Domestic violence complemented by gendered inequalities impact both women and children. Research shows that although domestic violence is a global, prevalent social phenomenon which transcends class, race, and educational levels, this social monster and its impact have been relatively ignored in the realm of schooling. In this study, I problematize the issue of domestic violence by interrogating: How do the family and folk culture educate/miseducate children and adults about their gendered roles and responsibilities? How do schools reinforce the education/miseducation of these gendered roles and responsibilities? What can we learn about the effects of this education/ miseducation? What can schools do differently to bridge the gap between children and families who are exposed to domestic violence? This study introduces CAREPraxis as a possible framework for schools to implement an emancipatory reform. CAREPraxis calls for a re/definition of school leadership, home-school relationship, community involvement, and curriculum in order to improve the deficiency of relationality and criticality skills identified from the data sources on the issue of domestic violence.
This study is etiological as well as political and is grounded in critical theory, particularly postcolonial theory and black women’s discourses, to explore the themes of representation, power, resistance, agency and identity. I interviewed six women, between ages 20 and 50, who were living or have lived in abusive relationships for two or more years. The two major questions asked were: What was it like when you were growing up? What have been your experiences with your intimate male partner with whom you live/lived. The data from the personal and reconstructed narratives of Belizean women were employed to (1) understand the lived experiences of women who have been battered, (2) unearth historical and cultural continuities, and (3) illuminate the complexity surrounding this social issue of domestic violence.
WITHIN AND BEYOND THE SCHOOL WALLS:
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR
SCHOOLING

A DISSERTATION

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*Acknowledgements*

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the circle of four men in my life who know what it means to care and be cared for.

In the memory of Ethlyn “Nan” Williams, my grandmother, a single mother who modelled CARE — courage, appreciation, responsibility and endurance.

♥♥♥♥♥

My dearest husband

Patch

Hans

Dwane

Brendan

and three wonderful sons

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In the 1930s Virginia Woolf invited her readers to stand on the bridge, and watch the movement of the procession of men to work. Each morning the men moved from their spaces, the home, into the public sphere of work and recreation. Each night they returned to their private spaces. Jane Roland Martin joined Woolf on the bridge in the 1960s. By this time women en masse had joined the procession to work too. Many women left their private spaces, but there was a major problem because two decades later, the view from the bridge had been altered. Many families were operating as one-parent households, mostly headed by women. By the 1980s, most families needed two incomes in order to sustain a home. Social problems that would live to haunt and hurt the society were emerging. As Martin observed, she pondered on these things. “What is wrong with that woman at the very front? She looks distraught. Her child is sick and she is wondering how to sandwich a trip to the doctor between clients. What about the young couple close to tears … And why are those women carrying on their backs and dragging toddlers beside them?” In 2001, Martin invited me to join her on the bridge. I stood on the Belize Swing Bridge in Belize City. Like Martin, I saw similar scenarios. Women from all walks of life had joined the procession to work. They were sharing many personal challenges on their way to work. They talked about their “lazy ass man” who didn’t want to work, retrenchment in the process of downsizing the workforce, and the menial wages they were paid for the long hours of work at several of the stores and restaurants owned by Indian and Chinese entrepreneurs. Some women talked about the constant fight they had with their male partners and teenagers. Students, K-12, who were crossing the bridge talked about what they viewed on the TV screen. They were watching *Passion, Friends, Days of Our Lives, Temptation Island, Survivor, Blind Date, American Idol, MTV,* and many of the more recent cartoons. I noticed that some of the students were wearing name brand clothes, and footwear advertised on American television. A few of them were talking about what their relatives had sent for them in the barrel from the USA. Others were talking about how their dad walked out on them. Eventually Martin turned to me and said, “What is Belize as a nation, a culture, and a society going to do about the children who are growing to be adults, and those who are being left behind?” I replied, “I haven’t given much thought to this, but one thing I know for sure, the school will definitely need to step in as a ‘Schoolhome and surrogate parent’ in order to address the emerging, and increasing social and economic problems. The Schoolhomes will need to make some major shifts in their goals, their curriculum and pedagogy.” After we left the bridge, I decided to look at one of the issues that troubled the women — the constant conflict with their intimate partners. This study, therefore, problematizes the issue of domestic violence and gendered inequalities which is prevalent in Belize and many other countries.

(Adapted from Jane Roland Martin, *The Schoolhome* (1992), after I had a very enriching dialogue with her in 2002).
Introduction

As the title suggests, this study addresses the endemic social phenomenon of domestic violence, and the rationale for the involvement of schools, and school leaders in addressing the problem. To better understand the phenomenon of domestic violence, different sources of data have been utilized, one of the major ones being interviews with Belizean women (in Belize, Central America) who have been battered. I seek to find answers to the following questions:

- How do the family and folk culture educate/miseducate children and adults about their gendered roles and responsibilities?
- How do schools reinforce the education/miseducation of these gendered roles and responsibilities?
- What can we learn about the effects of this education/miseducation?
- What can schools do differently to bridge the gap between children and families who are exposed to domestic violence?

This study is etiological as well as political as I problematize domestic violence in an attempt to reduce paucity in the educational dialogue about this social issue, and the implications for schooling.

Belize: Changes and Challenges

The 22,966 sq. km of land mass and islands now known as Belize was originally known as British Honduras until 1973. In pre-Columbian times Belize, (British Honduras) was the home to the Maya Indians. After Columbus
rediscovered the New World, Belize was colonized by the British superpower from the early 1600s. Belize was a British colony until September 21, 1981 when it achieved its political independence. Since then Belize has been a member of the British Commonwealth. Belize has been the only country in Central America where English is the official national language, and is widely spoken. But one cannot ignore the fact that English Creole is also spoken by the masses.

Historically and culturally, Belize has connections with other Central American countries, Caribbean countries, West Africa, Spain, and Britain. It is a multi-ethnic society with a population of about 256,062. Approximately 50 percent of the population is under 15 years, and the literacy rate (meaning the ability to read and write) is 70 percent. There is a high rate of teenage pregnancy and more than 50 percent of the children are born out of wedlock. The prevalence of absentee fathers make child-rearing the sole responsibility of many women. Interestingly, 60 percent or more of the women identify homemaking as the primary source of their economic activity (The World Fact Book- Belize, 2002).

Sometime during the 1630s, the British Baymen established settlements along the Belize riverbank to engage in the economic activity of logwood extraction, which was lucrative at the time because of its usefulness in the production of dyes. This mono-economic activity changed to mahogany when the logwood trade declined. The British Baymen required extra hands to cut timber (especially mahogany because the trees were scattered inland), so they imported African slaves from the British Caribbean islands. The displacement of these African slaves and their families, and the interaction of the British and African (as
well as other European groups and indigenous people) have left indelible and profound social, historical, cultural, political, and economic deformities in Belize. These deformities parallel what happened to the slaves and their descendants in other areas of the “New World” such as the Caribbean and the United States where slavery was institutionalized.

Over the past ten years, Belize and Belizeans have continuously faced more changes and challenges. We have witnessed a change in family patterns since many parents, one or both, have migrated to the United States. There has been a large influx of Central American refugees into our country and the teaching of Spanish at the secondary school level for four years has extended to the primary schools. Approximately forty percent of twelve-to fourteen-year-olds in our Belizean society do not complete primary education or further their academic development after primary school. There has been an increase in teenage mothers, and females usually head single parent households. More women, especially mothers, are working outside the home (The World Fact Book-Belize, 2002; www. Belize.gov.bz; Poverty Assessment Report, Kari Consultants Ltd., 2002).

Since the 1980s, the nation of Belize has been faced with the challenge of the ubiquitous television, which airs undiluted programmes from the United States. Although research results addressing the effect of media violence on children are debatable, there is research concluding that repeated exposure to high levels of media violence is detrimental to children. For example, media violence can encourage aggressive disposition in children, and even desensitize
them to violence (Bandura, 1963; Eron, 1993; Levine, 1996; Potter, 1979; Strasburger, 1995).

The mass increase in criminal activities endangers the lives of many school age children. Students on their way to school from both primary and secondary institutions have become targets for male teenagers and gang members. They are robbed of their bicycles, jewelry, money, and name-brand footwear. Violence within the schools has also increased, regardless of age, race, gender, or economic status. Students and teachers alike are experiencing various forms of school violence. There is an increase in the incidence of theft within the school walls. There have been occasional reports of the use of knives and other sharp objects by students, or the confiscation of these objects by teachers. School vandalism has increased tremendously, and in a few cases it involves students who attend or attended the vandalized school. Bearing in mind media reports from other Caribbean and Central America countries, and also the United States, the experiences of Belizean teachers and students as it relates to school violence are real, and on the rise (www.amandala.bz, 2002; www.channel5belize.com, 2002; Duhon-Sells, 1995; McPartland & McDill, 1977).

There have been some particularly gruesome incidents involving the lives of school-age females. Between 1998 and 1999, there were three separate incidents occurring in less than a year. Three girls on their way to school were abducted and murdered. The increase in school violence and murders of females eventually caused the Ministry of Education to intervene and protect the children
by introducing a school warden system into the elementary schools in Belize City where the majority of criminal activities have occurred.

Although Belize has attempted to address community development, empowerment, and education for women through various organizations since the late 1970s, empirical research shows that domestic violence and other forms of violence remain prevalent. As a matter of fact, the year 2002 was heralded with a number of dramatic crimes, including reported crimes of domestic violence. By March, the violent crimes had escalated. Consequently, the Chamber of Commerce vented their frustration by encouraging entrepreneurs to close their businesses for a day. On Palm Sunday when the symbolic triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is traditionally celebrated, Christians in the churches in Belize spent the day in prayer about the crime situation in Belize. Unfortunately, the crime situation at all levels exacerbated. In July 2002, a government employee of the Belize Defense Force stabbed his wife to death before the eyes of several witnesses. It is claimed that the couple had been having a stormy marital relationship for some time before the wife was ripped and laid to R.I.P. (rest in peace) (www.amandala.bz, 2002; www.channel5belize.com, 2002).

In Belize, the economic inequities, among other factors, have increased the percentage of economically disenfranchised Belizeans. Based on the Poverty Assessment Report (Kari Consultants Ltd., 2002),

- 25.3 percent of households in Belize, and 33.0 percent of individuals were poor … moreover, 9.6 percent of households and 13.4 percent of individuals were considered extremely poor … female heads of
households were more likely to be poor than male heads of households …
the poor were generally not educated and lacked technical and vocational skills. (pp. 2-3)

To address the problem of poverty, several schools in Belize City have implemented a feeding programme to cater to children from disadvantaged homes. However, this gesture has had a negative impact. Many primary school educators disapprove of the feeding programme because of the additional burden of baby-sitting kids during teachers’ lunch breaks. Currently, both the students in the feeding programme, and many of the students who are not in the feeding programme, remain at school during the hour-and-a-half lunch break. This is also the teachers’ lunch break. While teachers have a moral obligation to the students, there is no built-in mechanism for the teachers to have their lunch break without the students’ interference.

The Need for the Study: In the Shadows, Under the Covers

Although the research literature has shown that domestic violence is rampant despite class, race, or educational levels, the interest to explore it as scholarly work is very recent (Carden, 1994; Davies, 1994; Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Harway & O’Neil, 1999; Hofeller, 1983; McClaurin, 1996; Tierney, 1991; Weis, Marusza & Fine, 1998). Up to the 1960s the subject of domestic violence was still under the covers. According to Gelles (1980), “scholarly and even popular literature of wife abuse was virtually nonexistent in the sixties. It would be
equally fair to conclude that the decade of the seventies witnessed a wholesale increase in attention to and published reports on various aspects of violence in the home (pp. 873-874).” But after the covers were pulled off this social phenomenon, there were still problems related to research. Nearly all published work on child and family abuse was based on clinical samples. Early studies of family violence typically failed to employ control or comparison groups. Usually, the conclusions of the research were based on small, non-representational samples (Gelles, 1980; Propper, 1997; Van Hasselt, Morrison, Bellack & Hersen, 1988). Furthermore, Propper (1997) postulates that the types of surveys used, mainly Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) and the National Canadian Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS), “were limited and at times negative” (p. 71). Therefore, most of these [criminal investigation surveys and records about women] records represent only the most severe cases of injury and only a small, self-selected proportion of wives and husbands being assaulted…. They do not provide an accurate measure of the extent of spousal assault in the population. (p. 51)

Furthermore, research on domestic violence conducted in the seventies focused mostly on establishing a reliable estimate of the incidence of family violence, identifying factors associated with different forms of violence in the home, and developing theoretical models of the causes of domestic violence (Van Hasselt et al., 1988).
According to Weis et al. (1988) over the last two decades “in the field of education, there have been a number of ethnographic studies … such ethnographic work has uncovered ways in which schools serve to reinforce gender hierarchy … (p. 3).” At the same time Weis et al. (1998) argue that while this kind of research is vital to understand how schools continue to contribute to gender inequalities,

It is important to notice which forms of violence enter the dominant discourse, and which remain in the shadows, at the margins and still under covers … the issues of violence at home and violence as embedded in institutional arrangements have been relatively ignored. (pp. 2-3)

For instance, school violence is a form of violence that is becoming dominant in the discourse of violence, especially with the latest rampage of school shootings in the United States; however, domestic violence and the implications for schooling still remain under the covers. Hence, the major aim of my study is to bring domestic violence to the forefront, to problematize the issue, and to help school leaders see why they need to a part of the solution to this grave social issue.

Following are snippets of the experiences of three children and a teacher which should help draw our attention to the importance of the schools’ involvement in the family’s private domestic affairs.
One of the participants for this research is a teacher from Belize. Here is a minute portion of her battered life for nine years.

“He had several sweethearts during our marriage. Then the woman started to phone at my work. He wouldn’t listen when I speak to him. We would get into a big argument. I tried to ignore what was happening. It was so hard on me. I had this job and did not want anyone to know that something was affecting me. I was very stressed and had so many sleepless nights. He did not give me any money. I had to pay the bills from my money. Then he demanded that I give him money and he would squander it. At one time he even wanted me to get a loan for him and because I did not get the loan he hit me. He threatened to kill me several times. One time he held a gun to my head. It was a 9-millimeter pump action. Sometimes I went to school and I felt like I was just floating.”

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In *The Sanctuary of School* by Lynda Barry (Rousmaniere & Abowitz, 1998), a seven-year-old child in the United States is troubled by her family conditions. They are poor, their house is small and crowded, and her parents come to blows at night. The young psychologically haunted child is unable to contend with the traumatic experiences. She sneaks out of the house early in the morning to go to school to find peace and tranquility. The child finds temporary relief when her teacher gives her some attention. The teacher walks towards her, calls her by her name, and allows her to carry the bag. The female student finds serenity in the art corner where she is allowed to paint. The teacher interrogates
the child but doesn’t probe deep enough to realize that there is a major private
domestic affair, which is a phantom in the child’s life.

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In an article in the *Royal Gazette* from Bermuda (2002), there was a
narrative of two children attending primary school who apparently seemed
comfortable and competent. They were intellectually capable, and socially
involved in the life of the school. Their dad had a prestigious position as the
manager of a bank; however, a prestigious position or being intellectually smart
does not necessarily mean that an individual is socially well adjusted. This was
the case of this manager-dad-husband. He was abusive to his stay-home wife.
The children were mentally and psychologically tortured by the abusive sounds of
their predatory father. They heard the brawls at night and went to school the next
day as if nothing happened. In this narrative, no teacher questioned the students
about the domestic relationship at home because it was assumed that all was
well with them. After all, their academic performance was excellent, and their dad
had a privileged socio-economic status. This narrative exposes additional
reasons for school leaders not to take children’s life at face value.

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According to Weis et al. (1998), these scenarios of the teacher and the
children that I presented are not unusual. Nevertheless, domestic violence is one
type of violence that is *still in the shadows* although the boys and girls (and I
would add teachers) who are in our classrooms may not be able to forget the
fight or verbal argument that took place at home in the night or the morning
before they came to school. The issue of domestic violence needs to be out in the open at all levels because substantial research has suggested that children exposed to domestic violence are affected intellectually, socially, emotionally, and behaviourally (Graham-Berman & Edleson, 2001; Groves, 1997; Hoffman, 1996; Holden, Geffner & Jouriles, 1998).

In schools, there are certain dispositions of students that teachers should be seriously concerned about:

- low self-esteem, depression
- conduct-disorder
- withdrawal, social misfit
- poor academic performance
- truancy

Holden et al. (1998) confirm that the negative consequences, “are not limited to compromised mental health functioning. There is at least preliminary evidence for a range of other behavioral, health, school, and social interaction problems that these children commonly experience” (p. 7).

When I said to my Belizean friends and colleagues that my current research interest was domestic violence and its implications for schooling, they immediately wanted to ascertain how the two were related. Well, that is part of the rationale for conducting this study. Domestic violence is a complex issue and crosses the boundaries of numerous disciplines. There are no easy answers to deal with this social phenomenon. Additionally, for too long, school and society have been disconnected, and many times we tend to forget that the children with whom we work
are the products of their environments, meaning the home, neighbourhood, and the wider society. The stories from the school environment, the narratives of women who have been victims of domestic abuse, my personal reflections, and the cultural myths that will follow in subsequent chapters are signposts for the school to be concerned about children’s home environment, and their domestic affairs.

**School Re/form: Catch ‘em Young**

As a woman in various roles – mother, wife, daughter, niece, sister-in-law, friend, neighbour, church “sistah,” citizen and educator – the issue of domestic violence and generally, female oppression, is of interest to me. As a woman, friend, and wife, I am perturbed about women who are constantly battered. As a female educator and mother, I am interested in the impact of domestic violence on children and families who witness or live with this abuse. I strongly believe that in Belize the relationship between families and school, and between school and society should be much stronger.

The context in which I situate my study of domestic violence is a critical-feminist-educational discourse of school reform which will be explicated in more detail in the final section of this study. Traditionally, schools serve the function of preparing their graduates for employment in the business industry, and to maintain the status quo; hence, the business community, the media, and government are usually the catalysts for school reform. However, many scholars, and theorists perceive schools to be agents of change for transforming society, and vehicles for social justice (Astuto, Clark, McGreen & Pelton Hernandez,
Over the last two decades in the United States, Belize, and many other countries, major and continuous educational reforms related to curriculum, leadership, pedagogy, assessment, multicultural education, teacher certification, technology, and school-community partnership and collaboration have been implemented. However, instituting packages for reform does not necessarily mean that noticeable or positive changes will occur. An increase in policy-making to improve teaching and learning outcomes and requiring schools to do more should not be equated with doing better. Sometimes institutions undergo reform in renaming only, because the existing patterns and practices remain the same. Besides, most of the educational reforms that are suggested and implemented are cognitively related. I firmly believe that, as much energy, time, and money need to be spent on reform which addresses the social-relational development of the child. I am sure that policy makers involved in school reform would point out that there are elements related to social development in the prescribed curricular packages handed to schools. I would argue that either the elements appear in name only or are ignored. But then, as long as the yardstick for measuring students’ and schools’ performance is cognitively based, the social-relational development of the child will be “placed on the back burner.” I whole-heartedly agree with those who believe that the educational process can no longer be defined as four “Rs,” meaning reading, ‘riting, ‘rithmetic, and respect. Changes in
the family constellation and the additional social baggage that students bring to school demand urgent attention!

This study and trans-national research show that domestic violence is a global, prevalent social phenomenon, which transcends class, race, and educational levels. This social domestic experience has damaging effects on both women and children. Holden et al. (1998) state,

Although there is ample evidence that women have been abused by their husbands and partners through the ages, researchers, clinicians, and policy makers have been slow in recognizing the problems of children exposed to violence. Given the magnitude of this problem, there is a clear shortage of information about how these children are affected. (pp. 2-3)

With this in mind, it is mandatory that schools take a prominent role to intervene and assist in transforming the culture of domestic violence. We cannot continue to wait for tragedies or family crises. I believe it is better to catch ‘em young, and use prevention methods rather than wait to use crisis management when the children become perpetrators or victims as adults. The old adage says that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. Therefore, school leaders (and here I mean teachers and administrators) cannot continue to pretend that children coming from homes where domestic violence is prevalent are not affected. School leaders need to lift the covers, expose the beast, and engage in proactive activities within and beyond the school walls to get rid of the domestic violence.
Within & Beyond the School Walls: Theoretical Framework

I draw on a multiplicity of disciplines and discourses to explore and problematize the issue of domestic violence. However, the major discourses which undergird the study are critical theory, feminist discourses, postcolonial discourses, and educational discourses comprising curriculum reconceptualization, and critical-reflective-feminist-pedagogy. The literature available on some of the discourses is abundant, and therefore, the literature review in this study will be more illustrative than comprehensive. The critical perspectives of postcolonialism (e.g., Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Triffin, 1995; Loomba, 1994; Memmi, 1965; Mongia, 1997) and Black women’s discourses (e.g., Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981, 1984, 1994, 2000; Morrison, 1987; Walker, 1973, 1983) will be useful to explore and examine, issues of power relations, resistance and change in oppressed and colonized societies. It will be apparent that in this study, I do not treat the theoretical perspectives of postcolonialism and Black women’s discourses as mutually exclusive but related in several ways. A careful examination of these theories (critical, postcolonialism, Black women’s discourses) has produced five major interconnected themes – representation, identity, power, resistance, and agency – on which I will constantly rely throughout this study to unmask the phenomenon of domestic violence.

Educational discourses underpinned by critical reflective practice of teaching include scholars such as Brookfield, (1995), and Zeichner and Liston, (1996). Scholars with a reconceptualists’ perspective of curriculum include Ornstein & Hunkins (1998) and Pinar, Slattery and Taubman (1996). A
A combination of works related to critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy will also be used to develop an alternative praxis for school leaders to consider using (e.g. Apple, 1983; Freire, 1970; Wexler, 1992; Delpit, 1988; Giroux, 1983 1995; hooks 1994; McLaren, 1988).

Two of the features that will be common throughout this research are narratology and reflexivity. Narratology is a useful feminist technique allowing the researcher to use narratives or reconstructed stories to establish a point. Stories are virtually in every aspect of our everyday lives. Storytelling is part of our inheritance. Narratology includes the texts of cultural agents and cultural artifacts. These texts can be used to examine how cultural myths indoctrinate, manipulate or reform individuals and groups. There are many benefits to be derived from using memories and story telling, such as understanding the resistance and struggle of the participants, and creating new meanings in our lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Richardson, 1997).

Reflexivity is a strategy or technique promoted and used by feminist researchers and theorists (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fonow and Cook, 1991; Harding 1987, 1991; Profitt, 2000; Seale, 1998). According to Fonow and Cook (1991) reflexivity means “to reflect upon, to examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process” (p. 2). Reflexivity, like the habit of critical reflection, is beneficial for several reasons. It allows researchers to write themselves into the research, which may come in the form of a personal or “intellectual biography” of the researchers’ pre-existing views, experiences and values. Reflexivity can assist the researcher to produce more inclusive methods.
sensitive to power relations. It allows the possibility to contribute to change through the construction of knowledge, and therefore, assist in emancipatory goals. Reflexivity engages researchers as active producers of the research by revealing who they are (Profitt, 2000; Richardson, 1997).

In order to join the political struggle for social change, I have decided to include my self-conscious reflection and thoughts in contained spaces throughout this study. While I refer to these spaces as reflection boxes, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in their work of narrative inquiry, would probably prefer,

[M]emory boxes in which the people and events of today are told and written in the research texts of tomorrow. Once this narrative process takes hold, the narrative inquiry space pulsates with movements back and forth through time and along a continuum of personal and social considerations. (p. 66)

Thinking of the word box, I can perceive some people interpreting it as very confining and oppressive. For me it is symbolic of the first 18 years of my life. At the same time, the boxes will allow me some space in this dialogue, and in the study: space that I have been denied as a youth; space that allows me to continue to make sense of my world and my lived experiences; space that allows me to connect to other people.
My Odyssey

This intellectual quest has been long and eventful. It has been the longest, most lonely, and taxing academic task that I have undertaken in my professional career. Of course, I could say it was expected since it is a partial requirement for the highest academic qualification, doctoral degree. My biggest frustration has been my self-interrogation almost on a daily basis. One question that surfaced daily was why am I conducting inquiry about the issue of domestic violence? Unconsciously the thought of gender issues and resistance was planted in my life long ago. I never nurtured it so its maturity was slow. In retrospect, I served as a member of the first shelter for battered women in Belize but never gave profound thought to gender issues or domestic violence; however, this study brought these issues and the impact on women, children, and families to the forefront of my mind.

During the odyssey, I had mixed experiences. There were so many memorable events. As my spirit wandered around the globe, I interacted with many women and scholars, visited several countries, and got a peek of the issues with which women struggle through print and video. I have learned so much that I am very motivated and determined to make a difference in the lives of females, be it single mom, single teenage moms, or women who have been victims of battering.

I was alarmed at and depressed by some of the unexpected events. I never anticipated interviewing someone who suffered domestic violence to the extent of murdering her husband. I interviewed women who were victims of
abuse during the Christmas season. This was probably not the best time because I associate the birth of Jesus with festivity. Instead, the women were sharing their heartbroken stories. This was an immense struggle for me, and I am certain it must have been tough for the women too.

During my odyssey there were additional experiences to compound my exasperation. I attended a dramatic performance staged in Belize at the time I was conducting my interviews for this study. It was entitled *Feminine Justice*, and written by Basil Dwakins. This drama was about spousal abuse. An abusive male doctor constantly abused his wife. One day he was involved in an automobile accident and he came face to face with God who is female. The judgment was phenomenal! One needs to see the performance or read Dwakin’s work to appreciate God’s role reversal, and the outcome.

I can’t put my finger directly on the reason, but most of the movies that I watched during the time that I was writing my research reinforced themes of family struggles with poverty and providing for their children, abandonment and alienation, shattered hopes, family violence, dysfunctional family relationships, domination from intimate male or in one case, control from a mother/mother-in-law. Movies such as *The Visit, Step mom, All About My Mother, Butterfly, For Richer or Poorer, Hush, Jitters, Joan of Arc, Antowne Fisher, Rabbit-Proof Fence, Angela’s Ashes, Joan of Arc, Anne Frank’s Diary, and My Family* kept me emotionally fragile.

The media also contributed to my emotional fragility. In 2002, for example, one of the issues in Nigeria was the stoning of Amina Lawal because she had
sexual intercourse, and a child out of wedlock. The Minorities Global Village webpage carried headlines like: *Poor Nigerian Moslem Scapegoats of Sharia Laws, Women Main Target of Sharia Anti Sex Laws*, and *Sharia Nigeria-Stoning Amina Lawal- Woman to be Stoned to Death for Having Baby Out of Wedlock* (http://www.imdiversity.com). There were many other family related issues and violence going on during the time of my study. Several of my friends were experiencing relationship problems with their husbands/common-law-husbands, and some of them broke up their intimate relationship. You will get a glimpse of other issues as you travel with me on this journey.

In the midst of exploring how schools can use fairy tales to problematize and explore intimate and family relationships in the last section of this study, I read this note that an intimate partner had left his common-law-wife before committing suicide (Amandala Newspaper published in Belize, January 19, 2003):

> Lord, I take this precious life bestowed to me. My life has become impossible to cope with. I need no autopsy, just bury me! I let you down, Lord, and my fellow men, who thought so much of me. Sorry Bev. A sincere goodbye.

The newspaper article continued by saying this:

> Police found Flowers body, on the bathroom floor of his common-law-wife’s home around 7:00 p.m. Saturday evening….she and Clive had been
having problems for about two and a half weeks, after she found out that he was having relationships with three other women…

I felt this woman’s pain, and that of the other women as well! So many questions ran through my mind. I wanted to be there to talk to her, to hear her story.

Several stories about women’s lives have been recorded and interpreted; however, throughout my research, I definitely knew that I did not want to duplicate descriptive or interpretive studies done about women. Not that these studies were not useful, but I was certain that I would be remiss to write about women’s lives without looking at a wider socio-historical context, and the inclusion of schooling or formal education. One of the biggest challenges, which I faced to achieve the goal of writing to change domestic abuse and inequities, was the lacuna in the literature to link the social issue of domestic violence and schooling. However, I was determined to spend time to explore and problematize the issue because of my desire to extend the discourse on domestic violence. I wanted to join those who were working towards social justice.

Throughout my journey I wanted to write something that was multi-disciplinary because I wished that there were a text which crossed the boundaries of various disciplines on the issue of domestic violence available for me to read when I was doing the study. Pulling the study together by weaving numerous disciplines, literary works, and data sources posed some challenges, but a flexible, emergent methodological design made it possible. The process of my research and writing reminded me of a quilt maker. I, myself, have never
made a quilt but as a primary school student, girls collaboratively made patchwork bed sheets. Like the patchwork sheet, the pieces of information for this study were eventually strewn together to make an “emergent whole” quilt. The pieces were not assembled haphazardly. I kept adding pieces, altering pieces, reading and rereading, writing and rewriting, reflecting and re/layering in an attempt to make the bed sheet meet the needs of different readers.

As the reader gets ready to launch into the core of the study, I will share this song I heard just before I handed my document to the members on my dissertation committee. It is entitled *Family Portrait* (2002), and the artist is Pink. It is a reminder of the challenges men and women face in an intimate relationship, and the stress placed on the children involved. The happy faces of the family on the graphic insert of this CD album are paradoxical to the lyrics of the song.

**FAMILY PORTRAIT**

**FAMILY PORTRAIT**

Uh, uh, some deep shit, uh, uh

Momma please stop cryin, I can’t stand the sound
Your pain is painful and it’s tearin’ me down
I hear glasses breakin as I sit up in my bed
I told dad you didn’t mean those nasty things you said

You fight about money, bout me and my brother
And this I come home to, this is my shelter
It ain’t easy growin up in World War III
Never knowin what love could be, you’ll see
I don't want love to destroy me like it has done
my family

Can we work it out? Can we be a family?
I promise I'll be better, Mommy I'll do anything
Can we work it out? Can we be a family?
I promise I'll be better, Daddy please don't leave

Daddy please stop yellin, I can't stand the sound

Make mama stop cryin, cuz I need you around
My mama she loves you, no matter what she says
its true
I know that she hurts you, but remember I love you, too

I ran away today, ran from the noise, ran away
Don't wanna go back to that place, but don't have
no choice, no way
It ain't easy growin up in World War III
Never knowin what love could be, well I've seen
I don't want love to destroy me like it did my family

Can we work it out? …

In our family portrait, we look pretty happy
Let's play pretend, let's act like it comes naturally
I don't wanna have to split the holidays
I don't want two addresses
I don't want a step-brother anyways
And I don't want my mom to have to change her last name

In our family portrait…
We look pretty normal, let's go back to that
(I promise I'll be better, Mommy I'll do anything)…

Daddy please don't leave

Daddy don’t leave
Daddy don’t leave
Daddy don’t leave
Turn around please
Remember that the night you left you took my
shining star?
Daddy don’t leave…

Mom will be nicer
I’ll be so much better, I’ll tell my brother
Oh, I won’t spill the milk at dinner
I’ll be so much better, I’ll do everything right
I’ll be your little girl forever
I’ll go to sleep at night.

Overview of Chapters

This study comprises five sections. In Section 1 there are two chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the guiding theoretical framework which is critical theory, and specifically discourses of postcolonialism, black feminism, womanism, and Africana womanism. Chapter 2 addresses the feminist methodology of narratology, and the research design for the study on domestic violence.

In Section 2 there are five chapters. This section is extremely vital because it comprises data from primary and secondary sources. Chapter 3 examines the various definitions of the text of domestic violence. Chapter 4 chronicles my positionality mainly as a mother and a wife, and an educator. Chapter 5 consists of the interviews from four Belizean women who are victims of domestic violence. Chapter 6 continues the theme of domestic violence. I relate the stories of three women (who I came to know personally), and how their male intimate partner abused them. Chapter 7 is also a reconstruction and recreation of a domestic violence story which culminated in death for both partners. This
story was recreated from the recorded events in one of Belize’s newspaper in the 1960s.

In Section 3 there are five chapters. Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 focus on the analysis and interpretation of the narratives of battering. Chapter 8 addresses the interpretation of women as victims and men having the power over them. Chapter 9 draws on Belizean cultural myths to explicate why men and women have been mis-educated. Chapter 10 depicts battered women in a counter-narrative. The women are agents, victors and resistors because they have obtained a level of consciousness which allows them to break away from the abusive partners, and/or seek professional help. Chapter 11 is composed of a discussion on the emergent theme, family relationships. Chapter 12 engages the metaphor of rip and R.I.P. (rest in peace) to examine domestic violence as a catastrophic performance.

Section 4 has four chapters which historicize the issue of violence. Chapter 13 explores the historicity of domestic violence by placing the issue within a macro context of patriarchy and supportive social institutions. In Chapters 14, 15 and 16, revisiting European colonialism in the Americas and the Caribbean unearths colonial violence and some commonalities with domestic violence.

Section 5 culminates the study with three chapters which serve three purposes. Chapters 17 and 18 summarize the findings for the questions which I introduced at the beginning of the study. Chapter 19 outlines why schools need to be involved in the lives of families and children who experience battering. I
also offer a possibility for curricular and pedagogical changes which foster knowledge, skills and attitudes for the enhancement of relationality, and critical literacy.
Chapter One

Seeking Support: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will explicate the theoretical orientations of colonial/postcolonial theory, and black women’s discourses. Then I will pause to examine five recurring themes and assumptions about the social phenomenon of domestic violence and oppression which are interwoven in these two critical perspectives. The themes I will constantly draw on are power, identity, resistance agency, and representation.

Traditions of Critical Theory

According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), “critical theory is a term that is often evoked and frequently misunderstood … a reconceptualized critical theory is intensely concerned with the need to understand the various and complex ways that power operates to dominate and shape consciousness” (p. 279, 283). Critical theory is dynamic; it is always evolving and changing. Scholars who embrace critical theories seek to transform society politically, socially, economically, historically, and culturally. There are numerous lenses through which critical theories can be explored. Although the overarching goal of critical theory is social change, a variety of orientations exist even within one tradition. For example, within the orientation of feminism there is radical feminism, social feminism, postcolonial feminism, and black women’s feminism. Furthermore, within black women’s feminism there is womanism, black feminism, and Africana
womanism. Secondly, even though a common conceptual vocabulary like racism, exploitation, gender, alienation, justice, and democracy are related to social movements and political struggles, the same phenomenon in each tradition can be conceptualized differently (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Schmitt & Moody, 1994; Smith, 1999). Like those who identify themselves as critical theorists and scholars, I have no interest in supporting the powers that be, and maintaining the status quo; hence, I’ll be committed to the struggle for the emancipation of oppression against women, and the reevaluation of their invisible, silenced history.

In this study, examining the social phenomenon of domestic violence via critical theory will be effectual; however, because there are multiple orientations, I choose to draw on postcolonial theory and the discourses of black women. These discourses provide latitude to critique oppressive structural forces, and at the same time engage political work that aims at transformation of the culture of domestic violence and the emancipation of women from passivity and silence. I merge the specific concerns of colonial/postcolonial theory and black women’s discourses because I see them as complementary rather than exclusive discourses. These two theoretical traditions are useful to (1) carefully examine and explore the prevalence of domestic violence and its perpetuation over the centuries, (2) critically raise questions about the relationship among school, society, and patriarchal and colonial violence, (3) seriously examine structures that maintain the status quo. I will now elaborate on the critical theoretical traditions of colonialism/ postcolonialism and black women’s discourses.
Colonial/Postcolonial Discourses

Colonialism is associated with the conquest and control of other people’s lands and goods and the extraction of tributes. Many of us are taught that words such as conquest, gold, glory, Christianity, and slavery are entangled in the motives and actions of colonialists. But colonialism exists today. A modern concept of colonialism would be in the form of economies conquered by other countries (Loomba, 1998), and like Memmi (1965) affirms, “colonization is above all, economic and political exploitation” (p. 149).

Colonial discourse studies serve to illuminate how the colonizer’s power is portrayed, and at the same time debunk issues of opposition, revolts, and resistance. Colonial discourse analysis is a way of thinking about processes, such as political, social, intellectual, and economic, to dismantle colonialism. Generally, the “project of a postcolonial critique is designated as deconstructing and displacing the Eurocentric premises of a discursive apparatus which constructed the Third World not only for the west but also for the cultures so represented” (Parry, 1997, p. 84).

Avant-gardes in the field of colonial/postcolonial theory are Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. These scholars theorize, critique, and debate contested issues relating to identity, political resistance, gender, power relations, and colonial ideologies. They interrogate the conception of the Other, devalued non-European cultures, and languages in an attempt to disrupt binary distinctions. They try to find ways to restore marginalized peoples to the center.
Postcolonial theory, like feminism, AfriKanA wo-fem-isms, and critical theory, is diverse. It is a response from pressures of new social movements around issues like race, gender, and ethnicity. The text, postcolonial/ism is used to define marginalization and to analyze local struggles like those of the Chicana, and African American people. Postcolonialism is interwoven in multiculturalism, women's studies, and black studies, and is interested in notions of representation, identity, agency, discourse, and history. It involves the critical historical inquiry of how colonialism has shaped cultural and national forms.

The discourses of colonialism/postcolonialism are similar to feminism and domestic violence in that they are highly charged and contested. A hyphenated post-colonialism/post-colonial for some scholars represents a temporal shift from when colonialism officially ended to the period that came after. For others, an unhyphenated postcolonialism represents a form of critical practices that include poststructuralist analysis of colonialism and legacies. Bhabha (1997) and several other scholars contest the opinion that “the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (p. 41). Scholars, who perceive this to be the goal of colonial discourse, must transform and reexamine this perception because several scholars agree that that there should be an oppositional colonial discourse (Bhabha, 1997; Bush, 1990; Mongia, 1997; Parry, 1997; Williams & Chrisman, 1994). Ashcroft et al. (1995) urge postcolonial critics and theorists to “consider the full implications of restricting the meaning of the term to ‘after-colonialism’ or
‘after-independence’ [for] all post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neocolonial domination …” (p. 2).

Contemporary colonialism also exists in the form of ideological control. One of the main modes of ideological hegemony is through mediated images from so-called first world countries which are thrust upon the rest of the world. Although some scholars may disagree, colonial legacy is still existent in the schooling differential in the United States. Although this may not be legally appropriate considering the tumultuous 1960s and 70s in the United States and the black-white, segregation-integration conflicts Hess (2000) talks about a “two-tiered educational system, one for blacks, one for whites” which exists in the United States. Because a Eurocentric curriculum prevails in schools in the United States, there is currently a push for a discourse of culturally relevant pedagogy, cultural competence/proficiency, and Afrocentric curriculum. Lowens is critical of the manner in which Americans are educated about their history in his work entitled *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (and I would add “tells me “ because it is still happening). According to Memmi (1965) the two-tiered education, and the false sense of the OTHER that history portrays occurs precisely because:

By what else is the heritage of a people handed down? By the education which it gives its children, and by the language … However, the very great majority of colonized children are on the streets. And he who has the wonderful luck to be accepted in a school will not be saved nationally. The memory which is assigned him is certainly not that of his people. The history which is taught him is not his own … The books talk to him of a
world which in no way reminds him of his own … The teacher and school represent a world which is different from his family environment … far from preparing the adolescent to find himself completely, school creates a permanent duality for him.

The colonized is saved from illiteracy only to fall into linguistic dualism…If only the mother tongue was allowed some influence on current social life … The entire bureaucracy, the entire court system, all industry hears and uses the colonizer’s language … Furthermore, the colonized’s mother tongue … is precisely the one which is least valued. It has no stature in the country or in the concert of peoples. If he wants to obtain a job, make a place for himself, exist in the community and the world, he must first bow to the language of his masters. (pp. 104-106)

My purpose in this study is to use the theoretical orientations as mediums to explore the forms of power relations, identity, resistance and agency, and representation that existed between, and among the colonized and the colonizer, mainly in Belize.

**Feminist Discourses**

In Belize, usually if the word feminist is mentioned, many people get apprehensive. Men, especially, believe that women will be turned against them, that women want freedom. One possibility can be attributed to what Ewens (1995) describes as “no one wants to create waves.” Ewens says:
In Belize no one wants to discuss sexual harassment … Yet many Belizean men continue to prefer a woman willing to remain at home, and have children, clean house, and above all be obedient … the structure of this society hasn’t even permitted a formalized feminist organization … If there is a feminist movement in Belize, it is a covert operation. Young women, allowed to study, left for American universities and then returned home – with degrees and feminist ideas. These ideas scared potential mates and family members. Mothers cautioned about the need to pretend to be stupid and humble if one wanted to find a husband. (pp. 78-79)

Feminism, which advances a conglomerate web of issues, is a contested and shifting discourse. Even within the Black feminist movement, there is a matrix of discourse (as will be discussed later).

What is feminism, anyway? The text, feminism, like many other words, has a multiplicity of meanings. The Oxford American Dictionary (1999) simplistically defines feminism as “the advocacy of women’s rights on the equality of sexes” (p. 353). But the meaning and perspectives are more complex than this. An exploration of the term feminism through Barbara Berg’s eyes (1978) reveals feminism as the freedom of women to decide their destinies, and to challenge gender determined roles and society’s oppressive restrictions of thoughts and actions. On the other hand, bell hooks (2000) reappropriates the term, and promotes feminism for everyone, both male and female, to be liberated from sexist role patterns, oppression and domination.
According to Hudson-Weems (1997), “feminism, a term conceptualized and adopted by white women, involves an agenda that was designed to meet the demand of that particular group” (pp. 152-153). I perceive feminism as a diverse perspectives or positions on issues related to women and gender inequalities – first wave, second wave, liberal, radical, social, black, postcolonial feminisms. These diverse positions seek to transform patriarchal and cultural structures which are “limiting and debilitating” to structures which are “ennobling and liberating” (Nnaemeka, 1997). I would define feminism as a form of education which aims at raising the level of one’s consciousness, especially that of women. It promotes the optimism of better comprehending patriarchal societies and the impact on women, and it advances strategies to combat or reduce chronic male dominance.

Feminist theories are related to concepts, propositions, and analysis that describe and explain women’s situations and experiences. Feminists are interested in propositions that support ways of improving the conditions for women. They question gender inequality, male dominance, sexism, patriarchy, sex oppression, hierarchical gender systems, and the exploitation of women. From a feminist perspective, there is need to recognize women’s interests, identities, issues, ways of being, becoming and knowing. Feminists work towards explicating and re-examining why women are suppressed, oppressed, and repressed in ways that men are not. Their political end is to suggest morally desirable and politically feasible ways to give women the same justice, freedom
and equality as men (Dworkin, 1974; Harway & O Neil, 1999; hooks, 1984; Lloyd & Emery, 2000; Peterson & Runyan, 1999; Profitt, 2000).

For this study I will ground my argument using AfriKanA wo-fem-isms (which I will explicate shortly) because I perceive their historical struggles and experiences to be very similar to the plight of Belizean women. Additionally, the historical and post-slavery experiences of Belizean women of African descent parallel those of black women in the United States and the Diaspora. As a matter of fact, these negative controlling images seem to pervade the inter-continental Diaspora and trans-continental Diaspora. In the section which follows, I will be explicating black women’s discourses, and why I chose to rename them AfriKanA wo-fem-isms.


