brady Bunch.

What if I was born independent automatically, no parents to depend on, get hurt by, and learn what anger is.

What if I took care of me, instead of anyone in the world.

Wonder if I’d change, be different,
have different views, ideas, feelings, thoughts, actions, and or whatever.

Well, too late for wonders
or what if’s

Life has given me heartbreak and turmoil,
but the person inside is now stronger
knowing that I have been there and done that,

Without the Damned Brady Bunch Image!
–Victoria, February 10, 2003

Victoria spoke eloquently about how her life could have been different, had she not been a child in a family that dealt with issues through violence. She craved a family that talked things through and did not use fists as decision makers. Every family, every mother and some children made decisions about how much they would tolerate. Though every family may have been resolved to no longer live in violence, not one father or male caretaker chose to discontinue using violence. There was no support from outside, nor trust that things could change, especially since many family members reinforced the violence, or through overt attempts to keep the secret. Machenzie relayed how her grandparents would do this. They would say,

‘girl, what’s wrong with you, why do you do this and that, just let it be, you know.’ I’m just, I don’t want to let it go. They’d just make me feel like crap...because that’s how it’s suppose to be, or something like that....You know, my grandparents would always just hush it up.

(February 13, 2003)

Without family support, or outside intervention, and husband’s or boyfriend’s inability or lack of desire to stop being violent, there seemed to be only two choices, stay and live with the violence, or leave.

Leaving

Mothers chose different ways of dealing with and surviving the ongoing abuse. In October, 1992, Maggie chose to leave her husband after 12 years of violence. He had come home, thrown her across the room, jumped on top of her and began beating her in front of the children. Machenzie described what happened:
He’d hit her in front of us before, but never like that. He just went crazy on her. And so she realized she just needed to get out; and so, she packed our bags, when he left, and put them in our room and the next day, when he was sleeping, when he finally came home that morning and went to sleep, we left. We went and lived with her friend. We didn’t call, didn’t talk to him for awhile. And then she called him to let him know she wanted to get a divorce and wanted to get out of this, and she had us, and she was keeping us because she’s not going to let him do this to us.

(February 13, 2003)

Maggie and the kids left and went to stay with a friend. She gave her husband the house and asked for nothing but their freedom from the violence. Machenzie said, “after we moved out to live with my mom’s friend, that’s when all the court battles and crap like that happened.” However, these were not just regular custody battles. Machenzie’s paternal grandparents had charged Maggie with kidnapping. During this period of non-communication, Maggie consulted with an attorney who drew up separation papers giving custody of the children to Maggie. She and her husband both signed the agreement, but never went to court for a judgement. Her signed separation agreement, unbeknownst to her was a non-binding piece of paper, leaving her ultimately vulnerable. (Field Notes, March 4, 2003)

Maggie was arrested and briefly incarcerated. Social services (DSS) stepped in to review the case. They inspected the home that Maggie and the girls were living in to ensure it was appropriate housing. Throughout the DSS investigation, the girls were not allowed to live with their mother. For four months, the children were sent to live with their grandparents, their father’s parents, grandparents who had fully supported the battering of the children’s mother, put pressure on the kids to keep the secret, and themselves were involved in a violent relationship. For four months, there was only supervised visitation with their mother. (Field Notes, March 4, 2003)

In Victoria’s case, her mother could not decide to leave. Not only was Victoria’s mother being beaten, but Victoria and her brother were also forced to bear the brunt of the violence. After one final episode of violence where Victoria was beaten not only by her father, but by her mother, she decided she’d had enough:
I run out of the house; I hide in the woods for 2 hours until finally, ya’ know, my grandma comes looking for me and my grandma found me...I’m just pissed off. So then my grandma finds me and she’s like, ‘just come with me.’ So then I moved out of their house, and moved out of their house, moved in with my grandma, didn’t talk to my parents for about a year and half until I graduated. (February 10, 2003)

Victoria’s mom later chose to leave. She filed a restraining order, moved in with her sister, and requested a divorce. The separation lasted three to four months. This occurred after Victoria had already graduated from high school, and had begun to reestablish relationships with her parents. Victoria stated,

My dad cheated on my mom; I guess my mom really couldn’t, I guess my mom really never got over it and eventually she grew a back bone for a split second or something and just left....she was living with her sister, then just one day they just popped up together again. So I was like okay, that’s cool. Whatever makes you happy. (February 10, 2003)

Victoria’s mother was not the only one who decided to leave after an extramarital affair. That was also the final straw for Claire. Though their verbally abusive relationship certainly made things more difficult, it was the affair that proved to be the catalyst for leaving, “I felt I needed to end this relationship due to lack of trust and my emotion[al] needs.” (Questionnaire)

**Assertion:** Sometimes family members leave as a way to handle the violence. A critical event, such as an affair seemed to help move the family member to action. However, our legal system does not adequately protect children and women from violence when they choose to leave. When mothers chose to leave violent relationships, they were vulnerable not only to increased levels of violence, but to the very legal system that should have protected them.

*Ever-Changing and Evolving Relationships*

Leaving was very difficult for all family members. There was no easy way to leave someone you cared about, no matter how violent the relationship had become. Though dangerous, and at times very stressful, by leaving family members could begin a new life.
We were scared to just leave at all, and be afraid of what might happen if he came after us, or if she pissed him off bad enough and he came full rampage. She just didn’t care anymore; she just didn’t want to put up with it. It took a while to start over again, learn how to deal with things, but it was a lot better. We’re a lot happier now. Everybody is. (Machenzie, February 18, 2003)

However, relationships didn’t end when mothers, or in Victoria’s case children, chose to leave. Negotiating new relationships was an ongoing and never-ending process and from what participants told me, would continue to be ongoing. For Danielle, there were not ongoing relationships with her mother’s boyfriends. These relationships did end, and she would have to negotiate a new relationship with a new boyfriend, only to find that he too could and usually did become violent.

There were many issues that children had to deal with as they were learning to negotiate new relationships. To begin, there was lingering fear that their fathers might continue to abuse them or their mothers. Machenzie said, “you never know, who’s not to say that one day my dad will go on a rage and come over here and start wowing out, you know, you never know when something like that [could happen].” (February 13, 2003) For Machenzie, there was also anger about not only the abuse, but insensitivity and a perceived lack of trying on her father’s part, “I just don’t understand...even if you’re broke poor you could at least make your kids a card, you know.” Machenzie went on to explain her frustration in watching her mother have to help the family survive in her father’s absence:

She didn’t have anything cause that’s all she had was him and he took care of her, and she just had to start over completely again with three kids and we had to live with her friends for 5 years. We couldn’t, we didn’t even have any where to live, we had no where to go. (February 6, 2003)

In addition to lingering fears and ongoing resentments for abandonment by fathers, children had to deal with extended family members and their reactions to the separation. For Claire’s family, there was a constant sense of shame that she felt from fellow church members. Ultimately, she chose to stop going to church at all. She never explained the subtle and not so subtle messages she was receiving from church members, so her daughters never understood her
reasons for leaving the church. From their perspective, their mother had changed, but not for the better.

Things have been more positive for my dad than for my mom. I think maybe that for her it’s kind of been like a step down....I think her morals have changed maybe. So I think that’s bad, but I think with my dad it’s made him just be [a] better person and, ya’ know, he goes to church now all the time, and I think he’s become a better Christian through this stuff because he relied on God during it, and my mom just kinda’ kept going out and doing other things. (Natalie, February 4, 2003)

For Mariah and Machenzie, dealing with their grandparents was a constant source of stress and anxiety.

every time that I go down there...everyone talks bad about my mom and that she shouldn’t have left my dad; it’s like they don’t even know what was going on half the time. And if I was my mom I wouldn’t have stayed with my dad either. And I just get tired of hearing them all talk about my mom. (Mariah, February 5, 2003)

In order to negotiate new relationships, an understanding of what had happened was important. For Mary and Natalie, their father became a strong support system. Natalie indicated,

I didn’t want to get in trouble or anything so I never spoke up if I was mad or anything and, but then I mean I guess you can only take so much and, and my parents just wanted me [to] start talking about things if I was upset or something....my dad was really open. I mean if we had, he wanted us to know that if we had any questions or if we wanted to talk to him, I mean he was, he would talk to us and I mean he just regularly, like when we’re in the car talk to us about stuff and he just wanted it, wanted to be really open about stuff. (February 4, 2003)

However, he never talked about his use of threats or breaking things to control their mother. And, as already described, Claire did not discuss issues in order to protect her children from her experiences. It seemed unfair that Mary and Natalie saw their mother as less Christian or that her life was somehow a “step down” because of her desire to protect her children and herself.
Claire never confronted her former husband about what he chose to tell the girls. She believed it was important for them to develop and maintain a strong relationship with their father. Maggie also felt it was important for her daughters to maintain contact with their father, despite the difficulty in doing that. In fact, Maggie went to great lengths to ensure that the children saw their father in a positive light. When Maggie’s husband forgot birthdays or Christmas, Maggie tried to make up for it.

When we were younger she would give me something that was suppose to be from him, and I knew it was from her so, she just tries to make up for things that he does and she’s only one person. She can’t make up for 2 people. (Machenzie, February 6, 2003)

Maggie would also intervene by forcing the children to go and see their father. Machenzie described her perception of the situation:

In the very beginning they had joint custody...I hated to go visit. The day we left, I never wanted to ever see him again, just cause I was so mad and my mom would force me to go see him. Sometimes, and I would, when I went there, it felt like it was a jail chamber, a jail cell, that you were locked in until they’d [let] you out, you know. And I just hated visiting. I’d go to a friend’s or try to runaway and hide in the back yard or something, cause I never wanted to go. She would force me to go, and it would kill me. (February 13, 2003)

Claire and her husband worked together and listened to their children about their desires for visitation. They became a part of the ever-evolving process.

I just lived with my mom and then with [dad] every other weekend or every weekend or something stay with my dad, I don’t know.... But then we told him that we wanted to, ya’ know, be with him half the time and my mom half the time, so they changed that and then we’d be with my dad one week. (Natalie, January 30, 2003)

For some families, with visitation came more complex issues. In particular, for Maggie, the violence did not end. On more than one occasion her ex-husband came to her home and assaulted her. She hit him back on one occasion and was charged with assault. However, abuse
was not only focused on her. Machenzie’s father would do irrational and cruel things to her. He threw away her 24 karat gold earrings, which were a gift to her from her mother. It was only when Machenzie had hit young adolescence that she finally told her mother that she was being abused. The abuse was confusing and left Machenzie feeling all the more isolated, alone and fearful of visitation.

When I started crying, he’d haul off and knock me out, you know, and I just never understand. That’s why I don’t really want to be a part of it because it confuses me too much. Like when I, I would never tell my mom, just cause I was afraid of getting her in trouble, or getting somebody in trouble, and I’d never want to talk about it. (February 13, 2003)

Likewise, once Victoria established a new relationship with her father, she had to find ways not to be abused any longer. After no contact for a year and a half, Victoria wanted to try again. It was an ongoing effort. She felt it was important to tell her father how she felt, but believed that he would become violent if she tried. Victoria said, “if I sat down and actually told my dad how I felt about the way he treated me like shit, my family like shit, everybody like shit, it would be just a huge fight.” (January 30 2003) Machenzie also felt it was important to share her feelings with her father, with a great deal of encouragement from her mom:

[Mon said] ‘the reason I would force you to go down there is because I wouldn’t want them to think that I was brainwashing you. So if you feel this way you need to tell him.’ I just never wanted to make him mad. And then I finally did tell him, this is why I don’t want to see him or this is why I don’t trust him or like him very much or this is why I see him as this kind of monster-person. It kind of hit a nerve and made him realize that’s how people see him. For him that was something bad and I guess it just pissed him off. And we just didn’t talk for years and my mom told me you know I’m going to keep forcing you down there! If you don’t tell him this is how you feel. And of course I finally told him, and he came back to her, and he was like, ‘[Maggie], I can’t believe you did that.’ She’s like, ‘[Machenzie’s] been begging me for months not to come to see you and I told her that if that’s the way she feels about you then she needs to tell
you. So, she needs to do it for herself and not always be hiding behind me.’ So in a way she kind of made me to be a strong person, you know, to stand up to my biggest fear, which is good. I’m glad she did. Because I’d still be a little puny, mute, no-say person. (February 13, 2003)

Machenzie said she didn’t visit her father for a long time after she shared her feelings with him. Her sisters, on the other hand would visit him and try to convince Machenzie that she should too. Yet, Mariah was also confused about her relationship with her father. She was desperate to feel loved, but did not feel safe with him. She did not have the verbal ability to talk to him or write letters about her feelings. She was also saddened that he had been sentenced to prison for carrying a handgun. She tried to convince Machenzie to try one more time. Machenzie chose to write a 13-page letter to her father and gave it to him the day he left for prison. She said, “he never wrote me back or talked to me personally just because he could tell that I had a lot of hate and rage and anger against him to the point where I just never wanted to speak of him ever.” Yet her father had not given up. Machenzie goes on to describe how her father attempted to redevelop a relationship with his eldest daughter:

He wrote [Mariah] and [Elaine] and they used to write back and forth all the time when he was in there and he wrote them a poem about how his kids mean the world to him. And in the letter he wrote them he said make sure [Machenzie] reads this. So I read it and that just kind of made me think that he’s like trying to talk to me. But he knows he has to do it in minute stuff. He just can’t call me and be like, ‘let’s talk about this’ just because I’ll be like no. He knows that he has to take steps into earning even my friendship. (February 13, 2003)

Machenzie’s father has continued taking small steps to reestablish a positive relationship. He has been calling her more frequently and recently attended a cheerleading event that she was in. Of course, even then, Machenzie believed that it was her mother working behind the scenes to help him reconnect. Machenzie said,

it’s an effort; knowing that he needs to [be] showing an effort for me to really care again; so he’s trying, I can tell. It’s a little better, but, I don’t know...I still think about the past, you know. People say, oh you can’t do
Assertion: Reconnecting after violence is a difficult and ever-changing process. Trust has been lost for both abusers and mothers. Participants needed to be able to trust their parents, and it was important to begin a conversation around the violence. The violence needed to be discussed, as a part of the negotiation process, in order for healing to occur and a relationship to be redefined.