Before I enter into a discussion about black women and feminism, I want to clarify the reason for choosing AfriKanA wo-fem-isms. After reading through a few of the contested areas, especially from Nnaemeka’s (1997) *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*, I decided to join her in coming up with a term which has a “workable, culturally relevant, and mutually beneficial symbiosis” (p. 21) of black women’s discourses. I decided to capitalize three letters in the original word Africana. My reason for doing this is as follows. The first “A” is representative of the continent of Africa, and all women (and men) of African ancestry in the African Diaspora. I am defining Diaspora using Hall’s (1997) definition of Diaspora as “identities which are constantly producing and
reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (p. 120). I used “K” instead of “c” for two major reasons. The “c” in Africa/ Africana reminds me of hostile colonialism. Secondly, I prefer letter “K” because of the concept of kin/ kindred/kinfolk/ kinfolks/kinsfolk which is a strength in many African families. The final “A” stands for the accommodation of the diverse, and sometimes disparate views of the black women’s theories relating to gender issues and feminism. I created the term Wo-fem-isms with an accommodation perspective in mind too. “Wo” for womanish, womanist, womanism; “Fem” for Africana /Afrikana feminisms, and “isms” for womanism and feminisms.

AfriKanA wo-fem-isms are not monolithic; they consist of many fundamentally important principles. I am drawing on three black women’s discourses – black feminism, womanism, and Africana womanism - not as competing, discrete discourses, but as a variation of black women’s theories. Moreover, I share Nnaemeka’s (1997) view that instead of being mutually exclusive, the discourses or theories of black women are complementary. The complex experiences and realities of black women are critical and “the full range of black women’s experience arises from their relationship one to the other [the kindred/kinsfolk spirit that I alluded to] than their relationship to white, middle-class feminism, particularly in view of the fact that ‘African’ in this context refers to those exclusively and ‘Black’ refers to people of African descent in the Diaspora (United States, in particular)” (p. 21). AfriKanA wo-fem-isms advocate activism, resistance to oppression, love for self and others, and a very serious commitment to creating bonded communities and families.
**Black feminism.**

The historical continuity of black feminist expressions can be traced back to the address of Maria Stewart in 1833, “What if I Am a Woman” to others such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and Ida Wells – and in contemporary times the numerous works of Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker. Black feminists want to ensure that the awareness of the cultural heritage that has enabled generations of black women to resist discrimination be highlighted and historicized. To Black feminists, race, gender, and class oppression are interlocking and they insist on liberation, not only for African Americans but all black people (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; McDowell, 2000; Walker, 1983). A black feminist or womanist is concerned with the affirmation of how women define and value themselves. Because of black women’s oppressed experiences, they are continuously assertive in reclaiming and redefining themselves. For instance they have their own thoughts on what constitutes beauty, justice, and solidarity. In 1895 at the First National Conference of Colored Women in the United States, activist Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, talked about the women’s movement as one that should be led and directed by women. However, it should be for the good of women and men, and for the overall benefit of humanity (Hudson-Weems, 1989; Lerner, 1972). This universal struggle was reiterated in the works of contemporary Black feminists like hooks (1981) who posits that “feminism … is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western cultures on various levels … and a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can
take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion and material desires” (p. 194).

**Womanism.**

The womanist philosophy was borrowed from Alice Walker’s *In Search Of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). Although Alice Walker is credited with the term womanism, Maggie Lena Walker (1867-1934) articulated womanist consciousness and enacted this in her work with women. Collectively, Lena Walker and the other women were advocates for solidarity and activism in order to overcome the “isms”—racism, sexism, and classism. They demonstrated strength, unity, agency, and resistance that provided a model for womanist praxis. They tried to get away from the *dichotomous thinking of black and white* because it blurs the ability to concretely see the lives of black women as well as women of color.

Alice Walker notes the derivation of the word *womanish* from a black folk expression. Mothers would use the expression to their female children when they were acting like grown women. *Womanish* is the opposite of “girlish,” meaning frivolous, irresponsible, and not serious. While they share the black feminist consciousness of the oppression caused by racism, classism, and sexism, black womanists also incorporate *issues of national, economic, and political domination*. So generally, black womanism is concerned with *sexuality* and *power structures* globally which subjugate blacks and women.
**Africana womanism.**

Hudson-Weems (1989) is of the opinion that feminists like black feminists or African feminists inadequately recognize the complexity of African descent women. She felt that the terms black feminism and womanism did not do justice to her conceptions and perceptions. Hudson-Weems proposes that Africana womanism “while it identifies the participation and role of the Africana woman in the struggle, it does not suggest that female subjugation is the most critical issue they face in their struggle for parity … [it] acknowledges gender problems in society as a critical one” (p. 187). Hence, Clenora Hudson-Weems (1989) coined Africana womanism as a term to include the Africana Diaspora.

Hudson-Weems sincerely believes that “the Africana womanist … perceives herself as a *companion* to the Africana man, and works diligently toward continuing their established union in the struggle against racial oppression” (p.189). The philosophy of Africana womanism speaks generally to the *preservation of self, families, and community*. There are several characteristics, mainly based on values that constitute this philosophy. They include:

- self-namer
- ambitious
- respected
- nurturing
- spiritual
- adaptable
- self-definer
- strong
- genuine sisterhood
- family centered
- flexible role player
- male compatible
AfriKanA Wo-fem-isms: Reclaiming, Renaming, Redefining Afrikananess

A crucial question at the back of my mind when I was reading and trying to make sense of the different black women’s perspectives was: Why did AfriKanA Wo-fem-isms originate? Why didn’t black women who were interested in the advancement of women join the white feminist movement? There are a number of reasons. Black women did not get a sense that white feminists were addressing the needs of black women, women of colour, and women of all classes. White women’s experiences were incongruent with blacks and the Diaspora since many of the whites were from the middle class. hooks (2000) for example, was highly critical of the works of Friedan and other white feminists who were insensitive to issues with which women of other racial groups had to deal. hooks criticized their dominance in the “feminist discourse [because they] rarely question whether or not their perspective on women’s reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group” (p. 133). However, hooks (2000) claims that she has good reason and intentions for being critical of the white feminist movement. She concludes her essay by asserting,

[T]hough I criticize aspects of feminist movement … a critique that is sometimes harsh and unrelenting, I do so not in an attempt to diminish feminist struggle but to enrich, to share in the work of making a liberatory ideology and a liberatory movement. (p. 145)

Black women scholars claim that feminism and advancing the rights of women are not limited to gender. So they deemed it incumbent to look beyond sexism to other areas of marginalization such as issues of racism, and classism,
which are also interlocking systems of oppression. They also claim that there are other issues affecting women such as poverty, land possession, employment, and illiteracy. Hence, black female intellectuals, including hooks, McDowell, Walker, Lorde, Davis, Collins, Hudson-Weems, and Miles brought a counter narrative and consciousness to white feminism. *AfriKanA wo-fem-isms* challenged the existing paradigm of the perception of black women. They resisted the negative stereotypes of the portrayal of black women in the media, and the racist-sexist myths and legacy propagated through the institution of slavery (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Walker, 1973). According to Nnaemeka (1997),

> African feminism is what Western feminism is not … [it] establishes its identity through its resistance … challenges through negotiation and compromise… invites men as partners in problem solving and social change … is not reactive, it is proactive. (pp. 6-9)

Nnaemaeka adds that African women also disagree over priorities that white feminists have because African women see and address such issues as they configure and relate to *their own lives and immediate surroundings*.

Angela Miles (1997) compares feminists who are assimilationists, and those who are transformatives. Miles perceives some feminists like “western”/ “white”/ “first world” as assimilationists. From her standpoint, assimilationists have the predisposition to establish “the case for women’s equality on women’s sameness with men” (p.164). But this is a shortcoming for advancing the causes
of women because assimilationists fall short of speculating alternative female possibilities, and do not challenge the nature of structures, and definitions such as humanities, or exclusion. On the other hand, transformative feminists from all parts of the world challenge the dominance of the “isms” – racism, classism, and sexism and they redefine everything. Hudson-Weems asserts that “many academicians uncritically adopt feminism in its established theoretical concept based on the notion that gender is primary in women’s struggle in the patriarchal system” but this is not so for Africana women (p. 150).

The portrayal of images of black women and men in the media by white males and females has invoked another bone of contention. These images have come about mainly because of the binary opposition and discursive comparison between black and white. The anti-black woman stereotypes included black women as treacherous, hard working, and self-sacrificing. They were unable to excel like white women, and were sluts. They were sexually permissive, whores, and prostitutes. The media distorted black women’s physical appearance by showing them with thicker lips and wearing garments that made them look heavier than they actually were. In addition, the stereotypes and myths were sustained and reinforced by the legal practice, and impacted the psyches of black men and women. They felt continuous humiliation, and women had low self-concepts, and were given menial jobs and lower wages.

The images of white women juxtaposed against black women as the Other also projected the images of mammies and matriarchs. These images of black women disguise the reality of socio-economic and political exploitation that is
central to the intersectionality of racism, classism, and sexism. While for the whites, mammy is a positive image of true womanhood; the image of matriarch is the opposite. Mammies are surrogate parents for white children who provide care, love, and attention. Conversely, the matriarchs are failures. They emasculate black males, and have little time to nurture and support their own children because they work for whites. This impacts their children's academic progress in schools. They are seen as irresponsible in their child rearing practices (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1981; Hudson-Weems, 1997).

AfriKanA wo-fem-ists object to and criticize these controlling images. The use of the text matriarch, for example, in this context is a misnomer. For in real matriarchal societies women are economically secure, own property, control their bodies and reproductive activities, and have a preference for female children. African women were always strong, but their power was eroded through colonization and the intrusion of systems with a different gender orientation and cultural organization. But they did not remain subdued for long, if at all. They were resistant at all levels by being unwilling to cooperate, raising their voices to the masters, singing subversive songs, shouting verbal abuses, and participating in slave revolts. Generally, women played a vital role within the slave family and the wider slave community, and one should not lose sight of their significant contributions in promoting the consciousness and practices of resistance among the slaves (Bush, 1990, p. 81; Collins, 2000; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1981; Hudson-Weems, 1997).
AfriKanA wo-fem-ists were ready, and remain tenacious, to reclaim their voices and redefine themselves. It was, therefore, imperative for black women to regain their place in society, but feminism originally introduced by white women was not addressing black women’s needs. The black women needed to challenge these controlling identities, which appeared to be normal and natural. AfriKanA wo-fem-isms which in my definition comprise black feminism, womanism, Africana womanism and other related discourses pertaining to the Black Diaspora, share the goal of being a counter discourse to white feminism; they are alternatives to the marginalization of black women and other women of colour. Having laid out the theoretical framework of the two critical theories that underpin my study, I will proceed to expand on the recurring concepts related to the theories, which are namely power relations, identity, resistance and agency, and representation.

Themes: Power, Identity, Resistance, Agency And Representation

Power

In society many social relationships are defined and differentiated in terms of power between the dominant and subordinate or the oppressor and the oppressed. Hence, this differentiation or organization of power relationships in a binary opposition creates inequalities in various forms defined in terms of gender, class, race, and age. There are different perspectives about power, although it is commonly equated with domination and control over people or things. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) assert:
Power is a basic constituent of human existence that works to shape the oppressive and productive nature of human tradition … We are all empowered and we are all unempowered in that we all possess abilities and we are all limited in the attempt to use our own abilities … dominant power in the 20th century is not always exercised simply by physical force but also through social psychological attempts … through cultural institutions such as the media, the schools, the family, and the church. (p. 283)

Two common concepts of power are power over and power to. Power over can be defined as the control of one person over another. This can be located in bureaucratic situations or on a smaller scale like the relationship of members within a family. On the other hand, individuals can exercise power to, or some level of empowerment. In this case, the person uses their ability to control their feelings, thoughts and behaviours; however, this does not necessarily mean that autonomy is achieved. Although every sphere is influenced by dominant structures, power is under constant negotiation (Fisher & Davis, 1993; Yoder & Khan, 1992; Radtke & Stam, 1994). Think about students in the classroom who negotiate with the teacher to change the day or time of the test because they still feel unprepared, or the child who says to his or her parents if I do x will you let me have y? Nnaemeka (1997) posits:

African feminism defines power as an item that is negotiable and negotiated; it assesses power not in absolute but in relative terms … While Western feminists discourse emphasizes the power grabbing that
reinforces individualism, African feminist discourse foregrounds the power-sharing that underscores community and humane living as encapsulated in many African proverbs ... point[ing] to a theology of contiguity and a horizontal power matrix that emphasize accommodation, sharing, interdependence and negotiation (p. 11).

Power can also be defined as a precondition for effective control and for limiting choices. Such power can be manifested in the form of repressive power. This kind of power is exerted by the military, guerilla, or other forms of internal security and does not restrain the movement of the people but can result in torturing people, executing them, or making them political prisoners. Power can also be classified as reproductive. In this sense, the main issue is related to women and fertility. Women can be considered factories that produce babies, and therefore, the males in their lives and the system limit their rights and choices. In countries like India and China for instance, a woman may be compelled to abort the fetus because it is a female (Alvarez, Dagnino & Escobar, 1998; Carlson & Apple, 1998; Eisenstein, 1996; Escobar & Alvarez, 1992).

Unequal power relationships and how groups perceive themselves as superior and others as inferior are long standing. Society has been thriving on this kind of power for generations as in the case of the ancient Maya civilization which existed in Belize and neighbouring Central American countries. The political organization of that society was very bureaucratic. The priests were the leaders, and the farmers were at the lowest end of the social pyramid. Although
the farmers were the food providers, they were the least respected and had the fewest privileges. They had the power to resist the dominance of the bureaucracy by not planting crops. But, I am yet to come across an account where they utilized their power this way. It could well be that if they did it is unrecorded because oppressed people are rarely represented as agents in history texts. It would be so refreshing to read that the farmers resisted using a Weberian description of power: “the chance of a man or a number of men [sic] to realize their own will in communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action” (p.180, 1946).

Similarly, in colonial Belize, the British and Spaniards exercised both repressive and productive power over the Maya and African slaves. The Maya had to produce tribute for the Spaniards while the slaves cut timber for exportation to make dye. But power is also circulatory, meaning that it reaches everyone even though it may be at different levels. For example, the slave masters controlled their slaves yet the slaves found ways to congregate and resist the masters’ rule. In the case of Belize the masters were scared of the slaves because they were usually armed due to the logging economy activity in which they were involved. In terms of the circulatory power dynamics, slave men controlled other slave men and women, and slave women had power over other slave women, and both slave women and men controlled children. Children had power over other children as well. The lighter the skin of the child, the more power he or she exercised over other children of darker skin colour.
Unequal power exists in all organizations. Once again, although power is circulatory, not all persons may take advantage of using their power. Take the hierarchical organization of the schools in Belize, for example, where the general manager has the most power and the teachers have the least power. If the students are taken into consideration as part of the bureaucratic structure, then they have the least power among all. But that is not to say that students do not negotiate power; thus, they are using power in some form. In subsequent chapters of this research, it will be evident that women who are battered negotiate power, resist power over, as well as give in to power over. bell hooks (1984) affirms that, “women, even the most oppressed among us, do exercise some power” (p. 90). For even though many women may assume a passive role in relation to men, they are assertive, and even domineering “in relation to one another, to children, or those individuals, female or male, who have lower social status, who they see as inferiors” (hooks, 1984, p. 91).

Identity

Identity, or a sense of who I am, is defined by a variety of experiences and contexts. While a sense of identity develops through childhood socialization and interaction with other individuals or groups, it is also controlled by external forces. One perspective of identity indicates that it is a fixed and stable characteristic of an individual, suggesting that one can know one’s self. Another perspective suggests that identity is acquired through socialization or the internalization of imposed social roles. This latter view suggests the opposite of the first. But
paradoxically, one’s sense of identity may be stable, like one’s ethnicity, and also volatile as one changes loyalties evoked in response to circumstances. I will provide an example of a circumstance that may change an individual’s ethnic identity. In Belize, I have seen Maya children adopted by Garifuna families, and therefore, they learn the way of life of the Garifuna family. For example they may be involved in the ancestral rites called “Dugu.” They may have a preference for fish and plantain versus corn tortillas and beans.

I believe identity can be transformed, and is fluid. It is evolutionary as interaction increases, and as individuals make sense of their experiences. One’s identity is shaped and reshaped by the social world as I will show from my experiences in Oxford, Ohio (Anzaldúa, 1997; Brown-Guillory, 1996; Butler, 1999; Collins, 1993, 2000; Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1981).

An individual can have multiple identities and so one’s identity is a composite of a number of attributes, natural, and socially constructed (Anzaldúa, 1999; Butler, 1999; Collins, 1993, 2000; Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1981). In my case, I identify myself as an East Indian, female, teacher, mother, wife, philanthropist, church member, and currently as a student. It is always important that one’s identity is manifested in one’s beliefs and disposition. In the following reflection box, I share a few personal experiences and thoughts about identity politics, and its complexity.

Before I came to Oxford, Ohio, I cannot recall focusing on my identity as I did here. I knew that I was a girl, and then later a woman who was married, had
children and taught students. When I came to Miami University, I learned about the Other, was treated like the Other and my identity expanded, and changed to a large extent.

The first thing I learned was that I was attending a white upper middle class university, so I was privileged. Well, this took some time to sink in because this category of ethnicity had no meaning to me. In Belize some of the common ethnic categories I was accustomed to were Creole, Garifuna, East Indian, Mestizo, and Maya. If individuals identified themselves as Maya, then they also needed to make a distinction regarding the identity of their Maya group. Were they Mopan Maya, Kekchi Maya, or Yucatec Maya? Although there are several similarities because of their connection to the ancient Maya, several differences also existed among them. Then I had to conceptualize what it means to be privileged – to be privileged at Miami University, and privileged in the United States. A week after I was at Miami University, I was encouraged to find a group with which to bond; the suggestion was the Graduate Student of Color Association. I was befuddled, and for a while could not make sense of all this. At first I thought, “Oh! Well there must be a Graduate Student of Colourless Association.” Surprisingly, I found out that was a silly assumption. I had to quickly learn what the Graduate Student of Color Association was all about. This seemed all insane to me!

It’s as though this was not enough categorization about people! In my new environment, I still had to learn the categorization of so many other things that seemed unimportant to me, not excluding the categorization of meals at the fast
food restaurants. Shortly after, I heard another category, MINORITY. Right away I thought less about the word itself but more about that in the United States, I am identified as a MINORITY in the United States. But, I do not feel that I am lesser than other people, and so whenever I hear this racial classification, I am awfully disturbed because it reminds me that someone or some other group devalues me in some way(s). Before coming to Miami University, I never heard, or had to deal with the “minority” ethnic group(s) categories at home, neither as a label or as a “stamp” to determine privileges such as which school I can attend, which job I can apply for or if I am entitled for social welfare, or financial aid. Advancing my education here has taught me that although I may have been naïve to these categories, and issues of race, class and gender, they are social constructs that exist in every society.

Terms like minority (referring to ethnicity), and people of colour were not a part of my vocabulary or experience. In my classes here at Miami University, I realized that I was “very different” according to American categorization. I was usually the only foreigner, and person of COLOUR, or BLACK. As a matter of fact, I was unpleasantly surprised to discover that I was BLACK when I did one of my first courses. That’s an ethnic label I have never used for myself, and one that no one has used (at least in my presence) to identify me in my home country. Don’t get me wrong because I do not think that BEING BLACK is bad. As a matter of fact, it infuriates me to recall that historically, BEING BLACK has derived negative and derogatory connotations, which have historical continuities and implications. In contemporary United States, Blacks, black skin, matty hair, and Ebonics are
reasons to be marginalized and classified as lesser than others. So instead of looking for the beauty and talents in BLACK PEOPLE, being BLACK came to be, and is still associated with being extremely dishonourable, and so deserving the most serious criticism. Being BLACK is associated with hostility, misfortune, and evil. I have heard the phrase, “if yuh black stay to the back.”

The mass media has revealed, reiterated and perpetrated that being BLACK means being a predator, a target for legal authorities, and a bird to be confined to prison. I recall the movie *SLAM* which represented black males as birds in a cage. Ray was incarcerated for possessing 1/4 pound of marijuana. I in no way condone drugs but these are the words that interested me. The lawyer told Ray he either had to cop or rock. If he was found guilty, his sentence would be about ten years, and Ray’s chance of beating the sentence was slim. The lawyer said, “You can’t make it. You are in trouble. You are a victim of casualty … Even if you were innocent I can only get you two or three… You are a victim, brother. You are black. You are young. You are from SE [Washington]…You don’t have a chance… When they lock you up you dead.” That’s very sad!

I nodded my head in disgust at these thoughts and the future of black males if this was the perception. I thought of my identity in this new culture, and the identity and representation of the blacks although they were born here, and the black males, especially. The mental image that I had was one of me scribbling the black and white comparative relationship across the chalkboard in my classroom. The
comparison using mathematical symbols would look something like whites > 
blacks, whites > Elizabeth. It would read whites are more valued than blacks, and 
whites are more valued than Elizabeth. This social construction and perception has 
social, economic and educational implications for the ones who are considered less 
than, or the Other. As I dazed over this symbolic representation, I shivered. It felt 
painful, and unfair although I have heard it constantly said, “all men [women] are 
created equal.” I was sure that I had made an error because if we claim to live in a 
democracy then that comparison is a contradiction. I replayed many of the readings 
from different courses I had studied. Yes, it was not a dream; it was not erroneous. 
It was constructed to be this way. It was a reality. I kept on thinking about what 
would it mean for a new mathematical convention to read blacks = whites, or vice 
versa. I struggled and eventually gave up, but society cannot give up! In the movie, 
SLAM, teacher Lauren did not give up on the African American male named Ray. 
She saw a ray in Ray, and she used it as an uplifting opportunity.

I recall being given an article, One Drop of Blood by Lawrence Wright, to read a 
few weeks after being in my new environment. I read carefully and was unable to 
comprehend what it meant. I shared my anxiety and confusion with an African 
woman, and lo and behold! She started to talk about the article and its content. In 
my mind and naivety I was thinking that she was so brilliant to know what I was 
reading about. I later realized that she lived through this, and the Civil Rights 
movement. It was all part of the American experience and history. It is this part of 
her living experience that hooks and other black scholars would claim white
women, white feminists would not be able to comprehend.

Two weeks after I arrived in Oxford, I went uptown to a beauty salon to get my hair done. The beauticians were all white women, and nothing is wrong with that! Oh! How I hate the labels but how else to describe them after learning, and constantly hearing the dichotomous ethnic labels, black/white. Anyway, one of them apologized, and said, “we don’t do ethnic hair.” My automatic response was, “What is ethnic hair?” For the umpteen time in less than a month, I had another bad experience because of socially constructed labels and categories, and because of being different. This was new! Culturally incomprehensible! Reflecting on the word ethnic, the major question that still lingers in my mind is what kind of hair do white people have? I have asked the question but so far I have unable to get a valid answer, and many times I get no answer at all.

In my new context and through interaction, I was now an alien female of colour who was fat, middle aged, and spoke with an accent. To some, I was Black and a minority. Minority? Never heard that term used in my country to define a group or groups. Although this is not how I identify myself, this was the way in which most people in my new environment perceived and described me. I learned that these social categories to which I was unaccustomed, can make our experiences enjoyable or frustrating, can provide privileges or constraints, can keep us caged in or allow us to fly free.

In the public domain, by my physical appearance I was perceived as BLACK. If I
said that my surname is Cardenas, I was identified as Hispanic. HISPANIC! Another unfamiliar label which is contested in the United States. I kept wondering what is the difference between the people in Belize who identify with the Mestizo culture and those in the United States who identify themselves as Hispanic and/or Latino. It seemed that the last name CARDENAS gave some people the authority to decide that I either know how to speak Spanish or I am from Hispanic/Latino ancestry. Several persons would start communicating in Spanish to me right away. I am not a Mestiza, and not of Mestizo descent; however, my husband is of Mestizo descent, and I adopted (borrowed) his surname through marriage. Nothing is wrong with being Mestizo but I would appreciate if people allow me to categorize myself instead of naming me based on assumptions.

My socio-cultural experiences in the United States are not unique. Alexander & Mohanty (1997) in their work entitled, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, share their experiences, and reflexivity as women of colour and feminists. They relate their intriguing story of moving to the United States in the mid-1990s. According to them, none of their previous cultural religious, racial, or class experiences had prepared them for the “painful racial terrain” with which they were faced in the United States. Like me, they were not born women of color, but that social construction was given to them as a major part of their identity in their new cultural and social world, the United States.
Resistance and Agency

Resistance and agency are inextricably linked to a strong sense of who one is. Usually a strong sense of self, one's identity, and convictions lead one to be assertive. Some people with a strong sense of self, convictions and integrity are able to influence others for good or evil. This influence is useful to organize people for political action against oppressive forces. This sense of agency can be individual or collective, and the resistance can be violent or non-violent. Resistance and agency are interrelated, and useful concepts to illuminate power relations (Fraser, 1992; McDonagh, 1992; Nada, 2001; Pope, 1992).

Agency denotes a subject position instead of the traditional object position in which women find themselves. Agency also denotes the ability to act. To have agency signifies the ability to negotiate power and to resist dominant forces. Although the instances of women's resistance to male patriarchy are rarely recorded, there are several examples of agency to resist dominant forces. The slave women, in Belize and the Caribbean, for example, aborted the fetus so that they would not be born into the world to suffer the same fate as their parents. Sojourner Truth (Isabella Baumfree) risked her life as she assumed the mission of spreading “truth” across the country. She also helped African American escapees find shelter. In the heat of the Civil Rights movement, Rosa Parks, in 1955, defied white authority by refusing to give up her seat to a white man. She was arrested and charged. These small acts of speaking and acting can disrupt the status quo, and are powerful strides towards the liberation of women and the

Recently, McClaurin (1996) who did her study in Belize indicates that women are challenging the sociopolitical powers despite the oppressive conditions. These women are creating changes for themselves and other women. Similarly, McClusky (2001), who did a study about women in one of the Maya villages in southern Belize, notes the change that is occurring among the women. She shared how a few women were resisting the cultural practice of arranged marriages and also states:

Men do not always get away with their infidelities, however. One woman in her sixties told me that she threatened her son-in-law with a machete because “he went with the next lady.” He was coming home after spending several days with his mistress when his mother-in-law spotted him on the path. She ran out of her house with a machete swinging it wildly. The man hid in the outhouse… (p. 132).

While it is encouraging to know that some Belizean women are exercising agency, it is also important to bear in mind that it may take some time for others to be convinced that they should be self-liberated or join in collective action and solidarity with established organizations or women’s movements fighting for the cause of women.

It will take time for women to see massive changes because we are operating within a structural system with interrelated factors in a male dominated society and world. Furthermore, the study of domestic violence is a very recent

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phenomenon. In order to better understand domestic violence in society requires three steps:

- First, women need to examine individual behaviours, antecedent events and reinforcers.
- Next, examine the abuse incidents in light of whether it is accepted or rejected by the society.
- Then take into consideration how violence is learned by succeeding generations (Egbert, 1999).

But women must not give in or give up. Women need to continue to act individually and collectively as they work towards social change. They also need to ensure that men are invited to participate as part of the change and solution, because men have been part of the problem.

**Representation**

Representation is a symbolic practice by which meaning is given to the world. Representation is socially constructed and issues of race, sexuality, and gender fall into this realm. Below are two excerpts which depict how women have been perceived. The extracts make the assumptions that women are naturally inferior to men and, as such, are seen as possessions and property instead of beings who should be treated equally to men and enjoy similar social, economic, and political privileges.

Women were made specially to please man; if the latter must please her in turn, it is a less direct necessity; his merit consists in his strength, he
pleases by that fact alone. This is not the law of love, I grant; but it is the law of nature, which is antecedent even to love. If woman is formed to please and live in subjection, she must render herself agreeable to man instead of provoking his wrath; her strength lies in her charms … She is the bond which connects the children with their father, she alone can make him love them and inspire him with confidence to call them his own. What tenderness and care must she not exert to preserve unity in the family! (Polakow, 1993, p. 22).

Eisenstein, (1979) agrees that women are not recognized,

[A]s diverse, individual human beings but as sexual objects, as pregnant bodies or as mothers … are also held responsible for child care, domestic labour, family harmony and keeping the family unit together. The counterpart to this is the expectation that a man will support the family … (pp. 41-42)

Women by nature of socially constructed ideologies of gender, race and class have been vulnerable to domestic violence, exploitation and limited power. Women are represented in contrast to men. Historically and currently, men are perceived as the logical thinkers, excellent decision-makers, and perfect in every way. Men always know what is just right for women. They know which feminine dispositions are inappropriate, and which punishment to administer. Historically, whether in folk stories, paintings, poetry, books, and on contemporary television screens, women have been represented as seductresses, temptors, sex objects, immoral beings, adulterous servants, poor decision-makers, slaves, and
everything that is negative and demeaning. Females have been used as
prostitutes, and then society looks down on them as whores. Unfortunately,
women are often held responsible for men’s promiscuity because promiscuous
men are called womanizers, suggesting that women cause this behaviour. But
this should not come as a surprise to women because it has been propaganda
with a long historical precedence (Allen, 1997; Collins, 1993, 2000; hooks, 1981,

From Polakow’s (1993) quotation, it is evident that men perceive
themselves to be the rulers of the universe, and believe they were created to be
in charge of women. Therefore, women must be tolerant and accept male abuse
while males can lose their temper and keep women subjugated. Women are
represented as child-bearers and child-rearers; they are responsible for
transmitting cultural values to the children. They are the cornerstones of the
family; they should ensure that the family stays together. From the description of
the construction of gender, it is evident that women and wives are treated as
lesser beings. Women had/have no emotions and were to smile under all
circumstances because they were/are to remain charming to their husbands.
Women were not trusted by their husbands, so I would assume that the men
constantly had visions of infidelity and clandestine relationships as will be noted
in Lisa’s story, and Belizean cultural mythos later in the study.

Subsequently, the difference in power and treatment has affected women
immensely in terms of how women perceive themselves, and how they are
represented in various texts. From the various quotations of the scholars, these
experiences of women led most women to feel worthless, helpless, and compliant. Similarly, men have treated women in the manner in which they regard and represent them. This resulted in the Pygmalion effect. In other words, women started to believe, and were thereafter conditioned to believe that they are passive, helpless, dumb and are good only to “cook, wash and mash,” as we say in Belize. My reflection about the conception of representation is summarized in the box below.

The conception of representation reminds me that in 1997 I did a project in one of my courses at Miami University in my first exploration of gender stereotypes. I analyzed a few of the textbooks we use in our Belizean schools to determine the extent to which it conformed to the literature about gender bias, female under-representation, and stereotypes. I used two basal readers and an English textbook. The three textbooks were published for use in schools in the Caribbean. The Nelson’s New West Indian Reader, Introductory Book 1 consisted of 48 pages. Although about fifty percent of the illustrations included women, they were traditional stereotypes. The mother wears an apron, cooks, and cuts a cake. The men and boys fish while the girls sit passively in the boat. The language was very sexist. The boys wanted to be space travelers and pilots while Ann said, “I want to be an air hostess. I’ll fly in John’s plane …” In the Caribbean Junior English 1 textbook, there were 92 pages. Most of the pictures depicted females playing ball, reading, studying, waving or skipping while the males were playing marbles, washing a van, riding a roller skate and engaging in
vigorous sport. A poem found on page 18 reads:

What does a bee do?
Bring home honey.
What does father do?
Bring home money.
What does mother do?
Count the money.
And what does baby do?
Eat up the honey.

In Belize we have a riddle that goes:

Rigl, rigl, guess me this rigl:

What dah di diffrence between wahn woman and money?

The response is woman goh frahn man to man, and money go frahn han to han.

There are so many other interesting perceptions and representations of females/women. Here are a few from my collection which tickle me, but also provide a framework for understanding the perpetuation of female gender stereotypes.

A mill and a woman are always in want of something.
A mill, a clock, and a woman, always want mending. *Proverb*
A beautiful woman is the ‘hell’ of the soul, the ’purgatory’ of the purse, and the ‘paradise’ of the eye. 

(Fontelle)

My only books were women’s look, and folly’s all they’ve taught me. 

(Thomas Moore)

Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low, an excellent thing for a woman. She’s beautiful, and therefore, wooed. She is a woman; therefore, to be won. 

(Shakespeare)

The happiest woman like the happiest nations, have no history. 

(George Elliot)

There are three classes into which all elderly women that I ever knew were divided: first, that dear old soul; second, that old woman; third, that old witch. 

(Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

Sir, a woman preaching is like a dog walking on his hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all. 

(Samuel Johnson)

Woman’s place is in the home or in the grave. As the research emerges, it will be obvious that this Pakistani proverb may be true. 

Women are wacky. Women are vain.
They’d rather be pretty than have a brain. Several women would definitely challenge Margaret Fishback’s statement from the 1940s today.

The stereotypical images and representations of males and females are still prevalent as illustrated by an analysis of eight textbooks done in Belize in the 1990s to determine the extent of gender stereotyping. The findings were similar to mine above. No scientific or academic work was presented for females, except that of a teacher. Males carried out the work that was identified outside the home. Males were represented as predominantly active and females as passive. School leaders, parents and other caregivers need to collaborate to break this gendered stereotypical cycle.

The television screen has so much power because so many hours of an individual’s day or life is spent in front of the screen. A few recent movies such as Tomb Raider, Crouching Tiger, Charlie’s Angels, and The Messenger: The Story Of Joan of Arc attempt to represent women as fearless and powerful. While there are attempts to portray women with more positive traits, the media for the most part continues to perpetuate gendered stereotypes. For instance, women are still largely used in the majority of ads relating to products for cleaning bathroom, kitchen gadgets, home appliances, and hygiene products. Conventional beauty is associated with females who possess unblemished skin, and are tall and slim. Music videos depict females as sexual objects to give men pleasure.
**Back and Forth**

In this section, I outlined the theoretical frameworks in which this study is grounded. The overarching theory is critical discourse, and the two major supporting theories are postcolonialism and AfriKanA wo-fem-isms. Figure 1 below is a visual organizer which outlines some of the goals and concerns of the theoretical frameworks. I proceed to the final chapter in this section to discuss how I obtained data sources and designed the research.
Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks: CRITICAL THEORY
- power relations
- illuminate oppression
- schools support status quo
- social change, transforming society
- knowledge is connected

Postcolonial theory
- ideological control
- reconception of “Other”
- deconstruct and displace Eurocentric premises
- marginalized people to center
- critical historical inquiry of colonialism

Themes
- power
- representation
- identity
- resistance
- agency

Afrikan Wo-fem-isms
- challenge colonial stereotypes
- eradicate colonial ideology and domination
- restructure society
- interrogate all “isms”
+ issues of economics, social, political concerns
- self, family, community preservation
- sisterhood
Chapter Two
How to Get There: Methodology

Researching issues related to social problems and society can sometimes pose challenges to the researcher. According to Ragin (1994), “social research reflects society” (p. 31) and the conception of society is complex and multifaceted. In a society there is a wide range of situations, problems or interests that a researcher can tell about. There can be stories about resisting authority, moving to or from a new school, job, neighbourhood or church, or even historical events (Ragin, 1994). In this inquiry, I chose to explore the social phenomenon of Belizean women who have been battered by their intimate male partners with whom they are living. While the prevalence of domestic violence is widely documented, the voices of Belizean women and children who have also suffered physical, psychological, sexual, and emotional abuses are under-investigated. I wanted to find answers that describe how we as women know our world, how we as women construct our respective realities, and how we gained knowledge about our role and function in society.

Researchers who embrace critical discourse as their theoretical framework view it as possessing conscious political intentions that are aimed toward emancipatory goals. In order for the critical approach to have any significance, it is expected that the researcher’s values are not divorced from the research. In fact, “there is no such thing as a value-free inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 367). Furthermore, the study must be part of a larger “critical” conversation as
opposed to adhering to any particular set of methods or research techniques.

The larger critical conversation for this study is grounded in patriarchal domination and colonial violence. These will be unearthed, and illuminated as the study unfolds.

In this study, I use writing as a method of inquiry. According to Richardson (2000) writing as a method of inquiry deviates from the conventions of social sciences, and therefore, writing becomes:

- a way of knowing, discovering while analyzing.
- an alternative to research practice.
- a method which allows us to experience the word and the world.
- an enabler to investigate how we construct the world.

In this study, my writing includes metaphors in order to get the reader to “experience one thing in terms of another. …through comparison” (Richardson, 2000, p. 926). I also draw on an array of “CAP (creative analytic practice ethnography)” such as fiction-stories, memory-stories, personal stories, poetic and visual representations, and layering through narratology. Throughout the study I engage in the process of reflexivity, and represent my thoughts in the reflection boxes.

While I am interested in learning about the social phenomenon of domestic violence, I also wanted to achieve three major goals in this inquiry:

- narrate the experiences of battered women to enhance their visibility in the social world.
• identify patterns and relationships using the data sources from Belize and from other scholars in regard to the conceptions of power, representation, identity, agency and resistance.

• examine the possible connection of the issue of domestic violence within a larger context of violence, and specifically colonial violence.

In order to understand, interpret and give voice to women who have been abused, I have grounded my evidence in cultural mythos from Belize, reconstructed stories about battered women I know, and narratives from Belizean women who have been battered.

**Purpose and Significance**

In this study, the marginalized voices of women, especially women who have been victims of abuse, are given attention. That is not to imply that the voices of men, and battered men for that matter, are not equally important. At this time I leave the latter research for a follow-up study or for some other researcher to take on. This study about domestic abuse and inequalities will add to the paucity of literature on Belizean women.

The purpose of the study is to problematize the issue of domestic violence and its implications for formal education. Concurrently, I want to better understand how battered women in Belize understand and construct their lived experiences by listening to their experiences as a child, and experiences of their battered relationship(s). This is a critical, hermeneutic, phenomenological study.
It is phenomenological because domestic violence is a social phenomenon.

According to Van Manen (1990),

Phenomenology aims at getting a deeper understanding of the nature of our everyday experiences. Phenomenology asks, “What is this or that kind of experience like?” It differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively … (p. 9)

On the other hand,

Lived experiences gather hermeneutic significance as we (reflectively) gather them by giving memory to them. Through meditations, conversations, day dreams, inspirations and other interpretive acts we assign meaning to the phenomena of life. (p. 37)

The shortcoming of a phenomenological study is that it describes meaning, and it lacks the goal of making connections to history. Examining folk narratives and cultural myths that exist in Belize using a hermeneutic approach is useful to expose hidden meanings which are embedded within the linguistic and cultural traditions of these texts that guide our ways of understanding the world and knowledge that we acquire informally (Kisiel, 1985).

This study is etiological as well as political. As an insider I possess privileged information about the phenomenon, and therefore, should be able to produce critical knowledge. The issues I will tease out based on the way we are socialized by the family give rise to the question of the role of the school which is also an institution responsible for socialization. Schools are the places and spaces where the majority of children in Belize spend at least thirty hours weekly until they are fourteen-years-old.
I am using the premise that there is a relationship between the culture of domestic violence and formal education in Belize since schools serve as social and cultural institutions which reproduce inequalities and gendered identities (Apple, 1979; Bowles & Gentis, 1976; Collins, 1993; Freire, 1970, 1985; Giroux, 1983; Morrison, 1987). With this in mind I aim to use the phenomenon of domestic violence to produce critical awareness and in the long term self-liberation, by exploring how formal education and school leaders can assist in bridging the *miss(ing)* education of our females and males.

I consider myself a *civic-minded researcher* because of the approach I am using to examine and explore domestic violence and gendered inequalities. These two interrelated social phenomenon are layered with afflictions rooted in societal structures; therefore, this study draws on multi-dimensional lenses: historical, social, intercultural, structural, reflective, and autobiographical. I took this approach because as an educator I hope for democratic goals to be achieved in education, especially formal education. With this in mind, the study must be a reflection of society’s complex contradictions with goals of emancipatory impulses.

**Research Design**

Operating within a critical discourse allows me the freedom and flexibility of design. I consider the research design for this study to be emergent. As an emergent research design I made changes as I progressed. In regards to my
data collection, the emphasis was less on structured interviews and schedules, and more to be at the disposal of the women who were kind enough to take time out to talk to me about their lives. Flexibility was built in for unexpected and new discoveries as I analyzed the narratives of the battered women, and as I continuously read to be informed.

I wanted to write myself into the text so I decided to use reflection boxes within the text to differentiate my voice and opinions from other voices. Juxtaposing my personal narrative and experiences as a child, a mother, married woman, a wife, and an educator helped me meet one of the major goals of the research, linking the social problem of domestic with the role(s) of schooling.

Readers will discover that the colonial legacy of the lingua franca common to most Belizeans, English Creole, Spanglish and Crenglish (a word that I coined for a mixture of English Creole and English) are widely incorporated in this study when airing our voices. English Creole afforded me (the researcher and interviewer) the opportunity to write with the participant’s linguistic voice in mind (as will be seen with the major questions for the research, and the narratives). On the other hand, by having a flexible design, I was able to rephrase the same questions in English when I interviewed the teacher because in many contexts, such as this one, educators would speak English, as well as code switch from English to English Creole.
Narratology and Reflexivity

Narratology and reflexivity are two strategies used by feminists in their research. Some scholars agree that there are many benefits to be derived from using memories and story telling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; McLaren, 1995; Profitt 2000; Richardson, 1995). A discourse of narratology allows the use of cultural and personal language in order to give the reader an insider’s view of the experienced insiders. Concurrently, narratology creates a dialogue between the present and the past (elaborated in Section 4).

A deep and critical reflection on our experiences and memories can be liberating because they help us understand how we have created new meanings in our lives. Engaging in this kind of introspection is not as easy as it sounds. According to Profitt (2000), “reflecting upon the past and recounting it through different lens involves a process of critical remembering … critical remembering carries conflict and pain but also a possibility of freedom, hope, and resistance” (pp. 11 & 12). McLaren (1995) posits that there are narratives that have been socially determined and accepted. This statement will be reified in the narratives collected from Belize. There will be numerous examples of the socially constructed narratives of gender roles, women’s perceptions of themselves, and men’s perceptions of women.

Reflection can appear deceptively to be a simple concept. At face value, the term reflection suggests the need to look back at something, especially when one level of it is viewed in isolation, but it is an important habit to develop and nurture because it allows individuals and groups to question the social and
political conditions of the society within which they live, and the assumptions of power and hegemony (Brookfield, 1995; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998; McIntyre & O'Hair, 1996; Regan Case & Brubacher, 1996; Schon, 1983, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Feminists and other scholars perceive reflection to be highly critical in one’s life. Reflection can result in self-knowledge, leading to self-liberation. It opens the door for one to become aware of contradictions in one’s life and in the society (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; McLaren, 1995; Profitt 2000; Richardson, 1995). Contradictions, self-knowledge and self-liberation can in turn lead to activism in an effort to help others become liberated, and this is my mission and my vision.

I have an interest in people's lived experiences. I have used the stories I hear from people to help me decide what I would like or would not like my to be. These experiences have sometimes been useful in the way I make decisions. Narratives remind me that life is dynamic, temporal and spatial. Life is an accumulation of experiences that go in many directions. It is filled with moral dispositions, hope and despair, as well as opportunities for continuous reflection on the personal, political, and the social (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, Profitt, 2000; Richardson, 2000). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) have an interesting twist to the use of narratives. The stories I sing in this work aim at all of these:

We cobble together stories that we may tell each other, some to share our profoundest links with those whom we studied; some to help us see how we can right a wrong or relieve oppression; some to help us and others
understand how and why we did what we did and how it all went very wrong and some simply to sing of difference. (p. 1061)

Story telling, how I enjoy hearing stories! From my childhood days I loved story telling. The most enjoyable moment for me was to gather around a pot of boiled crab with the moon illuminating our verandah while my mother and grandmother told stories. Once I had two folklore projects to do as an undergrad student, and certainly, I chose the oral history of one of the cultural groups, and a collection of folk stories from one of my neighbours. Even as an adult I am fascinated to re-read the fairy tales my teachers told me as a young girl. They allow me to travel to different lands and help me witness different living conditions and relationships. I get to read about conflicts and how they are managed. It’s so relaxing after a mentally taxing day.

Oh! Sure, enough even as an adult with children, I always looked forward to hearing Uncle Walter’s life stories that he repeated each time we visited him until he passed away. I must have heard these stories over a hundred times. While my cousins, my children and my husband would detest “hearing one thing over and over,” I admired how he made himself a hero. He built his own house at five-years-old. His schooling culminated when he was seven years, but he could read anything. He moved from our original home in the south to the west of the country and it was though he was Columbus. Although there were inhabitants living in the region, he was the first cab driver; the first to build a house on a hill and the tall
tales go on. I like to romanticize about how men and scholars wrote history books.

The experience may have been similar to how my uncle perceived his actions and his deeds. It was told from his perspective; he conquered and was always victorious.

I love story telling because I still find it baffling when I am in a Belizean story telling setting and the narrator begins with “wance upon a time, wen time was time, monkey chew tobacco an spit out wite lime.” Who started that? What does it mean? How can chewing tobacco convert it to white lime? Why did it have to be a monkey? Then when it was time to end the story, the narrator would say, “if the pin nevah ben di story wudn’t end.” Again, I would be silently questioning the idea of bending a pin, why not something else? Who bent the pin? Who decides when the narrator should say these words as an indication that he or she is about to complete the story?

Story telling takes different names. Jesus told stories and we call them parables. At times church members tell their stories about their relationship and encounter with Jesus. We call that witnessing, testifying or testimonio in the Spanish language.

**Data Collection**

Creswell (1998) writes that when conducting research, a researcher needs to examine dispositions, learned patterns of customs and the way of life of the researched group. There is also the need to study their language and interaction.
For this inquiry, studying women in settings such as the home, prison, and the shelter, generated data for battered women. In addition, data was collected from a variety of other sources: personal experience, introspection, interviews, life stories, and artifacts. These sources were invaluable as I attempted to make sense of the phenomenon, and the meanings people construct from their experiences. I reconstructed the stories of women who have experienced domestic violence, gather information through structured and unstructured interviews, and informal conversations with many Belizeans, mainly from Belize City.

**Interviews**

In order to maximize the benefits of this research, Malinowski (1922 as cited in Ogbu et al., 1994) posits that the researcher should learn the native language, live with and participate in their activities as much as possible. They suggest that the researcher engage in long periods of fieldwork. I spent six weeks in the field. I am a native of Belize. I have lived among the people in various districts, and worked throughout the country with women of varied ages, experiences and ethnicity. I have served as a teacher, teacher educator, curriculum trainer, national coordinator for UNESCO, and Girl Scout commissioner. I am multi-lingual, and so can communicate in standard English, English Creole and Spanish which are the three major mediums of communication used in Belize.

Reinharz (1992) asserts that semi-structured and unstructured interviews are a qualitative data gathering technique. Interviews are beneficial because they
allow the researcher to access participants’ ideas, thoughts and memories. It’s an effective way to hear what women have to say. Open-ended discussions are also useful because they provide an opportunity to explore the informant’s view of reality. They can assist the researcher to generate theory as well. Open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews allow space for women to share their experiences, and the researcher to ask for clarification if necessary.

The main participants in this study were Belizean women over eighteen years old. The youngest was twenty-three, and the oldest was forty-six. They had lived in abusive intimate relationship for two or more years. In order to receive the information about the women, I visited the office of the various service agencies in Belize to which battered women in an abusive relationship report. I shared my research project verbally, as well as in writing. I reiterated that all social agents involved, and myself, will bear in mind that the women in the study must participate voluntarily. There should be no coercion or threats, and no payment will be offered. The participants must know and be reminded that they are free to drop out of the study at any time, and must only volunteer information with which they are comfortable.

In order to capture the women’s stories and direct quotations I used an audiocassette recorder in addition to my field notes. I kept a journal to record ideas about battered women, and my personal experiences and reflections. The recorded information on the tapes was destroyed as soon as I transcribed the women’s stories. All notes, transcriptions and tapes were kept in a secure place which was accessible only to myself.
I interviewed six women. The director of Women’s Affairs recommended one of the women. She became my first participant. I, personally, contacted the first participant and explained the nature of my work. She immediately agreed and we started meeting. Each interview was scheduled for an hour; however, they lasted as long as the participant wished to talk. I had planned for three scheduled visits per person; however my flexible design allowed me to visit as often as the women saw fit. In the case of the first participant, I visited her six times. The director of the shelter recommended three other women for battered women. These visits lasted as scheduled. I have known one of the participants for many years. One day we ran into each other, and I shared my interest in studying domestic violence. She volunteered to share her story. We met once, and did the other two interviews by telephone. The sixth woman was recommended by a police officer. We met twice, and then she decided not to participate again. In the study, I will reproduce stories from four of the women because they capture a variety of sensations related to the issues of domestic violence.

I used both English Creole, and also the national language of Belize, English. The first part of the interview dealt with demographic issues. The other questions were related to the women’s childhood experiences at home, and with their intimate male partner. Here are the questions that I posed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creole Version</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Wey kinah a life yuh mi gat wen yuh mi young?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How yuh ma and pa mi live?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wey kindah a work dehn mek di pickney deh do?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Wen yuh ma and pa bex wid wan annadah how dehn work it out?
- Wey kinah teacha yuh mi gat wen yuh mi di go dah skool. How dehn use to treat yuh?
- Yuh mi use to go dah church? Whey kindah ah tings yuh mi learn?
- Wey kindah life yuh gat wid the man wey yuh live wid or wey yuh mi live wid?
- Wey yuh wouldah sey to dehn young gial wey no married yet or to people wey di live enah wan bad relashanship?

### English Version

- What were your experiences like when you were growing up?

  a) What stories were you told about male and female relationships when you were growing up?

  b) To what extent did these stories affect the way you acted? To what extent did they affect what you believed when you were growing up? At what age did you have your first boyfriend? Why? What was your relationship like?

  c) How did your parent(s) treat the males and females (children and adult) in the family?

  d) Did you observe abusive relationships with your parents or guardians? What was it like?

  e) How were conflicts resolved in your home?

  f) What chores did you do at home? At school? What did your brothers do (i.e. if they have brothers)? What events were you allowed to attend? Were your
brothers allowed to attend?

g) How did your teachers treat you in relation to the boys? Is there any teacher you particularly liked or disliked because of how you were treated?

h) Were you very involved in the life of the church? What did you learn from the religious teachings-in school, at Sunday school, from parent(s) or guardians about how girls and boys or men and women should behave, or do/shouldn’t do?

- What have been your experiences with your intimate male partner with whom you live or lived?

i) Now that you are an adult, how have these childhood experiences (at home, at school, at church) influenced your life with your male partner?

j) How has your male partner treated you?

k) How did you react the first time you were physically or verbally abused?

l) What is your health like?

m) What steps have you taken to “free” yourself from the abuse?

- What would you like to say to young men and women who are planning to “live together” or get married/ or to women who have been living in abusive relationship(s)?
After each interview I listened to the audio recordings, and read my notes. In this way, on the consecutive visit I was able to read what I had recorded to the participant, ask for clarification, and ask the women if I had represented their voices as they desired. I also verified if there was any portion of their story that they had decided to exclude. I would make the necessary notation immediately, and then we continued the interview after some informal conversation about Christmas preparation, the weather or incidents on the news.

Reconstructed Stories from My Personal Experience.

The stories in this Chapter 6 of this research were generated from personal memory, and the interaction with women who live, and have lived in abusive relationships. Profitt (2000) suggests there are many benefits of using memories and story telling as a qualitative method. Reflecting on experiences and memories can be liberating as they help us understand how we have created new meanings in our lives. Many times this can come in the form of how someone resisted oppression, challenged inequities, or lobbied for change. Story telling and narratives are useful to examine how people make meaning of their lives. They can inform how the narrators wish to present themselves to the other. Retelling stories can also helps narrators relive the past as they tell part of their life experiences. At the same time the researcher or listener can relive moments through those narratives.
Data Analysis

The data analysis, interpretation and discussion are no way a “God’s eye view” but a perspective influenced by my reality acquired mainly through my Belizean cultural experiences, with a sprinkling of formal education from an American (USA) setting. I pointed out in Chapter 1 that after sifting through the theoretical framework I arrived at five themes that I would concentrate on in this study — power, representation, identity, resistance and agency. I did a holistic reading of all narratives twice. In this phase, I began to identify commonalities among the narratives from the women. Next, I read each narrative separately. I carefully read through each sentence or sentence clusters, and coded that information with different colours. At this point I made the decision to combine resistance and agency using a red code. I combined representation and identity using a blue code, and for power I used a green code. I made the combination because as I said before all these themes are interrelated. Separating the themes in Chapter 1 was useful for definitional and reflective purposes.

Having read all the narratives for the themes that I originally identified, I revisited the coded information for reciprocal clarification in the third phase. Another holistic read of all four narratives made me recognize a common emergent theme, that of family relationships. Bearing in mind that this research design is flexible, I went ahead and discussed the emergent theme. This flexible analytic framework was very useful because my goal was not to look for a “truth.” Rather, I was interested in identifying patterns in the women’s narratives. I was later able to use the patterns in a wider local social context, and a historical
context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ragin, 1994; Seale, 1998). In the wider local context, I was able to draw on cultural mythos which were instrumental in providing insights into gender power relationships, the social and economic conditions, existing patterns, and exclusions of women’s voices (Reinharz, 1992).

**Back and Forth**

In this chapter I stated what my research design would look like. I reiterated that I am problematizing and critically examining the phenomenon of domestic abuse by using narrratology and reflexivity. Figure 2 graphically outlines some of the major points I made in this section. I proceed to Section 2 which begins to bring the research to life as I share my experiences, and those of other Belizean women.
Figure 2: Methodological Approaches

**Phenomenology**
- Understanding domestic violence
- Describe lived experiences

**Hermeneutic**
- Reflective
- Deeper understanding and interpretation

**Critical**
- Conscious political intention
- Aim towards emancipation
- Makes connection to history

**Researcher**
- Reflexivity
- Narratology
- Connected
- Interested attitude
- Civic minded
- Variety of representation
- Uses multi-dimensional lens

**Participants**
- Belizean women
- Been battered
- Ages 23-46

**Analysis**
- Coding sentence, sentence clusters
- Themes: power-over, power-to
- Tainted representations
- Family relationships
SECTION 2: CLEANING OUT THE CLOSET

This section comprises chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 and 7. In chapter 3, I refer to domestic violence, not as a word or a term, but as a text. This signifies that what appears to be a contemporary social issue has its roots planted in past history. Domestic violence is an historical continuity connected to social, economic, religious, and political legacies. In Chapter 4, I take time to share portions of my life with the reader. One of the principal reasons for writing my autobiography is for the reader to get an understanding of my experiences which automatically influenced my standpoint, and the lenses through which I view the world. Furthermore, writing from a critical theorist’s perspective affords me this opportunity in order to think through my own oppression and agency. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are the narratives of other Belizean women.
Beginning in the 1970s, the public was sensitized to the issue of domestic violence by the feminist movement. Dobash and Dobash (1979) advanced one of the earliest feminist analyses of domestic violence by unraveling the plight of battered women. They found that “adherence to familial patriarchy is related to women’s victimization. More precisely, husbands’ use of violence reflect violations of men’s expectations about wives’ domestic labour, men’s possessiveness and sexual jealousy and conflict over control of household resources” (p. 37). Harway and O’Neil (1999) writing from a feminist perspective identified four factors explaining why men are violent towards women. The factors are embedded in macro societal or patriarchal and institutional structures; biological or the hormonal dimensions of men; gender-role socialization; and, relational or the ongoing verbal and interpersonal relationships between partners.

Scholars face a continuous debate to frame the issues surrounding male abusive treatment of women, or to coin an appropriate term that defines the experiences of women who survive abuse in different forms. For some scholars, the term domestic violence is used narrowly to describe physical violence while others use the term more inclusively to contextualize family violence (Davies, 1994; Sev’er, 1997). Other scholars espouse that the term domestic violence makes it appear that male domination occurs chiefly in the home, thus, masking the fact that it is also commonly found outside the home. Despite the nuances,
scholars agree that abuse or domestic violence is multifaceted. It is a pattern of controlling dispositions and attitudes that intimate partners exert over each other. In this study, I limit my research to the male exertion of power over their intimate female partners because of its glaring historical reality, and my current research interest.

In addition to physical violence, male power is manifested in various forms. It can be emotional or psychological abuse in the form of repeated verbal attacks or coercion to do things that the female finds humiliating. Economic abuse deprives or eliminates a woman’s independent access to money. Sexual abuse includes rape, and the compulsion of a woman to perform sexual acts which she deems inappropriate. Domestic violence inflicted against a woman can also come in the form of isolation. The intimate male partner isolates the woman from social contact with family members and friends. In this way the woman is denied confidants with whom to share her abuses (Carden 1994; Davies, 1994; Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Harway & O’Neil, 1999; Hofeller, 1983; McClaurin, 1996; Tierney, 1991).

During the first year I worked on this study, I was convinced that domestic violence was an inclusive term for the abusive experiences of intimate relationships between men and women. However, as my journey extended and my reflections deepened, I questioned the effectiveness and appropriateness of the terminology in relation to this study. I reflected on that seven-year-old girl who was raped by her stepfather when I worked at a school in Belize City. I thought about the constant reports of abuses of children by their parents or guardians,
my personal childhood and marital experiences (which will be discussed and described later), and the current research focusing on male battering. I became hesitant to use the term domestic violence because it did not capture these experiences.

Scholars like Ashcraft (2000), Holden et al. (1998), hooks (2000), and Lerner (1986) share similar concerns about the effectiveness, and assumption surrounding the term domestic violence. In their opinion, terms like family violence, spousal abuse and domestic violence obscure the systemic use of violence by men against women. On the other hand, patriarchy implies that male dominance is an institutionalized process, and that dominance is manifested over women, children in the home, and women in the wider society. For instance, hooks (2000) prefers the term patriarchal violence because it encompasses “various forms of coercive force” (p. 61). Holden et al. (1998) espouses the terminology marital violence because it does not attempt to “prejudge or impose limits on the nature of violence” (p. 6), even when adults are not legally married. While I understand that Holden does not impose any limit on the types of abusive treatment that constitute domestic violence, using the term “marital” suggests that the abuse is limited to those who are married. However, in this study, domestic violence includes marital and common-law relationships.

Ashcraft (2000) reiterates, “the words we have are not always the words we need” (p. 1). In Ashcraft’s opinion, the term domestic violence tends to silence women and trivialize their experiences if they are not physically battered and experience a lesser degree of domestic injustice. Therefore, Ashcraft (2000)
purports “developing a broader concept of domestic control, which could incorporate domestic violence but also would allow for other forms of relational inequality” (p. 6). She proposes behavioural patterns and dispositions that may be unconscious or intentional. Hence, Ashcraft devised four domains which she refers to as domestic dodging, domestic distortion, domestic neglect, and domestic domination. According to Ashcraft (2000), domestic dodging is enacted by:

[F]orgetfulness, claiming ineptness, performing household duties poorly, flattering the person’s ability to accomplish household duties and planning activities that conflict with domestic responsibilities… in domestic dodging, the partner is frequently present but escaping domestic duties in a more indirect way... [while] in domestic neglect, the partner is usually absent or neglecting duties in a more direct way. (pp. 7-8)

Let me bring some of this abstraction to life. The movie, Angela’s Ashes (2000), has a number of issues to unravel. There are issues related to social justice, equality, power dynamics, and democracy. The issue on which I zoomed in was domestic abuse and domestic inequality. Angela’s Ashes had examples of domestic neglect. Many times Malacy, her husband, refused to seek employment. I agree that within the system he was oppressed, denied employment and lived in abject poverty. However, the times when Malacy could be employed, he wasted his earnings on alcohol instead of providing for his wife and children. On one occasion, one of his children was ill. Malacy’s wife urged
him to go by the train track to pick up coal but Malacy refused. Therefore, she had to leave her baby, and accompanied by their two younger children went out to collect some coal. There was a time when he went away to work. He promised that he would send a telegram with money. Alas! The family waited in vain.

In the case of domestic distortion, the individual tends to “mask or reframe domestic inequalities as something else,” especially when there are attempts by the subordinate partner to discuss marital affairs (Ashcraft, 2000, p. 7). Usually, there is no intentional harm when the partner “attempts to reframe an unequal division of labor … justifying unequal divisions or sacrifices as inevitable or economically necessary, and characterizing these divisions or sacrifices as expressions of love” (Ashcraft, 2000, p. 7). Conversely, domestic domination encompasses the current characteristics of domestic violence like isolation, economic control, physical abuse, and is intended to control one’s partner.

I have delineated various perspectives on language usage and meaning-making in relation to the issue of domestic violence. This experimentation and shift with language relating to domestic violence seem inevitable because meaning is not fixed. In other words, there is not one truth as many of us have been taught to believe. There are many perspectives regarding any issue. Meaning-making and perspective-taking depend on which lens an individual is looking through. There are many factors which determine the lens through which the individual views the world. It depends on things like cultural exposure, environmental enrichment, and age. Hence, as scholars attempt to understand the complex, emergent nature of reality, they construct/reconstruct meaning, and
create/recreate texts. It makes more sense to keep the terminology of domestic violence fluid in order for it to fit more cases of control, be it visible or invisible, passive or active (Ashcraft, 2000; hooks, 2000; Jencks, 1992). In this study, I will be shifting back and forth and using multiple terms: domestic violence, domestic violence against women, spousal abuse, battered women, domestic distortion, domestic neglect, domestic dodging, domestic domination, or violence by intimate male partners to be more inclusive of married and unmarried women.

**Patriarchy**

Earlier in this section, I mentioned the text, patriarchy. I will pause to examine this text and its legacy. What is patriarchy? Gerder Lerner (1986) explores the issue of male dominance and female subordination in her book, *The Creation of Patriarchy*:

Patriarchy in its wider definition is the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources. (p. 239)

Harway and O’Neil (1999) argue that:

Patriarchy is classically defined as the supremacy of the father over his family members and the domination of men over women and children in every
aspect of life and culture. Patriarchy oppresses women because it condones abuses of power and violates women’s basic human rights. Patriarchy is also responsible for the overt and covert discrimination against women in careers, religion, politics, families and civic life. (p. 94)

Both definitions cited above illustrate that there is a micro and a macro characteristic of patriarchy. The micro picture begins at home with the family where the male head of household is in control of the children and his female intimate partner. This picture extends into the macro sphere of society where men dominate women, economic, legal, and sexual activities. Women have also been discriminated against in the religious sectors. Historically, men have been in possession of property. They are the ones who gain social status, and acquire political powers. Men set up boundaries for women’s achievements; they exploit them through the use of mass media. This power dynamics created a wide gender differential, and politically charged binary opposition: privileged men/oppressed women; super-ordinate men/ subordinate women; benefiting men/ burdening women; enabled men/disabled women. This comes as no surprise in Western culture because patriarchy was Aristotle’s big proposition centuries ago. Aristotle proposed that men and women were significantly different, and proffered a sex polarity framework. In this case, women were inferior to men in all aspects. Therefore, on one end of the pole were men with their qualities of superiority, rational thinking and ruler-authority skills. And, women were on the other end of the pole with their qualities of inferiority,
imperfection, irrational thinking and behaviour, and their inability to rule or be in positions of authority (Allen, 1997). Unfortunately, the enabling/disabling mind-set is often reproduced, and thus, institutionalized by social institutions like the family, church, and school.

The next circumstance that further suppressed women was the notion of adopting a family name. Before the tenth century, families did not necessarily have a common surname. But as time went by, the church and legal institutions agreed that families should adopt a common surname, for it was a powerful method to identify a family’s possession. The stipulation was that the surname should be that of the father or the husband. This arrangement made women even more subordinate to the males. In retrospect, I can see the relationship between the surname adoption and a wedding ceremony in Belize where it is customary that the bride is generally passed from one male, usually the father, to another male, the groom. Bearing in mind the oppression that accompanies this patriarchal legacy, I have a deep appreciation for women who determine whether or not they want to make the choice of changing, or keeping their last name or hyphenating their last name and their husband’s last name. However, the last name that a woman may be carrying is most likely that of their fathers.

Despite the oppressive circumstances, it is important to bear in mind that while men traditionally held power and, for the most part continue to exert economic, political or religious power in all the important institutions in society, women are not powerless. Lerner (1986) emphasizes,
There have been and still are societies in which women share power with men in many or several aspects of life and societies in which women in groups have considerable power to influence or check the power of men. There also exist and have historically existed individual women who have all or almost the powers of men they represent or for whom they act as stand-ins, such as queens or rulers. (p. 31)

**Predators’ Prey: Domestic Violence in Belize**

In order to address the issue of domestic violence in Belize, I will combine the major findings of recent research done in Belize about domestic violence to illustrate that domestic violence has no barriers in relationship to age, ethnicity or educational level, and that there are varied forms of abuses in Belize. Iyo (1998) did a study of domestic violence in the district of Belize (one of the six districts which comprises the country of Belize). The results show that the urban and rural informants were fairly knowledgeable about domestic violence. Iyo outlined some of the causes of domestic abuse, and why women continue to stay in the abusive relationships. According to the study, violence is not gender specific. Both men and women are involved but the perpetrators are mainly men. Like other studies done in the United States, Iyo (1998) found that domestic violence is a result of many factors such as:

- unemployment of the male partner
- poor communication skills between partners
• males using alcohol
• females who are lazy or bossy
• lack of trust between partners
• extra-marital affairs and cultural myths passed down from fathers to sons.

Additionally, many women remain in abusive relationships for various reasons. Many times they
• are embarrassed to let others know
• have nowhere to go
• believe that even if the abuse is reported, nothing will be done
• are unemployed
• and/or they do not want to leave their kids.

Most of the women in Iyo’s study said that they stayed in the relationship to keep their families together.

Statistics available from the Ministry of Health in Belize (2001) in the Domestic Violence Reports December 1999 - December 2000, reveal that males were the principal aggressors and most of them were between 20 and 39 years old. I noted from the report that a small percentage of males as young as 10 years old have been recorded as victimizers. At least 11 percent of the male perpetrators had criminal records. The highest occurrence of domestic violence was in common-law unions. About eight percent of the victims were pregnant. The most frequent form of abuse was physical abuse. Additionally, statistics on domestic violence from the Police Department for the year 2000 showed that
McClaurin (1996) did a study of women from southern Belize. Her major interest was gender and the change that had occurred within certain women, despite the oppressive conditions. In her study, McClaurin (1996) notes that a few Belizean women are challenging the socio-political powers and making small strides in creating changes for themselves and other women. Nevertheless, the majority of women are still plagued by domestic violence and oppression. McClaurin also stated that some Belizean women are aware that there are impediments that block their progress as individuals and as a social group. Such impediments are inclusive of men beating their women, not living in the house on a regular basis to contribute financially or to assist in child rearing, abusing women mentally, and making demands on women.

Furthermore, McClaurin (1996) states that many women in Belize are unsafe in their homes. There have been reports of intimate partners beating women with knives, crowbars, machetes, electric wires, pint bottles, mop sticks, rocks, boards, and rope. Some women are threatened with guns regularly; however, few women press charges against their husbands because they fear going to court and receiving further repercussions. Instead of laying charges, some women decide to apply for a legal separation and financial support. Others feel that they cannot leave or report the violence for several reasons. The women

- have several children to support
- lack money or a place to live
are still in love with their partner
• hope their partners will change their abusive habits
• want the children to have a father
• don’t want their partners to go to jail because they are afraid that they
can’t cope on their own.

Zola is one of McClaurin’s informants, and in her story she concurs that
domestic violence is a vicious cycle. It is,

[S]omething like you have a little sore and you doesn't (sic) take care of it
and it really hurts. You go through it [domestic violence], the kids go
through it and they see what is going on and if you have nine boys and
they what is going on you have nine men growing up that will carry on
what their father is doing. (p. 84)

McClusky (2001) also conducted her study of some Maya women in southern
Belize. On page 56, she narrates one of the women’s perceptions of being a
“good” woman: “ Mr. Coc’s wife was bad? Yes, lazy, gal … But me I do my work.”
There is also a high incidence of domestic violence in this region and McClusky
relates what she was told. Francesca reveals that: “I hear that gal in hospital …
Aiy! Where the children are crying! … Yes, gal. I get to hear that her husband
kicks her right here … And now she’s sick, sick” (p. 132). But this level of
tolerance and women’s perception are gradually changing as is demonstrated in
the scenario that follows. According to McClusky (2001), “one of the women in
her sixties told me that she threatened her son-in-law with a machete because he
“went with the next lady … She ran out of the house with a machete, swinging it wildly…” (p. 132).

Unfortunately, women are no longer safe in their homes. The place and space where culturally and traditionally they were expected to spend most of their time, in the home, has become an arena of perpetuating conflict and abuse. Women have been domestically terrorized, and have become alienated in their homes by the males who claim that they love them. For many women, their havens have become a fire of hell.

**Across the Miles: A Trans-cultural Perspective**

Using a trans-cultural perspective of domestic violence can reaffirm the commonalities of women who are victims of male dominance. This perspective is a reminder that men are imbued with patriarchal values, and women are deprived in many ways. A trans-cultural perspective can serve to build alliances among women locally, regionally or globally if they realize that there are socio-cultural constraints, and structural impediments in every culture and nation which control women, denigrate them, and reinforce institutionalized patriarchy.

McGillvray and Comaskey (1999) in their study of the intimate violence of Aboriginal women from Canada state “for respondents in the present study, normalization has already taken place. The frequency, variety, and severity of violence reported by the respondents stand in startling contrast with the sense that it is an ordinary part of everyday life” (p. 8). In this study the women
assumed that walking around with black eyes from the violent abuse of men, and being continuously hit by men was natural and normal.

Rodriquez (1999) presented a paper on pregnant Latino women who have suffered from domestic violence. Five hundred and twenty-one Latinas of Mexican decent were interviewed. The results show that over 18 percent of the women were abused, and more than 50 percent incurred injuries during their pregnancy from being abused.

Davies (1994) conducted a study of the experiences of violence against women from about 30 countries. In Papua New Guinea, at least one of every six women who lived in urban communities had received medical treatment for injuries from their intimate partners. Davies indicated that while we usually think of violence as physically related or issues of rape,

[O]ther kinds of violence spring from a particular mind-set based on cultural perceptions of a woman’s place in society. One such manifestation in India is sati, the rite of widow immolation. The other is bride-burning (also known as dowry deaths). (pp. 43-44)

Trans-culturally, women are not the only ones who fall victim to male perpetrators. Children who are females are also victims of violence in many parts of the world. Some of them even before birth or at birth are aborted in countries like India and China. Consequently, the lives of male children are more valued because they can continue the family’s name or act as security for the elderly. Besides, males bring in wealth instead of draining the family’s resources, as is

I conclude this chapter with a poem written by Krista Barrow who attended Palloti High School in Belize City at the time the poem was written (2001). It is a poem which advocates reflection and agency, and at the same time vivifies the colours of domestic violence.

As I look into the mirror
I no longer recognize the woman I see
I have to touch myself
To be convinced that it is really me

I see the black eye
That you mauled with your fist
All the brightness and happiness
Replaced with depression and mist

The bruises on my arm
Can easily be concealed
But inside are permanent wounds
Which seem impossible to heal

Day after day
Night after night
You release your vengeance
I’d put up a vain fight
Your meaningless apologies
And promises to yield
Bring no comfort because
The past proves you unreal

I lie down and close my eyes
And painfully reflect on the years
The scars, the stitches and broken ribs
Have all healed but I still have tears

I have decided to stand now
And leave nursing two halves of a broken heart
I know I said forever
But! Never until death do us part.
*************

**Back and Forth**

In this chapter I offered various perspectives and fluidity in defining domestic violence. Wife beating, and other forms of domestic violence and inequalities have existed for centuries as an acceptable, and a desirable part of a family system within a patriarchal society. This disturbing problem has been a crouching monster, and has been ignored for centuries through a culture of ideological conspiracy. Both victims and perpetrators have been enculturated to believe that domestic violence is a private affair. Domestic violence and unequal gendered power relationships continue to be perpetuated through the interaction of patriarchy and socialization. In the chapter which follows, I share a partial autobiography.
I am a Belizean woman, born and raised in Belize. Both of my parents were Belizeans, also born and raised in Belize too. I was adopted by my grandaunt (who I refer to as grandmother), and her daughter (who I call mom) when I was six months old. When I questioned why I was adopted, I was told that my biological mother was unable to care for me because she had other children, was a single mother, and I was a sickly child. When I was about three years, she had moved out of our hometown, and when I was about eight-years-old, she had migrated to the United States. My father had disappeared while my biological mom was still carrying me as a fetus in her womb. This sort of family relationship was not unusual back then, and still prevails to some extent. Edgell (1982) shares a similar situation in her novel, *Beka Lamb*, about the social and political circumstances in the 1950s. Toycie, one of the female characters, also experienced the migration of her mom to the United States, and the disappearance of her father even before her birth. For most of my first nine years, I lived as an only child until two of my cousins came to live with us for a short while.

From an early age, I always knew that I wanted to be a teacher and a missionary. I wanted to minister to others. I cannot recall giving thought to being married and being a homemaker. Nevertheless, as a child there were two
situations I enjoyed acting out, that of playing house and school. In this section I reflect on my family and professional life. I share how my childhood experiences of playing house and school, and my family’s socialization did not prepare me for the realities of the sociopolitical world. In the final portion, I take time to *reexamine* my teacher leadership qualities in my professional life in order to illustrate how someone who wants to be active in the pursuit of change needs to make a *special effort*, and some of the struggles and risks with which he or she may be faced.

We were a family of three - my grandmother, my mother and myself. I was not allowed to have friends. I could not visit them and neither could they visit me. I was allowed to leave for school five minutes before the school bell rang, and was expected to be home five minutes after school was dismissed. That five minutes did not take into consideration, time that the teacher kept us back for talking, explaining assignments or sweeping. If I were a minute late, my mom whipped me. If she was mad with me, she never spoke to me or responded when I asked a question or bid the time of the day. I locked myself away in my room most of the time. I found solitude in speaking to myself, spend time writing my thoughts on paper, or crying in regret for being on this earth. This silence and detachment could continue for weeks. I spent many hours studying and reading my textbooks. While I excelled academically, and was valedictorian for my high school graduation, silence and seclusion took over the first eighteen years of my life.

Coincidentally, I really lost my voice one day. For a few minutes there were no utterances! I was about ten. It was about four in the evening and I had taken my shower and as was customary, I sat on a concrete post that was located in the middle of the yard in front of our house. I usually enjoyed singing out loud, and was doing just that when I felt a hard thump on my throat. It took me sometime to
realize that I was no longer singing. A boy, who I bet was older than I, was passing by and obviously he was the one who had used a slingshot and stone to shoot at me. My mother and I went to the police station but I do not recall the outcome. Unbelievably, a male had taken away my voice at the age of ten, but that was not to be continued during my lifetime.

As a researcher, my positionality and experiences shape my research focus. While I ensured that women’s voices were heard, I also struggled to strive for self-consciousness through constant critical reflection about my upbringing, my adult life, and my profession. Although I have multiple positions, in the sections which follow, I will accentuate that of a mother, wife, and educator.

Playing House: From Fantasy to Reality

Playing house was popular in my neighbourhood, and for Christmas gifts the girls in my neighbourhood and I received tea sets, pots and pans, and dolls for gifts. The boys received trucks and guns. I could hear them running around shouting “bam, bam, bam” as they played war. I always played house alone because my mother did not allow me to visit the neighbours or vice versa, or to have friends. In my fantasy world of homemaking, I was the decision-maker in my house. I did all the domestic chores. I had several children (my dolls) without sexual intercourse, did not suffer from morning sickness, and I did not carry them for nine months. There were no severe contractions to give birth. I fed my children (dolls) when I thought they were hungry. They never got ill so we never went to the doctor. I decided when to punish them, and for what to punish them. I did not work outside the home. I had no imaginary male companion living with
me, or any male visiting relationship. When I got tired of playing, I packed away my toys (including my children). There was no concern if I did not play with them for another week or two. I had no obligations or responsibilities to them.

This fantasy world lasted until I was about eleven years, when I eventually put away my toys and started another journey. I began high school, and had to get serious with my academic work. With this journey completed, I started another one, a longer one. I got married, and surely, the situation was not totally the same as when I played house as a young girl. And, nobody had educated me about what this real world would be like. I had a companion but he would not help with the house chores. I had to do it all alone because he was consumed with his job and so worked late hours. Through sexual intercourse, I conceived my first child. Coincidentally, it was more than morning sickness and heartburn during my pregnancy with each of the three children from the third week until I gave birth nine months later. My delivery was always painful, not only because of the contractions, but the placenta was always difficult to be expelled naturally.

When I delivered my first child there was no doctor in my town and so a successful delivery depended on two German nuns. They were caring and careful, but had to use a pair of scissors to remove the placenta. I was crying in pain. During my convalescence, I experienced one month of severe abdominal cramps that medical doctors claim are caused by the contraction of the uterus. This was complicated with postpartum depression for which I was unprepared.

Unlike my dolls, my children needed constant care, attention, and love. I had to feed them, bathe them, and take them to the baby sitter when I was
leaving for work. When they were ill, I had to take them to the doctor. They awoke several times in the night to be fed or just to play. I lost out on some sleep but was still expected to rise early to prepare the family meal, dress my children, drop them off at the baby sitter, and then leave for work. I spent many evenings during the week and on Saturdays doing laundry. Sunday was church day, and in the afternoon I ironed the clothing we would use throughout the new week.

As a child I suffered many bouts of loneliness. This did not change after I was married, although I had a companion. We spent very little time together as a married couple and a family. We did not do fun things together. I did not have friends, not because my husband kept me isolated but I didn’t know how to make friends. As a child I was very sheltered, and had been denied this opportunity so I had come to mistrust people. I had low self-esteem and self-confidence, and so was very jealous of my husband, especially since he was always kind to other women. He was kind to me too, but I thought his kindness should be expressed only to me. His kind and friendly action towards other women, combined with my lack of friends, and being fully responsible for home-making caused quite a bit of strife between us. We argued frequently. Let me hasten to say, I started the quarrel, and I guess that was caused by frustration and our inability to dialogue productively. I could never understand why he did not want to help me, or stayed out playing pool, or working until late almost every night while I remained at home alone (before I had children) or with my children.

In my fantasy playhouse, I did not need social, interpersonal or parenting skills. But suddenly these skills were vital and a necessary requirement when I
started my family. My family did not model this for me. In fact, I am trying to discern why my mom frequently verbally and physically abused me. She was very impatient, and as a mother for many years I was impatient too!

In school I learned to be academically successful and competent, but was uneducated for my social competence and familial reproductive roles (having children, caring for them, relating to my spouse) that would also be a major part of my adult life. In my relationship with my husband, I was fond of ridiculing him and picking a quarrel. At nighttime I would nag him until I fell asleep. At times he responded but frequently kept quiet. I cried so much and many times I was miserable, and in turn made my husband miserable too. I had little patience with my first child. As I grew older and read more widely, I made adjustments with the other two children. Upon further reflection, I physically and verbally abused them too.

I became pregnant with my second child when I was on my teaching internship. I was always sick, and still had to fulfill the duties of a wife, a mother, and a professional. The story had not changed when I had the third child five years later. My husband’s reluctance to assist me with domestic chores, shopping and sharing the care of the three children went on for seventeen years. I would beg him to let us take time out to discuss the issues that I felt were affecting me. He would say that we did not have anything to discuss because he does not have a problem. I felt that something just wasn’t right but never considered his actions and responses domestic abuse, until I came across Ashcraft’s work (2000). Domestic violence can be non-violent, and may be an
unintentional form of domestic inequality such as spousal domestic distortion, domestic neglect and/or domestic dodging.

In reflecting about these lived experiences, I realized my naivety at the time. I was unaware of the concept of socialization and the powerful impact it has on the life of individuals. I had one of these “aha” moments when I took a course in women studies. I learned about the influence of the socialization of the family, the schools, and other social institutions that reproduced and reinforced gender stereotypes.

O.K. that is why I was so engrossed with domestic chores and the children, while my spouse was not. At home, his grandmother made all the meals and when it was breakfast or suppertime, also mixed his cup of tea. She did the same for her common-law-husband too. When we were married, my spouse expected me to do this too!

There were no adult males in my husband’s family who modelled “fathering” a child. Like many Belizean men, he missed out on the vital and valuable experience that are desirable in a family.

I vividly remember the night I went to my mother’s house to say that I was leaving my husband because he stayed out of the house too much, and refused to help me in the home. My mother did not think this was any major
problem. Her response was something like a man’s place is on the street. He should have friends, drink and come home when he so desires. If a man were family-oriented, there would sure be gossiping, "something was definitely wrong with a man who stayed at home too much.” The woman must have given him “stay home” (meaning some concoction that made him stupefied). As a young girl, I did not ask what all this meant because I was not allowed to question. One thing that I knew for sure was that I did not agree with this business of "man on street, woman in house!"

My mom did not walk in my shoes so I am certain it wasn’t very easy to understand what I was going through. She never had an intimate partner live in the same space with her. She never had to juggle work, house work, and caring for children and a husband. Ever since the day my mother issued that cultural myth that has been reproduced so many times about the public space of men and the private space of women, I was determined to break that stereotype. I found it unhealthy for a successful and nurturing family relationship.

This kind of cultural and trans-generational conditioning, which in some ways oppressed women, were everyday experiences of others too. Two Caribbean novels I read, one by Jamaica Kincaid (1986) and the other by Michelle Cliff (1984), made me relive several experiences that occurred over forty years ago.
In her novel, *Annie John*, Kincaid (1986) shares Annie’s experiences growing up. It definitely parallels my socialization, and that of so many other Belizean women. Here are some portions which intrigued me because of the similarities to my experiences, as a child and as a wife. The experiences reiterate the many ways in which we are culturally miseducated.

“As my mother made my father his breakfast, my father would shave; then he would step outside … to quickly bathe in water that he had instructed my mother to leave outside overnight in the dew…. If I had been a boy, I would have gotten the same treatment….” (p. 13).

“From time to time, my mother would fix on a certain place in our house and give it a good cleaning. If I was at home when she happened to do this, I was at her side as usual” (p.20).

“He then grew to love his grandmother, and she loved him, for she took care of him and worked at keeping him well fed and clothed…. When he was no longer in school and started working, every night, after he and his grandmother had eaten their dinner, my father would go off to visit his friends…. In the morning his grandmother would awake at half past five or so, a half hour before my father, and prepare his bath and breakfast and make everything proper and ready for him, so that at seven o’clock sharp he
“My father by then would return home from work, and he was given his tea. As my mother went around preparing our supper, picking up clothes from the stone heap, or taking clothes off the clothes-line…” (pp. 24-25).

“One day I was throwing stones at a guava tree, trying to knock down a ripe guava, when the Red Girl came along and said, “Which one you do want?” After I pointed it out, she climbed up the tree, picked the one I wanted off its branch, climbed down and presented it to me…. I have never seen a girl do this before…. But looked at the way she climbed that tree better than any boy.” [Similarly, in Belize, as a girl I was discouraged from climbing trees because there would be worms in the fruits. I did not learn to ride a bike because it was un-ladylike].

Cliff (1984) shares experiences about puberty and rape. It was interesting to relive the naivety, and thus, the miseducation of young children. “… a doctor in Edinburgh reported there was a rare disease which only girls could contract, in which they were gradually turned into men. The disease was not life threatening…”

“It was about a five-year-old girl in Peru who had given birth to a baby boy …; neither [Zoe and Clare] wanted to think about the exact method by
which this little girl became pregnant. They knew about rape — Miss Ruthie and Miss Mattie had counselled them long and hard about this. Confusing them with stern advice that they should watch themselves around men because they might tempt the men without knowing they were tempting them” (p.103).

Every culture has its myths about menstruation, sex, pregnancy and birth. After I started my monthly cycle of menstruation, the words of advice or caution I received from my mom was “bettah be careful, cause anyway yuh ketch yuh cold yuh will blow your nose.” This did not make any sense to me, and I was always worried about the statement because I always had a cold. My mother told me that from birth to about three years I suffered from asthma. She and my grandmother prepared herbal medicines, and eventually I was cured. Although I was cured, I suffered from a head cold. It was not until I was an adult that I learned that she was trying to tell was, if I ever got pregnant, I would need to leave the house, and see how best I make it on my own or with the baby’s father. This is a vague advice for adolescent females. Maybe that is the best that she knew at the time.

This ambiguity seems prevalent. Similarly, Edgell (1982) relates the advice given to girls, “take some advice and watch these young boys and married men around here now. They’ll take slave man’s revenge if you’re not careful” (p.74). For a young girl, “slave man’s revenge” could mean
several things, and maybe nothing close to the intended meaning by the elder.

In her novel, Cliff continued to say, “the girls read and re-read the story and found there were no details at all about who the baby’s father might have been … A virgin birth in the Andes. The birth of a baby to a five-year-old girl became the story—not the act which produced the baby, not the five-year-old body which carried a being inside, nor speculation of what might have happened to either child. The Virgin Mary, the article concluded, had been fourteen when God had impregnated her” (p.104).

Virgin Mary! Alluding to the virgin Mary seems to be a widespread thread of indoctrination among Catholics in Belize, the Caribbean, and Latin America. In Edgell’s novel (1982), Father Nunez from the all girls’ Catholic high school (where nuns comprise the majority of teachers) said “we all want to go to heaven when we die…. As young ladies you must walk always with an invisible veil about you so as not to unleash chaos upon the world. God in His infinite goodness, gave us the Blessed Virgin to erase the memory of Eve, and serve as an example to the women of the world” (p.90).

I do not intend to get into a religious debate about the religious belief of the Virgin Mary, but I am definitely disturbed by Father Nunez’s indoctrination. Females alone do not “unleash chaos upon the world.”
Females alone cannot impregnate themselves. Well, of course now, there is the sophisticated science and technology techniques of artificial insemination and even cloning, so that statement may not be totally true in this age. But in Belize, who is it that is disrespectful? Who is it that hisses at young girls, and utters humiliating words to young girls, making mimicry of them? Who is it that gathers socially to talk about “how much gial dehn gawn thru (meaning sexual intercourse)?” Who is it that pays women to engage in sexual acts with them and call them prostitutes, like National Vellor in Edgel’s novel? Like Edgell pointed out, and from my personal experiences, in Belize it is the males, men and boys, old and young, married and unmarried! As an adolescent I, too, was challenged by males’ continuous sexual innuendos, and harassing remarks. I heard things like “coca-cola shape”, “backyard sticking out like a church steeple”, “yuh tail dah like wahn crayfish wid all di meat enah it”, and “ah whan get enah dah pants wid yuh.” But unfortunately, the responsibility falls on women to uphold fidelity and virginity. This is not the reality as is illustrated in Edgell’s novel, and the Poverty Assessment Report. Many women engage in pre-marital sex and have children out of wedlock.