Effects of Family Violence

Exposure to family violence has detrimental effects on children’s physical, cognitive, emotional and social development (Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989; Kolbo, Blakely & Engleman, 1996). Mariah, Machenzie, Victoria, Mary, Natalie, and Danielle were no exception. Whether the violence was primarily verbal in nature, physically violent or participants were the victims of violence themselves, the effects of family violence were pervasive. Though most of the participants would appear to be very resilient, many of them simply learned to put a mask on for the outside world, while crying inside. For Danielle and Mariah who appeared, given societal standards of resilience, to be less resilient, their behaviors had become clues to the effects of exposure to family violence.

Coping mechanisms that served their purposes in the midst or direct aftermath of family violence have not gone away. The ability to block things out, deny what was happening or stuff feelings had adverse long-term impacts for participants. Mary said,

I just block[ed] it out kind of like, it’s not that I [have] forgotten it, I mean you can’t really, you know. But I just don’t, and now, I’m, it’s been so long that I don’t even feel like I’m trying to block it out it’s just not, I just
sort of pushed it to the side and it’s not really there unless I want to go there. (February 11, 2003)

This might appear to be a positive coping mechanism. After all, it would be terrible to constantly think about the past, never able to let it go. Yet, issues of depression were evident in almost every participant. Victoria described the process of moving from blocking things out, numbing, to feelings of nothingness:

Violence is [the] feeling of, once you get to the point, ya’ know, where violence has affected you so much you feel like you are nothing; you feel like you’re nothing but a punching bag, nothing but something for someone to vent their emotions out on you. I guess, I don’t know, you just become so cold to everything around you, every emotion felt, that you just don’t let any, any type of emotion expressed what so ever. (February 10, 2003)

Victoria said, “I don’t have a problem to ever let it out. I just take stuff and shove it down.” (January 30, 2003) Machenzie used the metaphor of a tape recorder playing things back again and again:

When, people resort to violence, it usually leads to more violence, and bad things, and depression and stuff like that, negative aspects of life....No matter how much it is and how strong violence it is, the little things, like screaming and yelling, or actual physical violence, it always, like it’s like a tape recorder, echoes and repeats at the end and I just think about it all the time, and it makes me sad.....after awhile, trying to make him better, I realized there was nothing I could do and so, it put me in a stage of permanent depression. (February 13, 2003)

Dealing with the aftermath of violence was a process that has been never-ending for all participants, as Machenzie said, whether it was “screaming and yelling or actual physical violence....” Natalie expressed,

It’s made me emotional sometimes, ya know. I get upset about it every once in a while but I don’t know, it hasn’t been, I guess for me, it’s, it’s helped in some ways and been bad ya’ know, just cause I’ve had to move
and ya’ know when you’re in high school you don’t want to be different than anyone and I mean I don’t really care but I mean my family’s a lot different than the others so like I said and it’s kinda’ hard because no one else knows what it’s like. (February 4, 2003)

Feelings of being different or isolated because of the family violence was not unique to Natalie. Mariah felt the isolation very deeply. “It’s hard to go on [when] so much bad stuff [is happening] around you, and you just think that no one cares about you.” She described a behavioral pattern that she developed after her parents had separated, that ultimately played like a set of dominoes in her life. Her dad would come to the house, her parents would fight, and she would leave because I didn’t want to hear them fighting anymore....me and my mom would fight, and then she’d always tell me he’s not coming back and he would....then I’d just start hanging out with the wrong people and doing stuff that I didn’t need to be doing....I had a bunch of friends that, when my dad would come over and start fighting with my mom, and [I’d] just be, go over there and then I’d be really upset about it and then they’d want to go out and party...and then I’d wake up the next morning and I’d be, ‘oh, God,’ and forget that I wasn’t at home and I’d call my mom and just [say], ‘I’ll be home whenever dad leaves.’ Then she’d get mad at me.

This ongoing cycle has continued for Mariah and her mother. For Mariah, there was little trust that the violence wouldn’t return, and this had a detrimental impact on her choices and behaviors. This was a theme for other participants, even when this lack of trust didn’t culminate into behavioral problems. When referring to her boyfriend, Mary said,

I have a hard time trusting him. But I do that with every[one]. Almost everybody you know, if somebody breaks that trust it really takes a lot for them to get it back. I’ll forgive a person, I really I will, but it just, I don’t know, I just have a harder time trusting people. He hasn’t really done anything to make me not trust him, but I’m more hesitant to trust him to begin with. (February 11, 2003)

Mariah stated that she didn’t trust because, “I’ve seen that [violence] for so long, I mean, I just, I know my dad would have hit my mom, and so you never know who will do that to you.”
(February 5, 2003) Machenzie agreed that seeing your mother beaten by your father had life-
long consequences. “I saw, (heavy sigh), I’m an observant person, so when I saw....I just never
want to be put in that situation. So, it’s really hard for me to trust people.”(February 13, 2003)
The fighting ultimately took its toll on everyone. Mary stated,

the fighting and stuff took its toll on all of us. I mean, half the time I didn’t
know what was going on but then once I got old enough and I was arguing
with them you know I just became a part of it, I mean I wish I wouldn’t
have started things off like that. (Mary, February 11, 2003)
The toll was much more than feeling alone and isolated, different, experiencing depression and
lacking trust. The parentification of children, as already described occurred and had long-lasting
consequences, as Machenzie’s case exemplified:

I didn’t really get upset about it, because, like I said, if I got upset, even
though I was really little, everyone else would lose their cool. I had to
keep things as good as they could be, even though it was a bad situation. I
tried to take control in a way; I would try to take care of my sisters and
make sure they were ok. I use to feel like if something like that happened
to me... I didn’t like to talk about things. So, I wouldn’t try to talk to my
mom about it unless it were really bad, and I saw that she was really upset,
you know. I’d go ask her, is there anything you want me to do for you?
And she’d be, ‘can you go do this, or do the dishes, or make you guys
some sandwiches to eat?’ And she’d just go to sleep. So it was like trying
to learn how to be a responsible mother, type, when I was really, really
young. So that’s why I, people, try to take care of me now because it
really just bugs me to death because I don’t like to be taken care of.
(February 13, 2003)
Machenzie recognized that her coping mechanism continued to affect her today, and had an
impact on her relationship and her ability to accept help from others. “I hate it when people are
like, take care of you. I hate that....it’s not so much sympathy for me or feeling sorry for me,
[it’s] ‘cause they don’t think I can do this for myself.” Somehow Machenzie had translated her
being sick with a loss of not only independence, but that somehow she was incapable of helping
herself.

Though some positive adaptive responses were experienced by each of the participants, such as higher levels of compassion, a sense of maturity, and beliefs that they understood more as a result of having seen more, there was still a keen sense that things would be forever changed as a result of their childhood experiences:

as your child grows up and gets, you know, beat their whole life until they leave then they’ve got a lot of anger and rage deep down inside and when they get older and have kids or what ever, would go through life, they’re always going to be mad and hate life and constantly be pissed off and not ever care just because for years like they’ve had no one care and love them and treat them like a human being not a punching bag. (Machenzie, February 6, 2003)

Victoria added, “you know what psycho killers are? You know what people in jail are there for? That’s what people turn into. That’s the result of violence.” (January 30, 2003)

**Assertion:** The effects of family violence on children are pervasive and developmental. Lack of trust impacts future relationships and the exposure of violence sets up a precedent that must be dealt with. Denial and silence can be deadly.

Resilience and Protective Factors

*Life and how it can be different...*

When you lay in bed at night
and wonder what could be different...
Remember, you can always change and be different.

Sometimes I wish things were different...
*Life, friends, and family*

–Mariah, February 13, 2003

Resilience is, as previously described, many things to many people. Most generally, resilience requires exposure to some form of risk or adverse conditions, and success that somehow goes beyond what one might expect, given the adverse conditions or risk factors (Richman & Fraser, 2001). Vance (2001) suggests that,
resiliency is defined by the ability of a person to rise above significant adversity and have a reasonably successful life course, avoiding serious psychiatric disorder, substance abuse, criminality, or social-relational problems. (p. 43-44)

Masten et al. (1999) has outlined three criteria for researchers who study resilience. These include 1) developmental threat; 2) measures that would be used to suggest effective adaptation; and 3) protective factors that mediate risks.

For the participants in this particular study, the developmental threats were exposure to domestic violence and the multiple contexts of violence in their lives including community, relationship and their own physical or emotional abuse at the hands of their family members. I did not use any specific measure or indices to suggest effective adaptation. However, I would suggest that from a social perspective, an honor roll student involved in varsity athletics and cheerleading, a high school graduate at the age of 16, a college athlete, and a college-bound high school athlete would probably be considered somewhat resilient, given the adversities they experienced. Likewise, socially one might suggest that a high school drop out who had a child at the age of 16 and a student involved in substance abuse, running away and a school truant, might not be considered resilient. Protective factors that might modify or buffer existing risks or adversities is the third component.

Protective Factors

There were a myriad of protective factors that participants exemplified or described. There were a number of social skills, such as getting along with peers (Garmezy, et al., 1984; Offord et al., 1992; Werner & Smith, 1982) and teachers and strong components of compassion (Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1992). There were child competencies (Vance, 2001) such as good reading skills (Werner & Smith, 1982;1992), being a good student (Werner & Smith, 1982), and being involved in extracurricular activities (Werner & Smith, 1992). A positive state of mind and a future orientation (Werner & Smith, 1992; Wyman et al., 1992) seemed to be important to each of the participants. Children were resentful when parents, in particular male parents, were not employed (Werner & Smith, 1982) and discussed needing family rules and curfews (Werner & Smith, 1982; Wyman et al., 1992) to keep them out of trouble. Mariah
described several incidents where she was angry with her mother because she was out very late and her mother didn’t come after her. She perceived this as a lack of caring, and though she had developed a conflictual relationship with her mother, the underlying message seemed to be a thankfulness that her mother pushed the issue. Some participants relied on their church (Werner & Smith, 1982) to guide them through difficult times, while others were able to use adult mentors (Tierney et al., 1995; Werner & Smith, 1982; 1992) and social supports to counteract things that were happening at home.

As I analyzed the protective factors that participants described or I found likely through their behavior and affect, a pattern emerged. Of the 27 protective factors I found in the literature, Machenzie had 22, Mary and Natalie each had 21, Victoria appeared to have 11, Mariah, eight, and Danielle just four.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Mac</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Nat</th>
<th>Vic</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>Dan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likeable</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gets along with peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gets along with adults</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Sense of humor</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Empathy and Nurturance</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Above average IQ</td>
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<td>Problem-solving skills</td>
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<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
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<td>Internal locus-of-control</td>
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<td>Realistic hopes for future</td>
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<td>Independent mindedness</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>First Born</td>
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<td>Other caretakers for family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rules, routines, curfews</td>
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<td>Discipline with discussion</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Secure attachment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mother cares (from child’s perception)</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adult mentor out of home</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Peer support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inner faith</td>
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</table>

Though no participant described these as protective factors, they seemed to understand that some of these things made life easier. Victoria described her inability to get along with teachers at times because she disagreed with their actions. She said, “I didn’t agree with their actions or their fairness they gave to people. Sometimes I didn’t agree with that, and that’s the times I got in trouble.” (January 16, 2003) Participants who got along well with teachers tended to enjoy school much more than participants who either had conflictual relationships, or in Danielle’s case simply faded out of school, unnoticed, until she was gone.

Peer relationships were also important to participants. They used friends as an escape from their home environments and as role models for what families “should” be. Machenzie relied on her best friend for both of these. She stated,

I’d go spend weeks at a time with my friend, K, and I just didn’t want to come home, cause I always felt like I didn’t have a good family, because when I went to go visit her, they wouldn’t yell at each other, and they wouldn’t get mad and you know, they would have times when everybody in the family, including me, would sit down and order pizza or something and watch a movie together. (February 13, 2003)
Friendships also made it difficult however. Mariah also used friends to escape the violence, but these were often negative influences for her. This exposed her to much more community violence, substance abuse and negative influences. However, she said that she has chosen not to hang out with those friends any longer.

I hung out with these people for a long time and...most of them are older than me...and I don’t want to be living in a trailer and being on welfare and 20 years old and have three kids. I don’t want that to happen to me.

(February 5, 2003)

Mariah, Machenzie, and Danielle all described how friendships became a negative influence and exposed them to many more threats than they would have been exposed to. Friendships could also place pressures on participants to conform. Mary and Natalie felt a great deal of pressure because their parents were divorcing and none of their friends’ parents were divorced. They both felt a sense of isolation and that they were somehow different as a result.

Compassion was evident in nearly every participant. They had learned, from their perspectives, that violence hurts others and they wanted no part of it. Compassion looked different for each participant though. For Machenzie, it was reaching out to other students who were less fortunate than her. These were often loners or kids who just didn’t fit in. Mary and Natalie participated in many church activities to reach out to community members. This gave them a sense of confidence and of giving something back. Danielle was determined that she would give her daughter everything she never had as a child. Victoria grew to abhor violence and would confront any forms of violence that she saw.

His dog did something, I don’t even remember what it was. He smacked [the dog] in the face, right? I was, I went off; I was like Dude, don’t you ever hit your dog in my house. He was like ‘shut up, it’s my dog.’ I was like Dude I’m about to get really mad here. He[‘s] like, ‘all right, all right, I’m sorry.’ I just freaked out. (January 30, 2003)

Most participants were also good students. Machenzie, Mary and Natalie were well above average. Victoria, though she didn’t particularly like school, ultimately graduated at the age of 16. Danielle and Mariah struggled with school. Neither was a particularly good student and they found that they simply didn’t fit in anywhere. They also did not become involved in any
extracurricular activities. For Machenzie, Mary and Natalie, these activities became staples in their lives. All three students were athletic and relied on coaches for not only improvement in their sports, but as sounding boards for their lives and futures.

I found that participants with a strong future-orientation also had more positive frames of mind. Mariah phrased it well when she said, “I always feel that no matter how much bad stuff happens, it can always get better.” (February 5, 2003) Mary agreed and thought that she and her family members had become stronger. “I think that even though we’ve had hard times, we’ve each overcome it and are strong. Each of us are strong.” (January 30, 2003)

Consistent parent employment, a fundamental protective factor (Werner & Smith, 1982), was evident in most families though the mother was the primary breadwinner in several families. Mary and Natalie’s parents both worked full time throughout their childhood. Danielle’s mother worked sporadically, usually relying on her boyfriends for financial sustenance. This was an area of contention for Danielle, since she perceived that this made her mother more emotionally and financially dependent on someone else, and ultimately made it more difficult to get out of violent situations. “Mom is so emotionally dependent on a man....but she can’t really do nothing either cause she ain’t got a job.” (January 27, 2003) Machenzie, Mariah and Victoria’s mothers were the primary breadwinners for their families. For both of these families, the children perceived that their fathers were of little help financially and that they could not handle the child-care in their mother’s absence. In fact, this became a source of strain for both families, and from the participant’s perspectives an issue that would escalate into physical violence. Machenzie stated,

Just aggravation of, not that my mother had any other choice, but her working all the time and not being home and him having to put up with the three of us all the time, because he didn’t work and you know, when [Mariah] and [Elaine] would start getting to him, crying too much or whatever–there’s only so much a six year old can do....he’d just be–aggravated, no, yes, aggravated with us some, but just aggravated in a way that like my mom always worked and they never got to do things. (February 13, 2003)

Adult mentors, outside the home, were important for some participants. Coaches who were a constant in the lives of Machenzie, Mary and Natalie were effective in offering role
modeling and someone that was not violent. Victoria’s relationship with her high school
guidance counselor, Sarah, was, in her eyes, a life saver. She was emphatic as she spoke of
Sarah. Victoria stated emphatically,

“I’m not bullshitting you when I say that it’s here. If it wasn’t for her
[Sarah] I don’t think I would have gotten through high school. I don’t
think I would mentally [have] gotten through as much stuff as I did
without her....I think she was really my positive view. (January 30, 2003)

Assertion: Protective factors were abundant for some participants, where others had few.
The ability to utilize resources profoundly impacted participants’ perceptions of the family
violence and their ability to communicate those perceptions.

Paradigm Shift for Participants

When I asked Victoria where she thought she’d be if Sarah had not come into her life,
she was once again emphatic:

Definitely don’t think I’d be here. I don’t even think I would have
graduated high school. I don’t, I wouldn’t have met [Sabastian]. I don’t
think mentally I’d be as strong, I don’t think, I don’t think I’d be anything
like I am now. (January 30, 2003)

Whether strength came from adult mentors, the church, peer relationships, school relationships,
family strengths, or the myriad of other protective factors, one thing was evident with every
participant—they felt strong because of the experiences that they endured throughout their
childhoods.

I came to think of this as a paradigm shift. I had expected that I would be told about the many
negative effects of the abuse, but I had not expected participants to view family violence as a
positive experience. Victoria said, “I was a mess back then. I chill now; it’s completely
different.” (January 30, 2003) She explained,

just because your family’s messed up and you’ve be exposed to crappy
stuff all your life doesn’t mean that you have to be anything like them. It
should be, if you see that, you shouldn’t want to be like that. That’s the
example you don’t want to [be], so, I don’t know. I can see how kids, if
they have messed up families, how they would get into the pattern of
being like their parents but I mean mentally if they were wanting to be
different or something then they would see automatically what they don’t
want to be. (January 30, 2003)

This positive thinking, another apparent protective factor, was something more than an internal
locus of control (Bandura, 1977; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1992), markedly
different from Werner and Smith’s (1992) realistic hopes for the future or independent
mindedness (Furstenburg, Brooks-Gunn, & Morgan, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1992). This ability
to turn something negative into a positive experience resounded through each participants’
interviews. Danielle said, “I don’t want it, and I ain’t gonna’ deal with it....it’s just made me
realize what kind of person I don’t want to be with.” (February 5, 2003) In another interview,
Danielle said, “it made me smarter, know how to deal with this shit; not deal with it as much as
what my mom has and not be so dependent on a man....opened my eyes to my future.” (January
27, 2003)

Mary also believed that it would impact her future in a positive way. “Well I guess I seen
what it’s done to my family and I don’t want that to happen in, I want to change; what I want [is]
to make something better than what I came from.” (February 11, 2003) Turning the negative into
a positive was important for Machenzie also. She said, “violence is the devil’s work. You don’t
want to be like the devil. You want to be good and try to do the best you can, make something of
yourself. So, you know, try to turn a negative into a positive.” (February 13, 2003)

Machenzie believed that it was in seeing and being exposed to family violence that she
learned to become the compassionate person she is today. “growing up I learned that I should,
how I should treat others and how people are suppose to be treated, and different people’s
feelings.” (February 6, 2003)

For Mariah, there was an obvious shift in her perspective. During her adolescence, she
lived with her father for a short while and though she liked the lack of rules in the family, she
ultimately decided it was not good for her. “I just don’t want to end up like my mom, and I don’t
want any of that stuff to happen. So I’ll think about, and it’s easier not to think about it when I
don’t see my dad.”(February 5, 2003)

Machenzie summarized well what every participant shared:
They’ve made me who I am today just cause I think about things a lot more than most people do, and certain things affect me more than most people just because I’ve gone through a lot more then people my age have....It was hard to, even sometimes when I hear myself saying things I say to you, I don’t understand how I could go through something like that when I was little kid and have the mind set I do now. (February 6, 2003)

**Assertion:** The youth in this study believe, have created a positive story, a paradigm shift, of their perceptions of the violence in their families. They believe they have learned—how not to be—but this perception does not protect them. They do not have the tools; they cannot see the warning signs, that their relationships could become violent. Without these tools, they may ultimately be writing a story of their own experience of relational violence, one that becomes multigenerational, and like their own families of origin, ever-changing, and ever-evolving, but violent none-the-less.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Family are the ones that make you who you are, that are there no matter a good or bad day.

I am the shadow casted in many’s footprints. Some leave a lasting reflection, more than others.

He makes wrong choices, while she leads the way. She makes up for his mistakes, while he leads me astray.

My heart means well, while my mind is furious. I often get curious.
And don’t understand why.

He paved himself this windy road, and forgot to say goodbye. I’ve realized and convinced myself I’m doing better without.

I use to cry because it hurt so bad. Now I’ve got her and that makes me awfully glad.

I’m older now and so much wiser. I’ve realized how to treat others and how I deserve to be treated.

This is what makes me the person I so happily am. They are the ones I proudly call family.
–Machenzie, February 6, 2003

Overview

This dissertation conveyed one version, my version, my interpretation of the stories of six adolescent females exposed to domestic violence and, in a more limited sense, two of their mothers who experienced violence at the hands of their male partners. It was important for me to understand the contextual elements of exposure to domestic violence on its unintended and often forgotten victims, the children.

My fundamental goal was to better understand the lives of these young women. Through a contextualized, ecological, critical and postmodern feminist lens, I explored how these young women reflected on and made sense of their exposure to the violence in their families, the multiple contexts of violence to which they were exposed and the protective factors and resources they had or employed.
This study contributed to our understanding of the lives of adolescent females exposed to domestic violence by elucidating the complexity of the experiences of these young women and their families. It reminded us of the contextual importance of describing violence and the ever-changing experience of children and families who have experienced familial violence. There were no two experiences that were alike, yet common threads from which I could learn.

From these common threads family themes and coded categories were formulated. Assertions or declarations were developed to concisely portray my understanding of participants’ experiences. There were 17 assertions that were portrayed in the findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assertion</th>
<th>Implications for Research and/or Interventions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence is both physical and verbal in nature</td>
<td>Extend the parameters of how we define and understand violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violence is ever-changing</td>
<td>Extend the parameters of how we define, categorize, and understand violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mothers hid violence from children, which appeared to result in misinterpretations of violence</td>
<td>Extend research on understanding implications of hiding family violence from children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media exposure revictimized children and reinforced messages of victimization</td>
<td>Develop a deeper understanding of the impacts of media exposure on children who have been exposed to domestic violence; prevention and intervention programs assist parents to understand the impacts of media exposure on children</td>
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<td>Though children developed many positive coping mechanisms, children did not appear to have developed adequate tools to decrease the likelihood of becoming victims of domestic violence</td>
<td>Prevention and intervention programs should address pro-social coping mechanisms and warning signs of relational violence</td>
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<td>Through normalization of violence, children did not understand the breadth and depth of family violence</td>
<td>Prevention and intervention programs should address normalization of violence</td>
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<td>Denial, rationalization and minimization of family violence decreased the likelihood that children could develop the skills necessary to avoid future victimization</td>
<td>Prevention and intervention programs should address pro-social coping mechanisms and warning signs of relational violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional systems did not adequately respond to the needs of children exposed to domestic violence</td>
<td>Social policy, prevention, and intervention programs need to address the needs of children exposed to domestic violence; schools, courts, police should be adequately trained to respond to the needs of children exposed to domestic violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>The legal system did not adequately respond to the needs of mothers and children leaving violent relationships</td>
<td>Attorneys, judges and personnel involved in the court system should be adequately trained to respond to the needs of women and children leaving violent relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family violence should be discussed as relationships are negotiated and as part of the healing process</td>
<td>Prevention and intervention programs should address the family system dynamics involved as children negotiate new relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial and silence impedes the healing process and the ability of children to develop trusting intimate adult relationships</td>
<td>Prevention and intervention programs should address pro-social coping mechanisms and warning signs of relational violence</td>
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Protective factors should be enhanced for children exposed to domestic violence

Public policy, prevention and intervention programs should address the needs of children exposed to domestic violence; frontline people such as teachers, attorneys, coaches, clergy should be adequately trained to respond to the needs of children exposed to domestic violence

Dis-identifying with family behaviors of violence is not enough to decrease the likelihood of children becoming involved in violent relationships in the future

Prevention and intervention programs should address the necessary tools for decreasing the likelihood of future violent relationships; future research should focus on better understanding what those tools are and how to enhance protective factors that would decrease the likelihood of future family violence

Participants believed that violence was not just physical in nature, but also included verbal violence. Violence was much more than just physical battering, and in Claire’s case, there was never any physical battering. Yet, she and her two daughters exposed to the family verbal violence, believed that it was violent in nature. Not only did violence need not include a physical component, but violence was also a dynamic process. Unlike the preponderance of research that sees domestic violence as a monolithic process, these families seemed to indicate that the violence was not a static process, but rather changed, evolved depending upon the circumstances. Although Johnson (1995; 2001) expanded perspectives on domestic violence and developed categories of violence that could assist researchers and practitioners, it could prove deleterious to believe that family violence is static in nature.

As mothers experienced violence at the hands of their male partners, they chose to attempt to protect their children from viewing the violence they were experiencing. Is hiding the violence necessarily good? Participants stated that their memories were more vague when they did not actually see the violence. This would seem to be positive. However, this also tormented participants when they knew that their mothers were being beaten behind closed doors or outside of participants bedroom doors. Participants were exposed to the violence by also hearing it, and witnessing the aftermath either through seeing physical injuries such as black eyes or the
lingering emotional scars such as depression, fear, anxiety, or withdrawal. At times, mothers needed to leave their children alone. This too was traumatic for participants.