My initiation into puberty was the scariest experience I ever had as a child. I was ten years old when I experienced menarche. I awoke one morning and discovered blood on my underwear. It did not dawn on me to wash it out but then if I did it would be wet when my mom was ready to wash. My
mother still washed my clothes. So I wrapped it up as small as I could and hid it between other clothes to be laundered. I left for school, very uneasy and unable to concentrate on my lesson. I wish I could share this anxiety with someone. Class dismissed at noon, and I returned home for lunch. My heart raced as I walked up the steps. Sure, enough my mom was at the door, akimbo, waiting for me. She questioned angrily, “dah wey yuh get blood fram pan yuh panty?”

I was befuddled about this mysterious blood. I said to her that I did not know where it came from. I woke up and found it on my panty. She said, “yuh noh know, yuh noh know? Kohn yah to mi.” So many butterflies in my stomach at that moment for a child with a stern mom! What a guilty feeling to put a child through!

She grabbed me and told me to lift up my uniform skirt and she tied piece of elastic around my waist. Then she folded a piece of cloth several times and inserted it between my legs. She pinned both ends, one in front and the other behind. She gave me several other pieces of cloth and told me to change the one I had on when there was too much blood on it. Then in the evenings after school I should wash them out and hang them in the outdoor bathroom. I should not hang them where the neighbour can see them because they can do me “bad thing.” She said “an yuh bettah be careful because anyway yuh ketch yuh cold dah dey yuh wan blow yuh nose.”
My menstruation for this first month came to an end, and I thought that was it. The second month it came like a thief in the night again, but this time it was worse. I was bleeding heavily. I had changed so many panties and was so worried that I was going to die before morning because of losing so much blood. The abdominal cramps were excruciating! I wasn’t sure what to make of this. I could barely wait to hear my mom stir in the early morning. I rapped on her door and said that I was bleeding again and it won’t stop.

She responded, “oh! yuh bloody fool. Dah dehn ting kohn back again. Goh find yuh pieces a cloth and tek care a yuhself.”

Mmm! I gradually realized that this would be a monthly visitor. Many years down the road, I also realized, and learned through experience that blood can come from a woman’s vagina when she menstruates, loses her virginity or have a baby by normal birth.

Interestingly, when I was reading Alice Walker’s book, *In Search Of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (1983), I could not help but laugh out aloud, and reminisce my days of puberty. She wrote “when my sister menstruated she wore a thick packet of clean rags between her legs. It stuck out in front of her like a penis. The boys laughed at her as she served at the table …. And her cramps were so severe she could not stand. She was forced to spend several days of each month in bed…. My father was always warning her not
Menarche or menstruation seems to be a curse for females. In some cultures menstruating females are considered unclean. In New Guinea, for instance, women are secluded in menstrual huts. I have heard it said that when a female is menstruating she could make meat spoil. She can cast a “bad or evil eye” on young babies, and cause them to have unbearable stomach cramps. If she sees a corpse, she will bleed profusely. Claims like these mask the scientific explanations for the reproductive anatomy and physiology of females, and uphold ignorance, oppression, and exploitation. As a matter of fact, the natural process of menstruation has been used as a justification for women not to participate fully in society. Lerner (1986) supports this. She states that “it was because of biological constitution and their maternal function that women were considered unsuited for higher education and for many vocational pursuits. Menstruation and menopause, even pregnancy, were regarded as debilitating, as diseased or abnormal states which incapacitated women and rendered them actually inferior” (pp. 18-19).

When I visited Ghana, one of the elder women from one of the villages shared some information about bragoro (puberty rites) with me. She said that in their tribe puberty was no longer a big deal as a rite of passage, but it was a seven-day ritual in the Ashanti tribe. The young female is expected to
inform an older female about menarche. That information is then announced
to the inhabitants in the village, and to the Queen Mother. There is an
initiation rite, and the girl’s breast must be exposed to show that they were
presumably untouched by any man. During the seven-day celebration, the
girl is given egg(s) symbolizing childbirth. In this culture, a married woman
who is barren is a disgrace. People may even say that her husband has a
“wax penis” since the village would be unsure of who had the infertility
problem.

Here’s another related thought! I find it difficult to divorce “men” from my
thoughts and experiences. In scientific terms like menstruation and
menopause, I know that the intellectual explanation for the first syllable,
“men,” in these words is derived from men or men(os) which is Greek
meaning moon or lunar month, and today pertains to biological
terminologies. But men were the scientists many centuries before women
came on board, so I am even more suspicious. When I hear the term
menstruation it brings to mind puberty, a time when a girl can start
re/prod/ucing children if she is sexually active and not using contraceptives.
For the purpose of building a man’s affluence or keeping his status and
property, a female’s childbearing natural characteristic can be exploited.
Subsequently, when I think of the term menopause, I imagine men at the
helm of exploitation again. Many of them see menopause as a time when
women should take a pause from men, sexual pause I mean. The natural
process, and phase of menopause in a woman’s life, brings its own physical
complications for many women: hot flashes, vaginal dryness, urinary problems, and decreased ability to have children. Yet, there are men who say “oh! Mi woman dah ma-be-me (noh sweet again, referring to sexual potential).” Then they use this excuse and unawareness of this stage of a woman’s life to start initiating relationships with younger women. At times women need to have a hysterectomy for health reasons. Once again, because of our cultural miseducation, many men and women vilify this sort of surgery. They claim that “the woman lef wid wahn big hole an sex noh nice again.” There is certainly a need for reeducation in order to break the cycle of these cultural myths that keep us ignorant and, hence, keep women oppressed.

My childhood experience of playing house was unlike home making in real life because it was male dominated. It was unlike the fairy tales I had heard. There was no prince sweeping me, the princess, off my feet, then living luxuriously, happily ever after. I have managed to stay in my marital relationship with the same partner for thirty years now; however, all that glitters is not gold. I have had my portion of struggles but at the same time, I have finally come to realize that my real life experiences with my spouse are not unique.

During the time I was engaged in writing this study, I went to a performance of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, which interestingly was written in 1879. It made me think about how much women endured, would endure, or had to endure to
keep their marriages together. At the same time, I repeat all that glitters is not gold because outwardly this family had a maid to help care for the children, and the husband had a good job. At the time this play was written, only one divorce was recorded in Norway. The play is somewhat radical for its time because Nora exercised agency and decided to leave her husband.

In this dramatic performance Nora, Torvald’s wife, was a homemaker. Torvald was always busy in his office with little time to spare for Nora and her kids. When Nora talked about a splurge for the Christmas because they had been thrifty all along, Torvald called her names like scatterbrain, and Little Miss Extravagant. He accuses her of money running through her hands; he thinks she is stubborn. Torvald doesn’t have time to go with Nora to pick out a fancy dress for the ball they had planned to attend. When she wanted a favour from him she refers to herself as his little squirrel, running over the entire place and doing tricks, singing skylark, dancing fairy. For Torvald to continue being in love with Nora, he lives in a fantasy world conjuring thoughts of her as a young lovely bride just coming home for the first time when they will be alone. At the party he distanced himself pretending that they were secretly in love.

Nora unfortunately got a loan dishonestly and Trovald finds out. He told her “you must rely on me. I will advise you and give you directions. I wouldn’t be a man if this female helplessness didn’t make you twice as attractive to me. You must forget the harsh things I said when I was so upset at first. You’re safe now and
my big broad wings will protect you. [And so, in a way she is now both wife and child to him]. That is what you will be for me from now on, little frightened helpless darling….All you have to do is be open, frank, and honest with me, and I will be the conscience and the will for you” (pp.108-109).

Eventually Nora said to Torvald, “We’ve been married for eight years. Do you realize that this is the first time that we two, you and I, man and wife have had a serious conversation? … But you don’t talk like the man I could spend the rest of my life with…it dawned on me that for eight years I’ve been living with a stranger and I had borne him three children….There. Now it’s all over. I’ve put the keys here….Goodbye.” (pp. 116-119).

The interwoven narrative of my life, and the narratives of the eight women I will relate further in this study will be another opportunity to examine how women who are under patriarchal violence deal with the situation.
Family Life: “Bembeh” Transcending Boundaries

As I have shared previously, the family socializes males and females differently. This division in gender roles and responsibilities caused me years of misery, physical and mental frustration. I vowed to myself that I would socialize my sons differently. I wanted them to be able to help themselves with domestic work traditionally appropriated to women. In this way they would also be able to help their partners, if and when they chose one, as an adult. From a very young age my boys would be in the kitchen with me. As they grew older, we washed dishes and pots and pans together. When it was time to prepare food, we shared the chores. One child would pick the rice; the other would pick the beans, wash them and put them to boil, while the third cut up the vegetables. I did the final touches, and then we cleaned up together.

Each morning I awoke all three of them to make their beds, tidy their room, and then come into the kitchen to help with meals, and have breakfast before we left for school. On Saturdays they were expected to assist with a general cleaning of their room, dust the furniture, mop the floor, and clean the yard. When they started high school, they were responsible for washing and ironing their uniforms. Their dad was present many times, but he chose to sit and watch TV or be a passive spectator. Then one day the youngest son who was about six years old said to him, “Daddy, what is wrong with your hands? Why don’t you help us?” Believe me, I never said anything in regard to their father’s uninvolvement in the domestic chores of the family. Daddy did not start to help immediately, but it came gradually. To socialize three boys contrary to tradition
was considered womanish and brazen thirty years ago. It was radical and transcended the gendered stereotypical boundaries of enculturation and socialization from family and school.

The maxim says better late than never and it is also true for my husband. Although he had a late start, he was not left behind. He has resocialized himself and so that has given us more family time together. Changing unproductive habits have made the family relationship stronger. When I was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to pursue my master's degree in the United States, my husband willingly accepted to take full care of our two younger sons. Then, when I returned to pursue my doctorate degree he was once again accommodating.

While my mother and others would have referred to me as womanish and brazen, my husband nicknamed me “bembeh” because I was assertive, aggressive, and resistant. My husband viewed me as someone who wanted to have my own way, and liked to fight and quarrel too much. Like the term womanish and brazen, *bembeh* is a term that was also popular when I was growing up. One of my male friends defined bembeh as “a person, usually female, who is what we call upstart and will physically fight with anyone who interferes with her. She does not tolerate nonsense and often times will pick the fight, as she is not afraid of anyone. Lang time nuh hear dah word.” A female friend defined bembeh as “someone who is real sassi and tink ih hat (hot). A very quarrelsome person.” Another female friend provided this example of being a bembeh. “Listen to me Eliz, this is not funny. My siblings had given me that name as a child. They
claimed that I was so upstart and fiesty that I, the youngest one in the family, would look at my big brothers and sisters and would say to them that I would throw them out the window, or I would beat them. I would have been no more than two-and-a half or three years. My feeling is that they would do things to provoke me and I would give them strong talk which I think they enjoyed. From what I recall them saying, the name got stuck from a nurse. Growing up we had two hog plum trees that grew over into each other and formed a good shaded area. My father made benches under them and so it was like a park. The public health nurses would set up their business there when they came to do their thing. I was told that I told one of them that she was not going to give me any injection and that I would fight her if she tried to. Her reply was, "Oh so you dah miss bembeh"? The name got stuck."

Many women have shared similar experiences with me of domestic inequality. Some women I know have resisted by throwing out their male partner’s clothes as an indication for him to leave. This sort of assertiveness is a form of resistance and agency but can worsen the situation. The couple may end up fighting as in this scenario I am about to describe.

One of my friends once related to me that her husband was unhelpful in the house, and also had a sweetheart with whom he slept part of the night. At one point she got tired of the situation and threw his clothes on the verandah and closed the door. Humorously enough, when he came home that night he jumped
over the clothes, opened the door and came into the house. Then he said to her in a very calm manner, "You did not tell me that someone was moving in with you."

She said that she was so hurt because he was making fun of her. She started cursing him, and they ended up in a fight.

My friend’s husband and my husband’s dispositions are not uniquely our own but a reflection of the society around us. My actions and reactions, my husband’s actions and reactions, are not solely ours, but partially a reflection of the home ecology from which we came. The same can be said about my mother’s child rearing practices. I am sure she loves me very much, but adults around us model dysfunctional dispositions, and many times as children we follow them too. As a result when we become adults/parents, many of us become socially-relationally dysfunctional as well. Inter-and trans-generational learning can be detrimental.

The purpose of the earlier narratives is not to cast blame, but to highlight some of the challenges that families experience, and to initiate or extend the dialogue about the role of schools in assisting or supporting at risk children and families, and in providing the necessary services and a counter trans-generational education. The narratives serve as a reminder that educators, starting from pre-school, need to increase their awareness and actions by critically reflecting on the lives of the students entrusted to them. Critical reflection or reflexivity is a useful habit to help teachers to develop or strengthen. It is beneficial to (1) interrogate their views, values, and experiences, (2) be
sensitive to their students’ home and familial ecological conditions and experiences, (3) be more purposeful with their teaching, and (4) contribute to change not only the child’s world, but also to the sociopolitical world.

**Playing School**

Playing school and being in the profession was like playing house and becoming a real homemaker. As a child I played school, I pretended that the rails on the verandah were my students. When I played school, and even when I became a teacher, I operated from my *apprenticeship of observation* as I did with my homemaking and relationship skills. I whipped the rails if they were unable to repeat their multiplication table and spell difficult words. I denied them recess in the same manner my teachers would do. No parents came to me, and neither did I communicate with any parents. For many years during my teaching profession, I functioned using some of what I had learned from my teachers over the twelve years of my school life. However, one thing had changed. I wanted to get to know children’s parent(s) or guardian(s) personally. I visited their homes regularly, and met with most parents on a regular basis. This gave me an idea of their living conditions, and some of the struggles they go through as a family. As I gained more experience and awareness in my teaching career, I was able to make great strides in transforming my *theories of action*. 
**Womanish and Brazen**

The term *womanist* was introduced by Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). The concerns of the womanist perspective which is predominantly connected to a gender-trait or a social/political consciousness of African-American women centers around survival and empowerment of all individuals. When I was growing up, the term womanish was commonly used. It was used to describe a girl who talked back to her parents, and asserted herself in ways that adults assumed were not typical of young girls or children. If parents thought that their young daughter displayed a womanish disposition, it often led to a “good whipping or assn.”

The offensive disposition to talk back, *back chat* or be womanish can be linked to slavery. Slave men and women were harshly punished if they even attempted to talk back to their white slave masters. A slave would also be punished for talking back to another slave who was placed in authority by the master or mistress. I never talked back or *back chat* my mother or my elders because I knew I would surely lose a tooth or some teeth. My grandmother, however, thought that I was brazen. Since I was not allowed to have friends, I found my sanctuary most evenings on a concrete step-like structure located in the middle of the yard. I enjoyed singing out loud, talking to myself, and laughing aloud. Yes, I am convinced that I was not insane but just exhibiting that child-like disposition of speaking to an imaginary friend. Many times I unconsciously laughed out aloud, shortly after I would hear, “Joanne, [that's me] kohn yah.” I obediently came to her, and she would wring my ears and say, “Ah tell yuh stap
act like wahn brazen stallion.” Although I felt that the descriptions of brazen and womanish did not fit me, in reflecting on my family and professional life, I have come to believe that I was indeed womanish and brazen because of some of my adult practices which have been in opposition to how I was raised, and the acceptable norm for families and schoolteachers in Belize.

**Professional Life : Trials and Triumphs**

**Be-coming a teacher.**

In the 1970s it was rather unusual for someone to attend the Belize Teachers’ Training College (BTTC) without having taught in the classroom. I was an anomaly. This was so because at the end of my senior year in high school I passed five G.C.E. (General Certificate of Education). This was an examination administered by the colonial mother country of England. It was used as the benchmark for acceptance into sixth form (now junior college). Of the five examinations that I took, I was successful in English and Mathematics. If an individual was not in possession of a first class teacher’s certificate, he or she could be admitted on the grounds of having English and Math G.C.E. That’s how I came to be admitted. While I did well academically, I did have difficulty with interpersonal skills, and it all goes back to childhood experiences. I always felt like a misfit. The mode of instruction at the time was lecture method, and my learning style is experiential, visual, and interactive. The lecturers (as we refer to the instructors) were all Belizeans but most of them were very stern, and would
insult us without a second thought. They were very authoritarian in their leadership style.

Student teaching was about five months after I started my teacher education programme. The duration was four weeks and I almost failed that first year. I received a marginal pass. My supervisor visited me twice over the four weeks. The arrangement was for team teaching but my teaching partner fell ill, and was unable to continue the programme. There were forty students in my grade six class (Standard IV) who were academically and behaviourally challenged. I was from a small town in the most southern part of the country where students were respectful and socially adjusted. Teaching these students from the city was indeed a challenge for which I was unprepared. Generally, my supervisor felt that I had poor classroom management skills, and my instructional aids were poorly made.

The second year for student teaching was better. Before we went into the classroom, the supervisor spent several sessions helping us with lesson planning, and laying out his expectations. We were required to have several plans prepared, which he checked before we went into the field. We were to make worksheets for as many subjects as we possibly could. At the time a Xerox machine was non-existent, so we had to use carbon paper and write activities manually. This second time around, my team teaching partner was present. She was from my hometown. She was a bit older than I, and she had taught for some time. We got along quite well, and did a great job. This time I had a grade two class in one of the primary schools that had a high rating for quality teachers and
teaching. The staff and principal were extremely supportive and helpful. The students were well disciplined, and the expectations from all students and teachers were high. We had more visits from our supervisor, and we were encouraged to use peer evaluation more frequently. This second year was more successful.

**Internship: Cpm, a caring, patient mentor.**

It was time to demonstrate my ability to teach in the real world after completing my two years of teacher education. I did my internship in a city school, and the principal gave me a grade five (Standard 3) D class, that is, the students were promoted because of age, and did not have the numeracy and literacy skills for this grade. I was fortunate to have two field supervisors. I saw one of the supervisors twice for the entire year, and the other was a mentor to me. She lived about five minutes' walk away from my school, and so she was there almost every day. I learned so much from her that would continue to aid in the evolution of my professional life. My mentor-supervisor would observe me teach a lesson, post conference with me, give tips and return the next day to teach a lesson for me to observe. Then, the following day it would be my turn to teach a lesson as she observed. She taught me many teaching techniques to cope with large classes, and multiple academic abilities.

By experiencing her care, patience, and mentoring, I too became very concerned about the intellectual growth of my students and set high expectations for all of them. As part of the requirement to be awarded a trained teachers'
diploma, I was expected to conduct an inquiry project. I worked with a male student who needed individual attention. I conferenced with his parents regularly, and developed individual instructional packages for him to work on his own and at his own pace. This experience would impact my professional life for years to come.

**Re-remodelling teacher leadership qualities.**

The experience of teaching slow learners, and having a mentor during my first year as a teacher in the classroom has left its imprint on me. I, in turn, have mentored several teachers, and for several years worked with challenged learners. I did after school tutorial both at school, and at my home. During my seventeen years as a primary school teacher, I was challenged in many ways, and mainly because I was womanish and brazen as a teacher. Although for the more progressive teachers today, these examples may be a "so what?" during my early professional life the teachers at my school and many other schools across the country were still operating the way they were taught. This was so even if they had been through teacher education like I had. They earned certification, the financial compensation, but reverted to traditional, teacher centered ways of instruction. Being womanish and brazen did have its rewards because I was able to link school and society, school and family, and was willing to take risks.
Community engineer.

I always made every effort to know parents or families personally. I did home visits for most students, and especially those whose parents shunned school visits. I used ability grouping for Math and Reading. I introduced a buddy system, so the "brighter" students would help the challenged learners. I took my class on two or three fieldtrips annually, and we participated in many activities and competitions held by various organizations. We had many guest lectures and a career week which connected us with the world of work. Five minutes walk away from one of the schools where I taught was an upholstery shop and I had the permission of the owner to take my class there to observe how sofas were made. We collected scraps of upholstery material and made cushions from them. Male and female students used pieces of wood and tools to make a small chair. One semester a parent who had a restaurant came in once a week to teach males and females cake decorating. I also networked with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) so that my students and I could be informed simultaneously.

Change agent and risk taker.

Classroom instruction for me was mostly learner-centered and so my classroom was usually buzzing. The principal would usually come to my class and ask me keep the students quiet. Many times I closed the doors and windows with the hope of reducing the “learning noise,” because the principal and some teachers assumed learning does not take place unless the students are
extremely quiet. I preferred looping (did not know the term then), but always made the request to move up with my class. This gave me an opportunity to work with the challenged learners for a longer period of time, and there was continuity. Students got an opportunity to teach a Science activity for fifteen minutes. We enjoyed physical education together once a week, and again individuals or group of students had the opportunity to lead an activity. I introduced a sex education programme in the school after obtaining parents' permission. This was unfavourable with one of the church stewards who felt that this kind of education encouraged promiscuity. The truth is, several of the students between twelve and fourteen years were already sexually active. I felt it was my responsibility to educate them, bearing in mind my childhood and puberty experiences, and also realizing that parent's cultural miseducation had changed very little since my time.

One year, I decided to loop only grades seven and eight. I had my new class of grade seven students but they were all doing poorly in Math. I complained several times to the principal until she decided to do some investigation. She was alarmed to discover that the former teacher was not competent in Math at this level so she had skipped many of the topics. At the end of the school year, ten of the thirty-five students were still not proficient, so I had a meeting with the parents to explain the implications of their children’s promotion. Without the necessary numeracy and literacy skills, when these students took the grade eight national examination (Standard 6 B.N.S.E at that time) to determine their eligibility for high school, they would be failures. This
meant that they would have been unable to continue their education. The parents agreed for them to be retained. When I informed the principal, she was upset with me because there would not be enough furniture and space in the classroom for the repeaters plus new students. She told me not to try that again. Well, I did not have an opportunity for a second occurrence because I moved into teacher education. But if I had stayed at the school and this were to happen again, I would have done the same because I firmly believe that we, as educators (along with the transformative meaning of schooling) have a moral obligation for the education of the children entrusted to us.

_School re-reformer and curriculum developer._

During the last year I spent teaching at the elementary level, the principal had granted me permission to experiment with an initiative for a group of grade eight students. They were intellectually challenged, and I knew that when they took the exit exam, they would do poorly, and at age 12, 13, or 14 would not be able to get into high school. Their academic life would have been terminated, and for most of the girls, it would have been the genesis of having babies. For this group of students, the emphasis would be Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, and Science in the mornings, and in the afternoons they would learn life skills, and be involved in community service. I was one month into the implementation of my initiative when I was invited to be a field supervisor for the BTTC (Belize Teachers Training College). It was a difficult decision to make, but I felt that if I were able to mentor and coach other teachers, the results would multiply and
affect more students. So I decided to take up a new challenge and moved into teacher education.

**Re-repositioning: Prm, a progressive, reconceptualist move.**

When I was at the teacher education institution, my interest was working with teachers to improve their pedagogy, especially in the teaching of Social Studies. They planned units and lessons, and I worked with a school which bussed in students so the teachers could teach, evaluate and improve their lessons. Student teachers made games and big books, and we invited school children and teachers to an open day to use the instructional materials, and provide feedback. Annually, I expected teachers to research information about the various ethnic groups in Belize. This culminated with a two-week cultural presentation using a variety of instructional aids to provide the information, sample of food, dance, folk stories, and music that would benefit teachers when they returned to their respective schools.

**School and community.**

The Science instructor and I collaborated annually for a three-day fieldtrip across the country. I initiated a travel club, and we were able to travel outside the country. It is my belief that we can learn through print and programmes from the mass media, but nothing can replace first hand experience. As a primary school teacher, I always made use of the human resources in the society and I continued this practice as a teacher educator. I introduced an annual Resource
and Information Day which involved the participation of many private sectors, NGOs, and government departments. Once again, I did this with the anticipation that teachers need to be informed, resourceful, and life-long learners.

**Re-igniting the educational fire: school re/form initiative.**

Upon my return to Belize in 1998 until 2000, in addition to my full time workload in teacher education, I adopted a neighbourhood school and worked with some of the teachers to assist them to improve their pedagogy and classroom environment. There were many success stories and a closer connection with teachers and parents. During these two years, the kind of relationship that had been developed between the teacher, student and parent(s) could have been the starting point for the kind of school-home partnership that would assist families and children at risk, and provide the supporting service and education for parent(s) on a continuous basis. I have chronicled some of my experiences as an educator because it has some bearing on the last chapter of this study. Teachers and families need to form a community within the larger community. They also need to stay connected to the wider community.

**Back and Forth**

In this chapter it is necessary to recall that local understandings of domestic violence are dependent on the dominant idea about the embodied nature of gendered differences and physical abuses. Reflecting on my domestic life, I have unearthed that abuse may not be present physically, but can be
passive, and even invisible. Regardless of how it manifests itself, abuse disrupts productive family relationships. The gendered role socialization, and the lack of relational skills surfaced in my domestic and family life. My domestic labour was exploited by my husband’s expectations and this form of domestic violence although trivialized has long lasting emotional and psychological consequences.

Through play children tend to model what they see adults do. When I played school, I used corporal punishment has been the common form of discipline used in primary schools in Belize. What I was in fact doing was reproducing some of the teacher dispositions that were reinforced through social learning. But individuals can attempt to change their dispositions and social interaction. Critical reflection/reflexivity is a useful technique to shift consciousness which enables and enhances the process of change. School leaders are a major group of professionals who can orchestrate or continue the process of action for transformation within and beyond the school walls.
Chapter Five

Living with the Monster: Survivors’ Narratives

Much has been said in the previous chapters, and in order to stay focused, I pause to revisit preliminary statements. This study is about the endemic social phenomenon of domestic violence, and the rationale for the involvement of schools in this regard. I utilize different sources from Belize, and even related literature regarding women and abuse from other countries. The data sources from Belize consist of local folk narratives, folk songs, reconstructed stories, and interviews from survivors of domestic violence. The collection of women’s narratives which I am about to share in this chapter is a rich source to understand how some women make meaning of their lived experiences. When I interviewed the women I was concerned with two major experiences, namely, what was it like when they were growing up, and how the childhood experiences (at home, at school, at church) have influenced their lives with their intimate male partners. The women’s experiences will be complemented with the other cultural artifacts to make meaning of their experiences within a broader socio-cultural and historical context.

I want to alert the reader that in the chapter heading above, I use the term survivor as a text/sign because it encompasses agency and resistance, as opposed to conveying the stereotype of women as victim. Traditionally and historically, women were considered victims of abuse; however, in this study the
term *survivor* signifies that women have been silenced and have struggled, but survived despite the abusive relationships with their intimate male partners. Furthermore, using survivor as a text/sign interrogates the historical significance of the word. I will spend some time in Section 4 exploring the significance of history, and its relationship to domestic violence.

This Belizean proverb, wen fish kohn frahn rivah battam and tell yuh haligetah gah pain ah belly- believe ahn, (when fish comes from the bottom of the river to say that the alligator has a stomach ache, believe it) is a reminder that experience counts, and it can be the best teacher. African American scholars, especially those who write in relationship to women’s issues and slavery, share the notion that experience is valuable. It provides something tangible to which second hand experience (watching television, reading a book, hearing the story from someone else) cannot be equated (Collins, 1990, hooks, 1981; McDowell, 2000). In this section the reader is afforded the opportunity to get a glimpse of the lives of women who survived battering. It is a powerful glimpse of the lives of women in Belize who endured abuses from their intimate male partners (who claimed they loved these women). The tapestry of four women’s lives, narrated by themselves in the way they wanted their stories shared, is filled with more pain than joy. The first participant had murdered her husband and was in prison at the time I interviewed her. The second participant has been a long time friend who volunteered to share her story. The third participant was in the shelter for battered women when I interviewed her, and the fourth participant had sought refuge in the shelter. She managed to separate
from the abusive intimate partner. The women’s narratives provide a time for us to reflect on our lives, or the lives of others we know. I will forever continue to be grateful to these women who did not hesitate to open up their lives to me, a stranger in many ways. Yes, there are some commonalities. We are Belizean women and mothers, but I had never met three of the women before. Let’s begin the journey together.

**The Journey Begins: Incarcerated Secrets**

I now share how I came to meet the first participant, and my perceptions of that encounter. I was seeking ways to get battered women to participate in my research so I decided to visit the Women’s Department first. The director of the department was very courteous, and helpful with providing locally printed references. She also indicated that I might want to think about visiting the female inmates at the prison. I took her suggestion and made arrangements to visit the prison. I visited seven times in two weeks and usually spent more than two hours in the female inmates’ temporary home. There were thirty female inmates on my first visit. By the end of the first week the female inmate population had increased by four. From the first visit, I noted a differential in the freedom of movement between female and male prisoners. The female inmates did not go out into the yard except to hang out their laundry which they did twice or thrice weekly.

On the other hand, many of the male inmates were walking within the fenced area, and even outside the fenced boundaries. Most of them were idle, while a few of them washed cars and ran errands. This “confined freedom” allowed some of them to earn a few pennies, or beg for “luxury” items like a soft
drink, cigarette, or a tin of condensed milk which they were not afforded in prison. A few of the inmates were involved in woodwork which was sold in a small craft shop. The women begged visitors who came into their bounded space. They asked for items like phone cards, toiletry, biscuits, chocolate, and twenty-five cents.

I was perplexed, and at the same time disturbed by what was happening within and beyond the prison walls. Earlier, I talked about the feeding programme in some of the elementary schools in Belize which provided a meal for children from poverty stricken families. Surely, this is a band-aid solution. It is creating a high level of dependency, and masking a larger socio-economic and political problem that will continue to haunt us. Within and beyond the prison walls we are creating a parasitic culture for some males, females and families. This is extremely unhealthy!

Within the bounded prison space for the females was a large area which is multipurpose. The females sat around in the large hall which acted as a dining area, social room and beauty salon. At the time I observed that there was little activity to occupy their hands and minds. On the bookshelf, there were some obsolete books, but we consider them useful because of our lack of resources. I never saw any of the women reading them. I learned that occasionally there may be an educational programme, but most times when administrative positions change hands, programmes fall by the wayside.

Whenever I visited, I thought about how many minds and human hours were being wasted within this wall. It would appear that some decision makers
prefer to create organisms or human beings who live at the expense of others, but more dangerously, organisms or human beings who are obtaining all or part of their material nutrients from their hosts, the other members in society. Within the prison walls reform for criminals should be combined with legal and cultural awareness juxtaposed with technical education, and working skills. Most of the criminals are young males and females (who are academically deficient). One of the major goals in the criminal transformation process should be the elimination of illiteracy and the attainment of cultural education. In order to augment vocational training for the prisoners, males and females, the decision makers need to consider “reform-through-labour institutions.” In other words, there would be programmes and classrooms for vocational teaching/learning, research facilities, laboratories and experimental plots set up by agricultural work units. There needs to be a collaborative effort between the ministries of government responsible for prison, health, education and agriculture. This calls for multi-sectorial collaboration in the government ministries.

When I visited the women they were well attired in a yellow or an orange top which had the department’s logo stamped on it. They had the freedom to choose what colour skirt or pants they wore with their official top. For breakfast and supper, they were served bread and coffee or some other beverage. For dinner (midday meal) they were served rice and beans, rice and beans and some kind of meat, or rice and some kind of meat.

The women expressed their joy to have me with them, although I got to do very little with them because of limited time, and the focus of my study. I did
spend time with them for church service and also for their Christmas programme. From the first visit, several of them informed me that they wanted to speak to me. Although it was out of the realm of my research focus, I made the time to listen to those who wanted to share with me. From our conversations I learned that many of them felt neglected as children. From my observation, I could see how some of their childhood experiences had an impact on their adult life. For instance, one woman said that when she was a little girl, her stepfather abused her. She said she never felt loved, and she believed that people were always picking on her. She was unable to relate socially to the other female inmates. While I was conducting my research, she was always in trouble at the prison and was often locked down. When this happened, she would be denied visits from her relatives. Then she became angry and tearful and continued to believe that no one loved her. She had six children, and tried to garner money in prison by selling cigarettes or candy. She managed to acquire about $100.00 every three months to send to her children. I was sad when I left because I am certain that she will continue to get into trouble and her negative feelings about herself will be reinforced because she has not learned how to deal with others. She needs counseling.

There was a sixteen-year-old adolescent in this prison. She shared her heartbreaking story of running away from her Mom when she was twelve. She made no contact with her mom or other family members while she was away. She was living in a nearby country, and returned three years later. She did not want to disclose what kind of work she was involved in while she was away. On
her return, she found her mother in a debilitating, unhealthy condition. She felt lost and so she turned to drugs. She was caught, and unfortunately, had to serve her time. She was concerned that after leaving prison she would return to using drugs. She was all teary eyed as she talked about how she really wanted to change her life. She mentioned that her aunt was on crack-cocaine too. She was scared to leave the incarcerated space which had provided some safety. She needs counseling, and support too!

There was an older woman in her forties who had been deported from the United States after she was caught with drugs. She was living in the United States for more than twenty years. When she was deported, she lost everything. She talked about the alienation between her only son and her, and the problem she had keeping off drugs. By the way, this was her third time in jail. Her greatest desire was to be reunited with her fourteen-year-old son but she had no clue of his whereabouts. She too claimed that when she left the prison walls and went back into society, it was difficult. No one wanted to provide her with employment, and the only people who wanted to be her friends were drug users. Birds of a feather flock together, we say, but that is not the answer to the increasing drug problem. The private and public sectors need to assist more with the over stretched human and financial resources from service agents.

Another woman in her twenties had five kids and she was convicted of burglary. She talked about unemployment and the inability to provide for her children. At the time she was involved with the burglary, she did not have a job so she stole “some stuff” with the hope that she could sell it to get money to feed
her kids. But, alas! She was caught, and as a result was separated from her children.

I was distressed by the women’s stories. I was distraught, and disappointed with the political system, family fabric, schooling system and community support. The female inmate population comprised thirty-five women. This was a very small sample of the nation’s population but their stories were testimonials of the national social epidemics that we are facing. All of the women’s stories are important as they have deep implications related to the social problems that are embedded in our society, as well as the challenges of youth, single parents and unemployed individuals. Inside the prison walls needs to be a study by itself. I would not like to leave these women’s stories unattended, but I need to stay focused. I proceed now with my first participant who was an inmate.

First Participant

The morning when I arrived at the prison in Hatteville, Belize, my plan was to schedule a visit with the female inmates. But that plan was quickly altered. I was given permission to speak to Fina, the woman who murdered her husband. I explained to Fina the purpose of my visit. She agreed to be one of my participants and said, “let us talk today.” I wasn’t mentally prepared for that but my first thought was how could I deny her this opportunity. I was nervous but I decided to stay. That was a very uncomfortable, tense, and traumatic experience for me.
Fina sat near me. Her hands were set on the desk of the principal officer. They held her youthful face. She did not look at me. Fina cried as she talked throughout the interview. That first day I did not ask any questions, and Fina did not pause. She talked for two hours. She repeated information, and went back and forth through her life story. Fina is of Mestizo descent so she weaved Spanish in and out of her story.

I was consumed in what Fina was sharing as she covered her face with her hand, wiped her hands across her wet nose from time to time. My heart was aching as I reflected deeply about where I was at age her age. I had two wonderful sons who I loved dearly and was married to the same man for several years. I was in the teaching profession for many years. I had served in the capacity of principal and teacher during this time. I had earned my trained teachers diploma, and my associate degree. I was giving service to my community by serving in various capacities in the Girl Guides Organization. I had travelled to several countries in the Caribbean and North America. But that is not to say I was not a prisoner too. Certainly, not incarcerated in a public facility but I am sure I was held captive in other ways.

I mentioned quite a bit about my incarceration in the previous chapter. My husband was still an officer in the Belize Police Force at the time, and he was in the Special Branch department or as we locally say he was a detective or secret agent. The nature of his job had put quite a strain on our relationship because our home was a
place for him to rest, be refreshed, and reenergized in order to function effectively on his job. Our home was not one where the family members did much together. I was fully in charge of the children. My husband had been raised to believe that food had to be freshly prepared three times daily. Sandwich and leftovers were out of the question. So I had to make fresh flour tortillas, fry jacks or johnnycakes for breakfast and supper. For Belizean women who have done this or still do it, they know what I am talking about. In order for me to cope, while I was preparing breakfast in the morning, I simultaneously prepared lunch which consisted of any or several of these: rice, beans, meat, mashed potatoes, vegetables, macaroni and cheese.

During the one and a half hour lunch break, I had to rush home with my school-age-boys and warm up the food in time for my husband to come home and dine. I had no means of transportation, and in order to keep things neat and orderly, I cleaned up immediately before rushing back to school.

Although both of us were working, our income did not suffice to hire a maid because we were raised to believe that we had an obligation to take care of our parents, and so we had to send part of our income for my mom and his mom. People are incarcerated in many ways. Earlier I shared the stories above of the women who were the behind prison bars and who were incarcerated by their conditions and experiences. Fina was one of these individuals.
Fina pleaded with me to visit her the next day. I did show up. We hugged and greeted and once again she sat in the same position as she continued her story. Once again she cried incessantly until her eyes were red and swollen. It was as if she wanted to cry her heart out. Fina later disclosed that no one had asked her to tell her story. Ironically, the newspaper headline made it appear that it was all Fina’s fault. The newspaper knew of the culmination, that is the damage to Fina’s husband. They did not investigate the years of abuse, the damage to Fina caused by living in an abusive, controlling relationship.

As Fina continued to share her life with me, repeating several things she said the day before, I was feeling so depressed and drained just thinking how cruel life can be to some people and for some people. Many times I had to take deep breaths as I felt tears swelling in my eyes. I was hoping not to burst out crying because I do not know what would have been Fina’s reaction.

I am about to tell Fina’s story as she desired. I chose the pseudonym for her, and also the title after listening to her story. I chose the text thorn because from her description of her life, her husband was unfortunately a thorn in her side, in her flesh, and in her mind. This thorn eventually led to their lives being torn apart because Fina ended up murdering him. Getting rid of the thorn led her to also be torn apart from her children and family, and his family was also torn apart from him through the fatal death.
Fina’s Story – Thorn and torn: “buen ejemplo como un novio but he change.”

I am 28 years old from the northern district and I have seis ninos, five girls and one boy. The oldest girl is ten. The other ninos are seven, five, four and three years. Mi nené completed one year yesterday.

I am muy triste because when I left her she was one month. I married with my husband. He was 38 years old. He was from the north too. We were married for seven years.

My first hija is not for my husband. I let her live with my parents from three years old. Mi mamá and papá are sick. Mi mamá can’t walk well and mi papá can’t see well. My mother-in-law, she no like me. She did not want mis ninos around her. When I had my first two children, I did not have bad experience with my husband. We start to fight as soon as I have my baby boy. He is five now.

My husband never like work. I used to say, busca trabajo. Look for work. Sometimes he work with his papá. Sometimes he give me money when he work but he prefer to buy the food himself. When he give me money and I have left over then I buy some panty or other thing that I need.

I have problem to born mi baroncito. I stay with pain for long time. Then when my baroncito was growing he could not talk or walk. Two years come and he still can’t walk. I tell my husband that the baby need vitaminas and I need vitaminas too. My husband say this no importa. I get pregnant quick again after I have my baroncito. I tell my husband
that I find it hard to carry mi baroncito. Mi baroncito no walk and I pregnant. My husband no hizo caso. He said it is my problema.

I need to take mi baroncito to el doctor. My husband no help me. I tell mi mama. She give me $80.00. This was hard for me. They are sick. I need money to buy medicina. Mi mamá and mi papá need money to buy medicina for their sugar and pressure.

My husband no help me. One day he went to work and me escapo. I gawn to town. I gawn to el doctor. He only give me few vitaminas because I pobre.

When I get to my house I find mi ropa outside. My husband say I gawn con otro hombre. I pick them up and gawn to mi mamá. My husband come to mi mama house. He tell me to come home. I say necesito tiempo to think it over. I went back. Mis padres no like this.

No long after mi baroncito need some more vitaminas. It cost $50.00. I ask my husband how I will manage. He no care. Mi mamá help me again. At the hospital a lady see me and my children. She ask, how many children you have? I say four but my oldest daughter live with mi mamá.

I tell el doctor that it is hard for me to pay this money. El doctor ask me if I have a husband. I say, yes. I said tengo pero no tengo. Mi mamá made some medicine to help mi barancito walk. My mother-in-law no help me but mis vecinos echarme la mano.
Many times we no have clothes to change. Mis vecinos give me ropa. Mi hermano help me. Mi hermano ask me why I no leave my husband. I will help you. I never want to leave my husband because nunca quería padrastro para mis hijos. We grow up solo con mi papá.

I have too much problema to have mi baroncito. I tell my husband to be careful so I no get more children. I tell him we no have relaciones until four days after my menstruación. He say you wanted man so now you should bear it. Sometimes a woman no want have relaciones but the man force her. He throw me in bed and drag off mi ropa. I cry and try to hold them on me. He tear them off. Sometimes even when two days when I have my menstruación he have relaciones. I try to fight back but he hold my wrist on the bed.

I get pregnant again quick after I have mi barancito. Yes, I take pills but I no careful. One day he find it and throw it away. Then he search all the time through my things for pills. Maybe if I take the pills, I no have so much hijos.

Sometimes we have no food to eat. The nurse tell me go to Social. Social say I have to pay $10.00 to get el documento for my husband to help. I no have the money so I go back to live with him. He beat me and I lost mi nené when I three months pregnant. Sometimes I hide and make pan dulce and sell and I save the money. Then my husband say I have another man.
In January, I want to baptize mi nené. The Sunday, I have to prepare food. He buy me some food to make cake. I no know where he get money. I tell him come early to take care of mis ninos so I can cook. I get up early. He say he have to go work. I send tell mi suegra to help me cook, but no suerte. I send ask another woman, lo mismo. No suerte. I get molestia and try to get the things done and mis niños ready. We have el bautismo. But we argue from Sunday, and Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday.

Wednesday morning he gawn to work. The food ready when he come. He went to look for food. He eat and want to get some more. I say, if you eat all the food then how we will get it back. What mis niños will eat? You eat already. Then he push me close to the firehearth. He say you think you hot and I try to hit back and miss.

I get molestia and say last laugh is best laugh.

Then he want to take my three-year-old to the godmother. I no accept because I say I no dead yet. Why you want take mi nené to the godmother? Then he still gawn.

I hear that my neighbour like him. My neighbour on this side and this and this side talk to me. This neighbour no talk to me. I no believe she like him. I gawn to the house where he gawn and knock. Nobody answer. I gawn back home in a rage. Then I gawn to the house one next time. I knock again. Nobody answer. I went back home and get the knife. I gawn into the house from the back. They mi di siddown. I say, give me mi hija. He say take it hijue puta. I was so vex and he shame me in front of this woman. I take the knife
and stab him. I walk outside and he follow. Then he fall down. My older hijos gawn dah school.

On the fourth visit I wrote the first verse of Maya Angelou’s poem (1994), *And Still I Rise* to take to Fina.

*Still I Rise*

*You may write me down in history*

*With your bitter twisted lies,*

*You may trod me in the very dirt*

*But still, like dust, I’ll rise.

After she composed herself at the end of the interview, I talked to her about being special and this was not the end of the world. I said maybe this experience, even though painful, could be rewarding because you could think about turning over a new leaf in your life. You could think about talking to other women and sharing your experiences and consejo. “Fina you are beautiful and special and so I brought you a part of a poem so you can read it when you feel down and know that you can *still rise*, despite the pressures of the world.”

Since Fina cannot read well, I read to her as I pointed at the words, and then I shared my interpretation of the poem and its relation to Fina’s life. Then she asked me to read it to her again. I did, and this second time she tried to read it with me. She knew basic sightwords like you, me, I, in and but.
Fifth visit

As I entered the door, Fina ran to meet me. She hastened to get the stool she usually sat on. It was though we had some kind of ritual going. We hugged, and she was in better spirits today. That made me feel better too. Here story continues below.

I am feeling better today. I was very happy over the weekend. I tried to read the poem. I have it on the wall in my room [cell]. All day I kept laughing to myself and the other mujeres ask me if I crazy. I say no. I feel happy. Each time I remember mis hijos I cry but this weekend, no. I laugh. I no know why but I just happy.

Oh, I know I forget to tell you something. Yes, it is about mi marido. He mi have an accidente.

Yo soy terca. Contestaba a mi mamá. I will have paciencia with mis hijos. Mi mamá and mi papá lash me because era muy terca. I did not listen. Hasta doce años I began to listen. I come out of school when I thirteen eena standard II [grade 5]. I never pass. Now I want to learn to leer because me hace falta. I need to disturb people to read for me. Like one prisoner from the other side, he like me. He write me letter but I kian read it. I have to ask people to leer and to write it for me.
Mis padres tratan bien. But I was terca. I was haad a’s. I was the main one. Mi mamá
say one day you will pay. Look why I deh now. Eena jail. Mis padres me castigaron
plenty times because I back ansah. I will not beat mis hijos wahn lat because I need to
have paciencia.

Remember, I want you to mention mi suegra, because mi suegra es una mujer. Since she
is woman, then she should feel for me but she say I do her son bad things. She no help me
with mis hijos. And this time mis padres are sick but they have mis hijos. I cannot speak
to mis hijos because they live in a far off village. I want to know how they are doing.
Christmas is coming and I will not see them. That hurt me.

My husband, he have a truck accident. Then he treat me worse. My husband head get
hurt. Mi suegra dice que I give him something to drink. I no give him nothing fi drink.
They say in the village that I was haciendo maldad. I put something in the food. Then he
did not want to eat the food.

He had to get treatment and go the hospital by mile 21. You know where the crazy people
go. He no get better. Then he fight more and more with me.

Mis padres have ten hijos. I have siete hermanos y dos hermanas. Since I am in prison, I
no get visitors. That make me triste. In the beginning I mi use to tink that mi esposo era
tranquilo. In the beginning era tranquilo but then he fight with me. Mi esposo es buen
ejemplo como un novio but he change. Mi papá era milpero. We poor. Mi mamá she
work in the house. She no quarrel with mi papá. We go dah school. Only one teacher mi use to kay bout me. She talk to me in Spanish and English. She help mi wid my work.

**Consejo from Fina**

I want to say this consejo

a todas las mujeres.

Find a good job.

No do like me and cause a crime which tek me to jail.

People who have jobs-no turn yuh back on women.

Give women help so they can suportar sus hijos.

Mujeres no turn your back on mujeres.

We need to supportar one another.

Mujeres need help to get education,

And work eena office.

If no education at least trabajar en un restaurante.

Los hombres son muy peligrosos.

They say one thing but do not mean it.

Me?

When I get out from jail,

I want a job para suportar mis hijos.

I hope that when I go for job,

they will not turn me down.

I want to learn to read.
I think if a woman can read,
then people no tek advantage from her.

♥♥♥♥♥

Second Participant

Maeti and I have known each other for over twenty-five years when she and her common-law-husband moved to my hometown. Both of us were married to “shine button” officers. Yes, that is how the youth referred to police officers in my time. We were young couples starting our families and we weren't sure where it would lead us. Like the saying goes, “life is a gamble,” and I dare say, so is marriage.

Maeti and I would meet and greet occasionally, and shared a little about our life. That’s because we had different occupations and challenges. I was a teacher and a homemaker, and she was a homemaker. She had four kids and I had one. She would allude to mistreatment by her spouse but did not go in any great detail. I was too modest to delve further for I always believed that people would tell you what they want you to know. Whatever they do not tell is because you should not know. But now I think sometimes people may want to share some things about their life but they don’t know how to do it. At times they may even be like me who never did like to relate incidents of my life because there wasn’t anyone I trusted. I
always felt that people would talk about you, and when they saw you or met you, you would be so transparent.

After about three years we separated, and I did not come in contact again with Maeti again until we moved to Belize City. Once again, it was mostly "hi and how are the kids." Then she moved in the neighbourhood where I lived, and we were about 15 minutes walk away from each other. Her children attended the same school where I taught, and she was a parent who was very interested in her children’s schooling, and so I would see her very often. One day she came to my house and poured out her story about her spouse’s abuse. She was trying to keep the relationship together because of her children. She was short of some uniforms and books for her kids so I shared what we had. About three months later we met at the supermarket and she was wearing sunglasses. I have never seen her with sunglasses before. So I said, “you look nice and different with your sunglasses.” She disclosed some of the domestic problems she had been experiencing. She was beaten that night, and when she took off the glasses I could see the bloodshot swollen black and blue left eye. She said, “but I neveah lef mi self, I fight ahn.”

When I returned to Belize during the Christmas season of 2001, I met Maeti. We talked casually about not seeing each other for a while. I mentioned where I was in life and collecting data for my research on domestic violence. She said, “gial, well you could interview me.” When I realized I that she was serious, I took her up on the offer and we set a meeting date.
On the day of the first visit, Maeti was sitting at her dinner table with many printed materials around. She greeted me and told me to sit down on one of the dining chairs opposite her.

“Gial, ah deh right yah di look pan deh postcards weh I collect. Yes, I into postcard collection now and I mek all kind a lee thing out ah dehn.”

She handed me some of the collection and there were a variety. “I also do stamp collecting,” she continued.

I also shared my interest in postcards, coin and stamp collection long ago, especially when I worked with the Brownies from the Girl Guides Association. Then I said, “ but the house silent, man.” Those words immediately triggered something that made Maeti start to talk about her children. Throughout the entire interview process, Maeti did not focus on her abusive relationship. Her focus was on her children. Let us hear the part of Maeti’s life that she wished to share. I titled it *sword and shield*. First, because of the abusive side of her life that she alluded to long ago. Her partner was like a *sword* - a sharp, thrusting implement that hit on her so often, a sign of power and authority, and even a sign of destruction because of the number of years they spent together and the condition in which he left her.

The choice of the word *shield* represented Maeti’s attempt to ward off any discussion or revelation of domestic abuse at this time. She covered her abusive years with memories and achievements of her children.
Maeti’s story—Sword and shield: “ah gi him lat ah chance but he nevah change.”

[An abridged English translation can be found in the Appendix D].

Yes, gial. Dehn pickney big now. Only two di yah wid mi. The second youngest wan just done put up this extension fi mi. Dah hihn lay the blocks and put down the flooring to.

Well dehn zinc dah old zinc but as soon as ah get money ah wahn buy some new one.

Yes, gial, hihn tek di trade affa eh pah. Dis wahn be mi living room now. Dis gi me so much mooch space eena di house.

Yes, gial. Well dis dah di pictah ah mi oldest daughtah. Yu membah she, right? Well membah ih mi gah wan baby. I mine dah baby fi she until last year when she sen fur ahn.

Dat dah mi first trip dah states. Gial, she maried to wan man whey luv she. She gah everyting whey ih need and now she gah wah next baby whey dah fi ih husband. So she gah 2 kids. I mi gawn fi di wedding. Dat dah mi nice wedding. Gial, she no wan fi noting.

Den yu membah Ralph. Well, hihn geh married to. Hihn married to wan church gial.


Yu know me and deh pa bruk up lang time, right? Gial, mi couldn’t tek it no more, gial. I grin and bear sake ah mi pickney. Gial, we coulddah di live eena wan betta condishun
dan dis. I could a mi gah wan nice big house lang time. Gial but ih noh work wid me. Yu membah true, yu membah.

Dah seven years now since we bruk up. Dehn pickney wouldah wan me tek ahn back but gial mi noh di do dat. I put up to lang wid fi hihn foolishness an ih no wan change. I gawn thru to much wid hihn. Ah gi hihn lat ah chance but ih nevah wan change.

Mi second dattah, well she finish high school and mi fi go dah sixth form but ah couldn’t mek it gial. Money no deh and ah couldn’t get nobady fi sponsah ahn so ah tell ahn go work and we wahn si if she culd get in dis January. Gial, she no gi mi no trouble. Yu know dah only two gial ah mi gat, right?

Well, di wan weh di home yah now, fail first form and ah neveah gat di money fi sen him back neither. But ah wan try fi Septembah. Yu know how I go, gial. I no give up easily. I dah wahn survivah [survivor].

Ah still cook mi li dinah pan Sunday and go sell dah game. Dah no much but dah wahn big help.

Well dah wahn whey mi gawn dah college wen your son mi di go, hihn finish six form and dah wan accountant dah bank. Dah, lee boy smart, gial. Right now he noh even dey yah. He get fi gawn dah states. But gial, hihn noh like it. So wen ih cum back hihn gwen
back go work dah bank. Gial, hihn mek good pay and hihn help me wan lat. I only proud a mi children, gial.

Yu know he had to work aftah school fi pay he school fees. Gial and still ih do good enah school. Wen ih reach fourth form and do CXC, gial di bway pass wan lat wid lat ah wan. Dah lee bway smart, gial.

Well, gial, dis piece ah lan whey we deh pahn, the compny sey dehn want it. But dehn noh wahn get it. I noh di gi dis up so easy aftah me and mi pickney dehn done work haad an put up dis house. Well, me get pan TV and mek everybady know whey deh wahn do wid me. Me dah wahn single maddah. Mi haffu work haad fi help mi pickney and I noh gah no straight jab. So dehn have to pay mi fi mi house and fine some way else fi put mi. I noh di mek dat go so.

We closed off because it was time for the Belize evening news. During our conversation the TV was on, and she divided her attention between the television and me as she spoke. The soap opera, Another World, was showing.

Then she said, “well, gial I noh watch it all the time but I like watch Another World. Yu wahn we watch the news togedah?”

I agreed and she motioned for me to sit in her living room. We talked casually about the state of affairs of our country. The news ended and I left. She agreed
to call me when she had time to talk to me again.

Time elapsed and I was unable to set up another appointment with Maeti. I was getting worried but the day I managed to contact her she explained:

Gial, ah mi deh up and down bout dis land. Ah gawn si wahn lawyer. Gial, mi noh di give up because di govhament wan chance poh people. Deh business fi mek sure me and mi pickney gah somway fi live. After all ah done staat help miself. Ah noh di give up. You know me. I talk to lat a people aready and deh sey if I wan demonstrate deh wahn back mi up. Di lawyer say dehn no gah no right fi put mi affah dis land because ah don di yah ovah ten years. Ah gah dis place build up. You see it when yu mi cum. If di govhament mi gi pipple lan wen dehn apply farr it den dis wouldn nah happen.

Gial, well ah noh put up new curtain yet. Ah wahn do dat fi new years. Ah sew dehn myself. Chrismus dah jus wan day. Mi son whey mi deh dah states cum back and gial, ih done geh back ih jab. Gial, dat dah me lee help but ah kian mek ih mine di house cause ih young and need wan life to. But ih help mi gial.

Mi dattah fram states sen wan lee money fi mi to. Well, dahn wan whey married to the church gial ih no sen me noting. Gial, dah gial dah someting else. She noh wahn hihn gi mi noting. Ah mek she know plain dat I dah fi hihn ma and ah mek hihn know whey di bible sey fi hanah yu parents. I write hihn wan lang note and mek ih know whey ah di tink.
Well, mi husban hihn mi call and wish dehn pickney merry christmas. Gial, hihn noh gi we wan shit. Dehn ih tell dehn pickney ih wan talk to me. Yeer whey hihn wahn tell me, hihn yeer sey me gah wan man and hihn no build no house fi no man live eenah. I mek hihn noh plain dat we culd dah mi deh togedah if hihn mi work wid me. We don separate and life goes on. Well, gial, ih sey ih wahn kill me and hihn.

Gial, me gah dis boyfriend bout two years now. Yu see how long ah stay widout man aftah a lef hihn. Well di pickney dehn noh so kay fir ahn. Ih work an help me. Gial, ih treat me good. Ih ker me dah dance and ker me out dah night. My husband nevah ker me noh way. Gial, I noh ole yet and I still look good.

Gial mi noh wahn talk bout abuse and mi life wid dah man. Life goes on and I have to move on. Ah know ah nevah always win wen we fight but ah nevah lef mi self eiddah. Yuh know mi ma dead fram ah young and lef we. Yes, mi breddah and sistah dehn gah good job but me tek man soon. Gial, ah gah talent but nevah get the opportunity fi gawn furdah dah school dat’s why I haffu look out fi mi pickney dehn.

Well, gial I glad fi yeer whey you do wid youself. I proud ah yu, gial and wish you all di best. Wen yu see mi again ah might deh eena mi house pan mi own piece ah lan.

***************
As I continued to do my member checks, I wrote to Maeti. Here is one of the correspondence from me to her.

FEB. 2002

Hello Maeti,

I am in the process of typing the stories from the women in Belize. Yours was very powerful too because it gives a different focus. You seem not to want to dwell too much on the past, just move on. That is impressive! I am sending you a copy of what I have put together so that you can read. I need to know if this represents what you said to me. Let me know if I need to make any changes. You can do so in writing.

Thanks ever so much. Prayers and thoughts as you continue to fight the battle with your land. Any progress? Let me know too.

You have so much inner strength. You are a model for women.

Your friend,

Joan

Here is a response from Maeti.

28th March 2002

Dear Joan,

It was so nice to receive this beautiful letter from you. I do enjoy reading this letter. I like the way you put it together.
Girl my case is still going on with this land….It was adjourned until further date as to be announced….

I really believe schools need to work closer with families and their children, especially poor families and children affected by domestic violence. Working closer with family would give either partners to share what’s going wrong, it would be able to mold children parents teachers closer in a better relationship., and parents would have more freedom to speak, even the children would have more privilege. This openness will not happen immediately, but along the way it will come.

Working along with poor families is a tickling topic so anyone working with these kinds of families would have to be very careful, showing a lot of love and caring would be so nice. Keeping whatever you know close up and not spreading too much would be appreciated too.

Families and children affected by domestic violence is a touchy topic too. Parents being the role model is very good. Why I say this because I look at my children. They have seen violence and abuse on me and they seem to be so different. I believe if you open up to them having them in a more sophisticated school and having a friendly relationship with children of different background can really help…. I am not saying rich kids or kids that have what they want don’t suffer abuse. They sometimes do, but they keep it under cover just like the poor, until the correct time comes where you cannot bear no more. Then you speak to a special friend.

I am so glad for my family the abuse me and them went through. I am also proud of them I can say to anyone what I produce today, telling someone what you went through and not hearing it around is good for me.
I believe that only schools but the government also, they would surely make a big
difference on poor families….My dear Joan I wish you all the best until I hear from you.

Love and prayers in Jesus name.

Love Always
Maeti

♥♥♥♥♥

Third participant

The interview took place at the shelter for battered women during the
Christmas season. There were two women at the shelter, and each of them
had four children. The director introduced me to them, and then Donay
volunteered to talk to me. She did not cry as she told me her story. She
smiled now and again, was quite composed, and looked me in the eyes
frequently.

The title regret and reform: get outtah wan bad relationship bifoie ih geh
worse reflects my interpretation of Donay’s story. She deeply regretted her
recent abusive situation, and also leaving her first relationship. She is badly
in need of an education which she hopes that she will be able to acquire in
the near future. These words “get outtah wan bad relationship bifoie ih geh
worse’ are hers. She warns women to put on the brakes before it is too late.

Here is Donay’s story.
Donay’s story — Regret and reform: “get outtah wan bad relationship bifoe ih geh worse.”

[An abridged English translation can be found in the Appendix E].

I twenty four years an I gah four children. Three gial and one bway. Di first gial dah fi my first bwayfren. I mi live wid him fi two years. I really regret dat I lef ahn. Ih nevah abuse mi but we part because ah fi hihn uncle. Ih uncle mi mentally ill an tell mi tings. Den wen I complain to hihn, ih side wid fi hihn people and ih uncle. I culdn’t tek dat so I lef ahn.

No lang aftah, I get wid dis nex person and the nex tree pickney dah fi hihn. Di first couple ah years we live peaceful but den ih gawn to drugs. Dah deh di misery begin. Ih sell everyting weh ih culd put ih han pan. Mi plate, spoon, mattress, mi clothes, and even fi hihn family dehn tings.

Ih noh work yuh see ahn ih need fi buy drugs so ih tief ahn sell di tings. Lat a time we no gah noting fi eat so I wouldah ask fi hihn family fi help me but dehn tell me sey dat dehn need help dehnself. Yuh see we mi live pan fi hihn family prapatty.

Den I staat to work dah people house ahn do security work. Yuh see my stepfaddah da di bass ah wan ah di security place so ih nevah haad fi mek ah geh dah jab. But wen ah get pregnant wid dis laas baby, ah stap work. Ah culdn’t fine no babysittah ahn ah nevah gah money fi pay. Den my mah she so sick, she culdn’t help mi. Den my secand sistah she no talk to me. Yuh see she vex wid me because she sey I talerate di man fi do wey hihn wan
wid me. But she noh undshstan. She gah wan good jab an everyting so she no have fuh worry.

Well, I stay wid hihn because I see my mah stan up and tek it like wahn woman. My mah pass thru lat ah abuse to but she nevah lef di man. Enah di beginning she nevah gah much luck wid man needah. Like me, she geh pregnant wid me and dat was it. My pah gawn out a fi she life. My mah bear dah life fi we soh I mi wahn di same fi mi pickney deh.

I gah wan breddah but hihn deh someway dah states. Ah yeer hihn eena jail. But I nevah stay home. Yuh see my stepfaddah mi di try fi molest me ahn my ma no believe wen ah tell she. Ih use to show me ih private. Den wahn day ah tell mi sistah fi no go noway wen she yeer wi stepfaddah call mi. Because ah mi wan mek she yeer wey hihn mi wan sey. Dah aftah dat mi ma believe but she still nevah lef mi stepfaddah. Dah hihn fine wan youngah gial and lef my ma.

Well, my bway abuse my first daughtah wey dah noh fi hihn to. Yu see my oldess daughtah stare pan ahn because wey ih tek di drugs ih look wild and ih eye dehn red ahn ih look different. Hihn noh like dat and soh hihn beat she up. Den she look like she always nervous and soh she pee di bed like wen she stress out because ah fi we problem. Den enah nite hihn get up ahn beat she. Dis dah my daughtah wey seven. Den like dat ih jus haard fi mek I gah sex wid hihn. I fine it haard fi kiss fi hihn mout because ah wey hihn smoke up di drugs. Den ih beat me but ah no lef miself. Ah fight back even if ah noh win.
Di first time ih fight wid me ah talk to ahn and sey to miself, we wan get ovah dis. Hihn wan realize dat ih wrang and den stap. I staat to tink dah something wey I do ahn. I mus mi wrang so ahn blame myself. Until wan time wen she pee di bed and hihn beat ahn we fight again.


Wen we mi di live togedah sometimes ah only gah bread ahn sugar ahn watah fi gi mi pickney. Latah time ah gi di pickney ahn lef miself widout. Wen ah ask mi in-laws dehn fi help, deh sey dehn no gat. Ah no gah no lan, no house. Ah no gah noting. Ah gawn dah di minstah ena mi divishan. Ah ker mi pickney deh wid mi mek ih see we situashan. I explain mi situashan to ah ahn. Ah ask ah fi please gi mi wan piece a lan. Ah wan buil mi house, ahn geh wan jab as wan school warden. Enah dis way ah culd work dah day and noh have to lef mi pickney dehn dah nite. Yuh see if ah work security again, dat ah nite jab and den dehn pickney wahn stay by denself. Mi in-laws dehn drive mi aff ah dehn lan. But di ministah no help mi. Ah feel depress. Ah wahn give up. Ah cry an pray to the
good Lord. Now mi oldest daughtah wan know wey we gwen fram yah because yu know we only gah three weeks yah. Sometimes wen ah geh so frustrated, ah feel like kill ahn. Ah nevah move out fram hihn. First time ahn move out. Ah wahn wan educashan. Yu see we mi move dah different school aahn I no tink any teachah mi tek time fi mi. Now ah wahn go back dah school addahwise, ah nevah wan have wan good life. Ah no have nobady fi depend pan ahn ah no gah no way fi stay.

Yu see dehnyah mark. Ih stab mi enah mi han ahn cut mi shoulder. Ih mi wan catch mi face so ih culd mark it soh no addah man wuldah want mi. Dat done happen two years ago and ah still stay but ah fight back. The knife gawn right thru mi right han. Yuh culd see dat mi small fingah still cripple.

Lattah ah time ah no sen my oldest gial dah school. Sometime we no gah no food an ah noh wan sen dehn hungry dah school. Sometime wen we get something fi eat ih done late and soh ah noh sen ah dah school.

Well, ah noh tell the teachah because ah feel shame. Yu see di school gah wan feeding programme but she shame fi mek ih frends dehn tease ahn. Right now ah no even gawn fi report card an ah noh even know how much school fees ah owe.

Advice from Donay

Young women mus tek time.

Noh rush.
Enji yuself first.

Know what yu want enah life.

Get outtah wan bad relationship bifo ih geh worse.

Remembah we are women and we are worth happiness.

♥♥♥♥♥

Fourth participant

I conducted the interview at Eida’s home. We talked by telephone after the director of the shelter gave her name to me for battered women. She did not hesitate to share stories from her marriage with me. On one occasion her common-law-husband walked into the house, and I was a bit nervous. He did not look our way and went about his business. Eida told me that she had informed him that I was coming to interview her about her previous abusive situation.

Eida had sought refuge at the shelter and she had volunteered to share her story. I chose the words mistrust and mask because from Eida’s story, she was unsure that her husband was the choice for her. Throughout their marriage he had extra marital affairs, and he did not trust (mistrusted) her either. Their life was a disguise of the reality they lived. He wanted to have
the image of a loving, caring husband and father in the public, and at home he was the opposite. Eida also assisted in *masking* their abusive relationship, as you will see when you read her story below. “I had to be who he wanted me to be” are Eida’s words. Here is Eida’s story as she wishes it to be told.

**Eida’s story— mistrust and mask: “I had to be who he wanted me to be.”**

This is a long story and I do not know where to start. I was married for nine years and separated from my husband about two and a half years ago. I had one daughter from that marriage.

He had several sweethearts during our marriage. He had this woman and took her every weekend to the north. I was not in agreement with this. Then the woman started to phone at my work. He wouldn’t listen when I speak to him. We would get into a big argument. I tried to ignore what was happening. It was so hard on me. I had this job and did not want anyone to know that something was affecting me. I was very stressed and had so many sleepless nights. He did not give me any money. I had to pay the bills from my money. Then he demanded that I give him money and he would squander it. At one time he even wanted me to get a loan for him and because I did not get the loan he hit me.
He threatened to kill me several times. One time he held a gun to my head. It was a 9-millimeter pump action.

Sometimes I went to school and I felt like I was just floating. But I think the job helped me keep my sanity. He wanted to look a certain way in the public. He was very possessive and jealous. He even came by my work to see if there was any man around.

I tried to discuss issues with him many times but he did not want to. What he says goes and his word is the truth. He wanted to have me like I was a puppet.

I could see this before we got married. First of all, he didn’t want me to have any friends. He was possessive of me even before we were married, because he didn't want me to have friends. He felt jealous towards anyone I came in contact with, even if I didn't know the person previously. He talked about going everywhere I went. At first I thought it was cool, but after a while you realize that you need your space and feel like you're in prison. He would show up at places that I went and always wanted to know where I was going.

We talked about growing up and he lamented a lot on being physically abused when he was growing up. We wanted to have three kids. He said he would never hit me. If we had a conflict, we should discuss it and try to resolve it before we went to sleep. However, it wasn't that way. He made all the decisions when it came to that and did all the talking. I was to remain quiet and humbly accept what he proposed in other words. I was not to have any opinions, or oppose his decisions.
He had to be there for any function that the school had. He would accuse me of other men. If I went shopping, he went too. One night I went to the women’s group meeting. He was very annoyed because he wanted to be there too but it was for women. He locked me out of the house.

I did not speak to anybody. I was so embarrassed. I put on a big act. I knew that if I told anyone something different they would not believe me. Like I said, he wanted to look a certain way in the public. He would hit me where it wouldn’t show because he wants people to believe that he is the perfect man.

People told me he was having an affair. When I confronted him he said that I could go and have an affair too. And then I was getting calls at my work and late at night at my home. If the woman called and I would say anything, he threatened to kick me down and punch me down.

One day I found a receipt showing that he had paid for items for her. He asked me if I had the receipt. I said that I did not have it. He started to choke me. He punched me in my back. He put a gun to my head and said he would kill me. I said, if you want to do that go ahead. I was tired of mistreatment everyday. I was treated like thrash. I could not even go to church because he thought I was going to see somebody else. Even at school, he wanted to dictate to me. He would come during break and demanded that I leave and come and sit down with him.
My mom noticed that I looked distressed but I told her that my job was stressful. I did not tell them anything until after I left him. And I did not tell them everything.

Then I heard on the radio that there were counsellors at the women’s development department. I decided to go to a counsellor but I pretended that someone else was experiencing these problems. The counsellor advised me to secure all very important documents. She said that I needed to get away for a while until I could make a decision. This was hard because I had to work and because he followed me so closely. She gave me a number for the shelter.

He wanted us to make a barbecue. He told me to clean the meat. I said that I will not. He held the knife to my throat. He hit me in my back. He cursed me all night. I could not sleep. I had little sleep for three days. I felt like I was nothing. I felt disoriented. Then I asked myself why am I going through this. I do not need to go through this. Then I went to shelter. Well that is a whole nother story by itself.

He knew I took classes in the night. I thought he did not know where I was and would leave me alone. I was escorted to class. Shortly after I entered the class, he turned up at the door. He made gesture for me to come out. I pretended not to see. Then he entered the classroom and just kidnapped me. He took me outside the city and he cursed and threatened to kill me if I did not come home. Then he took me back to our home.
Anyway, eventually, those from the shelter got to find out where I was and so came and got me and my daughter.

I grew up in a Christian home. My father was the minister of a small church. I never saw my parents quarrel and they did not encourage fussing among the children. They taught the boys to respect and not to raise their hands to girls. The males were to take care of the females. There were nine children and I was the seventh one. In our family girls and boys shared the chores. My dad was very traditional and would not do jobs that women would do. But my mom told the boys they needed to learn in case they get a wife who can’t.

When I was dating this guy, my mom warned me that a boy should not take advantage. She explained to him that she gave me education so that they don’t take advantage of me.

For too long different boys and girls behaviour has been accepted. Society needs to change. Raise up the children so they can learn to contribute 50/50. Women take the bulk of raising the children but men need to take up responsibilities. A woman working outside the home, come home, take care of children and train them the best they can. Women are not appreciated for what they do. Everything should be ready when the man comes.

I resisted my circumstances. I tried to block out his threats and curses. I was unable to quarrel because that is not how we were raised. One day he whipped our daughter and I
said that I would call NOPCA. He did not do anything because he wants a perfect image. So he kept her at home for two days and I made her wear long pants to hide the marks.

Schools still have boys and girls doing different things in sports and art and craft. Like the boys can play football and basketball but the girls should skip. Boys do craft and girls do sewing. As for me I encourage boys to do sewing. When I read stories about the family and female chore, I point it out. In my classroom both boys and girls sweep and wash the cups. The boys say they should only lift the benches or bring water.

Teaching entails a lot. We should help children interact socially and they may be going through problems too. It is critical that teachers be aware of the signs and symptoms of abuse and how to cope. Sometimes we blame it on rudeness. Teachers need to be trained in counselling because as soon as we get into the classroom it is filled with problems. Teachers should be concerned when the children’s are not doing well in school and when there are changing patterns in the children’s behaviour. There needs to be counselling for teachers because they have problems too. We need a teachers and parents support group.

I have turned over a new leaf in my life but thoughts of abuse continue to haunt me from time to time. I talk to my partner about my feelings. I have stomach problems and suffer from depression. At times I feel distanced and indifferent to my partner. In the first relationship, it wasn’t me. I had to be who he wanted me to be. We have a baby boy as an addition to our life now.
A Message from Eida

Look at the person’s personality
and whether or not he wants to be possessive.
If he does not want you to have friends
that is a definite warning sign.
Know if he has a steady job.
Learn about his family background.
If he comes from an abusive home,
most likely he will end up abusing you.
Spend a lot of time praying and find someone to confide.
If you are stressed out, find a quiet place by a creek,
and sit there. It has a calming effect.

***************

I sent this e-mail message asking Eida to have a final read on her story before I included it in my study.

Eida,

… Well, below you can find your story. Kindly read it once again to see if I represented your voice correctly. Let me know if there needs to be additions or deletes. Remember we talked about "couching" it so that the narrator is not that easy to identify. Thanks very much.

ejc
An e-mail response from Eida
Date: Sat, 02 Feb 2002 14:53:38 -0500

It was my pleasure to share with you. I hope my story will be beneficial to others.

p.s. reading the story brought tears to my eyes, however, they were tears of joy, knowing I am no longer in that situation.

Eida sent me this e-mail a few months later.

On Friday we were divorced. I don't feel exactly happy about it, but it does bring some closure to that episode of my life that I would like to forget about as it still affects me greatly, especially in this relationship. It’s very hard for me to discuss my feelings with my partner. I don't know how to start, if he goes out too long, I feel insecure a lot.

Sometimes I feel that this will not work out. I feel like letting go of it because I don't want to get hurt and I don't want to let my frustrations create too much friction that will eventually lead to a miserable situation.

♥♥♥♥♥

Back and Forth

In this chapter, I narrated the “soul” from the interviews of four women. All of them are young, and unfortunately, one of them was unable to bear the habitual abuses and she murdered her husband. The three other women managed to let loose of the abusive partner. Their abuses were physical, verbal, and economic and the women were injured in many ways. Children also felt the brunt of living with parents who were abusive to each other. In the next chapter, I prolong the domestic abuse storytelling by drawing on the unpleasant relational experiences of three women who I know personally.
Chapter Six

Reliving Their Trauma: Reconstructed Women’s Stories

It can be liberating to reflect on our experiences and memories critically. We can gain an understanding of how we make meaning of our lives, and also how we can create new meanings in our lives. This understanding can come in the form of how we resisted oppression, challenged inequities, or lobbied for change. Likewise (from a feminist perspective) narratives, reconstructed stories (which can manifest themselves in various forms like music, poetry and images) are useful to construct a collective history (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Brookfield, 1995; hooks, 1981; Profitt, 2000; Richardson, 1997).

In this chapter the focus will be the lives of three women, Lisa, Marina, and Tomasa, with whom I was closely associated. They were victims of domestic abuse too. At the time when I interacted with them, investigating battering was the farthest thing from my mind. I wish I knew twenty-five years ago, what I know now. If I did, my friend, Lisa, would not have had to bear the burden of being a victim of domestic violence for over twenty years. My experience with researching the phenomenon of domestic violence has been agonizing in many ways, and in the process of my research as I switched my mental memory channel to retrieve the abusive experiences of my friends, intensified the pain. According to Profitt (2000) introspection is not as easy as it sounds because “reflecting upon the past and recounting it through different lens involves a process of critical remembering….Critical remembering carries conflict and pain but also a possibility of freedom, hope, and resistance” (pp. 11 & 12).
I can still hear Lisa’s wailing. A sound and condition that I was convinced I could do nothing about. Or could I? In retrospect I could have. Our neighbours could have too, if we were socialized differently. I, and other Belizeans in general, have been enculturated to believe that incidents that occur in the home are private and as such we should not intervene. That’s their business. “Noh be intahfaring.” I am no longer convinced that domestic violence is a private affair. Yes, this private affair is everybody’s business.

As I write there is a mixture of pain, tears, gloominess and regret, but I write with the possibility that I too can contribute to the social justice, equity and freedom for women that feminists and activists are struggling towards. My prior understandings of domestic violence before 1997 were very limited but very practical. I say practical because of the numerous occasions when I personally witnessed the abuses of men against women. On some occasions it was a one-time experience to see the woman abused, and on other occasions the woman was battered for many years.

While I was growing up, I never witnessed domestic violence. I can recall my adopted mother talking about her grandmother and the abusive life she lived. My mother did not use the term abusive, of course. She talked about how her grandfather would take the cooking pot and hit her grandmother in the head. She recalled one instance when blood oozed from her grandmother’s head after she was hit. Then she would add "but God says till death do us part.” That’s how the
story ended for her grandparents. They never separated until death!

As I reflect while I am writing this information, I ask where did all the men in my neighbourhood go? In the neighbourhood where I grew up, I saw women and children but no father except for one family who seemed to be of Arab descent. In my own family, there were two females, my adopted grandmother and my mother. My mother had a visiting relationship but I rarely saw the male she was seeing. Saying that I did not witness domestic violence is not to say that I was not physically abused as a child. However, my understanding of domestic violence up until 1996 resulted mainly from the interactions with family members and friends. From my observations there were various complexions of domestic violence. I will share anecdotes that have been recreated from memory to show what I mean.

Lisa’s Experiences

Lisa had moved from her grandmother’s home after she got married to Pat. They rented a house with a fence, and the landlord and his wife lived upstairs. One of the main reasons for this choice was that Pat was very jealous. Lisa’s husband had a good time each weekend and came home drunk. She was left at home to cook and wash and watch the “four corners of the wall.” I can vividly recall some of her words because of the extended time I’ve known her, heard this story, and watched the abuses in silence.
After they got married, she had to discontinue her job at a small restaurant in her hometown. He kept her isolated from her friends too. Soon after they were married, he came home drunk early one morning. He kicked the door. Lisa jumped up in fright from her deep sleep and listened. He was kicking the door and shouting to her to open the f---- door or he would kill her now (I got to know Pat personally, and his use of profanity is profuse).

He had his set of house keys but Lisa had to get up and open the door. On entering the house, he kicked her, slammed her on the bed and squeezed her throat. His major concern was for her to confess which man left the house as he entered the gate. If she did not confess, he would kill her. He said, “now, m----- f----- tell me which man just come out a di house. Tell me cause I wahn kill you r---. I see a shadow run across wen I came in dis yaad. Tell me maddah f------,” he said as he continued squeezing her throat. Eventually, he let go of her. She confessed that no one had left the yard. He swore she was lying and got very angry and shouted, “ well I wan teach yu fi lie yu f----- Cum sid down on dis chair.”

Lisa said that he grabbed her by her nightgown and pushed her on a chair around the dining table. He took out a knife and said to her, “ yu wan tell me di truth or yu wan cut off one ah yuh toe. He got an electric cord and commanded her to bend over, and to cut her own toe.

Lisa said, “I was crying. I could not cut my own toe. He wap mi crass mi back wid di electric card because I nevah wan cut mi toe. Cut yu toe maddah f----- ah, cut yu toe
. Whap! Whap! Whap! He start to beat me. I culd not cut my toe so ih beat me til I culdn’t move. I mi well wail up.”

Lisa did not know how much time had passed but when she opened her eyes, her mother was standing at her beside in the hospital. Lisa was hospitalized for one week. Pat had gone to call her mother to take care of her because “yuh f—ing daughtah mi di dirt mi.” Lisa said, “I culdn’t move fi one week, and after I heal and come out ah di hospital I mi wahn go da mi ma. But Pat said, “no f----- tall. Yu da my f---- wife and yu gwen back home wid me an behave yu f------ self or yu wan get another dose. Ever since den, dat dah di life I live. Yu wan see fi yuself.”

Well, sure enough, I saw and heard for myself, and like I said earlier I witnessed Lisa’s abuse silently. I can vividly recall hanging out the laundry early morning when I heard some commotion and screaming. It was Lisa’s husband dragging her to the outhouse, and she was struggling to get away from him. I heard sobbing and Lisa saying, “stap, Pat bway. Stap. Yu wan mek ah get sick.”

When Lisa and I were talking secretly over the weekend she revealed that Pat had slept out all night. When he came home he entered the bedroom, showed her a woman’s bikini, and one of the woman’s shoes. He told her he was having a “fine time” with a woman last night and now he wants to have sex with her. She was barely awakened when he dragged her out of bed, took her downstairs, forced her to shower, had sexual intercourse standing against the wall, and forced her to shower
Pat was engaged in frequent recreational activities with his friends. They either went to the bars, brothel, or they would come over to his house for social gatherings. Whenever there were visitors and friends over, Pat would order Lisa in the most demeaning way. He cursed her, and she had to keep moving. She could not socialize with any one who was present. Pat could jump up and grab any woman he wanted to dance with or tease any woman, and all was well. On the other hand, if any male tried to do the same to Lisa, that was it. He would be driven off the compound. A fight might even ensue. There was no time for Lisa to sit and take a break during the day when Pat was around. The children were treated in a similar way. They were disrespected, and beaten with any object that Pat could get his hand on.

The children are grown now and have started their life and the ordeal continues for the sons’ common-law wives. One day I saw a bruise over Macy’s right eye and when I asked her what was the matter, she told me that Keith (one of Pat and Lisa’s son) and her had one of their usual fights. He had thrown a bottle at her. Over time, the common-law-wives of the other three sons shared several similar abusive experiences with me.

Lisa decided to run away after twenty-three years of abuse. She left her two youngest children behind. Her husband still visits occasionally and persuades her to return because life will be different, but Lisa is very skeptical. She believes “he no gat no
change fi change.”

The story about Lisa makes me literally bleed internally each time I mentally replay the fifteen years of her domestic violence that I observed in silence. Too scared to report it to any one, I watched as my friend and neighbour suffered at the hands of her husband. I want to point out that from Lisa’s story we can see the cycle of violence unfurling and repeating itself. The three sons are modelling what their home experiences were. Violence was the mode of interaction between their parents, and unfortunately, this is their intimate interactive pattern as well.

♥♥♥♥♥

**Marina’s Experiences**

This second anecdote is not as graphic as Lisa’s story but does have elements of abuse in it. Marina was a thirteen-year-old East Indian when Adolfus became her lover. When the love affair deepened, she continued to stay with her parents and he came to visit regularly. Adolfus was much older than Marina. He had several relationships with other women before her. As a matter of fact, he claimed ten children with other women. Eventually, Marina and Adolfus entered a consensual relationship. They lived on their own. He was always out drinking and womanizing, while she stayed at home. She could not visit her parents and neither could they visit her. She had no friends and no source of income.
Each morning Adolfus would give Marina the exact amount of money to buy food to prepare the day’s meals. He had already calculated what the cost would be. She had no say in what meals would be prepared. She was just expected to prepare what was laid out for her.

Marina also had to ask for money to buy personal accessories she needed, from feminine napkins to shampoo. She also had to do everything for him, from setting his water to bathe to mixing his morning beverage. He never hit her but was verbally abusive when other people were around. Like Pat, he would order her to do things, and occasionally even coloured the commands with some curse words. This consensual relationship also lasted for more than twenty years, and yielded one child.

♥♥♥♥♥
I lived among the Maya people in southern Belize for two years because my husband was employed as a police officer. His legal authority encompassed all the villages, and so I was afforded the opportunity to travel with him on many occasions. I interacted with many of the villagers, and specifically the women. Tomasa was one of the many women friends I had while I lived in one of the Maya villages. She was older than I was, and had six children while I had only one. She did the domestic chores at home, and at times accompanied her husband to the farm. Sometimes I got to go to the farm with them too.

Many times I would see bruises on her body and ask her what happened. She would tell me something about the farm and cutting bush or carrying wood. One evening she came running to the Police Station, and said to the constable on duty that he needed to arrest her husband now. Her husband had beaten her with a machete, and he had threatened to chop off her neck. There were red marks of the lashes over her body. The police made her sit in his office, and went out to arrest the husband. They found him drunk, and sprawling on the floor in his house. All the children had run off to their grandmother’s house. The police locked him down, and went over discuss court proceedings with the alcalde of the village.

The next day Tomasa’s husband was to go to court, but Tomasa came early in
the morning to ask for her husband’s release, and for the officer to drop the case. The police and alcalde complied. In the two years that I lived in the village, Tomasa was beaten several other times and came to report the physical abuse. One day she was bleeding from her foot where she received a small chop wound. But she usually came to repeal charges made against her husband. He was always released, and so he never had any penalties. Eventually the police officers were discouraged, and when she came to report the violence they ignored it.

♥♥♥♥♥

Back and Forth

The anecdotes in this chapter extended the experiences of women who lived with domestic violence. Whether the abuses are physical, economical, emotional, psychological, isolational or a combination, they impact women’s psyche and emotional well being. Lisa eventually decided to let go, but Marina and Tomasa stayed until death separated them from their partners. Marina’s husband expired five years ago, and she has since lived alone. Tomasa’s husband passed away six years ago, and she migrated to another country with one of her daughters. In the chapter which follows, I will revisit the incidents leading up to the murder of a common-law-husband by his female intimate partner, and how the legal system responded to the crime committed by her.
I was too young to remember the details but I recall the evening when I heard my mom say to a friend that Nora Parham would be hung. I was not allowed to question “big people’s talk,” and so I never learned of the details of this historical incident. After hearing Fina’s story about how she came to murder her husband, I became curious about the story of Nora, and I asked one of her sons to relate the incident to me. This is what he could recall.

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A Child’s Perspective

“She was allowed to see the eight of us the day before the execution was to take place. I can still remember she was wearing a flour bag dress. With tears rolling down her cheeks she kissed each of us. The last words she said to us was no matter what may happen, do not take drugs. They say she was pregnant too. The next day, my mom was laid to rest. She was thirty-six-years-old.

I can still remember that day when he came home drunk. He lashed my mom with a machete. Sometimes when they fight, he kicked her down the steps. My mom left him on several occasions but he did not leave her alone. She left me with him. In between the separations and back and forth make up, my mom had kids for other men. She let them live with relatives. The youngest was given
to someone who was not a member of the family. She worked outside the home when she left him. As a matter of fact, she was working at a restaurant when my father met her. He had sweethearts outside too and was mad when my mom told him about it. This would start a fight.

Sometimes I would get beatings from my mother even when I didn’t do anything wrong. I guess she was taking her frustration with my father out of me. My father had made a kite for me. I went to school the day. I took my kite to school. My mom was at home. She was ironing some clothes using a gasoline iron. My father went to the outdoor toilet. He always smoked a cigarette when he went to the toilet. My mom came downstairs with some gasoline and threw it around the toilet. She closed the door with a stick from outside. When he lit the match to smoke his cigarette, the toilet caught fire. He could not get out.

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The Belize Billboard’s Perspective

What we heard from Nora’s son was the culmination of an abusive relationship. He was little and does not remember the details. I needed to know more so I decided to check out the popular national newspaper of British Honduras (now Belize), THE BELIZE BILLBOARD, to see what perspectives I would get about this murder. What were some of the circumstances that led Nora to end Trapp's life? Could this tragic ending have been avoided? In the rest of this chapter, for the most part I will summarize the news report, and occasionally use verbatim or quotes from the newspaper article itself.

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Thursday, February 7, 1963: The Belize Billboard reported *Policeman Burnt.* P.C. No. 183, Ketchell Trapp of Orange Walk suffered from severe burns and has been hospitalized in Belize City. The details of the incident have not been revealed.