The first experience of seeing the violence was particularly potent for participants. This epiphany (Denzin, 1989) served to be transformational in each child’s life. They could never go back. Their world was forever changed (Peled, 1993). This was similar to what Garbarino (2001) described as Snowden’s secret, that through witnessing violence within the home, there was an inherent capacity for evil and that each of them were vulnerable to that evil. They also learned Milgrim’s secret, that there was no limit to violence, as they became desensitized and came to depersonalize violence. Through redundant media portrayal of violence, and through recurrent traumatization children became not only re-victimized, but were taught just what else could happen to them. They learned that there was no limit to what could happen to them or their mothers.

Children were also witnesses to the violence by being active participants in the violence or becoming inadvertent or intentional victims of violence at the hands of their fathers or male caretakers. At times, children found themselves in between parental fights. Participants became scapegoats, targets, excuses, but as Danielle said, “excuses don’t cover the bruises.” Children wanted to intervene and at times tried, but found that when they attempted to contact the police or other agencies or in other ways attempted to stop the violence, they found that the violence did not go away. The violence, ever-pervasive, ever-changing, never went away. No matter what participants attempted, they found that their strategies were futile in decreasing the violence. This was just the first lesson in what Garbarino (2001) referred to as Marshall’s secret, that there is no hope.

However, there were more lessons to drive home Marshall’s secret (Garbarino, 2001). Participants initially coped with the family violence by using problem-focused strategies (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980), then moved into a process of self protection. Participants developed and sustained coping skills that no longer reflected the situational needs in their lives. From these necessary coping mechanisms, children learned to use emotion-focused strategies (Folkman & Lazurus). They learned to avoid, block out, deny or forget. They learned to hide from their feelings, forsaking their sense of vulnerability, and put on a face, a mask, to the world. This mask hid the child safely beneath. Machenzie described her ability to do this:
I’m like those Pepsi commercials that you see all the time where people are those zip-up kind of people. That’s kind of what I do. I put one of those on every morning. I’m really not like this — I’m like this — or something. I don’t want to show people what’s underneath the first layer, so I just pretend to be somebody else in a way. But I’m still myself. I just pretend to be a happy person when I’m not really happy all the time.

(February 18, 2003)

By putting on a mask, children, and later adolescents distanced themselves from the realities in their midst. But, distancing themselves at what expense? My concern was that through this process these young women, themselves beginning and forming intimate relationships as adolescents, did not have the necessary coping skills to engage in healthy relationships, or to leave abusive relationships. This was reinforced as three participants who had been physically assaulted on at least one occasion by an intimate partner and the three who had not been assaulted, shared their experiences.

Children quickly learned, even in this small exploratory study, that there was no avenue for escape. Not only were they powerless to stop the violence or intervene in a meaningful way, neither could the adults in their lives. Most participants were exposed to extended family member violence. They became witnesses to the violence among family friends, aunts, uncles and grandparents. As they shared their stories with grandparents or other family members, they were hushed and silenced. When they went outside the family, there was little or no action. As Victoria said, “cops didn’t help me; cops don’t ever help.” The system, in fact multiple systems developed to assist youth and families had simply failed to intervene in these youth’s lives. From these systemic and institutional failures and the experience of their families’ response to violence, children learned that they were powerless, and more importantly, alone. This was perhaps the deepest wound of all. Garbarino (2001) described this as Dantrel’s secret, and quite possibly the most damaging of his five secrets, that adults cannot protect children. It was a lesson that learned quite well. It was a lesson that Maggie also learned when she took her children as she left the violent relationship and was arrested for kidnapping. Her children were removed from her home, placed with their paternal grandparents and could only see their mother when supervised. For four months Maggie was separated from her children, all because she left a
violent relationship. And yet, Victoria, Danielle, Machenzie, Mariah, Mary, Natalie, and their mothers, Maggie and Claire were survivors. There was a resilience in them. And still, I was concerned it was not enough.

Using the literature on resilience and protective factors, and analyzing which participants seemed to have more protective factors, it was clear that Machenzie, Mary and Natalie had more protective factors, and appeared to be more resilient, while Victoria, Danielle and Mariah had fewer protective resources and seemed less resilient. And, in fact, it was Victoria, Danielle and Mariah who had themselves been victims of at least one incident of violence in their own intimate relationships. Despite this fact, I don’t believe that Machenzie, Mary or Natalie have the necessary tools to avoid violent relationships. Though they appeared to have more protective mechanisms in their lives and more easily took advantage of the resources available to them, they were blinded in some way to the possibility that their relationships could ever be violent. They could not see warning signs in their own relationships that could ultimately lead to violence. For example, Machenzie did her boyfriend’s laundry, and proudly exclaimed that, but couldn’t see the disconnect when she was angry with him for expecting it. She felt that it was her duty, but resented him. When we talked there were subtle hints that she was feeling coerced.

For Mary, she did not trust her boyfriend. Though they had been dating for three years, she stated on numerous occasions that she really couldn’t trust him. I continuously wondered how that lack of trust could impact her later relationships. Natalie, Mary and Machenzie each glorified their relationships, placing their boyfriends high up on a pedestal. Nelson (1997) points out that it is a systemic and relational dynamic that when the partner is unable to live up to that unrealistic expectation that violence can occur.

Participants did not recognize the possessiveness, masked in the form of idle jealousy, that their boyfriends displayed. Though participants romanticized this jealousy and dispelled mood swings as typical, they could not see that these were warning signs. They did not comprehend that the enormous amount of time and energy spent with their male partners, often in isolation, could be an omen of what could come in the future. They were unaware that these warning signs were apparent from our limited conversations. What appeared to be adolescent resilience could simply be masking the unavailability of necessary tools to reduce violence in the lives of women exposed to family violence as children. There were certainly shades of resilience
in each of these young women, yet the current views of resilience should be questioned, expanded, and not used to mask underlying issues that could ultimately prove detrimental to children exposed to domestic violence. I am concerned that though these young women are survivors, they do not have the tools they need. Denial and silence impedes the healing process, and dis-identifying (Rubin, 1996) with family behaviors of violence cannot be enough to decrease the likelihood of these young women becoming involved in the violence their mothers chose to leave.

Implications for Research

Expanding Perspectives on Violence

This study identified an expanded view of what domestic violence means to those who have lived and experienced its consequences. It is important to understand the perspectives of those whose lives have been directly impacted by this phenomenon. Through first-hand knowledge, participants helped me to understand that domestic violence was not just about physical violence, or even patterns of violence which included physical violence. For participants it also included the mental anguish that resulted from verbal violence and the aftermath of physical battering neither of which needed the prerequisite of physical battering. It would be useful to further explore this issue in larger studies and in other geographic areas. It might also prove fruitful to further understand how extra-marital or extra-relational affairs can be connected to ongoing patterns of intimate terrorism and other forms of relational violence. For these participants, it seemed to be part of an ongoing process.

Second, participants elaborated on their perceptions about the changing nature of violence in their families. Violence and responses to violence were dynamic processes that were contextual in not only volatility, but in frequency, severity, content, consequences, intent, and the participants. Johnson (1995; 2001) has dramatically altered our understanding of the need for contextualization and categorization of violence. This impacts prevention, intervention and policy decisions around familial violence. This study indicated the need for ongoing research of the contextual and ever-changing processes involved in domestic violence.

This may have been so readily apparent in this small study since this group of participants had never sought the assistance of shelters, where much of the research on intimate terrorism has been conducted. Large quantitative studies may not be able to detect such
contextualized changes. We need more research on families who have not participated in shelter programs and have never publicly disclosed their abuse in a systematic fashion. For the families involved in the present study, there remained a certain level of secrecy. However, this research was and would be difficult given that this population remains hidden and difficult to access. An ethical consideration would be the sensitivity of this research and the impact research could have on participants.

Understanding Multiple Contexts of Violence

Much of the research on domestic violence has fervently attempted to isolate the effects of exposure to domestic violence of children from those who suffer both exposure to domestic violence and experience child abuse or other forms of violence. Yet, research on resiliency, risk, and protective factors has indicated that it is necessary to understand cumulative risk factors to more fully understand the complexity of the impact of violence in the lives of children. The isolation of individual risk factors provided “insights with the sequelae of specific experiences, but their interpretation can be problematic because many adversities are interrelated and may have cumulative nonspecific effects” (Garmezy, Reed & Masten, 1999, p. 171). Richman and Fraser (2001) have indicated that for this reason, “specific causal models will always fail” (p. 4) given that no one model could adequately capture the complexity of the multiple risk factors associated with multiple contexts of violence.

This particular study has contributed to our understanding of how multiple contexts of violence intertwine in the lives of young women exposed to domestic violence. Of particular note was participant roles in the adult fights. Children who attempted to intervene in the violence only did this for a limited period of time. When children felt this action had no positive impact on the violence, and in fact had negative impacts on the child or actually was perceived to escalate the violence, children turned within. This issue is worthy of continued research given its direct impact on coping mechanisms that children use, connections to protective factors, and possible implications for prevention and intervention, treatment programs, and public policy.

In further examining multiple contexts of violence, it could also prove fruitful to evaluate the implications of media violence on children exposed to domestic violence. For most participants, viewing horror movies and exposure to other entertainment media violence had an almost revictimization effect on them by reminding them of the abuse they had been exposed to,
as well as potential abuse they or their family members could suffer at the hands of their fathers or male caretakers.

Coping Mechanisms, Protective Factors and Resilience

This study indicated a number of coping strategies and protective factors that youth had or used in order to physically, psychologically and emotionally survive the onslaught of verbal and physical violence they were exposed to and experienced. The connections between these factors and resilience is an area that is in need of continued and ongoing research.

Resilience is still a somewhat vague process. How is it that I, as a child, survived abject poverty, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, family violence, community violence and a myriad of other childhood adversities to become a doctoral candidate with a healthy relationship and no indication of chronic psychological distress? I think nearly anyone would say that I am resilient. Yet, it has not always been so. Throughout high school and college I lived under a cloud of depression and despair. Resilience was, for me, a process, not an event.

Rutter (2001) has referred to eight features involved in the resilience process: 1) level of risk, meaning the accumulation of varying risks; 2) sensitivity to risk, signifying genetic influences and prior effects of experiences. This might include protective factors of temperament and the ability for children to develop positive connections. If a child is less trusting and more distant due to exposure to violence or ongoing abuse, the child may be less able to develop strong relationships with possible adult mentors; 3) reduction of negative effect, which might include parental supervision to decrease community risks or substance abuse. If parents are still able to effectively supervise their children, even in the midst of personal depression and economic difficulties as a result of leaving a male partner, the risk of children becoming involved, such as Machenzie and Mariah, in more community violence could be somewhat reduced; 4) reduce negative chain reactions, such as teenage pregnancy or dropping out of school, which only increases negative scenarios for adolescents. For Danielle, dropping out of high school and becoming pregnant only exacerbated her negative situation and ability to tap into available resources; 5) fostering positive chain reactions, which might include extracurricular activities which could become turning points in children’s lives. Machenzie, Mary and Natalie were able to use this as a major resource in their lives. It allowed them to
momentarily escape their family situations in a positive fashion and extended their ability to tap into adult mentoring relationships that otherwise may have gone unused.; 6) open up new opportunities, such as educational advantages or other adult experiences that may decrease the impact of varying adversities; 7) neutralizing experiences that could negate or offset negative experiences; 8) processing their experiences, giving meaning to experiences and incorporating that meaning into self-concepts. None of the participants in this study tapped into available therapeutic resources for any length of time. Sarah, Victoria’s high school guidance counselor, was able to provide enough support to assist Victoria through high school. However, even this relationship could not be sustained long enough to more fully begin to transform Victoria’s perceptions of herself and her future. But, this relationship did add one more protective factor and allowed Victoria more future options than if she had dropped out of high school.

This research by Rutter (2001) and others open up varying avenues to resilience and suggests a firm connection to the usefulness of coping mechanisms and protective factors. However, this research also raises the question of how protective factors and coping mechanisms might actually inhibit resilience. For instance, an inability to trust was an issue for every participant. This precluded their ability to engage in counseling relationships that could help give meaning to their experiences and incorporate those meanings into a more positive self-concept. Second, every participant had developed a paradigm shift about her experiences of family violence. This paradigm shift was a positive coping mechanism and provided protection against hopelessness and despair. However, did this paradigm shift become a crutch as children grew into adolescents and began engaging in intimate relationships themselves? Does it blind them, pushing them into a sense of denial with respect to their own relationships somehow mirror those of their parents? This could certainly be further studied.

Longitudinal studies could prove very useful in further exploring these issues, following children with varying coping mechanisms and protective factors as they engage in the process of resilience. How do further risk factors, such as teen pregnancy, dropping out of high school or surrounding one’s self with negative influences alter the trajectory of resilience? It would be important to continue following these youth and learning about new adaptations to experiences.