Friday, February 8, 1963: The newspaper report read *Nora Parham Charged With Murder Of Ketchell Trapp.* Ketchell Raymond Trapp who was 37 years old, died in the Belize City hospital Wednesday morning as a result of severe burns. His 36 year-old common law mate, Nora Parham, formerly Williams, is charged with the crime. Allegedly, Trapp and Nora had a quarrel on Wednesday around midday. He hit her. Then he went to the pit latrine. She threw a quantity of gasoline into the latrine, and set it on fire.

Sunday, February 17, 1963: The heading read *Nora In Belize Jail.* Nora was in the Belize prison awaiting trial at the sitting of the April session of the Supreme Court. At the preliminary hearing, there were twenty-three witnesses.

Wednesday & Thursday, April 24 & 25, 1963: The headline making the news was *Nora Parham On Trial; Charged With Murder Of Cop.* Inside and outside the courtroom was packed with citizens to witness the hearing of this historical event—woman kills common-law husband. Nora was nicely decked in a cream dress, and white hat as she sat erect in the dock. It was not an easy task to empanel a jury. About six of them were excused because they had conscientious
objection to capital punishment. Eventually, twelve men formed the jury: Joseph Dennis Robateau, Norman Richard Kemp, Theodore Fuller, Basil Vernon, Antonio Aguilar, Claude Moody, Keith Wallace, Norman Saldano, Joseph Adolfo Vasquez, Sydney Swift, Kent Badillo and Alfred Haylock. The preamble from the prosecutor included the definition of murder, and how intent may be determined. The prosecutor pointed out that the alleged indictment of Nora was on the day of Trapp's death. For a plea of temporary insanity to have been accepted, Trapp's death had to occur in the 'heat of the moment.' Unfortunately in this case, Trapp did not die immediately as a result of the burns received. He died two days later.

"The facts" were related. Nora and Trapp were living in Orange Walk for at least eight months. Their relationship was an unhappy one. Trapp drank and perhaps assaulted Nora. They were convinced that Nora had built up anger within herself over a period of time because she had expressed threats of wounding Trapp to different persons. Martha Martinez, the wife of a police officer, revealed that Nora was going to burn Trapp with lard because he liked to drink and beat her. Martinez discouraged her from committing such an act because Nora had children. Nora did not seem overly concerned or fearful because she added that she would do the same thing like George Lemonine's wife — throw lye on Trapp. Martinez disclosed that Nora had said that the government would take care of her children if she were to commit a crime.

Allegedly, Nora said something similar to Frances Fuller about burning Trapp when he was asleep. Alonso said Nora threatened to burn everything in the house. Donald Sanchez, a police officer, testified that Nora had made at least
nine different visits while he was on duty to complain of Trapp’s domestic battering, and that she would burn him with hot lard. He warned her not to carry out her plan because she would go to jail. All these witnesses claimed that they discouraged Nora, but her response would be statements like:

- “They are not going to hang me, I am only going to jail for a little time.”
- “I am not worrying; I know a lady who went to prison and when she came out, she was big and fat.”
- “If I throw lard on him and he dies, they ain’t going to hang me.”
- “This time when I finish with him, he won’t be of use to any other woman.”

Frances Fuller, with whom Trapp and Nora boarded for a short time, also revealed that the reason for the constant quarrel between the two was because of the children. Trapp was rather unhappy because both he and Nora were black but two of their children were brown-skin. As a result of the skin colour, Trapp claimed that the children were not his.

Sunday, April 28, 1963: The report was that other witnesses testified. This time Alfonsina Beaton (who claimed to be friends with both Nora and Trapp) testified. According to Alfonsina, one evening in November, about four months before the incident, Nora and she met in Sanchez’s house. When Sanchez interrogated Nora about Trapp’s whereabouts, Nora replied that she had “left him at home with his disgustingness.” Beaton also mentioned the difficult financial situation
that Nora and Trapp were experiencing. For instance, when Trapp received his salary, he would put it in Nora’s right hand, and then he would take it away from her. Trapp was the one who paid the grocery bill. Beaton said that she advised Nora to leave this abusive relationship.

“Nora makes statement from the dock”

On the day the newspaper reported this, Nora got an opportunity to tell her side of the story. Reading and transcribing this was excruciating for me because Fina’s experience was fresh and vivid in my mind. It took me several days to get Nora’s story on paper. I cried, took breaks, sought distractions but my melancholic feeling just lingered on. I do not wish this for any woman. We must SIN—Stop it now.

I am representing Nora’s story in a poetic style for a variation in the representation of my text but also because it lengthens her testimony. I purposefully included the graphics in between her voice giving a symbolic sense of the duration of her abusive experiences. There is a section that is very spaced out, and the reason for that is the chaotic moment of the conflict that had occurred between these two people who said they loved each other. As I come to the culmination of her narration, I make each line one word to symbolically illustrate how the many years of abuse can culminate in the wink of an eye. The result can be tragic!

Nora’s testimony follows, and beside her voice I have included some questions that I wish I could have received more insight into from her.
Nora’s testimony

“I and Ketchell Trapp living ----------for seven years
And sometimes have fuss ----------in the home
And through this fuss----- we have, he would beat me --
-------------------at times
And through these------------ fightings I leave
him ------sometimes.
Then he came back--- to me and make it up.

After he make it up-------------------
He got transfer to Orange Walk.
We were there -------on several occasions
We had quarrels ------and --------fight
And on the sixth day of February
We had a quarrel ----and
He started beating ----me.

After then he was going outside--------
Saying to me he was going to toilet.-------
He used threatening words to me.--------
I then replied to him saying
I will make the sergeant know
About your threatening words.

He then turned back in the bedroom.
While he came in the bedroom
I had the gasoline iron.
My hand with a pan of gasoline.
He came in the bedroom

Elizabeth’s questions

Tell me a little more about the
fuss, fuss about what?
What did those beatings and
fightings look like? How did
you feel during the conflicts?
How did you feel afterwards?
What made you stay in the
abusive relationship for so
long?
What were the quarrels about?
Who started them? When you
separated from him where did
you go? What made you leave
or stay sometimes? Who took
care of the children when you
left?
What were those threatening
words? How were you feeling
at the time he uttered the
threatening words? What made
him utter those threatening
words?
With a stick in his hand.
And he hit me on my head-------
And he was going to hit me another hit.

I threw ---------the gasoline
on him---------- And-----------
he grabbed -----------
away the pan-----------------
From me.

And I went through the back door--------
And he stone me→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→→
with the said pan.

After he stoned I ran
Around ???????????????
>>> the house
And he never see
Where I got to.►►►►►►►►►►►►►►►►

I went in the house○○○○○○○○○○○
Through the front door.
Then I took my gasoline
iron►►►►►►►►►►►►►►
From where I left it
And put it in the box.

While I was inside
I heard a noise★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
And I run to see what►►►►►►►►►►
It was.
When I went
To see Ketchell Trapp
Come out
Of the latrine
Under fire
I then run up
To help him
But I see
I COULD NOT.

Then
I ----
C-o-n-t-i-n-u-e-d
R-U-N-N-I-N-G
Towards the
Hospital ----back street.
Towards
The
Station.”

Was there another place to seek refuge besides your house?
Why didn’t run to a neighbour or friend?
How did you feel when you saw him on fire?
How did you offer assistance to him? Why did you offer assistance to him?
Why did you choose to run to the hospital first? Why did you plan to run to the police station?
Thinking back to that day, what would you have done differently?
What advise would you give women living in a battered relationship/ young women in general?
Death sentence

Wednesday, May 1, 1963: Nora Found Guilty But Jury Recommends “Mercy”
Judge Passes Death Sentence. The verdict is passed. Nora will be hung until she is dead, dead, dead (as we say in Belize). The jury was requesting mercy but that plea had to be sent to His Excellency the Governor. Nora was described as “showing not the slightest sign of emotion... stood erect in the dock” as the death sentence was pronounced. All along and even at this point the newspaper claims that she had four children when in fact she had eight sons.

Sunday, June 2, 1963: It has been a month since Nora is sentenced to be executed. Her relatives and many friends were not giving up on her so they made a petition. The newspaper headline read Save Nora for Her 8 Kids’ Sake, Women To Ask F.M. (for mercy). Nora had four children from her first marriage which also turned sour, and she left without her kids. The oldest son was fifteen at the time she was sentenced to the gallows. The next four children were from the deceased, Trapp. The oldest was six and the youngest was fourteen months. Many people supported the petition. There were signatures of at least 2,461 citizens, many of whom were women. However, the special committee appointed by the governor decided “the law must take its course.” So Nora was to be made an example.

Tuesday, June 4, 1963: The news report cited Govt. Will Decide If Nora Dies Tomorrow. George Cadle Price, the First Minister at the time, was presented
with the petition and a deputation comprising Nora’s eight sons and other relatives. Time was running out. George Price promised to transmit the information to the Governor immediately. After receiving the information, the governor said that any representation was to be made in writing. The children wrote a letter begging for clemency on behalf of their mother and the younger children. This fell on deaf ears. Nora was going to die.

_Plea for Nora_

This anonymous plea was printed in the newspaper. Once again it has a different representation. “A Woman, A Mother’s Plea”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>But since the law provides that</th>
<th>And then deep in your hearts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persons convicted of murder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May be pardoned,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is where</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My argument comes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And where hundreds of people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support me is in the belief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That Mrs. Parham should be pardoned.</td>
<td>Sing this hymn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My faith looks up to Thee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My faith looks up to Thee, Thou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lamb of Calvary, Saviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divine; Take all my guilt away;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O let me from this day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be wholly Thine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I think of <strong>her eight boys</strong></td>
<td>May Thy rich grace impart strength to my fainting heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>My heart goes out to her</em></td>
<td>My zeal inspires! As Thou has died for me;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Because</em></td>
<td>O, may my love to Thee,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>They are the ones</em></td>
<td>Pure, warm and changeless be a living fire!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Who will suffer</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eventually</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If their mother is hanged.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| As a mother, I can say **we**      | While life’s dark maze stretch, and grief’s around me spread, |
| *Women Are weak vessels*          | Be Thou my Guide;                                           |
| *And so very*                     | Bid darkness turn to day, wipe sorrows tears away,         |
| *Often do things which to men*    | Nor let me ever stray from Thy aside.                      |
| *Are irrational.*                 |                                                          |
| *That is why we should all ask*   |                                                          |
| *God to control our stubborn will.*|                                                          |
| *And that is why some sympathy*   |                                                          |
| *Should be given*                 |                                                          |
To Mrs. Parham.

Women of British Honduras

Whether Nora is pardoned or not,

Get up at 5 in the morning

Kneel by your besides

Pray for Nora.

Blest Saviour, then in love, fear
and distrust remove;

Oh, bear me safe above, a
ransomed soul!

A MOTHER

Executed

It is Wednesday, June 5, 1963. This is the tragic moment.

Six Wreaths On A Mound Mark Nora’s Grave
7:34 a.m. The prison chaplain arrived to administer the last rites to Nora.

7:40 The visiting Justice arrived to witness the execution

7:50 The doctor arrived to give the death certificate

No black flag was flown, no bell was rung,

no noise was made when Nora was hung.

Only a mound of freshly turned dirt crowned by six wreaths…

Nora was buried ten minutes after ten on the morning


MAY SHE R.I.P.—REST IN PEACE.

Just before the last shovel of dirt was placed on the grave, Nora’s eight sons left in a car, MOTHERLESS.

Domestic Violence Ripping Families Apart

On Thursday, June 6, 1963, we had all lost her. This loss would tear our family apart. The monstrous predator of domestic violence was responsible for the life of my aunt, and her intimate partner. Because of the patriarchal beast which preyed on women way back then and even now, her neck was broken in that noose. I would never get to know her. Her eight sons were left behind. The four younger ones were orphans, and those boys would never grow to know the love of their mom. All eight of them may never know what abuses she endured, what coping mechanisms she used, what support she never had for she would not be
there to tell her side of the story. These eight boys were separated. Different family members adopted them. My mom had lost her sister. She became faint-hearted and migrated to the United States. She never communicated with anyone back home. She never set foot back home until her body was laid to rest in the small village where she grew up about three decades later. Domestic violence needs SIN—STOP IT NOW.

**Back and Forth**

In this chapter, I recreated the murder of Ketchell Trapp, a police officer by his common-law-wife, Nora Parham. But Nora is not alone as a victim or an agent as we have seen from the narratives that were shared earlier in this section. As recent as this year, 2002, the *Wartimes* newspaper carried this article on page 5 of its October/November issue: *War hits home for United States Women*. In summary, the report alluded to the high rate of domestic abuse in military homes, and holding war and military institutions responsible for laying the foundations for domestic violence against women, and violence generally. According to the writers of the article, shortly after the military officers returned from serving in Afghanistan, four women were killed within weeks of each other in the United States. In the chapter which follows I will return to the narratives of Belizean women who have been victims of abuse, and perform a hermeneutic dissection to see what we can learn about power, representation, identity, resistance and agency, the five themes deduced from the theoretical frameworks.
The perspective of Belenky et al. (1986) on how women view reality, and make sense of their lived experiences is not without contestation. However, for this study, Belenky et al.'s perspective provides a way of looking at how some Belizeans come to understand themselves and others around them. I appreciate the perspective that the thinking of women can shift, and does shift during their lifetime as they discover new ways of knowing, and/or reach different levels of consciousness. According to Belenky et al. (1995), there is a developmental model of women's ways of knowing.

One of the ways of women's knowing is silence. It is a condition where the woman comes to know herself as voiceless. She is subject to authority and control because that is what she has learned. In her upbringing she has been denied opportunities to gain her voice. This occurs if she is raised in a home where there is a “one way conversation.” The adults are the ones to speak and make decisions for her. The silence is reinforced and reproduced by formal education. She may find herself being silent for eight or twelve years of her schooling because the teacher is solely in control of the class. The teacher decides when to move, when to talk, and what to talk about. These experiences hinder the development of communication skills which are a very important part of social relationships. Belenky et al. (1986) confirm that “without playing,
conversing, listening to others, and drawing out their own voices, people fail to develop a sense that they can talk things through" (p. 33). A lack of communication skills can make an intimate relationship unproductive.

Another phase or form of knowing is received knowledge. In this case, the woman's way of knowing is by receiving and reproducing knowledge from those in authority. Once again, the family and school are very instrumental in transmitting this form of knowledge. But there is room for other ways of knowing like reaching a consciousness of subjective knowledge. At this level, the woman's knowledge is personal, and she has come to value herself more. There is an inner voice or strength within the woman. These intrinsic values are vital if a woman finds herself in bondage in an intimate relationship that is dysfunctional. She can begin to do something about it.

At this time, I need to revisit the questions that I asked at the very beginning of the study. The questions were:

• How do the family and folk culture educate/miseducate children and adults about their gendered roles and responsibilities?
• How do schools reinforce the education/miseducation of these gendered roles and responsibilities?
• What can we learn about the effects of this education/miseducation?
• What can schools do differently to bridge the gap between children and families who are exposed to domestic violence?

In order to get answers to these questions, I used the narratives of four women who are survivors of domestic abuse. In this section there are five chapters.
Chapters 8, 9, 10, and focus on the analysis and interpretation of the narratives of battering. I rely heavily on the theories of postcolonialism and AfriKanA wo-femisms to unravel the interrelated threads of representation, agency, identity, resistance, and power dynamics. I will also unmask emergent themes. There are several similarities among the stories and a few differences too. In chapter 8, I discuss how an interpretation from the women’s narratives which is women as victims. In chapter 9, I draw on some popular cultural myths as I attempt to illustrate ways in which women come to know and understand their role, and lived experiences. This is followed by chapter 10 which reveals a counter-narrative of women as helpless and victims of their circumstance. Chapter 11 contains some of the emergent themes derived from making connections supported by the literature review dispersed in the previous sections. Chapter 12 experiments with the metaphor of rip, ripping and R.I.P. (rest in peace).

Throughout this section we will find examples of what Belenky (1986) postulates:

Society teaches woman to put their trust in men as defenders, suppliers of the economic necessities, interpreters of the public will, and liaisons with the larger community. Women learn that men hold the power and in society’s eyes have the ultimate authority. (p. 57)
Chapter Eight

Power over: Victims Walking in a Man’s Shadow

In this chapter the excerpts from the women’s narratives depict them as victims. Their intimate male partners have the power over them. The women struggle with many faces of domestic violence. The three excerpts which follow are from three different women sensitize. They sensitize us to some of the life threatening moments that the women went through with their intimate male partners. The women were scared and scarred but yet they remained in the abusive, controlling relationship.

**Fina:** Sometimes a woman no want have relaciones but the man force her. He throw me in bed and drag off mi ropa. I cry and try to hold them on me. He tear them off. Sometimes even when two days when I have my menstruation he have relaciones. I try to fight back but he hold my wrist on the bed.

**Donay:** (translated version) The first time we got into a fight, I talked to him. I said to myself, “we will get over this.” The last time we fought was about a week before Christmas. We fought because he wanted to hit my daughter. I asked him to stop. He pulled a machete. I told him to stop… You see these marks? He stabbed me in my hand and cut my shoulder. His intention was to scar my face so that it would be permanent and no other man could love me. That happened two years ago, and I remained in the relationship but I fought back. The knife went through my right hand. You can see that my pinky finger is crippled.
**Eida:** He threatened to kill me several times. One time he held a gun to my head. It was a 9-millimeter pump action. One day I found a receipt showing that he had paid for items for her. He asked me if I had the receipt. I said that I did not have it. He started to choke me. He punched me in my back. He put a gun to my head and said he would kill me.

He wanted us to make a barbecue. He told me to clean the meat. I said that I will not. He held the knife to my throat. He hit me in my back. He cursed me all night. I did not speak to anybody. I was so embarrass. I put on a big act. I knew that if I told anyone something different they would not believe me. Like I said, he wanted to look a certain way in the public. He would hit me where it wouldn’t show because he wants people to believe that he is the perfect man.

I have turned over a new leaf in my life but thoughts of abuse continue to haunt me from time to time. I talk to partner about my feelings. I have stomach problems and suffer from depression. At times I feel distanced and indifferent to my partner. In the first relationship, it wasn’t me. I had to be who he wanted me to be.

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**Cruelty to the Woman You Love**

As a woman, and as the researcher, I am perplexed at how a man can be so cruel to the woman he claims he loves, and to the woman who carries his
children for nine months. These women’s experiences mirror those of my friend, Lisa. Her husband humiliated her, commanded her to dismember her body. He whipped her severely with an electric cord. She was hospitalized. Kelly (1997) posits that abused women all share common premises: (i) women are the targets of male violence because familial patriarchy leads men to believe that they have the right to control their wives and children, and (ii) force is a legitimate mechanism for asserting or maintaining this control. The ideology of familial patriarchy holds that men should have dominant authority within the family and it requires women to be obedient to male authority and to provide men with household labor, sexual access and fidelity (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). When women do not meet these expectations, using violence against them is socially legitimated.

The incidents that I just described were forms of physical abuse, but domestic violence exists in other forms as well. At times there is disjuncture between what we learn as abuse and what we experience as abuse. Davies (1994) affirms that while we usually think of violence as physically related to issues of rape, “other kinds of violence spring from a particular mind-set based on cultural perceptions of a woman’s place in society. One such manifestation in India is sati, the rite of widow immolation. The other is bride-burning (also known as dowry deaths)” (pp. 43-44). Many times women may take certain behaviours to be normal in their relationship but they need to carefully examine the pattern and severity of the actions of their male intimate partner. As I cited earlier, in their study of Canadian Aboriginal women, McGillvray and Comaskey (1999) stated
that the women assumed that walking around with *black eyes* from the violent abuse of men, and being continuously hit by men was natural and normal.

Sexual abuse or rape is another form of domestic violence. The legal definition of rape varies. In this study I am defining rape as vaginal penetration and/or the non-consent of an intimate female partner or even a female minor. In examining Fina’s narrative, her husband had no respect for her desire to refrain from engaging in sexual activities when she had her menstrual cycle. Similarly, Lisa was awakened from her sleep and coerced to have sex with her husband. To make matters worse, he did not sleep at home the night and he taunted Lisa with possessions of another woman with whom he claimed he slept. I find stories like these heart wrenching. It makes a woman feel and look helpless. But these scenarios serve as reminders of how woman have been perceived and represented over the years. We have been used, abused, and misused. We have been looked upon as objects. We are treated as if we have no emotions and men can just ‘rip’ into us. As women many of us face similar situations as the female slaves did. Female slaves endured sexual abuses from men, mainly their masters. They were impregnated without any choice, and when they had their children, the master claimed them for his economic advancement, but treated them as the Other.

*“Woman Hating”*

Lisa’s story reminds me of Andrea Dworkin’s writing, *Woman Hating* (1974). One day I was flipping through Dworkin’s work and a section on
Dworkin was summarizing the Story of O by Pauline Réage. ‘Brace yuhself’ because it is very graphic, and tragic. It gives us an idea of the extent of men’s control and sexual abuse.

Dworkin writes:

O is taken by her lover René to Roissy and cloistered there; she was fucked, raped, whipped, humiliated and tortured on a regular and continuing basis … and there plundered, despoiled, raped, gangbanged; realizing that there is nothing else left for Sir Stephen to do with her, she asks his permission to kill herself, and receives it. (pp. 55-56)

The experiences of O, the experiences of slave women, and the experiences of women who are victims of domestic abuse in Belize are not unique. Their experiences parallel what happens to women in other countries. In a study from Papua New Guinea and India, for instance, at least one third of the women from Papua New Guinea who participated in the study were beaten to have sex, and some of them were forced by their drunken husbands. Similarly, in India, at least two thirds of the women in the study were forced to have sex and some of them were beaten (Study Center for Gender Equity, 1999).

Another unobtrusive form of abuse is isolation, and if women are not careful, isolation can seem normal. Marina, for example, was not physically abused but she was kept isolated from friends and relatives. By extending his power in this manner, the male partner makes it almost impossible for his abuse to be detected. There is little or no space for family members and friends to
question her about her relationship, or with whom she can share her concerns and struggles. The woman is denied a supportive community that could provide her with courage, and hope and an outside perspective on what is happening in the relationship.

Marina, Fina and Lisa were unemployed. This situation leaves them at the mercy of their partner. They must wait until some pitiful sum of them is handed to them or they must beg for money. Their male intimate partner totally discounts the work they do in the home because that at least warrants some kind of compensation. These women find themselves having to submit to begging for money to buy basic things like shampoo and sanitary napkins. This attitude by both parties warrants immediate attention!

Fina also mentioned that she was physically abused when she was pregnant, and so she lost her child. This should not be taken lightly. It is rather unfortunate, but Fina’s case is not unique. I want to once again draw attention to a study done by Rodriguez in 1999 where she stated that more than 50% of Latinas incurred injuries during their pregnancy from being abused. Abuses like this can result in the hospitalization of the woman, but what happens to the man? This kind of domestic abuse needs immediate attention, and legal retributions. Women need to know that they are to report these incidents, and that they should quit sheltering their male intimate partners. Most likely, if the male intimate partner is abusive to the female intimate partner in this manner, and they separate, he will do the same to another woman. So SIN—STOP IT NOW!
Sometimes too, like in my case, there may not be sexual, physical, economical or isolational control but domestic violence may manifest itself in ways that seem trivial. By this I mean that the male partner may incessantly find reasons why he cannot assist with the children or domestic chores. He may often pretend that he forgets what was requested of him. These actions can form a pattern, and become a hindrance to a productive intimate relationship because of the domestic inequality.

**Why not leave**

Although the women experienced these debilitating and physic circumstances, they delayed leaving the relationship for a long time. Let’s see. Fina, spent eight years, Maeti twenty years, Donay seven years, Eida ten years, Lisa, twenty three years, Tomasa, twenty years and Marina twenty years in the abusive situation. If we total these years, the sum is more than a century of tolerating abuse!

Many times when family members are aware that there is a problem, they will intervene. Fina’s brother asked her to leave the relationship but she refused. Donay’s sister was aware of what she was enduring and was mad at her because she lingered in the relationship. Eida’s mom sensed that she was domestically challenged but Eida denied that was so. Instead she evaded the real issue and blamed her stress on her job. As outsiders or family members, Belizeans may comment, “deh yah woman foolish fi stay wid di man;” however,
there are multiple reasons why women stay. But they need to break that abusive cycle and SIN—STOP IT NOW!

Domestic violence is detrimental to a woman’s health. Eida stated that she was suffering from depression. Many years of domestic abuse take its toll. Research has shown that women who have suffered from domestic abuse are psychologically affected. They may exhibit low self-esteem, feelings of hopelessness and/or even a tendency to minimize or deny violence. In some cases women may experience chest pain or even flash back which is referred to as posttraumatic disorder. Eida, in one of her correspondence shared with me that she felt emotionally unstable and even had thoughts of breaking off the relationship with her current intimate male partner. Eida's feeling is not uncommon among women who have been abused. Research shows that women globally suffer trauma. A fact sheet from England (2001) showed that battered women attempted at least one to four suicides. There were miscarriages and premature births like Fina's. The fact sheet also revealed that domestic violence starts or intensifies during pregnancy, and there were many reports of physical injury.

The reasons for staying in the abusive relationship or leaving the abusive relationship depend on the options that are available to the women. Eida, for example, is a teacher, and so she may be fearful of the social stigma if she leaves although she may not be the only female teacher who is struggling with this issue. Another reason to tolerate the abuse may be job related. The majority of teachers in Belize are employed by various religious denominations in church-
state schools. Hence, we are expected to abide by certain principles of the Bible which are ingrained in us, like “women submit to your husband.”

From the episodes, these women did not leave their abusive relationship for reasons that are congruent with what other scholars have suggested. One of the major reasons is because of enculturation. We have come to believe that the way we are treated is the way things should be; it is normal. We have been taught to conform by our socialization from the family, the school and the church. In some cases like Donay, we learn to be helpless. Donay saw her mother stay in an abusive relationship and thought that was the right thing to do. Our religious and personal beliefs about staying in a relationship can hinder our leaving. If a woman, like Eida, has been brought up to believe that she should remain in an intimate relationship until she and her partner are separated by death, then she'll stay. A woman may have the personal conviction, like Donay, that she is responsible for making the relationship work, so she stays. Women also stay in abusive relationships for fear of being further physically damaged like Lisa or Eida.

All the women in this study stayed because they were hoping for some change to occur that would make their life less miserable. All of them were concerned about losing their children. In all the cases, except for Aida, the women were economically dependent on their partner so a lack of financial resources held them back. Sometimes when a woman has been constantly humiliated in the relationship, like Lisa was, she may come to believe that she is worthless, and stay in the abusive relationship.
As I reminisce the women’s narratives, leaving seemed to be a process. For some of them, the first reaction was to blame themselves. Then they endured the suffering, and began to notice that the abuse was a pattern. The big dilemma for them was whether to leave or to stay. Some of them left and returned shortly after with the hope that the situation might change. Unfortunately, it did not. Some of them remained in the relationship. Lisa remained for twenty-three years, and even when she left there was no guarantee that she would be safe. Eida left, and sought refuge at the shelter, yet her husband was daring enough to kidnap her and threaten to kill her.

**Women as Accomplices in Their Assassination**

I switch now to briefly examine how women may be assisting in perpetuating the power of men by what they say. Although the statements made by the women may have been a result of our socialization process, it is an oppressive cultural liability that needs to be critically examined and challenged. We need to correct this miseducation. We need to SIN—START IT NOW. We do not want the next generation of women to be stifled by the same machismo and marianismo syndrome which I will address shortly.

Fina repeated some words which must have affected her in many ways. Let us look at what she said:

“My husband never like work… My husband no hizo caso… My husband no help me… My husband no help me… My husband no importa… He no care.”
There can be many reasons for this reaction. Here are some things that came to mind. He doesn’t care because he feels like a failure or has been made to feel like a failure. It would be interesting to learn about his childhood experiences. What did his parents say to him? What was his father’s relationship to his mother and vice versa? Why didn’t he look for employment on a regular basis? Was he discouraged because he had been looking for work and was unable to find one unless he left the village? Did he lack the necessary skills and knowledge to get a “good” job? I know that as a teacher I have encountered teenagers who in the process of looking for a job say they want a good job and good pay; however, many times they lack the numeracy, literacy, technical and even interpersonal skills. They seemingly do not take that into account and so they prefer not to work for what they call “pilinky money.” Why does Fina’s husband seem so inconsiderate and uncompassionate? Once again we would need to rewind a little and get into his earlier experiences in life to better understand why he was so bitter. The next question would be: Is this the machismo syndrome at work?

Fina also mentioned that ever since she had her baby boy violence became a frequent part of her life. Well, was her husband discouraged or frustrated with the condition of his son? In many cultures, including Belize, a son takes precedence over a daughter. This can be so because the son is expected to “carry on the family’s name.” A daughter or female should be there to care for parents or in-laws when they are old or unable to help themselves. I can recall when I had my sons. Our friends and relatives would give kudos to my husband.
They would say things like “bway, yuh dah man”, “yuh know which side ah di bed fi sleep”, yuh know wey angle fi push it een” (it meaning the penis). And to me they would say, “wen yuh gwen back fi di gial?”, “gial, yuh no gah no help. Yuh mek all di help fi di man.”

If we listen carefully to Maeti’s experience, although she may not be aware of this, she praises her son much more than her daughters. Let us revisit what she said (translated version).

My youngest son extended this portion of the house for me. The one who went to high school with your son is an accountant at the bank. He is a very smart son. He is presently in the United States…He makes a good salary working… and he helps me very much. He did a work scholarship while he was attending high school in order to help with the payment of his tuition. He did well on the regional examination. He is a very brilliant child.

This is what Maeti had to say about her girls (translated version).

This is a photo of my oldest daughter who is now living in the United States. I was taking care of her first child while she was away. I took the child to her when I attended her wedding. It was a beautiful weding. Her husband provides very well for her and the children.

Cultures make it feel right for men to chastise their intimate female partner for reasons such as not cleaning the house, leaving the house without his knowledge, questioning him about money, refusing to have sex, “back chatting”, and other ways that he perceives to be rebellious and disobedient. Machismo/marianismo has been a socially learned tradition with gender specific dispositions.
that men and women in the Latino society are expected to follow. In this tradition the men have options and the women have duties. A man’s place is in the world while a woman’s place is in the home. Interestingly, marianismo or marianista is modelled off the Virgin Mary and her perfection. Like Mary, the woman has a sacred duty, engages in self-sacrifice, and dispenses care and pleasure. This kind of familial socialization is detrimental to females because it leads to female passivity and dependency (Gil & Vasquez, 1996).

I want to say this to my sistahs. Whether or not you are dating, thinking about dating, or in a current relationship you need to take the warning signs of domestic abuse seriously. The analogy I make in Figure 3 is that domestic violence is like a hurricane. There are warning signs of domestic abuse or domestic inequalities which can be compared to the signal flags for hurricanes that frequent Belize and the rest of the Caribbean annually. Take heed! Figure 3 illustrates what women should be considering when their intimate male partners abuse them. The warning signs are not exhaustive but I have provided some warning signs that should be taken seriously. Females should not wait for a second occurrence of any of these warning signs whether they are dating or living with an intimate male partner. From the first negative controlling action or word by your male intimate partner seek professional help or someone with whom you can share your experience. It is better to nip this problem in the bud than to wait for it to become uncontrollable and unsafe. Do not let the challenges of domestic violence escalate so that it results in ripping you apart from your children, and your family. Do not let the struggles of domestic abuse cause you
to lose your temper so that you rip your intimate partner apart from his family, and your children.

**Back and Forth**

This chapter is the genesis of the interpretation process. The narratives help us understand that domestic violence exists in subtle forms of men’s emotional domination over women: continuous insult, control of money, treating the woman like servant, having extra-marital affairs, keeping her from getting a job, and belittling her. The mythology surrounding being a good mother is a powerful controlling ethos that impedes many women from leaving an abusive or unfulfilling relationship. Even though many women’s lives still consist of economic uncertainty, there is a variation in personal relations and family structure. While many women still endure physical and mental abuse, other women assert that these issues are irrelevant to their own personal experience (McClaurin, 1996; McClusky, 2001; Marin & Russo, 1998). In the next chapter, I focus on how women and men come to learn and perform gendered roles and responsibilities.
PHASE ONE: The first time may be a mistake. Talk about it with your partner as soon as possible. Alert someone.

PHASE TWO: The second time it’s becoming a habit. Start thinking about what your next move will be if it occurs again. Seek advice from a counselor or service organization.

PHASE THREE: IS A NO, NO! Third time—SEEK SHELTER IMMEDIATELY. He will strike again.

Figure 3: ABC WARNING SIGNS of DOMESTIC ABUSE

Accusing
Badmouthing /Blaming
Breaking promises
Changing topics when you’re talking
Cheating
Controlling your friendship/movements
Cursing
Distorting your words or conversation
Embarrassing you in front of others
Finding fault with everything you do or say
Forgetfulness is a habit
Frequent phone calls while you are at home/work
Insensitive to your feelings
Isolation
Interrupting when you are speaking
Name calling
Making unexpected visits at home
Manipulating you and/or children
Overly jealous
Physical abuse
Refusing to help in the home
Refusing to dialogue about relational issues
Secretive about whereabouts
Sexual abuse
Unfaithful
Verbal abuse
Witholding money
Yelling
Zonk (stupefied from using drugs or alcohol)
Chapter Nine

End/gendered Indoctrination: Belizean Cultural Myths

In this chapter I examine some of the reasons for the women’s perceived helplessness and the men’s dominant, controlling dispositions in the intimate relationships that I narrated. My big question is: How did we women come to believe that we should “grin and bear” (as we say in Belize)? Anzaldúa (1999) refers to the same concept as “cultural tyranny.” Enculturation shapes the body and the mind and so, culturally, women are taught to be helpless. Schools, families, and religious institutions are complicit in reproducing asymmetrical, gendered relationships by handing down a prepackaged and prescribed curriculum, way of life, or guidelines to each generation. I will revisit portions of the women’s narratives to look for examples of helplessness. Donay and Eida expressed some level of frustration with their abusive, controlling male partners.

**Donay:** Sometimes wen ah geh so frustrated, ah feel like kill ahn.

**Eida:** He put a gun to my head and said he would kill me. I said, if you want to do that, go ahead. I was tired of mistreatment everyday.

How did Donay come to believe that her mother “tek it like wahn woman” and so should she? What message was indirectly sent to her because of witnessing this abusive prevailing occurrence and attitude in her mother’s life? Does this means
that if a woman gets out of an abusive relationship it makes her less of a woman? No way! One of the major reasons why most women stay in abusive relationships is because of the social and cultural upbringing which teaches us that to be a “good wife” or a “good mother.” We should conform to men’s wishes. Once married, we should stay with him “through thick and thin,” “good and bad” or for “better or worse … until death separates us.” Men are the providers; they wear the pants and so can control women like puppets.

Our consciousness of the world is shaped by many our experiences in the family, at school, and in society. It is shaped by horizontal relationships, meaning interactions with our peers and those in our age range, as well as by vertical interactions with those in authority or who are older. I pause to share some of the folk stories and songs that were common when I was growing up. After relating the stories, I will explain their meaning from my standpoint. For most of this chapter, the cultural mythos will be in the reflective boxes since I will be relating as well as interpreting them in connection with the interwoven themes of representation, identity, power dynamics, resistance, and agency.

**Folk Stories**

[Most of the cultural myths in this section are summarized in Appendix F].

**STORY ONE**

Wan chiney woman live with her husband, a chiney man. Dehn have several children togedah but the last child mi black. So the chiney man was very angry and start to question the woman as to how this child come out like this. The chiney woman sey that
she and ih husband probably make hihn at exactly midnight wen no stars or moon nevah di shine. Ih mi very dark.

This narrative depicts the woman as unfaithful. The question is how can two persons of the same ethnic origin have a baby with different skin colour? We need to be careful when passing judgments about people’s children or our own children based on skin colour or other physical characteristics. A woman does need to sleep with another man to have a child with different physical appearance. If we recall the stories during slavery, the white men sexually exploited black women. These unions led to colourism. Hence, a man and woman of black complexion could indeed have a child or children with fair skin, curly hair and/or blue or gray eyes. That in no way should be interpreted as cheating.

For whatever reason, the woman in the folk story found it difficult to provide what can be considered a valid explanation. The reason she gave makes her appear silly and untruthful. Well, how would the black woman respond to the black man about her child or children? Would she say we “made” them in broad daylight when the sun was brightly shining? If she responded with what we may consider to be a foolish answer, maybe she lacks the vocabulary to express the reality. If this is the case, then we need to fill the gap of that miseducation/missing education.

There is a popular Belizean song composed by Mr. Peters about a woman tricking a man into believing that a child was his. Mr. Wilfred Peters, by the way, is a Belizean Creole who keeps the culture alive with his 'brukdown" lyrics and rhythm reflecting slavery,
mahogany camps, and infidelity. I asked Mr. Peters about the origin of the song, *Shall Ayi Pickney.* He wasn’t sure of the origin, but he knew that the term referred to a child who did not resemble the parents or other family members. I tried to make sense of it this way. Maybe it was “SHALL I,” meaning that the man or father of the child would be asking himself, “SHALL I” accept this child as belonging to me or “SHALL I” not accept this child as belonging to me? In other words the man found himself in a dilemma. This is a common situation today as seen in the media; however, science and technology often solve these dilemmas through DNA testing. Possibly back then, and even now, there are children who are from the same parents but they differ in physical appearance: hair texture, hair colour, skin colour and even eye colour. This can result in gossip and the woman can be accused of having a clandestine relationship. What we often ignore is the latent colonial legacy, and the result of interracial relationships.

**STORY TWO**

Lang time ago wan man work dah benk and so ih have to lef ih woman and goh work. Well di man use to fraid fi Joe Grind. Joe Grind dah wan man wey go round man house wen dehn di work and screw dehn woman. Well, dis man mi figure dat fi hihn woman, mi di Joe Grind behind ih back, so wan day ih preten like ih mi gwen dah work. Shahtly after hihn lef, Joe Grind step in. Noh laang aftah dat, the woman an Joe Grind hear di door open. Well, Joe Grind run and hide in a di loft. Di man walk in ah the room and ih di woman ask dah wey hihn come back fah. The man tell ah sey hihn foget someting. Dehn di man sey ah kian’t find wan money weh ah mi gah put up. Well di woman tink sey hihn di accuse she and she sey, me no know bout dat cause me no touch nohting. Well the man
StorY THREE

Wan time wan man use to go work an fi hihn woman mi gahn wan sweethart. So everytime di man goh work di sweetheart come visit. Well, deh mi gah wan parrat weh kudah mi talk an every evening wen di man kohn home di parrat sing sey dat missses gah wah nex man, misses gah wan nex man. But di man noh pay attention to di parrat. Soh wan day the lady decide dat this parrat wahn put ahn ena trouble so she chap the parrat ena ih head an throw ahn ena toilet. Shee mi tink sey di parrat mi wahn dead. Well, wem di man cum di evening, ih ask weh polly deh. The woman tell ahn sey ih dead and shee trow ahn ena toilet. No lang aften di woman sey dat, shee gawn use di toilet and dehn ih hear wan voice sey, “lawd, misses if you kud live wid dah big chap, I culd live with this small one weh yu gi mi ena mi head.”

STorY FOUR

Wan day wan man mi di walk thru somebody else yard. Hihn mi very occupied wid ih own thoughts. Ih nevah di pay attentshan to what mi deh roun ahn. Suddenly ih smell wan fishy scent and widout looking up ih sey, “good mawning ladies.” Wen ih realize dat nobady noh answah ahn, ih look back and guess wat? No woman noh mi di deh. Dah
The images of the women in these stories are tainted. Once again women are represented as infidels and liars. They should be punished for cheating on their male intimate partners. But when a man cheats he should not suffer the same consequence. The woman may fight and curse, but biologically the man is stronger than the woman. and if they Women are also represented as thieves. They are depicted as “stinky.” The story about the odor from the salted fish being analogous to the odor from a woman is dumbfounding. It suggests that women are unclean. They have poor hygienic habits. In story three, the parrot is also insensitive to naming the woman’s body part.

Where did polly learn to call the vagina, a chap, meaning a cut? A chap or a cut seems to suggest that something is wrong with the woman. Is part of her missing? Men do not have a chap or a cut. Does that make them better than women, or privileged? We have been culturally miseducated to refer to the genitals in some puzzling terms. The vagina becomes coco, pussy, pussy hole, cunt, poke, connie, or bungu bungu. Vagina Monologues by Eve Ensler (2001) has some interesting information. The smell of the vagina is fishy or “cheese,” “wet garbage,” “Depends,” or “damp moss.” Like Ensler, I am concerned about what we call the vagina. She provides other names for the vagina such as pooki, twat, poochi, toadie, tamale, and nappy dugout. Similarly in Belize, the penis has been known as dick, prick, cock, stick, wee wee or tulush. It’s interesting to watch teachers teach the parts of the body to their students, yes, including me. We have no problem naming eye, hand foot, ear, mouth, or neck. We usually skip over the
genitals. Oh! How we blush if a child draws the body and adds genitals. I changed this reluctance to name genitals after several years of teaching, especially when I realized it was necessary to teach teenagers sex education. We need to educate our learners to deal with biological issues related to sex and sexuality in an informed way.

STORY FIVE

Wan time wan woman man use to beat shee pah wan regulah basis. Di woman scream out so loud like di man mi di kill shee but wen yu see dehn nex day dehn dah like ass and chembah pat. Dah jus like noting happen. She tell fi shee fren dehn if di man no beat she, di man noh love shee. Wen shee noh get wan beating, shee staat to feel like somting wrang.

Let’s break the cycle of this myth that perpetuates the notion that when a man beats a woman, it shows that he loves her! We need to redefine love. What does it mean to love someone? How is that love manifested in actions and words? What is the difference between I love you, and I want to make love to you? Is love mistaken for lust?

As we will see later, historically, men beat their women because the law afforded them the power to chastise their wives, children, and slaves as they saw it fit. These were their possessions and so they had control over them. Historically women have been depicted as adulterous, ill-tempered shrews, or dedicated to making the lives of their husbands miserable. Hence, the man usually becomes frustrated with his wife and occasionally beats her.
Hofeller (1983) reiterates that medieval society viewed women as needing strict control:

The female is an empty thing, easily swayed: she runs great risks when she is away from her husband. Therefore, keep females in the house, keep them as close to you as you can, and come home often to keep an eye on your affairs and to keep them in fear and trembling … If you have a female child, set her to sewing and not to reading, for it is not suitable for a female to know how to read unless she is going to be a nun … (p. 53)

STORY SIX
Sometime man talk bout wan annadah as ‘woman fumfum.’ Dehn claim sey di woman di doh di man bad ting fi gat ahn fool fool, ‘woman fumfum’ or tonto bobo. Di woman culd tek ih period clath or feminime napkin wey full ah blood and put it eenah di pillow wey di man sleep pan. Or sometimes di women sid down ovah hot cooked rice befoe ih gi di man fi eat. Lattah ah time di man’s parents, friends or family members become worried and dehn go geh advise from a sorcerer or obeah man or woman. Usually the sorcerer, male or female, cuts card, rub wan egg ovah di person’s body and determines dat di woman di try do di man bad ting. Soh di obeah man wan sey weh kine ah treatment di man fi get. Like maybe di man need fi bade enah blue, use some special kine ah herbal bath fi wan serten amount ah dayz. Den yu gah di reverse ah dis situation. Di man might be romeo or wan womanizer. Den di woman geh worried and shee goh dah the obeah man or woman. Sohntime dehn tell di woman fi mek di woman bring wan ah di man pitcha. Den the obeahman mek wah wax dally, stick di pitcha pan it wid lattah ah pin and put it enah wan battle. Den ih ask di woman fi bury it dah fi shee step so di man kud walk
Ovah it. Dis wan tame di man. Sohntime di obeahwoman smoke several *puro* (cigars) evry nite an bun di man battam no mattah weh ih deh an ih haffu git up an kohn home to fi hihn woman.

In this episode the woman is perceived as evil. She is in control of the man, and that is a weak sign on the man’s part. If we recall Fina’s story, she hinted at this phenomenon.

Here is what she said, “remember, I want you to mention mi suegra, because mi suegra es una mujer. Since she is woman, then she should feel for me but she say I do her son bad things.” The bad things Fina was referring to would be the myth of the unhygienic feminine practices to control their male partners.

There are many more myths that I have heard while growing up and as an adult. I choose to stop here so we can move on to the folk songs. As a child and as a teacher, singing folk songs were joyous and creative moments. During my music lessons, students would improvise instruments by hitting two rulers together, drumming on the desk, hitting empty cans with stick, or rubbing a gratah (grater) with a fork while they moved lustily as they sang. I remember the fun I had preparing students to sing Creole folk songs for the annual Children’s Festival of Arts. I did not give thought to the cultural stereotypes and representation of women that were portrayed. As a teacher, Eida may have similar experiences, too. Here are a few of the folk songs I learned as a child and taught students for at least 15 years during my teaching career.
Folk Songs

[Most of the folksongs are translated in Appendix G]

FOLK SONG 1

Koras (Chorus)

Wan red-yaiy gial dah wahn troubl to wan man. (3 times)

An shee waahn, an shee waahn, an shee waahn evryting.

- Ih yaiy like toad an shee waahn yaiyglass (3 times)

An shee waahn, an shee waahn, an shee waahn evryting.

- Ih aze like shillin an shee waahn aze ring …

- Ih lip like liva an shee waahn lipstick …

- Ih wase like barril an shee waahn hipsta …

- Ih fut like baaj an shee wahn high heel …

This folk song represents a woman as greedy for material things despite the fact that she may be ugly.

FOLK SONG 2

Fan mi soalja man, fan mi
Fan mi soalja man, fan mi
Fan mi soalja man, fan mi
Gial yu karakta gaan.

Seka high heel and big airdoo
Seka high heel and big airdoo
Seka high heel and big airdoo
Gial yu karakta gaan.

FOLK SONG 3
Evry fifteenth an enah mont wen dehn policeman geh dehn pay,
Evry fifteenth an enah mont wen dehn policeman geh dehn pay,
All yuh kuh yeer dehn sey,
Lawd! Tideh dah mi man payday.

Like FOLK SONG 1, folk songs 2 and 3 reinforce women’s greed for material things, especially to make themselves attractive. The greed for material things leads women to engage in prostitution with the British soldiers who were present in large numbers up until about 1994. In FOLK SONG 3, the women appear to be lazy, just depending on a man’s paycheck.

FOLK SONG 4
Freetown gial noh gah noh wata fi wash dehn skin, kip ahn clean,
Freetown gial noh gah noh wata fi wash dehn skin, kip ahn clean,
Wy, wy, wy
Wy, wy, wy
Policeman tek deh gial in chaaj.

This folk song is somewhat related to the story about women smelling like salted fish. Although this piece has some history to it in terms of the lack of amenities like water for the public, it also alludes to uncleanliness. Water scarcity makes it impossible for the women to take a bath. My question is where do the men get water to take a bath? Why is it only the women who are unable to bathe? Does this song privilege men over women as
in other instances? Is it that women fetch the water and men use it so women need to wait until the pipe pours water again?

FOLK SONG 5
Brong skin gial go home an mine baby,
Brong skin gial go home an mine baby,
If ah go away in a sailing boat, yu noh fih goh noway,
Stay home an mine baby.

According to this folk song, a woman’s place is in the home, taking care of the children and preparing meals to nurture the family. This comes as no surprise because the place of a woman has been socially constructed to be the home. In a later discussion about domestic violence, we will get a glimpse of how we have arrived at female subordination and male domination.

Maya Folklore

Eric Thompson in his book on Ethnology of the Mayas of South and Central British Honduras (1930) relates more than 25 cultural stories connected to the Maya. The stories are male dominated, and represent women in a negative light. Following are three brief summaries of the ones mentioning females.

In A Sorcery Story, a wife transformed herself into a mule and then back to human. In The Foolish Wife and The Tabai, the wife was in the habit of wasting time. She never completed her housework. One day she found some money and told her husband that she sold some
wool in order to get the money. He did not believe her, and accused her of being a ‘silly woman.’ In *Juan and Rosalie*, Rosalie was a beautiful girl who came to Juan’s bed at night. Juan’s grandmother made tortillas daily. Juan had work to do for his father, but it was Rosalie who completed Juan’s tasks in the night.

In *Characters and Caricatures in Belizean Folklore* (1991) by Meg Craig, four female sorcerers found in the book are La Sirena, La Sigua, La Sucia, and Xtabai. La Sucia has long, black hair and is clothed in white. She is a beautiful mermaid who is very evil, stealing children and seducing drunken males. She also impersonates men’s sweethearts. La Sigua is a wicked witch who attracts drunks during the night. La Sucia, meaning dirty or filthy, is a big woman with golden, long hair. She exposes her long breasts and transforms herself into a man’s sweetheart and leads him astray. Xtabai is a beautiful Indian woman dressed in white, a late night seductress with long hair.

**East Indian Folklore**

Mr. Ramu and the Rabbit is an East Indian folk story that I recorded when I was doing an oral history research project in the late 1980s in Belize. Mr. Ramu was an Indian hunter who went hunting daily. One day he went hunting and returned with a small young rabbit. Mrs. Ramu, his wife, sang and smiled as she happily cleaned the rabbit. Mr. Ramu returned to the rice plantation. Mrs. Ramu cut up the meat and seasoned it. Then she cooked the meat and some rice. “Today we will have a tasty meal of tacari rabbit and rice,” she said. Mrs. Ramu was getting hungry and her husband was taking too long to
return, so she decided to eat some food. After the first serving she decided that she wanted some more. She ate a second time, and this time the young, tenderly cooked meat was completely gone. Mrs. Ramu became worried so she cut off a piece of her leg and quickly stewed it in tacari gravy. She wrapped her bleeding leg in an old cloth, her long, frilled skirt hiding her wounded, bleeding leg. She sat down and waited for her husband to return. Then she heard his merry whistle. She served his food, and mixed him a tall glass of lime juice, then waited at the door to greet him. She took his “shot beg” (plantation bag) and hung it behind the door. They began to talk while he ate. Mr. Ramu thought that the food was extremely palatable and asked Mrs. Ramu what made the food so delicious. But Mrs. Ramu was growing weak from the excessive bleeding and couldn’t answer. The parrot began to sing:

Ol man eat ol lady leg.

Ol man eat old lady meat.

Ol man eat ol lady flesh.

Chi chi chi chi chee!

Mrs. Ramu weakly demanded that the polly stop talking nonsense. But the polly continued singing. The parrot sang the song three more times. Mr. Ramu was unable to bear the singing any longer. He saw Mrs. Ramu’s head hanging limply on her chest. He lifted her dress and confirmed the parrot’s story. Mrs. Ramu was dead.
**Femininity: Tainted Representations**

The depictions of the women in the folk songs and stories are tainted with submissiveness and subservient images. They are typically evil. Rosalie’s grandmother does the usual domestic chores. Mrs. Ramu is also represented in the traditional manner of being a housewife who is contented with her status. This may be so because some women do enjoy homemaking. She waits for her husband to eat with him. I think that is admirable, and it is important for family members to eat together. What is disturbing, however, is that a woman does not eat because she fears being punished by the man. I have heard several stories from my grandmother about women who had to eat after their men ate. When I first moved to Belize City, I observed that my neighbour served her husband before herself and her children. I recall a time when she had only two eggs, which she scrambled for him, and she and her children ate bread alone. Whenever she cooked chicken, the man was entitled to the leg and thigh; the children ate the neck, back, and foot. In the sorcerer’s story, the wife transforms herself into a mule. Why not another animal? Is the mule symbolic of how women are perceived, unintelligent, made to be “ridden,” and stubborn? If this is so, this story ties in well with the foolish wife’s story. Furthermore, her character was not very different from other women in the earlier stories. She was untruthful. From the work of some of the scholars, we have seen that when a woman is untruthful or stubborn like a mule, a man is of the opinion that the woman warrants correction, so he punishes his property, his woman.

Rosalie’s story is filled with stereotypical images of a woman. She is very considerate.
While Juan slept, she toiled. Both Rosalie and Mrs. Ramu, both offer self-sacrifice for the men in their lives. This is surely the way that men in the past, and most men today, would expect their women to function. But self-sacrifice is two-way, and should not be performed in actions that lead to death (as in the case of Mrs. Ramu).

Women charm and seduce men by bewitching them. In some instances they are beautiful, and in others they are unsanitary. It is worth noting that the negative representations of women keep recurring in the folk stories. Mrs. Ramu is depicted as gluttonous because she ate all the meat; her appetite for food seems insatiable. In many of the folk stories related earlier, women’s sexual appetite is also portrayed as unappeasable. The examples of food and extra marital relationships make it appear that women are unable to control their strong desire for sex and food. The result is punishment. Mrs. Ramu had to sacrifice herself because she feared the punishment. If she and her husband had a mutual understanding, she could possibly say that she ate the meat, and in that case, provide something else for him to eat. In the same vein, women who have affairs outside of their relationship are punished, but the same cannot be said for the man.

Several scholars believe that fairy tales, which are commonly narrated or read in the infant division in Belizean classrooms, also teach gendered roles and responses. In the fairy tales, women are mostly beautiful, greedy, live as magical figures, and wait for prince charming to live happily ever after (Dworkin, 1974). While I can understand scholars, and especially the feminist stance, I cannot recall fairy tales having this impact on me. As a matter of fact, I still enjoy reading fairytales. There is some magic in it for
me: a place to escape to when life on earth seems too expansive for me to handle. There is the wand of Cinderella’s godmother that immediately and magically changes the impossible. Through the fairy tales, I live the glamour and elegance of some of the female characters in their attire, and in palatial abodes, which I know, will never be mine. But schools do play a major role in reinforcing gender stereotypes in a variety of ways through its curricula materials and fairy tales (nursery rhymes being one of the major forms of literature for the young children). So it is imperative that schools modify their role and responsibilities. They need to step forward to break the cycle of sending direct or indirect messages of submissive, dependent, and conforming females. There is an urgent need to end gendered stereotypes that have been perpetuated over the centuries, and have become impediments to women’s place of equity in the society. I will address this issue in more details in the final chapter.

**Back and Forth**

I have outlined ways in which the women’s narratives are reminiscent of the Belizean cultural myths. When I started to examine the myths, the women were portrayed as victims of their perpetrators. But it is equally important to inspect the flip side of that coin, and I will explore how women resist and exercise agency in the next chapter. These women and myself are survivors of abuse, and we have lived to tell our stories to help other sistahs.
In analyzing the Belizean cultural mythology, it is evident that it perpetuates and affirms gender stereotypes of women as creatures of clandestine sexual relationships, disobedience and unfaithfulness. However, a closer examination of the cultural mythos reveals that they can be presented as a counter-narrative to the traditional stereotypes. The cultural mythos propelled messages that women were to conform to oppressive ideologies. I will now step back to re-examine the folk stories, folk songs, and the women’s narratives to explicate what I mean.

A surface examination of the folk story of the foolish wife suggests that she is downright lazy, and women are expected to complete their domestic chores. A second profound examination of that same story shows that the woman’s reaction may be a form of resisting domination and traditional stereotypes. In Rosalie’s case, I wish that I had more information about the kind of relationship that this couple had. If it was a mutual one, then Rosalie probably chose to assist Juan secretly. If it was not mutual, then it appears that the usual expectations of women were depicted.
Women Make Choices

In the folk stories, Ixtabi and La Sucia dare to leave their private space. They go out late at nights. They have the power to seduce men. They lead the men to places that they, the women, chose. Similarly, while the sorcery’s story depicts women as witches and bitches, this same story can be interpreted as women being in control of the choices they make. Women can also act as agents of changing their relational situation by using circulatory power. In several of the folk stories, the women had the capability to transform themselves. They were able to define and redefine themselves. This is contrary to what is expected of women, but feminists and black women welcome this kind of resistance and transformation. It is critical that women, and young females be assisted with multiple ways of interpreting cultural mythos rather than accepting the surface level traditional indoctrination. Gloria Anzaldúa in her book, Borderlands: The New Mestiza (1999), discusses the empowering perspective of folk stories in more details. She illuminates how folk stories support and resist the existing system of male domination.

Power to Retaliate

Power and resistance exist as an interplay of changeable positions, and so they can occur concurrently. If a man resists his female intimate partner’s decisions in any way, he is perceived to be a man, not a woman fumfum. On the other hand, when a woman resists her male intimate partner’s control, she is perceived to be a bad woman. The resistance is unhealthy and consequently,
she should be punished. Contrastingly, I perceive the resistance to be the beginning of the woman’s autonomy. The autonomy will slowly evolve, and the battered woman can and will gradually take charge of her life. I applaud these women for their fortitude. Their identity is grounded in strength—strength to tolerate, endure, persevere, and survive despite all odds until they reach a new level of consciousness. Their narratives open our eyes to the possibility of change for the better. However, we should not forget that changing for the better is always a challenge because it has to come from within a person, and from within the people in an organization or an institution. I will closely examine the women’s experiences for covert or overt examples of resistance and agency.

From the women’s narratives, and the women caricatures in the Belizean folk stories, the women demonstrated the power to retaliate against the prohibitions and restrictions placed on them. In the narratives shared by the survivors, the women had reached another level of knowing. The knowledge had become personal, and they began to value themselves more. There was an inner voice, an inner strength within the women that made them decide to do something about their abusive situation. The women enacted defiance even though to an outsider that defiance may seem insignificant, and long over-due. Eida, for instance, held on to that receipt she found. That trivial response infuriated her husband to the point of abuse. Although some women realize that the consequences of their action may make things worse, they still resist. Fina exemplified some level of agency and resistance too. She secretly made sweet bread to sell in order for her to earn a few pennies.
In the folk stories about Joe Grind, while one can say that the women were infidels, I would also argue that they demonstrated the power to use their body as they desired. But the fear, the jealousy, and the control of their intimate male partner resulted in mal-treatment. I believe that these stories were purposely circulated to create fear within women, and therefore, they would refrain from adulterous or promiscuous acts. We have seen, however, that there are women who would dare any situation.

Fina may have been nervous, but she did not give up on continuously urging her husband to look for a job. When he gave her money, she refused to spend all, and so her frugality allowed her to be able to provide for some of her feminine needs. When she needed to take her sick child for medical treatment she told her parents. Fina was resourceful. One day when her husband went to work, Fina escaped in order to take her sick child to the doctor. When she returned she found her clothes outside. She went to her parents’ abode. Fina was brave and stood up to the consequences. During the cycle of violence, when her husband returned to ask her to come home, she told him that she needed some time to reflect. That’s great! She eventually realized that she needed some space and distance to work this through. What was lacking, however, was some professional assistance. Seeking some counseling would have been one possibility, but I know that there are no counsellors in the village. Also bearing in mind her financial circumstances, she was financially disabled to go to town. Fina was unable to afford, or to seek professional counselling which is a service that
should be available for all women, free or at a minimal cost (depending on the woman’s economic situation).

*Sour Honey: Cycle of Violence*

Fina returned to her husband, and this seems to be a normal response for most women. This back and forth relationship can be explained using the cycle of violence theory. I pause here to explain the cycle of domestic violence so that any *sistah* can recognize it when she is experiencing it. It may help her to be better able to make decisions about her next step to break this cycle. Many sistahs may fall into the situation like Fina. Like a mouse, Fina was caught in the trap set by the cat, the *cycle of violence*. It is claimed that many men use this as a means of getting women to remain in the relationship, and it is a cycle because it happens repeatedly. So that’s something else to think about.

There are phases in this cycle. First, there is tension; something angers the perpetrator or intimate partner and he lashes out, most often physically. What happens at this point is that the woman tries to rationalize his behaviour. At times she may even feel responsible for his disposition. Donay felt this way. She said,

The first time we got into a fight, I said to myself that we will get over this. He will realize that he was wrong, and the quit fighting with me. I began to think that I did something to irritate him, and so I blamed myself. (translated version)
Did he ever come to realize that he was abusive, controlling her, maiming her and her children physically, economically, emotionally and psychologically? Maybe, but it was short lived. Tomasa did something similar. She thought that her husband had too much to drink, and that he will eventually get over the domestic problem. Not so! The drinking-domestic abuse became a pattern in Tomasa's family.

In the second phase, the perpetrator becomes aware that his behaviour was uncalled for, and so he may apologize or justify his behaviour. The woman most likely will feel sorry for him. If the woman went to report the matter to the police (as in Tomasa’s case) she may even request the withdrawal of charges pressed against him. She hoped that he meant what he said.

The third phase is a “honeymoon” period. The honeymoon period can occur shortly after the abuse, or days after the abuse. Many times the perpetrator gets loving and romance and sex is used as a “sweetup” moment. But unfortunately, this does not last long. The sweetness in the honey turns sour before long, and the cycle is repeated until it becomes chronic, as we all have witnessed from reading the narratives.

**Fighting the Oppressive System**

Maeti, Eida, Fina and Donay were also victims of systemic oppression. Maeti said clear and loud that she would not give up the plot of land on which she is currently living. She took steps to inform the media, and subsequently the public, about the problem. She also sought legal advice. This is admirable, a
source of strength and inspiration for other women who find themselves in a similar situation.

Donay approached the state representative of her electoral constituency who is a young male, almost her age. Unfortunately, she did not receive any hope from him. Fina also mentioned the incident with the doctor. She said, “I tell el doctor that it is hard for me to pay this money. El doctor ask me if I have a husband. I say, yes. I said tengo pero no tengo [I have but I don’t have].”

The doctor’s response was so insensitive. Once again bear in mind that he was a male, and do not get me wrong because not all males, or all male doctors may have responded this way. But the doctor could have asked other questions to better understand what Fina was trying to relate to him. From Fina’s comment it seemed that she came to him as a woman in desperate need. She saw him as someone in authority who could probably help. I also think that her response “tengo pero no tengo”, was powerful.

Actually, what does it mean to have a husband? Is it for him to be visible through the symbolic wedding band a woman may be wearing, or signing his last name to her maiden name? Does having a husband mean that because we went to church and made the vows, we get taken granted after awhile? That’s one of the major problems I have with the ritual performance at the wedding ceremony. Much time and energy is spent to make everything so perfect. There is much financial expenditure to cater for the wedding. There is need for formal wedding
attire, a wedding cake, flowers, food and many times even honeymoon expenses. In the end the amount of energy, time and money expended is not worth the while if the partners did not have plans for the marriage. I mean that as much time or even more time needs to be spent in dialogue about issues such as how many children the couple plans to have? How will the family be supported? What will happen if one or none of them is employed or lose their job? How will the domestic chores be shared whether or not a woman works outside the home (bearing in mind that home making by itself is a full time job)?

I have learned from my experience that unlike the wedding ceremony, marriage is a way of life, and so the couple should constantly negotiate, adapt and adjust to their new challenges. The dialogue needs to be ongoing. Unpreparedness for living together can yield unhealthy relationships like that of Fina and Eida. Although Eida claimed that she and her partner had conversations prior to the wedding, in the end she lived with a dictator. Instead of learning and growing together, Eida felt that her spouse “wanted to have [her] like a puppet.” Her movements and actions were determined, and manipulated by her intimate male partner.

Fina recognized that poverty is a curse. Women, children and families suffer immensely when they are from low socioeconomic status. Women have children with low birth weights. This in turn is associated with a number of challenges later in life. For poverty-stricken families, there is often less access to food, and specifically, nutritious foods. The shelter of people living in poverty is usually deplorable. Many times poor women who work outside the home are
unable to pay for quality day care for their children. The narratives of Fina, Donay and Maeti provided numerous examples of substandard living. They fought the system individually, but would a collective voice be more effective?

**Back and Forth**

In this chapter, I showed that women are agents of change; however they have systemic issues with which to battle. The traditional stereotypes of women, and systemic oppression affect women's self-image, and confine their opportunities. However, these need not be barriers if we take active measures to empower our females as agents of change. Women, like the ones in this study, should be encouraged and taught to build alliance and collaborate with existing women's organizations to advocate for changes at all levels. As women, we also need to learn to support each other instead of using our sistah's misfortune as gossip and further victimization. We should bear the lyric of Bill Withers' *Lean on Me* in our hearts and our daily actions:

**Lean on Me**

Sometimes in our lives we all have pain
We all have sorrow
But if we are wise
We know that there's always tomorrow

**Lean on me, when you're not strong**
And I'll be your friend
I'll help you carry on
For it won't be long
'Til I'm gonna need
Somebody to lean on

Please swallow your pride
If I have things you need to borrow
For no one can fill those of your needs
That you don't let show

**Lean on me...**

If there is a load you have to bear
That you can't carry
I'm right up the road
I'll share your load
If you just call me

So just call on me [SISTAH], when you need a hand
We all need somebody to lean on
I just might have a problem that you'd understand

**We all need somebody to lean on.**

In the upcoming chapter, I will explore family relationships as the major emergent theme of the study.
Chapter Eleven
Reaping What We Sow: “Bud” Family Relationships

A bud is a growth on a plant in an undeveloped stage. The bud will eventually develop into a flower or leaf. A child is like a "bud." He or she will develop into an adult. What kind of adult grows from the bud is dependent on a variety of factors. One of the major institutions and environment of influence is the family. The family’s interactional style is a dietary model for the child. It can enable or disable a child while he or she is growing up. The adult who grows out of that bud can be a thorn or a rose, a perpetrator/abuser or a victim depending on the family’s social-emotional-relational diet that is fed to him or her. A close examination of the interactive patterns from the narratives in Section 2 reveals barriers to healthy relationships. Such practices include criticism, condemnation, hostility, guilt, disrespect, impatience, inconsideration, intolerance, loss of self-control, and ridicule.

Un/healthy Social-emotional Relationships

According to Eida, her parents had a healthy social relationship but her husband came from a family with an unhealthy social-emotional relationship. He developed into a thorn, essentially a perpetrator. The same can be said of the sons of Pat and Lisa. The father modeled harmful ways of interacting and they in turn developed into thorn and abusers. They followed in his footsteps, and were recycling violence. They had become socially handicapped, and lacked the ability
and willingness to dialogue about challenging family and relationship issues. They were unable to re/solve problems and to use the six most important words: “I admit I made a mistake.” Donay and I were not females from a healthy interactive lifestyle either. She watched her mom suffer at the hands of the perpetrator, and she thought that it was healthy to stay in an abusive relationship. I am also a bud of the disabling interactive patterns, despite the fact that I was raised in a single parent-extended family of only women. I was a victim of harmful social-interactive patterns like criticism, hostility, disrespect, impatience, and ridicule that my mother modeled. I had to unlearn many of these patterns and it was a challenge. I had to resocialize my self. It is important to note that some people may develop positive interactive patterns despite negative experiences, and vice versa. But research shows that most buds develop into the flower or leaf that they saw, and experienced as a child.

**Child Abuse**

Research shows that when an intimate male partner abuses his female partner, children suffer too. The children may be abused as well or suffer from the traumatic experiences of the two adults. This is what Donay says about abuse.

(translated version) My first daughter is not for my husband. He abuses physically abuses her because she stares on him. He takes drugs and she thinks he has a wild look. She is nervous. He doesn’t like her to stare at
him, so he beats her. She is terrified and so she ends up wetting the bed. This makes him mad and he beats her again.

Donay was also abused as a child. She said, "my stepfather always showed me his penis. My mother did not believe me until I asked my sister to be my witness. She still did not leave my stepfather when she found this out.”

Similarly, Eida shared her daughter's experience: “One day he whipped our daughter and I said that I would call NOPCA. He did not do anything because he wants a perfect image. So he kept her at home for two days and I made her wear long pants to hide the marks.”

Although there are mixed feelings about the impact of domestic violence on children who observe or experience this crime, it is important to note that some studies done show that children can be affected immediately and/or for the long-term. They may display anxiety, low self-esteem, insensitivity, aggressive, defiant, and even anti-social behaviour. However, there are different shades of the effect on the child based on factors like age, frequency of the abuse, and the type of emotional support or counseling provided (Carlson, 1990; Edelson, 1999; Westra & Martin, 1981).
**Be Careful What We Say and Do**

As parents, we need to be careful about how we assert ourselves in the presence of our children because what we say or do may come back to haunt us. This is what Fina has to say about her mother’s predictions.

Mis padres treat we good. But I was terca. I was haad a’s. I was the main one. Mi mamá say one day you will pay. Look whey I deh now. Eena jail. Mis padres me castigaron plenty times because I back ansah. I will not beat mis hijos wahn lat because I need to have paciencia.

Fina believes that the “curse”, “goat-mouth” (as we say in Belize) that her mom put on her has come to pass in her tragedy. While that may be so, unfortunately sometimes when parents are unable to deal with challenges they say things which they do not really mean or wouldn’t like to happen to their children. Fina will do well to bear her experience in mind when dealing with her children.

Dysfunctional parental relationships can have harmful effects on a child. In addition to the examples of Eida’s husband, and Lisa’s sons we can learn from Fina’s words, and the lyrics of Eminen’s song, *Cleaning Out My Closet* (2002) (which I am about to share) as another example of thinking before we act or speak as parents, and family members. The lyrics of the song will be followed by a brief discussion.

“… I’m sorry, mama I never meant to hurt you. I never meant to make you cry,
but tonight I’m cleaning out my closet…”

What is in his closet? The first thing that came to my mind was clothes. But I soon discovered that Eminem is not talking about clothes. He makes reference to his childhood experiences living with his mother. In cleaning out his closet, Eminem expresses great anger. He is angrier with his mother than with his father. His father separated from the family when he was a child and his mother had to take care of the children as a single parent. According to Eminem, she was on medication, and she also made him believe that he too was ill because she frequently put medicine in his food. When his brother, Ronnie, died she said that she wished it were Eminem.

Eminem is distressed, and even seems hysterical by what he continues to convey in his lyrics. He calls his mother a bitch, and wishes the worst for her. Here is what he says,

Yer getting older now,
and it’s cold when you’re lonely
An Nathan’s growing up so quick,
He’s gonna know you’re phony.
And Hailie’s getting so big now,
You should see her,
She’s beautiful.
But you’ll never see her,
She won’t even be at your funeral.
See what hurts me the most is
you won’t admit you was wrong…

you selfish bitch,

I hope you fuckin burn in hell

For this shit …

From the lyrics of his song, Eminem appears to be carrying a heavy psycho-emotional package in his baggage. He seems to be unaware of, or fails to take into consideration the sacrifices his mom made for him based on the circumstances in which she found herself as a single parent. She was evicted several times. The idea of eviction calls attention to many related questions like: Why was she evicted? Where did she and her children live when they were evicted? Did she have a job to pay her bills? Why or why not? Was she a victim of sociopolitical circumstances like the women in Belize? Families with inadequate income are heavily impacted. Their children are mal-nourished, and they are unable to adequately provide school materials for them. Living in poverty also increases stress among family members, and this stress in turn affects the children. Stress can also lead to conflicts which if not properly managed can lead to abuse. Notice that Eminem does not make the same accusations of his father in this song.

I, like Eminem, had negative feelings towards my biological mother until I became a parent. I hold parents accountable to ensure that they talk about the challenges they face with their children when it is appropriate. Talking about tough issues can be therapeutic for both the child and parent. It can help the
child understand why the parent(s) made certain choices or moves in life or why harmful wishes were expressed. Parents need to know that stick and stones hurt bones, and words can scar for life. I urge parents to initiate conversations with their children about tough issues. Create an open environment, and always be honest. As I reflect on parental communication of hardships or reasons for making certain choices in life, I want to add that sometimes parents may lack the skills to do this, and so there is a need to re/educate our parents. The church, and other organizations in the community can assist in this re/education. The schools should also play a major role in this endeavour.

As I reflected on the lyrics of the song, I felt strongly that the schooling system is inadequate in meeting many of the needs of today's children. The lessons we learn from the family, and the schools do not include parenting and childrearing skills. Jane Martin Roland said in the *Schoolhome* (1992) schools (and I will add families) need to prepare children for the reproductive (parenting, partner relationships, domestic chores) as well as the productive processes (earning a living). Some questions that come to mind are: Who has taken the time to teach us (males and females) about childcare? What will become of the children who were raised in homes where they witnessed abuse? What will happen to their children when these abused children become parents? Who has indoctrinated us to feel that mothers are the ones solely responsible for childcare and transmitting the cultural values?
Mother-daughter Relationship

In Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in the 20th Century Literature (2000), edited by Elizabeth Brown-Guillory (1996), women from different ethnicities unmask their thoughts about the mother-daughter relationship from numerous literary sources. For the Native Americans, a daughter’s way of knowing is a bridge connected to her mother’s bank of knowledge. One of the major modes of transmitting a mother’s knowledge is through storytelling in which the past and the present are linked. The daughter is expected to sustain and maintain the cultural values through committing the story telling to memory to pass on to her daughter. Correspondingly, mothers from the Mexican culture are also expected to be the repositories and transmitters of cultural values, even though they may not fully comprehend why they teach what they teach. On the contrary, the mother-daughter relationship in the Indian culture is weak, and even devalued. Mothers have a preference for sons because they strengthen or enhance their lineage. Daughters are born to be “given away,” and husbands are the successors of the daughters’ fathers.

This cultural myth about the relationship between mother and daughter, and the function of motherhood is under attack. Several literary writers are rewriting the mother-daughter relationship to disrupt the grand narrative of women, or mothers as “bastions” or “mules of the world.” Mexican-American women are challenging these stereotypical images. Gloria Anzaldúa does an excellent job of exploring the dualisms of the folk caricatures like La Llorana, La Malinche, and Ixtabai. Like Anzaldúa, many African American writers are
revisiting the tainted gendered cultural pattern of what it means to be a good mother, and the indoctrination of their daughters to the cultural stereotypes. They would agree that mothers must refrain from being accomplices in their own assassination, and therefore, mothers must discontinue the practice of teaching their daughters to be silent, to endure pain, and to produce children because of men's desire. Mothers need to reclaim their spaces, places and identity. Daughters need to create their own identity and not walk in the shadows of their mothers, especially the hardships and pain (Alexander, 2001; Anzaldúa, 1997; Brown-Guillory, 1996; Crew, 2000; O'Reilly & Abbey, 2001). The mother-daughter relationship should not be one like that of Donay and her mother. Donay observed that her mother took the abuses “like a woman,” and so Donay decided to do the same. We need to SIN-STOP IT NOW.

**Blended and Extended Families**

Based on the information disseminated by the Belizean women and myself in our narratives, we have illuminated that not only do family members need to learn to live in harmony, but also do in-laws, and step-families. Fina strongly felt that "my mother-in-law, she no like me. She did not want mis niños around her.... My mother-in-law no help me..." Donay also alluded to her in-laws' uncompassionate interaction. Bearing in mind that a mother-in-law is also a woman, and hopefully with more experience in family relationship and child rearing, it is necessary that she tries her best to bond with her daughter-in-law. This handshake is two ways, meaning that the daughter-in-law also needs to be
supportive and respectful of her mother-in-law. I have heard many hideous stories about mothers-in-law. In fact there is a website which features jokes about mothers-in-law. Ironically, in Belize we have a plant with thick long green leaves, and we call this plant maddah-n-law tongue (mother-in-law's tongue).

Step parenting was another issue that came up in this study. Fina had her first child who was not from her husband. Fina and I did not discuss the reason for leaving her first child with her parents, but this is an important matter to consider. Donay talked briefly about her experiences living with a stepfather. Her first child was not for her intimate partner either, and we saw how he mistreated the child. It seems as though this disharmony in blended families has been around for many years. In the fairy tale about Cinderella, and Hansel and Gretel we gain some experience of dealing with a stepmother. There are wicked stepfathers too. Donay and her daughter can attest to such experience.

There is need for education in dealing with blended families. Women and men need to realize that they just do not say they are in love, and want to live together without lengthy conversations about their children. They need to discuss all the issues like a couple planning to get married. Furthermore, they need to discuss how to discipline their children, how to resolve conflicts, and they also need to discuss these matters with their children (if they have any).

**Learning from Nora and Ketchell**

What can we learn from the story of Nora and her intimate partner which occurred almost half-a-century ago? Trapp was a police officer and although
police officers should be able to keep the peace, they can disrupt the peace within the family. Trapp, like Tomasa and Donay’s partners used drugs. That is not to say that the drugs were totally responsible for the domestic abuses within the family, but may have contributed to it. Donay alluded to this when she said that her partner would be under the influence of drugs, and that in turn he would physically abuse her daughter. Tomasa was also violently beaten by her husband when he was drunk.

Nora did report her battering experiences to a police officer. Nora, like Fina, may not have had the language to express what she was experiencing. Nora was looking towards those in authority for direction and support, but they failed to hear her plea. She said from the dock, “I will make the sergeant know about your threatening words.” She did, but it fell on deaf ears because when Nora reported the matter, and hinted that she would burn Trapp, the police officer trivialized the issue. Sanchez, a fellow police officer, testified that he was aware of the conflict and abuses of Nora by Trapp. He did not act upon the report. This happened because the officer could have been trying to protect his colleague, Trapp.

Law enforcement officers also batter. According to Lott (1995) in the article on *Deadly Secrets: Violence in the police family*:

A unique culture exists within the law enforcement. Usually police officers who are perpetrators are not arrested because of close bond formed among them, and they are rarely advised on avoiding family conflicts and battering. “In many ways police families resemble other families” (p. 1).
However, because of the additional stress of the officer’s work, “even exceptional police officers can become very poor spouses, parents, and friends” (p. 1). While these reasons are worth pondering, they cannot be used to justify battering for:

[T]he cost of failing to intervene in police family violence situations [and other family violence for that matter] goes far beyond monetary losses. What is the value of a career or a family or the damage of emotional scars left by unchecked family violence? (p. 4)

Domestic violence needs to be critically unraveled, and even if the judge of the commits it, he must pay the consequences.

Another reason for ignoring Nora’s incident could also be because at the time spousal abuse or battering was considered a private family affair. Many sistah’s also knew there were constant conflicts and abuses in Nora’s life, but did little about it. This reminds me of when I experienced the pain of Lisa, Tomasa, and Marina but I did not have the tools, the words or the courage to do anything. But there is need to SIN-STOP IT NOW. Domestic violence is everybody’s business, and we must unprivatize this domestic affair which is harmful to women and children, and generally to family relationships.

Nora was a woman desperate for help but the advice she received was inadequate, and surely not healing her wounds. Like the other women in this study, Nora was physically abused and threatened by Trapp. The manner in which she narrated her experiences alluded to the cycle of violence. She said, “and through these fightings, I leave sometimes. Then he came back to me and
make up.” Trapp, like Marina and Fina’s partners, had complete economic control of the family’s finances. Trapp was so emotionally insensitive, that he teased Nora with his money, and then withheld it from her. Another bone of contention that led to constant conflict for the couple was the colour of children’s skin. These women’s narratives are potent for rethinking the way the family, school and society should educate both our males and females.

**Back and Forth**

In this chapter we are reminded that families are continuously changing in their composition and experiences. Such experiences can become overwhelming and rocky at times. To make meaning and sense of the women’s stories required the excavation and exposure of Belizean cultural myths, and other historical, social and political influences that have deformed our awareness and acceptability of place, time, values and ideologies. A critical perspective about domestic violence against women demands that the researcher’s narratives about the lives of battered women are not only interpreted but also inclusive of possible suggestions to aid in social change. Figure 4 is a summary of what I covered in Chapters 8 -11. In chapter 12, I explore the performance of domestic violence using the metaphors of *rip, ripping, rip into* and *R.I.P. (rest in peace).*
### Figure 4: Summation of Interpretation

**Men can/do**
- have power-over women
- hate women
- cruel things to the woman they love

**Women**
- find it difficult to leave abusive relationships
- can be accomplices in their victimization
- must heed warning signs of domestic abuse

**Men and women are indoctrinated by cultural myths**
- Folk stories and songs give tainted representations of women
- Folk songs and stories represent women as submissive and subservient

**Women**
- have power to retaliate
- heed to learn about/ understand the cycle of domestic violence
- are victims of the political and legal systems

**FAMILIES**
- Men and women need to be conscious of their deeds and words
- Families may model healthy/unhealthy social-emotional relationships
- Child abuse is a common result of domestic abuse
- Mothers and fathers need to disrupt gendered stereotypes
- Mother need to teach daughters to claim their space and identity
- Men and women need to take positive steps to engender productive social-emotional relationships
- Men and women who move into blended or extended families need to be re/educate
- Domestic abuse has no barriers

**POSSIBLE OPTIONS TO DEAL WITH THESE ISSUES**
- jail perpetrator
- ignore the problem
- treat all family members
- assign social worker to family
- social worker surveillance
- remove children from family
- increase media publicity about the issues
- get schools/school leadership involved
- programmes and therapy for battered women only
Chapter Twelve

The Drama of Domestic Violence: From Rip to R.I.P.
In the introduction to this study, I referred to domestic violence as a text/sign because of its significant historical connection. The ideologies and cultural practices regarding domestic violence are legitimated by cultural pedagogy. In other words the family, the school, popular culture (TV, movies, video games, lyrics from songs) help to construct our reality, as well as regulate and dominate what we say and do. This legitimatization has been perpetuated for centuries. This notion will be developed in Section 4. In this chapter, I take a look at the adversarial effects of domestic violence. A combination of newspaper clippings intentionally organized on the photos of the Belize prison (located in the village of Hattieville), and the Belize City cemetery creates a graphic which is symbolically arranged to capture the chaos and energy expended in domestic disputes. It also powerfully illustrates two major consequences of the drama of domestic violence. The domestic violence activities are vicious. The consequences can be fatal. There is injury, murder, stabbing, and poisoning. One woman resorted to taking her own life, and the life of her children. The victims and/or victimizers can lose their life, be incarcerated in a hospital or a prison. These actions are not unique to contemporary society. They were around during the days of slavery too (as we will witness in the next section). It is this kind of drama and tragedy that I will be exploring in this chapter using the metaphor of rip, ripping into and R.I.P. (rest in peace).

Hodge (1995) provides a vivid description of a quarrel between or among Caribbean people:
Quarrels are spectacular: a great deal of energy and artistry are applied to body movements, the ingenuity of insults, the graphic recitation of the antagonist’s crimes; a good quarrel will provide a morning’s dramatic diversion for a whole neighbourhood often emerge onto the street as if in search of an adequate stage. (p. 190)

The dramatic description attributed to the quarrel by Hodge can be paralleled to domestic violence in many ways. The stage for domestic abuse, (and its sometimes tragic ending), is set in the home. The catastrophic climax, meaning death or injury, are staged in the kitchen or the bedroom. Sometimes the domestic violence beast leaves the confines of the home. It can be staged at the workplace as in the case of the BDF (Belize Defense Force) driver who murdered his wife, manager of the BDF canteen, at their workplace in July 2002. Staging domestic abuse and murder at the workplace is evidence that the community’s location is of no concern for the barbaric encounters of domestic violence. It can be a small peaceful, rural village or a densely populated urban community. The antagonists or the perpetrators are usually males, but domestic abuse is occasionally dotted with females as perpetrators.

At sometime in the intimate relationship, the enchantment of living together dwindles or fades. The pleasure and passion of lovemaking become a thing of the past. The future of the children is of no concern. The love pledged by the two adult intimate partners becomes heated and intoxicated with
overpowering arguments, provoking a reaction of agitation and frustration. The hostility increases, and the perpetrator emerges like a venomous snake who strikes at the enemy with a blood dripping rip from a knife or a machete, a short, sharp blast from a gun, or bright red flames from a fire fueled by gasoline and lit by matches. There is a mixture of chaos, confusion and lamentation as families are ripped apart, or become casualties of the domestic war. The perpetrator and victim is a father or mother, a brother or sister, a son or daughter, a niece or nephew, and a grandson or granddaughter. Amid the explosion of physical death or injury, the gruesome acts leave blemishes that can and will last a lifetime.

Reflecting on the historicity of domestic violence, and the implications for the themes of representation, identity, power, resistance and agency, I created the acronym rip. Rip, I paused to think. What is that all about? It reminds me of ripping, tearing something apart. The movie, DEAD POET’S SOCIETY, immediately came to mind. Professor Keatings demanded that the students in his class “rip out” the introductory pages of their poetry text. In this way, they would not be influenced by the author’s interpretation and explication. Ripping out the introduction was also a metaphor for the transformation of traditional teaching and learning to liberatory teaching and learning practices.

This epiphany made me grab the closest text at hand which was The Random House Webster’s College Dictionary (1991). It defined rip as to cut or tear apart roughly or vigorously; to rip into means to attack physically or verbally;
to rip off means to steal, to steal from, cheat or exploit. Rip also means a worthless, dissolute horse. I also realized that “r”, ‘i’, “p” could also form R.I.P. (rest in peace). I decided that I had to deliberate on this some more, and therefore, for the remainder of this section, I share thoughts that occurred to me as I deliberated, and also a few pieces from scholars which support my ideas.