For instance, given the research on protective factors and resilience, it may have been easy to assume that Victoria, Danielle and Mariah were more likely to themselves become
involved in violent relationships. As previously reported, these three have been the victims of at least one assault at the hands of an intimate partner. Of the three, Victoria had more protective factors. One might then expect that Victoria would be the most likely to leave her male partner or to engage in a more questioning attitude about the event. Instead, she blamed herself. Though this was only one incident of violence after she had engaged in a lesbian relationship after they had separated, she has, two years later continued to live in isolation, unable to extend her support network.

Mariah, a very troubled teen with a history of runaway behavior and substance use, immediately left her boyfriend when he struck her. She refused to return to him, saying “I don’t want to end up like my mom and dad were.” (February 5, 2003) She also immediately told her father about the situation. Though this proved to be a confusing process for her, she did not rationalize her boyfriend’s behavior, but immediately said no to the violence.

Danielle, a high school drop out and teen mother at the age of 16, and engaged in what I have described as a mutual violent control (Johnson, 2001) relationship rationalized her boyfriend’s substance abuse and behavior toward her, often minimizing, a coping strategy she had learned as a child watching her own mother’s abuse. It would be very useful to follow Danielle, to learn her adaptive responses throughout her adolescence and early adulthood. Despite limited resources, few protective factors, and a keen ability to rationalize and minimize abuse, Danielle told her boyfriend to leave. (Field Notes, February 25, 2003) She had given him a choice, the drugs or her. He would not give up the drugs, so she told him to leave. A week later Danielle called to say that he had gotten the last of his things from the house and that she had finally managed to stop crying. She said it was the right thing for her and her daughter, but that it still hurt.

The two participants who had the fewest protective factors and appeared to be less resilient had both said NO to intimate violence. It was a process for both. Their lives will be much more difficult than Machenzie’s, Mary’s or Natalie’s, but these young women are, despite their many adversities, resilient.

*Institutional Failures to Protect*

I have looked through many windows into why institutions are ineffective in responding to the needs of children exposed to domestic violence. As a former police officer responding to
domestic violence calls, I have seen, first hand, how volatile the situation can become. We were trained to keep families out of the kitchen, too many sharp knives and in areas such as the living room with more space to maneuver and where there were quick exits to either get victims, perpetrators or ourselves out of the arena of violence. There were occasions, even for me when that was necessary. I can understand, as Osofsky’s (1999) research indicates, that there is a hardening of officers in their responses to domestic violence calls. It would be useful to understand the subtle connections between training, enforcement experience for officers and their long-term responses to domestic violence situations.

I have also been a counselor and case manager in a variety of settings including public and alternative schools, community agencies, and residential care. I have developed therapeutic foster care programs and worked closely with social services, the department of education, mental health, department of health and court services. I have personally reported dozens of child physical and sexual abuse cases, and more often than not, nothing happened. Even in the face of incontrovertible evidence of physical and sexual brutality, fathers or abusers were not asked to leave the home nor were children removed from the home. I came to see the system as ineffective at best and abusive and traumatizing to many children and families. It was in this atmosphere that I learned there was a thin line between being an obligated reporter and losing the trust of my clients when the system failed to respond adequately, if at all. It is a systemic issue. High case loads and dwindling resources do not provide an atmosphere of sustainability, for the kids or adults in the system. I am only one of many counselors, social workers, police officers, court service workers and nurses who have chosen to leave the system and move into other avenues of interest. These systemic issues should also be addressed through public policy.

These are ALL issues that could benefit from research. I believe there is a connection between counselors, social workers, probation officers, nurses and others who believe that they are unable to incite real change and choose an either emotional escape, just as the children who moved from problem-focused strategies to emotion-focused strategies when their attempts to intervene in the violence went without positive change, or a physical escape into another, less demanding, career.

*Process of Research*
As useful as it is to extend current and ongoing research agendas to incorporate how we define and contextualize violence, evaluate multiple contexts of violence in the lives of children exposed to domestic violence, coping mechanisms, risk and protective factors and resilience and institutional failures of children and families in need, it’s also important to better understand the impacts of research on participants, the research process itself.

Gaining entry to this population was difficult. Given time constraints, I did not use many of the resources I had access to, and long-term relationships with. Although I used snowballing with community contacts and used some counseling colleagues, there were other resources including police officers, attorneys, court services, counseling programs, social services and hospitals that I was unable to more fully tap into or follow-up with. Using resources such as these is not without its own set of problems and ethical dilemmas, but could prove efficacious in gaining access to this hidden population.

I believe two components of my research process were particularly useful with this population, the use of poetry and multiple interviews. Poetry provided an avenue to understand and make sense of the experiences of participants that could not be understood through traditional interviewing techniques (Percer, 2002). It provided a starting point for not only articulation and expression of thoughts and feelings, but for the development of our relationship. I believe it fostered a positive connection. Natalie described this in our final interview.

I think the poems are a good idea. It’s hard for someone to write a poem and I found myself being personal. So I mean...there’s always something in there that’s going to kind of shift, shows you about what they’re thinking, I think.” (February 21, 2003)

I believe the poetry was also empowering to these young participants, giving voice to feelings they had been holding inside for many years. The poetry was often powerful and evocative, a self-expression that was difficult for participants to otherwise articulate. The poetry gave a vividness to the writing, and hopefully evoked emotions in readers, allowing for a small moment to understand the very real experiences of participants. It would be very difficult to forget that a real person wrote each of those poems, based on lived experiences and came to be their interpretations of what those experiences meant to them. To me, this was more true to understanding the complexity of experiences and hopefully allowed readers to more fully
experience those complexities. Finally, poetry allowed me to triangulate data. As participants expressed themselves through their poetry, I could use this to triangulate information they shared in their interviews.

Multiple interviews were also useful to the process of establishing rapport. I found that as interviews continued and I showed that I cared about participants as people, not just research data, we were able to share a great deal more intimacy in our dialogue. This in turn seemed to be an almost healing experience for most participants. Mary was describing how this process had been helpful to her because it was the first time that someone really took the time to listen. She stated,

I know it’s difficult for each person. Some people don’t want to talk about it. As much as some don’t want to talk about it–it’s nice that someone wants to hear what you have to say. They [referring to friends who haven’t been able to listen] avoid it. My friends do that to me. I’m not stupid–I know what they’re doing. (February 11, 2003)

Danielle said that it helped her to see things differently.

It’s helped me look at it better, more on a positive side. So I know what I don’t want to grow up to be like. Instead of it being like one of these really cute little families where the wife does everything the husband tells her to. It’s just being the man over-powering the women. (February 5, 2003)

If participating in these interviews had anything to do with Danielle’s asking her boyfriend to leave, and I don’t know that it did, but if it somehow empowered her to make this choice, then participating in similar research processes and developing research in this area could perhaps prove to be a cathartic process for participants. Nonetheless, it warrants further investigation.

Machenzie indicated that the process had helped her in many ways, but most importantly allowed her to simply express herself. She told me it was helpful by, “being able to talk about things that bother me and not worry about you thinking bad about me, because you won’t, and you talk to me about it too, and being able to express how I feel and how I felt.” (February 18, 2003)
It was not only participants who said that this was a positive process for them. Maggie maintained contact with me throughout the process, given our concern about Mariah, and she stated on multiple occasions that this was so helpful because both daughters were talking to her more. It had opened up avenues of communication. I wonder, was it participants’ ability to share and have someone listen to them, or that it was one more adult mentor who was not abusive? I’m not sure, but more fully understanding this process could be useful for developing more methodologically appropriate studies with at-risk groups or other marginalized or disenfranchised populations.

These are issues that could be and should be studied more rigorously to determine possible healing processes and cathartic reactions for participants involved in research. Likewise, research could indicate that the research process is another avenue to healing and thus an additional protective factor to further neutralize or offset negative experiences such as exposure to domestic violence.

Implications for Practice

Prevention

bell hooks (2000) and many other feminists suggest that violence against women has strong roots in hierarchical rule and coercive authority. She suggests that capitalism and its complex reinforcement of power over those less powerful is used to support violence against women, and certainly many other forms of violence. hooks suggests that both men and women, within our social groups, reinforce the use of power and violence. It is through this avenue that she believes violence can be prevented. Reasonably, if we were able to prevent domestic violence, and other forms of violence, then we would eradicate exposure to domestic violence. Unfortunately, this is well beyond the scope of this dissertation.

However, public education about the impacts of domestic violence on children and programs that specifically target and educate women, men and families to the warning signs of violence, the ways in which violence is manifested, its aftermath and support services could decrease domestic violence at some levels. This study has shown that the invisible victims of domestic violence are everywhere. As a society, we tend to think of them as the women and children going to the shelters. But domestic violence takes many forms, forms which according
to the participant perceptions in this study, is ever-changing. Education in this area could prove vital in helping families understand that domestic violence is not monolithic.

Prevention could also target girls and boys. The participants in this study were once children, all involved in school. I’m not suggesting that public education can ease all social ills, but I do believe that helping children to understand the dynamics of violence may open a dialogue, where children do not have to feel alone, isolated and fearful to tell their family secret. With children like Danielle and Mariah, the warning signs were pretty clear that there was something wrong. Yet, for the most part, teachers and school guidance counselors didn’t reach out. Danielle simply faded out until she was gone. Mariah doesn’t even know her school counselor’s name. Does our society accept that there are a certain number of children who simply cannot be helped?

Prevention should be done to include educating teachers and counselors about the impacts of domestic violence and how to better educate and intervene with children and families. This is something that I have done every summer for the past four years. The teachers who have attended these workshops have been very thankful. It’s easy to dismiss the many systemic issues of too many kids, not enough time, burnout, too many hats, and other issues that decrease the likelihood that teachers or school counselors will effectively or prevent or intervene. Teachers simply have not been given the tools to deal with such sensitive issues.

*Intervention with Parents*

Parents in this study, and in many previous studies, have revealed that parents are often unaware of the amount and types of domestic violence that their children have been exposed to. Maggie didn’t think her children saw very much, but wrote in her questionnaire that “I’d once believed [the children] never witnessed physical violence, but as they get older I’m hearing more and more.” Thus as interventions are made with parents, it could be helpful to educate them about this phenomena.

Given that there was still a great deal of secrecy revolving around the violence in the family, for participants it could only prove useful to develop ongoing dialogues. I have concerns that in participant’s mothers’ desire to protect their children, they set up and reinforced a dynamic of rationalization, denial, minimization and keeping the secret. This is not to suggest mothers should be blamed, at all, for the violence that they experienced at the hands of their
male partners. Rather, parents, both male and female, including extended family members, should be educated about the impacts of the violence and also the secrecy. By developing ongoing dialogues, parents will know more of what their children actually witnessed, the impact of that exposure, and the developmental issues as children get older, and ultimately engage in their own intimate relationships.

*Intervention with Children Exposed to Domestic Violence*

The life stories of the resilient youngsters now grown into adulthood teach us that competence, confidence, and caring can flourish, even under adverse circumstances, if children encounter persons who provide them with the secure basis for the development of trust, autonomy, and initiative (Werner & Smith, 1992)

None of the participants ever engaged in ongoing counseling relationships regarding their exposure to domestic violence. Using Rutter’s (2001) processes of resilience, he implied that it was important for youth to process their experiences and incorporate new understandings into their self-concept. Without direct intervention, this becomes rather difficult. However, children do need to know that they are not alone in the world. This is why prevention efforts, such as training teachers, are really also intervention strategies. By developing strong relationships with teachers, school counselors or other adult mentors, children are able to add protective benefits and increase the likelihood of breaking the family secret. Even in the midst of systemic failures to intervene, these relationships can help counteract the feelings of isolation that come with continued secrecy.

Counselors should also be made aware of the impacts of exposure to domestic violence, cumulative risk factors and how these combine to increase the likelihood of mental and emotional distress in children and youth. Counselors should understand that there is not one picture of a victim of domestic violence or the children who are exposed to that violence. They are not just the behavioral problems or school dropouts. They are the honor roll students, cheerleaders, student athletes and teen mothers. Counselors should also understand that there is a mask that these kids put on. They have learned, through years of personal experience to hide from their experiences and often themselves. These coping mechanisms suited them well in crisis, but without positive adaptation, these coping mechanisms can become dangerous. I do
worry that Machenzie, Mary and Natalie are no less at risk than Victoria, Mariah, or Danielle. Protective factors have buffered the effects for them, but Machenzie indicated she would rate herself a 9 out of 10 for daily depression. She was also recently picked up for shoplifting at a local store. In my clinical experience this was a common practice among internalizing female teens. In their attempts to keep their pain inside, they participate in behaviors of taking in. Thus I believe that other behaviors may follow. My greatest fear, however, is that these young women simply could not suggest patterns or behaviors that their boyfriends might do that would be a red flag for future violent behavior, despite the daily lessons of watching their fathers or male caretakers. Only Mariah and Danielle could suggest one, substance abuse, that dramatically altered their boyfriend’s perceptions and behavior toward them. Thus intervention should include an understanding of the impacts of exposure to domestic violence and positive coping skills that could decrease the likelihood that young women would become victims of violence in their own relationships. Youth exposed to domestic violence must have the necessary tools to prevent intergenerational violence. They must be given the resources to lead a productive, happy and healthy life.