**Domestic Violence: “The Shadow of a Whip”**

The history of male domination and female submission charted by scholars has definitely given rise to the concern of feminists and critical theorists. They believe that violence against women is related to the patriarchal system of control which dominates and silences women (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Dobash & Dobash, 1972; Lloyd & Emery, 2000; Lerner, 1986; Profitt, 2000). Wife or intimate female abuse is not a new phenomenon, and the level of control that has been given to men over women is incredible. Domestic violence parallels the violence exerted and expressed by the colonial masters during slavery. Like slavery, domestic abuse appears in all forms. It can damage the person physically, economically, socially, emotionally, and/or psychologically. Merle Hodge (1995), *The Shadow of the Whip: A comment on male-female relations in the Caribbean*, affirmed my sentiments:
Caribbean society was born out of brutality, destructiveness, rape; the
destruction of the Amerindian peoples, the assault of Africa, the forced
uprooting and enslavement of the African; the whip, the authority of force…

But the violence of our society has not evaporated. It is still there. It is there in
the relations between adult and child, between black and white, between man
and woman. It has been internalized… Drastic brutality – physical and verbal
– upon children is an accepted part of child rearing in the Caribbean…

Our capacity for verbal violence is limitless. Teasing and heckling are taken to
lengths which would shock in another society [sic]… Quarreling is a national
pastime… And the fact that a physical fight between a man and a woman – or
more accurately, a woman – beating – may erupt into open air and rage for
hours without any serious alarm on the part of the onlookers for the safety of
the woman, without attracting the intervention of the law, is a strong comment
on our attitudes: ‘Never never put yu mouth in husband-and-wife business,’
… (pp. 189 – 190)

“A Little Something on His Stick”

narrates their life on the farm. Walker speaks to the constructed identities of
black women as the mule of the world, tramps, and evil bitches. She provides a useful narrative to understand how males learn to be privileged over females, and how the beastly perception of women is perpetuated. The learning is intergenerational and trans-generational. The men culturally miseducate their sons about women and sex. Concurrently, the women culturally miseducate the girls by hiding the reality of puberty and sex from them. Walker writes:

We lived on a farm in the South in the fifties, and my brothers… were allowed to watch animals being mated. This was not unusual; nor was it considered unusual that my older sister and I were frowned upon if we even asked, innocently, what was going on. One of my brothers explained the mating one day, using words my father had given: ‘The bull is getting a little something on his stick’, he said. And he laughed. ‘What stick?’ I wanted to know. ‘Where did he get it? How did he pick it up? Where did he put it?’ All my brothers laughed…

So my father went around talking about bulls getting something on their sticks and she [my mother] went around saying girls did not need to know about such things. They are ‘womanish’ (a very bad way to be in those days) if they asked…

The fact that she [my sister] was not allowed at official matings did not mean she never saw any. While my brothers followed my father to the mating pens… she stationed herself near the pigpen, or followed our
many dogs until they were in a mating mood, or, failing to witness something there, she watched the chickens…

My father expected all of his sons to have sex with women. ‘Like bulls,’ he said, ‘a man needs to get a little something on his stick.’ And so, on Saturday nights, into town they went, chasing the girls. (pp. 326-328)

When I think of the act of sexual intercourse, meaning penis into vagina, (especially for the first time) I envision many women being ripped into during the act because many men do not take the women’s emotions and needs into consideration. In reflecting on these connections, the thought of a woman losing her virginity also comes to mind. The act of penile-vaginal penetration to rupture the female’s hymen can be a pleasant experience if the man is gentle and compassionate, or a journey to hell if he uses his phallus power to rip into the woman in one strike. In Belize, I have heard some males describe their sadistic and sadomasochistic sexual performance with females in a very demeaning and beastly fashion. Even the action words for sexual intercourse are symbolically violent. Common actions to describe males’ vaginal intercourse with women are “juck up, fuck up, stab up, bone down, bruise up, pump up, and hit it.” The actions all convey pain, injury and time needed to heal. The rousing drama continues with the male's imaginative motions of “getting on top of a female, blowing in her face, sticking her, riding her, and/or hitting her from behind.” If the woman gets pregnant, the men say that they have the woman ”'jack up.” Imagine, jack up!
This is an unfriendly term. We talk about 'jack-up' a vehicle when we want to change a tire. Jackup also refers to a drilling rig ...with legs which can be lowered or raised (Merriam-Webster dictionary, online). This makes me nauseous! This kind of talk is an indication of how they/we have been culturally misinformed.

SIN-STOP IT NOW.

*Rape: Weapon of Domination and Repression*

According to hooks (1981), “rape was a common method of torture slavers used to subdue recalcitrant black women. The threat of rape or other physical brutalization inspired terror in the psyches of displaced African females” (p. 18). During the slave trade, rape was a common phenomenon, and “many a negress was landed upon on shore already impregnated by someone of the demonic crew that brought them over (hooks, 1981, p. 18). When men attack women and rape them, whether as married mates or not, that’s a form of ripping into a person. Enslaved women were subjected to rape continuously. Rape has been a weapon of domination, a weapon of repression. The covert goal was to extinguish slave women’s will to resist, and in the process to demoralize their men (Davis, 1982). hooks (1981) adds that “rape in slavery was more than a chance tool of violence. It was an institutionalized crime ...” (p. 51).

I pause now to share Waris Dirie’s (1998) narration of her real life story. It provides a moment for us to reflect upon our lives and the lives of women who suffered like Waris.
Waris was a Somalian girl. Her father had agreed to a pre-arranged marriage from which Waris was determined to escape. After her many days of running and hiding, she managed to hitch a ride. Shortly after, the vehicle stopped, and one of the men came into the back with Waris. He took his pants down and “his erect penis bobbed at me as he grabbed my legs and tried to force them apart (p. 7). Waris resisted and found a stone that she used to mall his head when he came back on top of her shouting “open your fucking legs” (p. 8).

While Waris escaped this rape, she did not escape an earlier one when she was in her nomadic village. Guban, her father’s friend, and she were to bring in the lambs before dark. Suddenly, Guban stopped, put his coat on the ground and invited her to come and sit with him. She hesitated, but after awhile she sat down because she was convinced that he was going to tell her a story. She was fond of hearing stories.

“Guban’s face came between me and the Milky Way; he squatted between my legs and yanked up my little scarf to my waist. Next I felt something hard and wet pressing against my vagina…. The pressure intensified until it became a sharp pain…. Suddenly, I was flooded with a warm liquid and a sickening acrid odor permeated the air…. I ran and threw my arms around her [mom’s] legs…What happened to her? He laughed casually…. I was trying to tell her a story and she got scared…. I [Waris] wanted to tell her
what my Papa’s friend had done to me, but I didn’t have the words – I
didn’t know what he’d done” (p. 22-23).

One night I was listening to Oprah Winfrey narrate her autobiography on
one of the television stations, and recognized for the umpteen times that like
her, many females are carrying around the secret of rape. Oprah had
experiences with rape from when she was nine years, and suffered from this
trauma for many years. Like Waris, she probably did not have the words at
the time to tell about this sexual violence, and invasion of one’s privacy.
The tragedy for her is that she was raped by a close relative too, her
nineteen-year-old cousin.

I facilitated a session for a workshop three summers ago in Belize City for
teachers from primary and secondary schools. We discussed the role of the
family and teacher as “parents/surrogate parents”. The breaking moment of
the workshop was when a female teacher said that she felt moved to confess
her childhood experiences of being a victim of rape. She was raped many
times by her uncle. She talked about the agony of living in silence. She
knew that no one would believe that this uncle, “prim and proper” in the
family and public’s eyes would engage in incest. She decided to assist with
counselling at the high school where she taught because she was of the
opinion that many girls may also be suffering silently from rape and other
forms of abuses and family problems.
The experiences of these three women, and Donay whose stepfather mentally tortured her with his erect penis, bring about a flashback of the seven-year-old child at one of the primary schools in Belize where I worked. She was entrusted to her stepfather for care and protection, but was raped instead. I kept thinking about how she had suffered painfully from the penile penetration rupturing her hymen. It is a discomfort for women, much more so for a child. What if the neighbour had not hinted, would the child have had the words, wisdom and courage to alert her mom about this violent act? I don’t know.

It is hard to imagine but seems to be a reality that many young females (males too) are attending school daily, but silently and emotionally suffering. Their teachers or parents may not know or may never get to know about traumatic experiences like the ones described above. It is sexual violations like the experiences of Waris, Oprah, the teacher, Donay and the seven-year-old that warrant exploring and examining domestic violence and the implications of schooling within and beyond the school walls.

Walker (1973), in her book, In Love and Trouble, relates a story in Her Sweet Jerome. The spouse does not beat the woman, but he cheats on her. The neighbours gossiped about her “little man is sticking his finger into somebody else’s pie.” At the same time she realizes that “she was and could not be surprised … for she had long been aware that her own pie was going — and the
longest time had been going strictly untouched” (p. 28). Women over the
generations have been ripped off; they’ve been cheated on by their men, and
exploited in many ways delineated by the scholars. Some who read this work -
male and female- may be able to identify with these experiences either
personally or second hand.

* Rip → R.I.P. *

The headlines from the newspaper on the graphic at the beginning of this
chapter draw our attention to the adversarial effects of domestic violence. When I
lived in a village in Toledo in the country of Belize in the 1980s, a wife was
frustrated with her familial conditions and spousal relationship. Late one evening,
she grabbed her partner’s scrotum and inflicted a wound with a sharp object. He
was rushed to the hospital, and subsequently released. The couple continued to
live together with their 12 children after he recuperated. Similarly, in 1993, in the
United States, Bobbit cut off her husband’s penis with a butcher knife. In January
2002, a twenty-one-year old Brazilian woman who was weary of her husband’s
extra-marital affairs and drunkenness also cut off her husband’s penis. Cutting off
the penis is such a symbolic act. The man’s phallic power has been cut off, and
the consensus is that their manhood has been taken away.

Some individuals, like slave women, have turned those ripped
experiences into R.I.P. (rest in peace). While slave women committed suicide as
a means of freedom from being ripped off, and ripped into, other women have put
their *rippers* to R.I.P. Similarly, some men have also put the ripped to R.I.P. In
1963, Nora Parham from the Orange Walk district in Belize set her batterer, a police officer, on fire. He did not survive, but rather was laid to R.I.P. Fourteen years after Nora’s incident in the United States, Francine Hughes set her husband ablaze. Francine claims (and shares many experiences) that Mickey, her husband, was an alcoholic. He was jealous and had kept her isolated from family and friends. He forced her to quit her job at a restaurant. He burnt her books so she could not continue her studies. The evening that the incident occurred, he had aggravated her to uncontrollable anger. He fell asleep and she sprinkled gasoline around the bed and lit it fire. At the court trial, her children were able to testify. One child said, “Daddy came in the kitchen and he was mad because mom was cooking TV dinner. He grabbed her arms... bends it up behind her back and is hurting her... and daddy hits her in the face and then hits her on the head...” (McNulty, 1981, p. 18). Unlike Nora, Francine’s verdict was “not guilty-by reason of temporary insanity” (McNulty, 1981, p. 283).

Although Nora and Francine’s cases occurred years apart and in two different countries, they are parallel in many ways. These two women had children, and were consistently abused by their male intimate partners. Both of these women used gasoline to incinerate these abusive perpetrators. Ketchell was set ablaze in the outdoor toilet where human waste is deposited, and Francine’s husband was set on fire in the matrimonial bed. The once warm and loving connubial bed was transformed into a furnace where the perpetrator perished.
To an outsider these performances may seem harsh, but in the minds of these two women putting their spouse to rest might appear to have been the best alternative at the time. Women may kill to save their lives or their children’s lives. Slaughtering may be the only way they perceive to set themselves "free." Could these two incidents (and I guess there are others but these interested me because of their similarities) have been avoided? Did the women consider the consequences of their actions? Would it have made a difference if the women had reported the constant abuse to the police? What if they reported it and nothing was done?

In Francine’s case, the issue of domestic violence was trivialized. When the police were interrogated about his response to calls about domestic disputes, he said he had responded to them “numerous times, I have been on hundreds of them… There is not much that you can do…” And people are not taken to jail if the situation is aggravating, “not unless there is an assault… that takes place in your presence—while the police officer is on the scene.” (McNulty, 1981, p. 2).

Finally, current legal and judicial systems enforce existing power relationships and thereby perpetuate partner violence. In the case of Nora, although it was a while back, I say that she was not supported by the legal system. Browne (1987) suggests that

Many spousal homicides are preceded by a history of abuse, and women are jailed for slaying their mates who frequently abuse them. Many of these women sought help from the police or others prior to the lethal incident but
either the urgency of their situation was not understood, or the alternatives offered were inadequate to allow them to escape. (p. 4).

**Back and Forth**

In an intimate relationship there are power differentials. Most often the male is the super-ordinate figure, and the female is the subordinate. However, the submission of women should not be taken for granted, even though their power is limited. Women may demonstrate agency in ways that are detrimental to them (as we experienced with the women in this chapter). The next section serves as a bridge connecting the cultural pedagogy with the larger social-political forces. I will illuminate the influences of historical forces on our perceptions of the world. Historicity embraces inheritances from hegemonic histories to create a counter-hegemonic discourse in order to disrupt the dominance of men, state and capital. Understanding the historical context can help unravel the sociopolitical and socio-historical impact of the past on the presence.

I close this chapter with a poem written by Melony Davis (2001), who was a junior at Excelsior High School in Belize City at the time she wrote this poem. Her message is that women, and I would say the society in general, cannot continue to ignore the private domestic affair of violence. We should collectively rise and SIN-STOP IT NOW.
I was not made to be a punching bag
I was not made to be a football
So punching and kicking up my body
I will not tolerate at all
As for telling me things to lower my esteem
Tells me you don’t care about me
So I rebuke you and your abusive ways
That my life can be protected and free.

A relationship is a unique partnership
Where two people work together as one
We're supposed to plan for a better future
And make it a God blessed union
I will not settle for anything less
Than what is deemed right by my conscience
That’s why I loudly and clearly express

Zero Tolerance To Domestic Violence
SECTION 4: BUILDING BRIDGES: VIOLENT LEGACIES

Ignorant of history, those who seek to ensure their permanence create the very conditions for their demise. Molefi Asante

As a researcher writing from a critical theory discourse, emphasizing discourses of postcolonialism and AfriKanA wo-fem-isms, I would be remiss if I did not “build bridges between the reader and the text….develop[ing] a form of cultural criticism revealing power dynamics within social and cultural contexts” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000. p. 286). In order to discern what continues to disempower women in the contemporary world, the analyses of the stories needs to be placed within a social and historical contexts. In this section, I will proceed to examine the issue of abusive relationships between males and females within a larger context, that is to say a historical context of domestic violence and colonial violence.

Reading, writing and examining history reminds me of our annual carnival parade in Belize City. My family members, friends and I gather on the verandah to watch the parade that lasts about two hours or more. We survey the panoramic view attempting to take in the diverse sights, sounds and movements, yet when we discuss the parade shortly after its completion, our focus is different. When we revisit the recorded video a few weeks later, many perspectives
change even more dramatically. The nucleus of this section of the research is historicity. History is story telling and as such the narrator weaves the pieces together the way he or she perceives them. If history is woven like the narration of my uncle’s stories, the narrator is always the victor, and the voices and experiences of the other people present are discounted, minimized or silenced. This has been the practice of traditional historians who consistently excluded “herstory,” and “theirstory” (meaning the colonized peoples) from the pages of history books because they wrote from an objectivist perspective.

Why historicize, dehistoricize, and rehistoricize? History is all around us, and we ourselves are constructed by history. From a critical perspective, writing about society, social constructs or a social problem like domestic violence warrants the investigation of history. The present is both embedded in, and a result of history. The colonized representations of dependency, devalued cultures, inferiority, and denigration of self, for example, are always part of history. There is great potential for exploring these questions by using historicity as a segue to disentangle historically created and narrated power relationships, and the impact on the construction of identity formation. Using this historicity as a vehicle exposes the interrelated oppressive forces of the sociopolitical, economic and cultural aspects of a society.
Chapter Thirteen

“If the Present Looks Like the Past”: Domestic Violence

I borrowed the title “If the Present Looks Like the Past” from Alice Walker’s (1983) *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens* in which she discusses colourism, blackness, and oppression as “divisive cancer.” I use the present in this chapter to better understand what domestic violence is all about, and how are scholars talking about this social phenomenon. The past is connected to colonialism, colonial violence and slavery, which I believe, are interconnected with domestic violence, and therefore, falls on a historical continuum.

Understanding the social construction of gender is useful to understand domestic violence and its global prevalence. Gender, like race and class, is a socially constructed condition. The mis/construction of gender starts even before a child’s birth when a mother, parents, or other family members debate on names, colour of clothes, and types of toys. After birth, the contestation continues about the social interactions and gendered expectations and roles based on the child’s sex. These interactions and gendered roles and expectations are further reinforced and legitimized by sociocultural institutions like the school and the church. When the child matures as an adult, the socialization process also makes parenting a gendered responsibility and the cycle continues. Marchand and Runyan (2000) aver:
Feminists scholars have repeatedly shown that gender operates at various levels... to produce and reproduce an intricate web of inequalities between men and women... gender operates in at least three distinct, yet connect ways: (1) ideologically especially in terms of gendered representations and valorizations of social processes and practices; (2) at the level of social relations; and (3) physically through the social construction of male and female bodies (p. 8).

In chapter 3, I presented various definitions and terminologies for the conception of domestic violence. At that time I had not come across Jones (1994) *Next Time She’ll Be Dead* in which she draws attention to the sufferings of battered women, and the structure of society which sustains male dominance, and represents women as victims and men as victimizers. She posits this quote about the structures of such a society:

One of those gray phases beloved of bureaucracy, designed to give people a way of talking about a topic without really seeing what’s going on... it's a euphemistic abstraction that keeps us at a dispassionate distance, far removed from the repugnant spectacle of a human being in pain. (p. 81)

I agree with Jones, and after revisiting and deliberating the array of perspectives on domestic violence, the first image that came to mind was a coin. A coin has two sides, likewise there are two lenses through which I understand
the situation of women who have been battered. The sensual images about the concept and actions of domestic violence are two-sided. On one side of the coin I saw destructive images that make the battered woman a victim because of aggression, assault, abuse, battering, brutality, beating, blaming, blows, coercion, control, death, degradation, demands, disintegration, devaluing, enemy, force, hostility, helplessness, intimidation, insults, isolation, miscarriage, prison, possession, suffering, submission, separation, screaming, threats, violence and the many layers of class, age, religion and skin colour. When I flipped over the coin, I identified positive, powerful images of agency, circulatory power, power to, resistance, retaliation, self-defense and survival despite all odds.

Domestic violence against women is characterized by domestic inequalities such as distortion, dodging, neglect, domination, battering and rape which harms a woman physically, emotionally, financially, sexually, verbally, socially and politically. Domestic violence has resulted in alienation, dependency, dispossession, silence, exclusion, in/visibility, and mental colonization. History, like the coin, can be flipped both ways. It can serve to silence and exclude women, and portray them as victims, and/or to illuminate the interrelated oppressive forces of domestic violence as well as to detect the things that do not remain the same. Actually, the latter would be more useful. In this section of the chapter, I complement history with the feminist agenda to question gender inequalities, male domination and exploitation. I simultaneously use postcolonial
discourse and AfriKanA wo-fem-isms to investigate the themes of power, representation, identity, resistance and agency.

**Domestic Violence Against Women**

Historically males (either father, spouse or slave master) governed women. In Rome the legal institution supported divorce, chastising or death for adultery. A woman could even be burned to death if she committed adultery, but the same punishment was not meted out for men. Interestingly, the “rule of thumb concept” had its beginning in England in the eighteenth century when men could still reprimand women, but their choice was limited to a tool no thicker than their thumb (Berry, 1995; Jones, 1994; Hofeller, 1983; Lerner, 1986; Roy, 2001).

Researchers have identified five major types of family violence: child physical abuse, child sexual abuse, parent/elder abuse, marital/date rape, and spouse/partner abuse. Sev’er (1997) notes the strides that have been taken by stating, “wife abuse continues to be one of the most important and pernicious problems of our times. We have moved from the stage of denial that it ever happens to acknowledge that it is a serious problem” (p. xi). It was only recently that there was a move to give more attention to violence against women, specifically battering. In the 1950s the English passed a law against assaults on children and women; however; according to Harway & O’Neil (1999) “in the United States, historically, relationship violence was not considered a serious problem and was judged to be a private matter” (p. 126).
The feminist movement has been very active and proactive in bridging the gap between domestic violence and public consciousness. By the 1960s, the women’s movement campaigned against rape and other gender inequalities, organized shelters, developed programmes and intervention measures, and advocated for new laws and policies (Berry, 1995; Jones, 1994; Harway & O’Neil, 1999; Profitt, 2000). Furthermore, the issue of wife abuse was virtually nonexistent in scholarly and popular literature in the nineteen sixties. Conversely, in the seventies there was increased attention given to domestic violence (Gelles, 1980).

In the 1980s, Mark Schulman conducted a survey of spousal violence against women in Kentucky (USA) for the Kentucky Commission on Women. The results of the survey showed that:

- twenty-one percent of married Kentucky women report having experienced at least one incident of spousal violence at some time.

- four percent of female partners had experienced severe forms of violence (women beaten male partner using a knife or gun).

- it is a myth that spousal abuse occurs only in poor households.

- victimized female partners rarely report the domestic violence that they experience from male partners.

The data on actual incidence of spousal violence indicate no significant differences among income and education groups (Iyo, 1998; Profitt, 2000; Schulman, 1981).
Statistical information (Berry, 1995; Jones, 1994, www.actabuse.com; www.cybergrll.com; ndvh.org; vpcswi.org) on the domestic violence in the United States approximately two decades later reveals that on an average:

- every nine seconds a woman is beaten
- 3 or 4 million women are battered annually
- women constitute 85% - 95% of intimate violence victims
- the highest rate of battering is experienced by women between 20 - 34 years
- 65% of intimate murders in 1996 were committed with firearms
- 25 - 45% women are battered during pregnancy
- 50 -70% of men who abuse women, also abuse children
- domestic violence costs at least $67 billion each year.

Many scholars argue that at the macro level there are inadequate laws and practices concerning violence against women. Social institutions such as education, law, religion, and popular culture support male superiority and the control of women, and violence is inherent in the established mode of social relations, distribution of goods and services, and legal practices of dispensing justice in the legal system (Bulham 1985; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Kirk & Rey-Okazawa, 2000). Using the data sources in Sections 2 and 3, I delineated ways in which certain values, attitudes, and dispositions are reproduced, transmitted and, therefore, become accepted as “natural,” or the norm. Institutions of patriarchal values and the history of colonial violence serve to connect the bridge to domestic violence and power relation. At the intergenerational level, my
personal experience of growing up in Belize has yielded several culturally ingrained myths such as:

- domestic violence is a private matter
- wife and husband stay together until death
- a nagging woman provokes a man, and so deserves a beating
- a woman’s place is in the home
- a man’s jealousy of his wife should be taken to mean that he loves her so much, he just can’t do without her
- a man shows he loves a woman if he beats her.

*Mis/education/ and Mis/interpretation: Religious Re/production*

Like the family and the schools, religious institutions are responsible for reinforcing patriarchal culture. Here is one instance to support this statement. The Christmas season is a time of celebration in Belize. It is customary that friends and relatives gather for hours and dance, eat, drink and reminisce the “good old days.” In December 2001, at the time I was collecting data for my study, I used one of the Christmas social events to discover what my Belizean friends and relatives had to say about the origin of domestic violence and patriarchy. There were several people present (different age-range and ethnicity) enjoying the mix of colours, sights and sounds at the social gathering. I shared my current research interest with them, and said “mek we talk bout dis wahn lee bit.” The men immediately jumped on the bandstand. The women had little to
say. We mainly giggled, and smiled. The men started to talk about the creation of man, and referenced Genesis repeatedly. Here is the gist of our conservation.

God decided that Adam was lonely so he made Eve from Adam’s rib. That gives Adam and men in general dominion over Eve and all other women. Eve was very evil and could not be trusted after she tempted Adam. So too her descendants, other women, are evil and cannot be trusted. Women like to tempt men, especially sexually. The Bible says women should submit to their husbands. Men have the strength to protect women and are the providers. If they doesn’t provide for and protect their family, they are punks. Man rules because he is the one who gets on top of a woman. If it is the reverse, what kind of man is he? He is a damn punk. They concluded, and besides dat dah di way ih mi always deh; man dah di wan in charge.

After this discussion, I have been thinking about what my grandmother used to say about the Bible. She told me that several books were omitted from the versions we read today. What I have come to realize is that when we are talking about the Bible and what it purports, we should indeed bear in mind that the Bible was not written in English. As a matter of fact, most of the books of the Old Testament were originally composed in Hebrew. The Bible was translated, and as such Bible translations were produced by careful scholarship in grammar, vocabulary, style, and history. Some of the translated versions are the New American Standard, New King James, New International, Revised Standard Version, and the New English Bible. The question that lingers in my mind is how much biblical perversion has there been during the
Thinking back to what the Belizean men were saying about female-male relationships as posited by the Bible, it is noticeable that the main thrust of the males’ argument for the subjugation of women is based on religion. Even though they have not been to church since they were school age, some of what they had learned through our church-state schooling had been ingrained in them. That comes as no surprise because churches and schools are two of the social institutions responsible for cultural mis/education. The examples which follow continue to support this claim.

St. Thomas Aquinas carried the Aristotelian revolution to completion by developing a new Christian philosophy which he felt was consistent with the religious teachings of Christianity. The sex polarity perspective became central, and captured the minds of the intellectuals in Europe and ultimately it was transmitted throughout Europe through both formal and informal education. By the twelfth century there were several nuns in the Catholic Church who were learned and rose to leadership positions. The celibate men in the church most likely saw this as a threat and took offense. They propagated the image of single, or unmarried women as temptation. They announced that women like these would cause a man to be lustful and to commit sin, so men should avoid them. The consequences were extreme, to the point of excluding women from the public sphere, and from leadership positions in the church.
Hofeller (1983), in tracing the historical chronology of wife abuse extensively explicates why factors that are legal, cultural, economic, political and religious have been major contributors of wife abuse throughout history. At the same time, she also explains occasional contributions that were made by women and/or decisions that were made in favour of women. According to Hofeller (1983), wife beating has been an accepted norm and practice from the early Middle Ages. At the time Christianity had a great influence on the status of women. Actually, “the Christian religion had incorporated many Jewish beliefs about the nature of the female sex. For example, in the narrative of “The Fall,” it was made clear that,

Eve was entirely to be blamed for the fact that mankind had been expelled from the idyllic Garden of Eden. During the Middle Ages this was loosely interpreted as meaning that woman was responsible for all the evil and sin in the world. (Hofeller, p. 50).

Similarly, Church Founders believed that,

Women primarily represented temptation to succumb to carnal desires, thereby impeding spiritual growth… In Ephesians, however, St. Paul writes: Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord … As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. (Hofeller, p. 50)

Additionally, in Friar Cherubino’s “Rules of Marriage,” he states that, “if a husband’s verbal correction of his wife were not effective, then he was to”… take
up a stick and beat her soundly, for it is better to punish the body and correct the soul than to damage the soul and spare the body…” (Hofeller, p.51). Hoefeller is alluding to the cultural actions and statements (like the above) that have been intergenerationally transmitted which leads to intergenerational programming. In regard to issues of gender and sex, most people have been conditioned in such a way that we have become mentally and socially deformed. The deformity is reflected in several ways such as:

- men’s perception about women and about themselves
- women’s perceptions about themselves and men
- society’s overall differential treatment of men and women
- and the warped socio-economic and political impact.

Bearing in mind that I alluded earlier to the numerous translations for the Bible, I take time here to provide a few quotations from the King James’ Version (1984) in order to get one perspective of the context. I will cite verses from the books of Genesis and Ephesians, and list other books of the Bible which reiterate the messages of the two former books mentioned here. I encourage readers to further explore, and examine the text for themselves.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

*Genesis 1:26-27*
And the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and as he slept: and he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead, thereof;

And the rib, which the Lord had taken from man, made he woman, and brought her unto man. And Adam said, this is now bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

*Genesis 2:21-24*

In Ephesians, the discourse is centered on Christ, humans and the relationship of the church, and also around recreating the human family and what God has done and is doing. In the chapters prior to chapter 5, there is mention of spiritual blessings, redemption, re-creation, digression, empowerment, unity, mind control, and then the circle of responsibility and mutual submission. It is important to read the entire chapter 5 to make sense of its implications. In my opinion, many of the verses can be lessons to avoid domestic and patriarchal violence, and the perceptions men have of women as will be discovered in the verses below. Here are a few of the verses.

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;
Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient:
but rather give thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor
unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any
inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Ephesians 5: 3-5

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.
Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For
the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the
church: and he is saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject
unto Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Ephesians 5:21-24

And now the message for the men or husbands:
Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave
himself for it;
That he might sanctify and cleanse it …
So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his
wife, loveth himself.
For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it,
even as the Lord the church:
For we are as members…
For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and they shall be
joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.
This is a great mystery…

Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Ephesians 5:25-33

Here are other portions of the Bible which are sources of principles for living as man and wife and generally as a family: 1 Corinthians 7, verses 1-16, Colossians 3:verses18-20, and 1 Peter 3, verses 1-8.

**Legal Impenetrability, Patriarchal Posterity**

Eventually these religious and social enactments became legal. The Code of Hammurabi marks the inception of institutionalizing the patriarchal family as a trait of state power, and at the same time it created defined limitations between women of different classes. After the patriarchal dominance moved from private practice into public law, female sexuality became regulated by the state. For instance a man unable to repay a debt was permitted to pledge his human property, meaning his wife and his children, his concubine and their children, and his slaves. Furthermore, the father had an unlimited authority over his children. In relation to marriage, Mesopotamian marriages were generally arranged through the negotiation of the fathers of the groom and bride. Daughters were invaluable as brides because of the bride price that they fetched. Homogamous marriages were also encouraged in order to keep the property within the same class (Allen, 1997; Hofeller, 1983; Lerner, 1986; Roy, 2001).
At some point, every state had laws against the assault of women, but the laws were rarely applied when men battered their female intimate partners. Police officers were reluctant to interfere in what was considered to be private family affairs. Women continued to press for law reform but gradually realized that the law was impenetrable. The impenetrability of the law and the inflexibility of the legal system resulted in high loss of lives. For example, between 1967 and 1973, over 17,000 women and children in the United States were killed because of domestic violence (Jones, 1994).

The legal system like the institutions of religion and the family continue to perpetuate domestic violence. Jones (1994) espouses:

> The law has never been able to affect battering effectively because of its own particular structure. Written by men for men, the law is designed to protect men from the state and to adjudicate conflicts between men, to preserve order in a society of men. (pp. 23-24)

Belize has recognized that domestic violence is a problem that warrants attention. It has made strides in updating policies in regard to women but the practice of the legal system continues to keep women in bondage. Chronologically, in the 1980s, the organization of Women Against Violence advocated for legal protection of battered women. In 1989, the Family Court was established to adjudicate domestic issues. In the 1990s the Domestic Violence Act was passed, and the first shelter for battered women was established. Yet, the law continues to discriminate against women because under the law,
women’s bodies are the possession of their husbands. Hence, a woman cannot bring a charge against her husband for rape because of their marriage contract which automatically gives the husband consent to have sexual intercourse with her when he desires. Furthermore, if it is proven that a wife who has committed adultery petitions for legal separation from her husband, she will be denied alimony for herself. Although these laws are stringent against women, many women continue to withdraw the cases of domestic violence that they lodged at the Family Court (Belize Periodic Report, 1999). What we as a society need to realize, however, is that each time a woman withdraws a case against the perpetrator, she is supporting the violent culture and dominant structure.

**There is hope: Educating Females and Males to Share the Centre**

In this section I wish to briefly share some information related to the text of consciousness (which I will refer to in other portions of the remainder of this research). According to Dalla Barba (2002), “becoming conscious of something means becoming conscious of something in a certain way” (p. 92). There is a multiplicity of consciousness such as double consciousness, independent consciousness, dependent consciousness, interdependent consciousness, reflexive consciousness, critical consciousness and deepened consciousness (Dalla Barba, 2002; DuBois, 1903; Freire, 1970, 1973, hooks, 2000).

Although the text, consciousness-raising (CR), is associated with the early stages of the feminists’ movement, it was used almost a century earlier in the writing of W. E. B. DuBois’ *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The goal of CR at the
time women were using the text was to raise or increase the consciousness/awareness of women to issues of female oppression in a male dominated society. The strategy was powerful and so meetings that began in women’s homes stretched into the community; thus forming a web of relationships. Through consciousness-raising meetings women analyzed their situations and conditions, engaged in debates, dialogued and eventually developed a standpoint on gender oppression and exploitation. They started with individual experiences and then examined the issues on a macro scale because the general feeling was “until we have seen what happens to us as individuals and what happens to all of us in a sexist society, we have not experienced a real feminist consciousness-raising” (National Organization for Women, 1983, p. 4).

By always keeping their political agenda, from “personal to political” in the forefront, the women promoted personal consciousness. In their opinion, personal consciousness could lead to new choices and perspectives. They advocated sisterhood, unity for a common cause, and action for positive change. The action oriented goal of the movement led to the development of women studies courses in academia. While this was a very progressive move, and hooks (2000) posits, “before women could change patriarchy we have to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness” (p. 7). I would argue that since the women’s movement claimed that the society is male dominated, then males should have been educated simultaneously. Their level of consciousness should have been raised too. Raising the level of consciousness, and including males in our efforts for change would strongly be recommended by AfriKanA wo-fem-ists.
Allen (1997), Lerner (1986) and Roy (2001) in their works expansively illustrate that establishing the patriarchal system was a process of at least two thousand years. I suggest that it will take time and perseverance for the change that feminists and women activists are hoping for to occur. Although many of us may not see the change in our lifetime, we should not be deterred from challenging the assumptions of oppression. Each woman and man in a society should be encouraged to search for alternative ways of thinking about structural inequities. We should constantly ask questions about our impaired abilities to think and act in ways that are liberating and transformative. Roy (2001) states, “as deeply as gender is woven into the fabric of society… fundamentally the system is still social and can be… by social action” (p. 155). Similarly, Lerner (1986) agrees that women can emancipate themselves from subordination because of new possibilities and changes which exist. However, women need to be cognizant of the fact that a patriarchal framework has penally colonized their psyche. In order to revolutionize this enslaved psyche, women need to develop the intellectual courage to shift their consciousness from incarceration to transformation. To get this result, women must position themselves in the center along with men instead of the traditional and historical periphery. They must learn to be critical of assumptions, omissions, and misrepresentations at all level using all forms of texts. Furthermore, women and men should reach farther than they can grasp, and be willing and courageous to risk failure. Both sexes need to remember that “woman’s cause is man’s cause” (Cooper, 1988).
In this chapter, I used historical discourse to better understand the prevalence and reinforcement of domestic violence. Figure 5 below outlines some of the main points covered, and calls on school leaders to take the social issue of domestic violence seriously. My teaching experience in the primary school is a testimony of how schools act as reproductive agents, how teachers operate from their apprenticeship of observation, and how disconnected or compartmentalized teaching and learning can be. It is imperative that readers and school leaders constantly revisit the historical texts, and carefully reexamine them for indoctrination, manipulation, and omission of voices from oppressed and marginalized peoples. Change takes time, but we need to begin the transformation somewhere. In the chapter which follows, I will reexamine colonialism and its violent legacy which mirrors the violence and gender inequalities associated with domestic abuse.
Figure 5: Domestic Violence has Implications for Schools

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

What can it be
- domestic distortion
- domestic dodging
- domestic neglect
- domestic abuse
- domestic domination
- domestic inequalities

Forms of DV
- physical
- emotional
- financial
- social
- sexual
- political
- psychological

Supported & reinforced by
- families
- schools
- religion
- law

Hope: Schools can help to
- raise critical consciousness
- re/educate males and females
- transform minds and society
Chapter Fourteen

If the Past Looks Like Colonial Violence

In the previous chapter, I furnished a brief overview of the historicity of domestic violence locally and globally. The critical discourses of postcolonialism and AfriKanA wo-fem-isms outlined in chapter 1 underpin the review of the structural forces against women within a historical context. I share McDowell’s perspective (2000) that “history is a fantastical and slippery concept, a making, a construction…‘a contested terrain' that often functions to repress and contain the conflicts and power asymmetries that mark the sociopolitical field” (p. 557). It is for reasons like asymmetrical power relationships that it is necessary to interweave history into this study. Historicizing will draw attention to the stigmatized assumptions of the colonized as dependent, acquiescent and insignificant, and the omission of the colonized as self-determined and resistant. Revisiting history through a critical lens can serve to unravel and negate reproductive oppressive historical myths, stereotypes, and gendered rituals. The historical reexamination continues in this chapter.

Slavery is a complex institution. It generated power for the dominator, and at the same time resistance and agency from the dominated. Our historical texts have been sanitized of these realities, leaving the prevailing perspective centering on the colonizer, and decentering the colonized. Blue et al. (2002) agree, "during the colonial era and in the immediate postcolonial period,
colonialism was explained and understood almost entirely by reference to the interests of the colonial power. Colonialism was thought to be a monolithic force…” (p. vii). However, drawing on postcolonial and AfriKanA wo-fem-ism discourses disrupt this monolithic perspective. These theories are useful to expose the self-serving and oppressive forces, as well as to illuminate the transgressions of the colonized. In the power dynamics there is an interplay of a variety of power strategies at work—power over, power to, and circulatory power which I will explore later in the chapter.

In this chapter I attempt to show that domestic violence and colonial violence (to be developed in this chapter) are linked with the broad discourse of violence. I draw attention to the text, colonial violence, which I will be exploring in this chapter. In my historical examination, I thought that I had coined the word, colonial violence, but as my reading of scholarly works expanded I came across the term. Colonial violence is part of the title of Jenny Sharpe's article, The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter-insurgency (1994). Sharpe does not define colonial violence, but discusses Forster's novel, A Passage to India, using these conceptions. I have searched extensively for the definition of this text but I have been unable to find one. Therefore, I am taking the liberty to examine and explicate the text, colonial violence, from my standpoint.

In the first segment of this chapter, I offer a definition of violence, to be followed by an examination of colonial violence. In order to achieve the latter, I surveyed and evaluated historical representations and documentation of slavery
and colonialism. I continue to interweave the themes of power, representation, identity, resistance and agency throughout the chapter.

**Discourse of Violence**

I commence with reflections of my childhood experiences and violence. Next I interweave historical forms of violence that made the news in our Belizean society.

My great grandmother was physically abused by her husband but I cannot recall hearing that my grandmother was abused. I know that as a child she would occasionally punish me by whipping me with a piece of cloth. I hollered and jumped around, but actually, it felt like brushing flies. There was a marked difference when my adopted mom punished me. She would grab anything in sight, and she would lash me for what seemed like hours. It didn’t matter which part of the body she caught. At the same time she was whipping me she would be uttering profanity loudly. I was lashed with a rake, sticks, electric wire, slippers, pot, pot spoon. Yes, just anything. What still baffles me is what could a child have done to warrant such level of anger from a mother. I didn’t have friends so it couldn’t have been conflict with siblings or friends. I was very submissive, and tried my utmost best to be obedient. I cannot recall hearing that her mom mistreated by her.
As an adult, I recycled this cruel interaction in dealing with my children. The oldest child suffered the most because as I grew older I altered my interaction patterns. It was hard work. I had to make a conscious effort to resocialize myself. It will be interesting to see how my children will interact with their children (if and when they have children).

The kind of punishment that my mother and I used would probably make someone think that she didn’t love me or I didn’t love my children. I think my mom loves me very much because she expresses that in black and white when she writes to me, but I think she had a problem with expressing this love physically. Many parents long ago did not show their love physically. I think that one of the reasons is the distanced relationship that was created during slavery. However, this colonial legacy does not make it right for us abuse our children.

While I was growing up I experienced corporal punishment. I learned that the penal system under British rule was stringent and severe. Criminals were hung frequently, and whippings with the tamarind whip were common. The tamarind whip or switch was an interlacing of three strands of switches from the tamarind tree. The tamarind whip was used quite a bit by school truant officers. The tamarind branch would be soaked in salt and water and used to punish truant students.
Occasionally, the deadly cat-o-nine tail was utilized. The cat-o-nine tails were plaited rope made of thongs of cotton cord about 30 inches long. The cat-o-nine was described as some kind of leather whip with nine belts or legs like an octopus. At the end of them there was some sort of metal. When someone was whipped with this, mainly for raping females, he was sure to be hit by one or several of these belts or legs. The last time a prisoner was reportedly whipped in Belize with cat-o-nine was in 1975 when he was convicted of raping a ward maid. He was given fifteen lashes. Another inmate convicted of beating and raping a Mennonite girl, was given 12 lashes. In early 2000, one of the most recent tamarind whippings was repeated in the Belize Prison. It is incidents like this that me have a strong opinion that colonial violence is very connected to domestic violence.

While I was a student in the American academy, each time I read the news from home, there were increased reports of crime. It would appear that violent crimes are now an epidemic in my country, especially the old capital city of Belize. The incidents seem to be coming closer to my neighbourhood and home. A teenager died in “a hail of bullets,” and a disabled 64 year-old-man died a few hours after the brutal beating from burglars who had entered his home. These two persons lived within a few hundred yards of my home. I knew them! It’s incredible! I think that several of our Belizean youth have graduated from petty crimes to mediated style shooting and shootouts, and armed robberies.
Here are some of the headings I came across in 2002 in the Belizean newspapers.

- Dispute with young lady leads to shoot out on New Road
- K.I., 22 accused cop killer, remains at large
- Philip Chin murdered—sixth murder in thirteen days
- Teenager dies at home in a hail of bullets on Neal Pen Road
- Jealous lover berserk with shotgun
- San Pedro resident beaten by police until “unfit for work”
- Taxi man killed, another shot, a third robbed at knife point
- Another teenager dies of gunshot
- “Mistaken” M-16 murder on Mahogany
- Headless corpse still unidentified
- “Ants” Westby dead: American missionary charged
- Seventeen years for L.H.
- Soup charged with Ratta’s death
- 2 KBH killed, 2 lovers die, 2 killers flee
- 6 Gurkahs charged for DZ death
- Disabled man, 64, dies after being beaten by thieves

Have our Belizean male youth gone bananas? Where is the loophole? Why is crime so unbridled in a small country of about 300,000 people? There are
many factors that cause crime. One question that was mind boggling to me throughout this research process was why are people violent? I have noted that sometimes even a child brought up in a stable, “good” God-fearing family becomes a vicious murderer. What could cause the beastly re/actions? I have heard it said that inside every man [and woman] there is a beast, just like there is a child. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons for violent dispositions. As I reflect on the phenomenon of violence, I ask several questions. Where does this violence originate? How is it perpetuated? What has been the effect? What other measures of conflict resolution and discipline can we use, can we teach parents, teachers and other caregivers?

As my research advanced, I came across a book by Rosemund (2000). He indicates that one reason for violent actions can be explained by the “violent gene theory.” According to this theory, it would appear that the violent gene is stronger in some people. Besides, by nature, human beings are inclined to be belligerent, especially when they do not get their way. Rosemund asserts that human beings are egotistical, self-indulgent, and want instant gratification. Barbara Whitmer (1997) concurs, “at the core of the violence mythos is the belief that humans are innately violent and hence require external structures to control them” (p. 1). Even if this is the case, the theory of violent genes does not give any human being the right to be violent and destructive to other human beings. Other people may argue that violence is related to nature, meaning that males are violent because of their testosterone
level, and females can be violent because of hormonal changes or hormonal imbalance. Still some people may blame violence on the nurture environment. In other words, what the child sees and experiences as a model can become the reality. These are interesting perspectives to stimulate a discussion among youth about the culture and nature of violence.

One can scarcely watch the ubiquitous television without being exposed to violence. Many of the cartoon programmes for children are saturated with acts of violence. Violence is the use of force to damage, terrorize, abuse or injure another person. It can take many forms — economic, physical, sexual, and/or emotional. Violence arises between or among siblings, intimate partners, peers, people from an institution or even a nation. Violence can be local or global. It is learned, transmitted, and reproduced; it is embedded in the beliefs, values, and structures of a society. Violence can be destructive, and can impede the self-realization of a person. Whether violence is physical, verbal or non-verbal, it can still tremendously impact a person’s livelihood or psyche (Bienen, 1968; Rupesinghe & Rubio, 1984). We live in a violent society and in a violent world, and Steger and Lind (1999) assert:

Rather than sailing smoothly into a new century of rational concord, we continue to find ourselves enmeshed in a net of violence stitched together by crime, war, environmental degradation, and the unequal distribution of material resources...we witness the emergence of new conflicts arising from
the effects of globalization, ethnonationalism, religious fundamentalism, and international terrorism. (p. xiii)

Today, there are various discourses of violence: educational violence, ecological violence, school violence, domestic violence, media violence, criminal violence, family violence, gun violence and workplace violence are some common ones. In the next section of this chapter, I aim to focus on colonial violence in Belize because it is a legacy with many ghosts. I am defining colonial violence as the brutal encounter between the colonizer and the colonized, the exertion of power over colonized people’s culture, value system, ideas and their cultural and linguistical disenfranchisement. Colonialism is multi-layered, and so