Reflections of the Researcher

I have been forever changed by this project. Machenzie, Mariah, Danielle, Victoria, Mary, and Natalie have changed my thinking about family violence. They have taught me to ask better questions and to listen with caution; there are many messages behind a single word. They have compelled me to question the idea of a researcher being only a researcher, and the ethical standards with which we adhere. I established a level of trust, no matter how small, and used that trust to learn from them and with them. From the beginning, I shared that there were some things that I could not hold in confidence, thus breaking our trust. Fortunately, I made only one report. I reported Mariah’s experience of violence at the hands of her former boyfriend to her mother. Did I need to report this? I’m not sure. But I know that I struggled with many other ethical decisions. What about Danielle and my perception of her relationship? What of her child who–based on my own research–one would assume she was being exposed to her mother’s experience of violence? Should I have reported that? What would the consequences of such reports be?

As a counselor, I often struggled with similar issues. Being an obligated reporter does not mean that it is black and white. It seems somewhat simplistic, but just as the participants in this
study reported to me, and in the dozens of cases I reported as a counselor, there was seldom a systemic action that appropriately intervened in family violence. The ethical dilemma of losing the trust of a client to report violence in a family was always difficult. I watched in horror as repeated reports of sexual and physical violence went unheeded. The law may be clear, but do we abandon our clients and our research participants in an effort to protect them—knowing that the system cannot protect them in many cases? Some would say it’s not my decision to make. The law is clear. Yet, that line that I navigated as a counselor was never simple. Nor was it simple as a researcher. My reality was that the line between counselor and qualitative researcher was a thin and precarious line, and the ethical dilemmas of completing research with such at-risk populations only blurs the line further.

As a therapist, I was always aware of the dance and the need to move gently into the back door. But as a researcher, when time constraints were so different, where did I draw the line? Participants sought out lousy relationships for the most part. As a feminist, I believe it is imperative to empower. How is it empowering to watch and observe as young women I’ve grown to care about remain vulnerable to young men they profess to love. What do I say, do, when I believe participants are in an oppressive relationship? Is it my role to confront them? How might that confrontation disturb the precarious boundaries of personal denial that protects participants? What issues might that confrontation bring up? They are likely issues that cannot be resolved within the time-frame of a study.

What is the ethical imperative? What are the ethical considerations of being caught in the middle of counselor and researcher and dealing with the contradictions of participants telling me that they have learned how not to be in violent relationships, when I see the violence, in its many manifestations, just on the horizon? I don’t have any real answers. I negotiated each of my relationships with participants in a way that was respectful and caring. Only time will tell if I made the right choices.

Limitations

This dissertation was a small, exploratory study. It would have been considerably strengthened by using a greater number of participants and having formally interviewed, not only the two mothers who agreed to participate, but all mothers of adolescent participants. I believe that multiple interviews with parents would prove useful, rather than just one interview.
Participants tend to recollect and process information from one interview to the next and this could only benefit data collection.

One of the great strengths of this study was also a limitation. By interviewing two sibling sets and their mothers, there may not have been enough variability in families. I should note, however, that the perceptions of and experiences varied even in those sibling sets.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A  Informed Assent for Minor Participants
Appendix B  Informed Consent for Parents/Guardians and Parental Participants
Appendix C  Informed Consent for Adult Participants
Appendix D  Interview Guides
Appendix E  Parent’s Questionnaire
Appendix F  Resource List for Participants
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Appendix A

Assent to Participate by (Minor) Subject

**Project Title:** Multiple Contexts of Violence in the Lives of Adolescents who have been Exposed to Domestic Violence

**Principal Investigators (Researchers):** Katherine R. Allen, Professor, Department of Human Develop & Karen S. Joest, Doctoral Student, Department of Human Development, Virginia Tech

**Purpose:**

My name is Karen Joest. I was a therapist, but now I am a graduate student doing research to obtain a more advanced degree at Virginia Tech. As part of my research, I will be talking with young people who have dealt with fighting between the adults at home (Moms and Dads or other men living in their homes). I will interview about 10 to 15 boys and girls, between the ages of 13-22, whose mothers have had to deal with being hit, yelled at or put down (told that they are worthless or not good enough) by men in their lives.

**Procedures:**

I will talk with you four times using some questions that I have written out. I will also ask you if you are willing to write some poetry, letters, songs, or do artwork. You do not have to do these, and nothing will happen if you decide you’d rather not do them. Each time we talk, it will last about 45-60 minutes and will be taped with a tape recorder. The total time for all 4 interviews will be about 4 hours. When we’re done talking someone will type up our conversation. I will keep these typed conversations locked up so that no one else can get to them. When we talk, we’ll do that in your home or another place, such as the library. The important thing is that we can talk privately without anyone else listening to us. Although I have questions written out in advance, our conversations will be open and you can talk about the things that are important to you.

**Risks:**

At times, you could feel sad, angry, or upset about the things we talk about. It may be hard for you to remember or talk about things that happened to you, your mom, and your family. I have given your mom a list of people (counselors and therapists) who can help you deal with the things that upset you.

**Benefits:**

Although it may be hard to talk about these things, I have been working with young people like you for a very long time. They’ve told me that it actually helps to talk about things
that bother them. It may also help me to teach others about your experiences, and what would have helped you to deal with the problems at home.

Confidentiality:

During our talks, you will use a different name so that no one can recognize you. This name will be used every time we talk.

I will not tell anyone else about the things we talk about in our conversations. However, since I am a counselor, there are times that I MUST tell someone something that you may have told me. These include: a) If I think you or any children in your family are being hurt or abused, I must report this to Social Services or the police; b) If I believe you are thinking of hurting yourself, I have to tell your mom, dad or guardian; c) If you threaten to hurt someone else, I must report this. Anything else you tell me will stay between you and me, and I won’t tell anyone else what you have said.

As I told you, our talks will be taped on a tape recorder and later typed up by someone who doesn’t know you. The typed pages are called transcripts. Both the tapes and transcripts will be locked up so no one else can get to them and read or listen to them. I am the only person that will have a key to the drawer where tapes and transcripts will be held. The tapes will be destroyed one year after I have finished this research project. I will keep your poetry, artwork, letters or songs locked up with the transcripts.

Compensation:

You will not be given money or gifts for participating in this project.

Freedom to Withdraw:

You can quit this project and our talks at any time. If you quit the project, no transcript will be made of our talks. If a transcript has already been made, then it will be ripped up and thrown away. If there are any questions that you do not want to answer, then you may say that you do not want to answer them, without any penalty of any sort.

Participant’s Permission:

By signing this sheet of paper, you are saying that you agree to talk with me. By signing this sheet, you are saying that you don’t have any other questions that you need answered, and give assent to talk with me.

Participant’s Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________
If I feel I have been treated differently than what this form says, I know I can contact Dr. David Moore, Chair of the human subjects review committee (the IRB) Virginia Tech, Dr. Katherine Allen, Faculty Advisor, or Dr. Joyce Arditti, Human Development Departmental Reviewer at the numbers listed below.

Karen S. Joest          Dr. Katherine Allen          Dr. Joyce Arditti          Dr. David Moore
Principal Investigator Faculty Advisor Department Reviewer Chair, IRB
540- 552-0910           540-231-4794            540-123-4791              540-231-4991
Appendix B

Documentation of Parent’s Consent to Participate

Project Title: Multiple Contexts of Violence in the Lives of Adolescents Who Have Been Exposed to Domestic Violence

Principal Investigators (Researchers): Katherine R. Allen, Professor, Department of Human Development & Karen S. Joest, Doctoral Student, Department of Human Development, Virginia Tech

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of domestic violence on children and adolescents who are exposed to domestic violence, and to other forms of community violence. The researcher (Ms. Joest) was a therapist, but now is a graduate student doing research to obtain a more advanced degree (Ph.D.) at Virginia Tech. She will interview approximately 10 to 15 male and female adolescents between the ages of 13-22, whose mothers have experienced domestic violence at home (being hit, yelled at or put down - told that they are worthless or not good enough by men in their lives). Each research subject will be asked about their experiences related to violence in their life.

Procedures:

The researcher (Ms. Joest) will provide you, the child’s parent, with a questionnaire regarding demographic data, and information regarding your experiences with domestic violence. You will be asked to complete and return the document to Ms. Joest.

Risks:

For some individuals, the study may be of minimal risk. However, for others there may be some risk of distress from recalling painful events which occurred during incidents of domestic violence in their home. It may be difficult at times to discuss or remember painful experiences that you have encountered. A list of counselors and resources will be provided to you that will be able to help you deal with any difficulties as a result of participation in the study. Any counseling that you seek would be at your own expense, as funds are not available in this project for that purpose.

Benefits:

No direct benefits are offered/promised to encourage you to participate in this study. The results of this project could help therapists to help other kids, since the information that you
share may help others who have gone through similar things. The information will be used to help others cope with domestic violence in their families and to develop more useful resources that could be helpful to therapists when other young people are being exposed to domestic violence.

Confidentiality:

Information that you provide in responding to the questions on the questionnaire will be considered as confidential, meaning that I (Ms. Joest, the researcher) will not tell anyone else. However, since I am a counselor, there are times that I MUST report some specific things that you may share with me or that I may suspect about you through our interviews. These include: a) If I strongly suspect that any other children in your family are being abused, I must report this to Social Services or the police; b) If I believe you are in danger of harming yourself, I must report this to the appropriate authorities; or, c) If you threaten to seriously harm someone else, I must report this. Anything else you share with me will remain confidential.

Completed questionnaires will be kept under lock and key, and will be accessed only by Ms. Joest and members of her graduate advisory committee.

Compensation:

You will receive no money or gifts for participation in this project.

Freedom to Withdraw:

You can stop your participation in this study at any time. You are free not to answer any question or questions that you choose not to answer.

Documentation of the Consent Process:

I have read this Consent document and its descriptions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby give my voluntary consent to participate in this project.

_________________________________  ____________________
Participant’s Signature                Date

If I feel I have been treated differently than what this form says, or that my rights as a participant in the research have been violated during the course of this project, I know I can contact Dr. David Moore, Chair of the human subjects review committee (the IRB), Virginia Tech, or Dr. Katherine Allen, Faculty Advisor, or Dr. Joyce Arditti, Human Development Departmental Reviewer at the numbers listed below.
Should I have any questions about the research project or procedures, I may contact:

Karen S. Joest               Dr. Katherine Allen               Dr. Joyce Arditti               Dr. David Moore
Principal Investigator    Faculty Advisor                Department Reviewer         Chair, IRB
540-552-0910                540-231-4791                  540-231-4794                     540-2314991

PARTICIPANT'S WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OR DUPLICATE ORIGINAL OF THIS CONSENT FORM
Appendix B

Parent/Guardian Permission Form
For Child Subjects Less than 18 Years of Age

Project Title: Multiple Contexts of Violence in the Lives of Adolescents who have been Exposed to Domestic Violence

Principal Investigators (Researchers):
Katherine R. Allen, Professor, Department of Human Development, Virginia Tech
Karen S. Joest, Doctoral Student, Department of Human Development, Virginia Tech

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of domestic violence on children and adolescents who are exposed to domestic violence, and other forms of community violence. The researcher (Ms. Joest) was a therapist, but now is a graduate student doing research to obtain a more advanced degree (Ph.D.) at Virginia Tech. As part of her research, she will be interviewing approximately 10 to 15 male and female adolescents, between the ages of 13 and 22, whose mothers have experienced domestic violence. Each child participant will be asked about her/his experiences related to her/his perceptions of violence in her/his life. The information will be used to help others cope with domestic violence in their families and to develop more useful resources that could be helpful to therapists when other young people are being exposed to domestic violence.

Procedures:

The researcher (Ms. Joest) will conduct a series of four in-depth interviews with each child/adolescent participant, to better understand the impact of domestic violence on adolescents whose mother’s have experienced domestic violence. Participants will be asked, as part of the interview process, if they are willing to write poetry about their experiences, although they will not be required to write poetry. If they do not want to write poetry, they can write song lyrics, draw a picture or write letters about their experiences. They are not required to do any of the above, and are free to withdraw from the interviews at any time. Interviews will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be taped with a tape recorder. The total time for all 4 interviews will be about 4 hours. Transcripts, or typed pages of the interviews, will be made of each interview and will be kept under lock and key, accessible only to Ms. Joest. Interviews will be held in your (the parent’s) home or another place, such as a library conference room, where your child and the researcher can talk privately without being overheard. Written interview guides will be used, but our conversations will be open to discussing the things that are important to your child, as a research study participant, with regards to this project and their own personal experiences.
Risks:

For some individuals, the study may be of minimal risk. However, for others there may be some risk of distress from recalling painful events which occurred during incidents of domestic violence in the home. It may be difficult at times for your child to discuss or remember painful experiences that she/he has encountered. A list of counselors and resources will be provided to you, and they should be able to help you/your child deal with any difficulties as a result of participation in the study. Any counseling that you seek for your child or yourself would be at your own expense, as funds are not available in this project for that purpose.

Benefits:

No promise or guarantee of benefits will be offered to encourage you to participate. It has been the researcher’s (Ms. Joest’s) experience, after working with kids and families for the past ten years as a therapist, that talking about these experiences can actually help people deal with them in more positive ways. The results of this project could help therapists to help other kids, since the information that you share may help others who have gone through similar things. The information will be used to help others cope with domestic violence in their families and to develop more useful resources that could be helpful to therapists when other young people are being exposed to domestic violence.

Confidentiality:

During the interview, your child will use a different name so that no one can recognize her/him as a result of participating in this project. This name will be used throughout the separate interviews, and will be used on all transcripts to indicate their identity.

Everything in our interviews will be considered as confidential, meaning that I (Ms. Joest, the researcher) will not tell anyone else. However, since I am a counselor, there are times that I MUST report some specific things that your child may share with me or that I may suspect about her/him through interviews. These include: a) If the researcher (Ms. Joest) strongly suspects that your child or any children in your family are being abused, she must report this to Social Services or the police; b) If the researcher believes your child is in danger of harming her/himself (such as indicating that they are considering suicide), I must report this to you, the parent/guardian. c) If your child threatens to seriously harm someone else, I must report this to the appropriate authorities. Anything else your child shares with me (as the researcher) will remain confidential.

Interviews will be taped on a tape recorder and later transcribed by a transcriptionist, who lives and works in another state, who thus could not know any of the child/adolescent participants or families. The transcriptionist will sign a document indicating she will not divulge, release, or disseminate information that is provided to her. Tapes and transcripts will be kept under lock and key. Tapes will be destroyed one year after completion of this project or at any time at the request of any child participant or parent/guardian of a child less than 18 years of age.
Poetry, artwork or song lyrics will be kept in a secured place with the transcripts.

Compensation:

Neither you nor your child will receive any money or gifts for participation in this project.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Your child can quit this project and the interviews at any time without any penalty. If they quit the project, any tape made of the interview(s) will be destroyed, and no transcript will be made of the interview(s). If a transcript has already been made, it will also be destroyed as well as any poetry, artwork or letters.

If there are any questions that your child does not want to answer, then they may choose not to answer them, without any penalty of any sort.

Parent’s Permission for Child/Adolescent Study Participation:

I have read this Parent’s/Guardian’s Permission Form and the description of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I give my voluntary consent to allow my child to participate in this project.

_________________________________ _____________________
Parent/Guardian’s Signature Date

If I feel my child has been treated differently than what this form says, or that my or my child’s rights as a participant in the research have been violated during the course of this project, I know I can contact Dr. David Moore, Chair of the human subjects review committee (the IRB) at Virginia Tech, Dr. Katherine Allen, Faculty Advisor, or Dr. Joyce Arditti, Human Development Departmental Reviewer at the numbers listed below.

Should I have any questions about the research project or procedures, I may contact:

Karen S. Joest Katherine R. Allen Joyce Arditti Dr. David Moore
Principal Investigator Faculty Advisor Department Reviewer Chair, IRB
540-552-0910 540-231-4794 540-231-4794 540-231-4991

PARTICIPANT’S AND PARENTS/GUARDIANS WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OR ORIGINAL DUPLICATE OF THIS PERMISSION FORM
Appendix C

Documentation of Subject Consent to Participate  
For Adolescents 18 years of Age and Older

**Project Title:** Multiple Contexts of Violence in the Lives of Adolescents who have been Exposed to Domestic Violence

**Principal Investigators (Researchers):** Katherine R. Allen, Professor, Department of Human Develop & Karen S. Joest, Doctoral Student, Department of Human Development, Virginia Tech

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of domestic violence on children and adolescents who are exposed to domestic violence, and to other forms of community violence. The researcher (Ms. Joest) was a therapist, but now is a graduate student doing research to obtain a more advanced degree (Ph.D.) at Virginia Tech. She will interview approximately 10 to 15 male and female adolescents between the ages of 13-22, whose mothers have experienced domestic violence at home (being hit, yelled at or put down - told that they are worthless or not good enough by men in their lives). Each research subject will be asked about their experiences related to violence in their life.

**Procedures:**

The researcher (Ms. Joest) will conduct a series of four in-depth interviews with each adolescent participant, to better understand the impact of domestic violence on youth whose mother’s have experienced domestic violence. Participants will be asked, as part of the interview process, if they are willing to write poetry about their experiences, although they will not be required to write poetry. If they do not want to write poetry, they can write song lyrics, draw a picture or write letters about their experiences. They are not required to do any of the above, and are free to withdraw from the interviews at any time. Each interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be taped with a tape recorder. The total time for all 4 interviews will be about 4 hours. Transcripts, or typed pages of the interviews, will be made of each interview and will be kept under lock and key, accessible only to Ms. Joest. Interviews will be held in each child’s home or another place, such as a library conference room, where the adolescent participant and the researcher can talk privately without being overheard. Written interview guides will be used, but our conversations will be open to discussing the things that are important to you, as a participant, with regards to this project and your own personal experiences. Your parents will be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding demographic data, and information regarding their experiences with domestic violence.

**Risks:**
For some individuals, the study may be of minimal risk. However, for others there may be some risk of distress from recalling painful events which occurred during incidents of domestic violence in their home. It may be difficult at times to discuss or remember painful experiences that you have encountered. A list of counselors and resources will be provided to you that will be able to help you deal with any difficulties as a result of participation in the study. Any counseling that you seek would be at your own expense, as funds are not available in this project for that purpose.

Benefits:

It has been the researcher’s (Ms. Joest’s) experience, after working with kids and families for the past ten years as a therapist, that talking about these experiences can actually help people deal with them in more positive ways. The results of this project could help therapists to help other kids, since the information that you share may help others who have gone through similar things. The information will be used to help others cope with domestic violence in their families and to develop more useful resources that could be helpful to therapists when other young people are being exposed to domestic violence.

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

Confidentiality:

During the interview, you will use a different name so that no one can recognize you as a result of participating in this project. This name will be used throughout the individual interviews, and will be used on all transcripts to indicate your identity.

Everything in our interviews will be considered as confidential, meaning that I (Ms. Joest, the researcher) will not tell anyone else. However, since I am a counselor, there are times that I MUST report some specific things that you may share with me or that I may suspect about you through our interviews. These include: a) If I strongly suspect that any other children in your family are being abused, I must report this to Social Services or the police; b) If I believe you are in danger of harming yourself, I must report this to the appropriate authorities; or, c) If you threaten to seriously harm someone else, I must report this. Anything else you share with me will remain confidential.

Interviews will be taped on a tape recorder and later transcribed by a transcriptionist in another state who could not possibly know any of the study participants or families. The transcriptionist will sign a document indicating she will not divulge, release, or disseminate information that is provided to her. Tapes and transcripts will be kept under lock and key. Tapes will be destroyed one year after completion of this project or at any time at the request of any participant. Poetry, artwork or song lyrics will be kept in a secured place with the transcripts.

Compensation:
You will receive no money or gifts for participation in this project.

Freedom to Withdraw:

You can quit this project and our interviews at any time without any penalty. If you quit the project, any tape made of the interview(s) will be destroyed, and no transcript will be made of the interview(s). If a transcript has already been made, it will also be destroyed as well as any poetry, artwork or letters. If there are any questions that you do not want to answer, then you may choose not to answer them, without any penalty of any sort.

Documentation of the Consent Process:

I have read this Consent document and its descriptions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby give my voluntary consent to participate in this project.

_______________________________ _____________________
Participant’s Signature Date

If I feel I have been treated differently than what this form says, or that my rights as a participant in the research have been violated during the course of this project, I know I can contact Dr. David Moore, Chair of the human subjects review committee (the IRB), Virginia Tech, Dr. Katherine Allen, Faculty Advisor, or Dr. Joyce Arditti, Human Development Departmental Reviewer at the numbers listed below.

Should I have any questions about the research project or procedures, I may contact:

Karen S. Joest Katherine R. Allen Joyce Arditti David Moore
Principal Investigator Faculty Advisor Departmental Reviewer Chair, IRB
540-552-0910 540-231-4794 540-231-4794 540-231-4991

PARTICIPANT’S WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OR DUPLICATE ORIGINAL OF THIS CONSENT FORM
**Appendix D**

**Multiple Contexts of Violence in the Lives of Adolescents who have been Exposed to Domestic Violence**

**Interview Guide**
**First Interview**

***Throughout the interview guide the use of the pronoun participant and participant, equally refers to he or him. Both female and male participants will be invited to participate in this research project.***

Prior to the interview, I will note the date, place, and pseudonym to be used for the participant on the tape. The participant’s name will NOT be used during the interview.

**Introductory Information**

To begin, can you tell me a little about yourself?
(Probe: age; born where; where currently living; describe each of the residences over the previous five years; likes/dislikes; current job)

Tell me about the things you enjoy doing?

Do you like poetry?
(Probe: regarding how participant uses poetry; why participant writes poetry; how it makes participant feel to write poetry)

What’s your favorite type of movie? Why?
(Probe: violent content in movies and amount of exposure; television and other forms of media and video games should also be evaluated)

What hobbies or activities do you like to do?

What is a typical day like for you?
(Probe: free time; activities;)

Tell me about your best friend (Probe: other friends; boyfriend/girlfriend).

What makes participant your best friend?
(Probe: characteristics; how they met; how long they’ve known each other; what they enjoy doing together;)
What are some things that you and your friend struggle with?
(Probe: relationship difficulties; friends; boyfriends/girlfriends)

How do you usually resolve your difficulties when you’re not getting along?
(Probe: talking; verbal aggression; fighting; i.e., conflict resolution style)

Tell me about school?
(Probe: current grade; any failures/held back; grades; participant/his feelings about attending school; personal relationships with peers (conflict style); personal relationships with teachers)

At this point what are your plans five years from now?
(Probe: job; relationships; school;)

**Background Information**

Tell me about your family?
(Probe: determine if participant has any children)

Tell me a little bit about each of your siblings.

Tell me about your relationships with your siblings.

Tell me a little bit about each of your parents
(Probe: for step-parents or parental relationships)

Tell me about your relationships with each of your parents (and any partners).

What are some of the positive things about each of your parents (and any partners)

What are some of the difficulties with each of your parents (and any partners)

How do your parents (partners) and you resolve difficulties?

**Poetry:**
*Interviewer:* Earlier, I asked you about poetry. (Share about my own poetry, if participant seems open to hearing this) Would you be willing to write a poem and bring it to our next interview? If so, write a poem about your family. (Emphasize that it can be about anything participant wants. These are participant/his words.)
Multiple Contexts of Violence in the Lives of Adolescents who have been Exposed to Domestic Violence

Interview Guide
Second Interview

Some questions will depend upon the responses from the first interview.

Are there any things you’ve been thinking about since our last interview that you’d like to discuss?

Poem
Would you share the poem you wrote?
(Have participant read the poem aloud; if participant doesn't want to read it aloud, I will read it aloud. If participant did not write a poem, we will talk a little more about poetry and I will request that we each write a poem [trust, risk-taking issues] and share together. Participant should write participants before I read mine since it could alter what participant would choose to write about. Remind participant that the poem is, "about your family.")

Tell me what this poem means to you?
(Probe: have participant interpret each line and stanza)

Thank you for sharing such a personal part of yourself. Now, I'm going to begin asking some questions about violence in your life. There are no right or wrong answers. I want to remind you that everything you tell me is confidential, and no one else will be told what you tell me. However, if you share with me that you're going to harm someone else or yourself I must report these things in order to protect you and others. Also, if you tell me that you or anyone under 18 is being abused, I must report that. Everything else is confidential.

What do you call it when people fight, hit or otherwise hurt others?

How do you define violence?

What does violence mean to you?

Tell me about a time that someone was violent with you or hit you.

What types of violence have you seen?
(Probe: family; friends; in the community; at school)

Tell me about other experiences that you've witnessed or seen violence.

Tell me about the neighborhood(s) that you’ve lived in.(Probe: violence participant’s been exposed to; SES; conditions; opportunities for violence or positive safe havens)
Tell me about violence in your friendships.
(Probe/Embellishment: at school; regarding their answers from first interview; boyfriends/girlfriends; intimate relationships)

What things make it okay to use violence?

Where did you get your ideas about violence?

What do you think about violence?

How does violence affect people?

How has violence affected you?

You've told me a lot about violence today, I'd like to ask you to write a poem and bring it back to our next interview. I'd like you to write a poem about violence in your life.
Multiple Contexts of Violence in the Lives of Adolescents who have been Exposed to Domestic Violence

Interview Guide
Third Interview

Some questions will depend upon the responses from the first and second interviews.

*What are some things that you’ve been thinking about since our last interview? Have any memories or thoughts come up that you’d like to share?*

*How did it make you feel to share so much about your life and personal experiences?*

**Poem**
Would you share the poem you wrote?  
(Have participant read the poem aloud; if participant doesn't want to read it aloud, I will read it aloud.  If participant did not write a poem, I will request that we each write a poem [trust, risk-taking issues; safety and mutual experiences…may use reflexivity] and share together.  Participant should write participants before I read mine since it could alter what participant would choose to write about.  Remind participant that the poem is, "about violence in your life.")

Tell me what this poem means to you?  
(Probe: have participant interpret each line and stanza)

Now, I'm going to begin asking some questions about violence that you've been a witness to in your family.  There are no right or wrong answers.  I want to remind you that everything you tell me is confidential, and no one else will be told what you tell me.  However, if you share with me that you're going to harm someone else or yourself or that you are being abused, I must report these things in order to protect you and others.  Everything else is confidential.

Tell me about times that you’ve seen adults or teenagers in your house physically fighting, hitting, or otherwise trying to hurt others.

Before, we talked about how you and your parents (partners) resolve things when you disagree, tell me more about what happens when they're really mad at you.  
(Probe/Embellishment: regarding their answers from first interview; also, when they're mad about other things; forms of punishment)

Tell me about the times that you’ve seen your parents (partners) fight?  
(Probe: describe violent events; probe for specifics of how participant was exposed to the violence, ie., seeing, hearing, used as a tool, etc...)

What led to the fight(s)?
(Probe: other forms of psychological abuse; patterns of abuse; one time event; how often this
would happen)

What would happen afterward?
(Probe: aftermath of the violence; community agency or police contacts; social supports)

Who started the fights?
(Probe: how does participant attribute blame?; substance use/abuse for either parent/partner)

How were you involved in the fight?
(Probe: perception of own role in violent events)

How were you affected by the fight(s)
(Probe: perceptions of the effects of the violence on self and others)

How would you normally react after a fight?
(Probe: behaviors, thoughts, feelings triggered by the violence)

How has your relationship with your parents been affected by the fight(s)?
(Probe: perception of how relationships with parents; siblings; peers; other family members as
related to the violence)

Do you know if your grandparents (or parent’s siblings; own dating siblings; or self) ever fought
like this? (Probe: intergenerational and cross generational transmission of violence)

What does it mean to you to say you’ve used violence?

Tell me about times when you've used violence.
(Remember: it may be more difficult to acknowledge participant own violence, participant may
rationalize this and not even call it violence-- Probe: fights; hitting others; verbal violence [put-
downs/threats])

What was happening during those times that you chose to use violence?

What did you get out of it (being violent)?
(Probe: feelings of power, revenge, attention)

Afterward, what messages did you get about using violence? How did people react?
(Probe: family; peers; culture; victim; teachers; others of importance to participant; family;
peers; culture; victim; teachers; others of importance to participant; did these people reinforce
violence, and if so in what ways?; punishments; contradictions)

You've told me a lot about violence today, I'd like to ask you to write a poem and bring it back to
our next interview. I'd like you to write a poem about violence in your family.
Multiple Contexts of Violence in the Lives of Adolescents who have been Exposed to Domestic Violence

Interview Guide
Fourth Interview

Some questions will depend upon the responses from the first, second, and third interviews.

*What are some things that you've been thinking about since our last interview?*

**Poem**
Would you share the poem you wrote?
(Have participant read the poem aloud; if participant doesn't want to read it aloud, I will read it aloud. If participant did not write a poem, ask participant to take a few minutes and write one. Remind participant that the poem is, "about violence toward others in your life.")

Tell me what this poem means to you?
(Probe: have participant interpret each line and stanza)

How do you view relationships as a result of your experiences in your family?
(Probe: attitudes and beliefs about gender roles)

How have your dating relationships been affected by your experiences in your family?
(Probe: attitudes and beliefs about intimate relationships, marriage, dating, and specific dating behaviors)

How do you feel about the experiences in your family?
Tell me about a time when you’ve felt sad.

How often do you feel sad?
(Probe: to describe)

How often do you feel like crying?

How often do you cry?

What do you do when you notice that someone is hurt or crying?

If I could give you three wishes what would they be?

What dreams do you have about your future?

Where do you see yourself five years from now?
(Probe: refer back to previous interviews; relationships; children; job; career; school)
We've talked a lot about the violence you've experienced and the violence that you've expressed to others. When you think about violence, what role do you think it will play in your future? (Probe: refer back to previous interviews; relationships; children; job; career; school)

How do you see the way you've grown up and the experiences that you've had impacting your future? Your dreams?
Appendix E

Parent’s Questionnaire (Adapted from Peled, 1993)

**Project Title:** Multiple Contexts of Violence in the Lives of Adolescents Who Have Been Exposed to Domestic Violence

**Principal Investigators (Researchers):**
Katherine R. Allen, Professor, Department of Human Development, Virginia Tech
Karen S. Joest, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Human Development, Virginia Tech

Interviewed child(ren) pseudonym(s): __________________________

Mother’s chosen pseudonym: _________________________________

Mother’s Current Age: ______

Parent’s Marital Status:
   ____married   ____single   ____separated   ____divorced
   ____cohabiting with an unmarried partner

Living arrangements (apartment, house, trailer, etc….):

Parent’s contact with child if not living in the same household:

Race: [Mother]____________________
[Father/other]___________________

Age: [Mother]____________________
[Father/other]___________________

Income per month:
[mother]________________________
[Father/other]___________________

Participation in domestic violence programs (date and types)________________________________________________________________________
Children in family:
Gender:
Age:
Lives with whom

Adult Violence History:

Adult physical violence (abuser, type, frequency, severity, time, intent, patterns, involvement with law enforcement, shelter, etc….)

Last incident of abuse (description and date):

Adult emotional and verbal abuse (abuser, type, frequency, severity, time, intent, patterns, etc…):

Last incident of verbal or emotional abuse (description and date):
Child’s Background:

How old (specific age or age range if the situation spanned several years) was the child when the abusive relationship occurred: ________________

Counseling History (type, dates):
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

Child’s witnessing of family violence (what was witnessed, when, immediate and delayed reactions):
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

Child’s witnessing of other violence (TV, media, games, community, school—what was witnessed and reactions):
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

Life events that have impacted the child (health, deaths, moving, family difficulties, etc):
Appendix F

**Resources to Help Children or Families Cope with Domestic Violence**
*(at the Participant’s Own Expense)*

**Project Title:** Multiple Contexts of Violence in the Lives of Adolescents who have been Exposed to Domestic Violence

**Principal Investigators (Researchers):** Katherine R. Allen, Professor, Department of Human Development
Karen S. Joest, Doctoral Student, Department of Human Development, Virginia Tech

The following list of counselors and resources is provided to you to help you deal with any difficulties as a result of participation in this study. Any counseling that you seek would be at your own expense, as funds are not available in this project for that purpose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women’s Resource Center of the New River Valley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Hotline</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Toll-free hotline</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Web</td>
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<table>
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<td>2 Virginia Hotline</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Project Link</td>
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<th>Counseling</th>
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<tr>
<td>2 Blue Ridge Counseling Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Mental Health Services NRV</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 New River Valley Community SVS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Valley Counseling Associates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Women’s Resource Center</td>
</tr>
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</table>
# Appendix G

Coding Families and Categories

## 100 Background Information
1. **Age**
2. School Information and Experiences
3. Work Information and Experiences
4. Race/Ethnicity
5. Home and Neighborhood Information
6. Hobbies and Free Time

## 200 Relationships
1. Mother
2. Father
3. Siblings
4. Intimate Partners and Close Friends
5. Negotiating Relationships with Parents
6. Parentification
7. Grandparents and Participant Child

## 300 Multiple Contexts of Violence
1. Witnessing Violence
2. Victim of Violence
3. Systemic Responses to Family Violence
4. Participant Responses to Family Violence
5. Perspectives on Violence
6. Being Involved in Fighting
7. Other Forms of Violence (eg., grandparents, extended family, relationship violence)
8. Other Stressors (eg., substance abuse, finances)

## 400 Protective Factors and Resilience
1. General Protective Factors and Resilience
2. Social Supports
3. Future Orientation
4. Perceptions of Paradigm Shift
5. Changes in Self Over Time

## 500 Methodology
1. Poetry
2. Emotions and Process of Interviews
3. How Process Helped
4. Changing the Process
Appendix H
Karen S. Joest, M. S., LPC
106 Hemlock Drive SW
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 552-0910
kjoest@vt.edu

EDUCATION:

Ph.D. 2003 Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)
Department of Human Development, Blacksburg, VA
Major Area: Family Studies

M.S. 1993 Chaminade University, Honolulu, HI
Department of Counseling Psychology
Major Area: Human Services and Community Counseling

B.S. 1991 Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN
College of Arts & Sciences
Department of Psychology; Department of Criminology

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Graduate Research Assistant—Improving Campus Climate to Support Faculty Diversity and Retention—Human Development, Virginia Tech. Principal Investigators: Fred Piercy, Valerie Giddings, Katherine Allen, & Ben Dixon. August 2002-present.
• Organized Focus Groups, collected and analyzed data, and developed reports
• Coordinated new faculty development breakfasts
• Investigated top 30 Research I universities through benchmarking retention project
• Assisted in development of College-wide diversity summit
• Participated in organization of university-wide workshop, Retaining new and underrepresented faculty: Creating a climate of support

• Taught two undergraduate courses

• Responsible for teaching five recitations to undergraduate students
• Emphasized content, organization and delivery styles
• Utilized Experiential activities to enhance skill development

- Assisted in development of research interview guide
- Conducted semi-structured interviews with family members who had formal or informal custody of the children of incarcerated inmates
- Analyzed qualitative data and field notes through content analysis


- Developed curriculum and taught experientially based and group focused courses
- Evaluated 100-150 students each semester


- Developed new counseling program at Independence Secondary
- Provided individual, group, and family counseling with “at-risk” youth
- Coordinated treatment planning and consultation with multiple agencies
- Facilitated staff development for faculty
- Developed career counseling, and peer mediation programs
- Supervised Radford University Master’s of Social Work Intern


- Provided individual, group and family therapy for emotionally disturbed youth
- Coordinated case management and consultation with social services, court services, department of education, and other service providers
- Formulated treatment planning, and social history reports
- Contributed crisis intervention and “on-call” services
- Furnished professional court testimony
- Conducted Staff Training and Development
- Developed and implemented outdoor experiential and adventure based programs
- Created peer mediation and conflict resolution program
- Supervised Radford University Master’s of Counselor Education Students


- Provided individual and family intervention with “at-risk” youth in the community
- Furnished case management services and interagency coordination with schools, court services and public/private providers
- Conducted crisis intervention training for teachers
Therapeutic Foster Home Coordinator/Clinician II–Chesapeake Community Services Board, Chesapeake, VA. November 1993-May 1994.
- Developed therapeutic foster care program for emotionally disturbed youth
- Provided clinical services for youth and foster families
- Coordinated case management services with multiple agencies
- Administered training to parents working with ED youth
- Supported families through “on-call” services
- Monitored grant proposal and assisted in ongoing grant development
- Developed budget for expenditure of $100,000 of grant and trust fund money

- Provided individual and group counseling
- Contributed crisis intervention with students and families
- Developed school-wide peer mediation program to decrease violence on campus
- Coached middle school girls basketball and softball

- Provided individual and co-facilitated group treatment, anger management, and psycho-educational classes for incarcerated sex offenders
- Offered family counseling for offenders being reunited upon release
- Completed and interpreted Psychopathy Assessments, and mental status exams
- Coordinated treatment planning in areas of sexual assault, substance abuse, crisis intervention, educational and career development
- Assisted Hawaii Paroling Authority in post-release planning

- Responded and investigated child physical and sexual abuse, domestic assaults, assaults, possession of drugs, burglaries, and larcenies
- Provided statistical analysis of all criminal activity reported on Wheeler AFB
- Developed sex abuse prevention program for pre-school through 8th grade
- Coordinated McGruff Crime Prevention and DARE Programs
- Conferred with Base Legal Office and Base Commander to implement and enforce all law enforcement policies

GRANTS

PUBLICATIONS

Joest, K. S., & Allen, K. R. (revision under review). *Classwomb technology: Connecting high tech classrooms with feminist family studies*.

Arditti, J., Lambert-Shute, J., & Joest, K. S. *Saturday morning visiting the jail: Implications of incarceration for families and children*. *Family Relations*, 52,


REFEREED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS


INVITED PRESENTATIONS AND WORKSHOPS


Control or Treatment: Probation counselors and the social climate. Lecture presented for Family Policy class, Virginia Tech. October, 2002.


TEACHING EVALUATIONS

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<th>No. of Responders/Overall Eval Score</th>
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HONORS AND AWARDS

College of Human Resources and Education Staff Association Scholarship. Virginia Tech. April, 2002


PROFESSIONAL SERVICE POSITIONS

2002-present  Reviewer for Journal of Marriage and Family

2000-2002  Student Representative, Graduate Student Assembly, Virginia Tech

2001-2002  Student Representative, Graduate Policy Committee, Human Development, Virginia Tech

2001-2002  Reviewed proposal abstracts for annual conference, National Council on Family Relations, Feminism and Family Studies Section

2000-2001  Student Representative, Police Chief Search Committee, Virginia Tech

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

National Council on Family Relations
American Counseling Association
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy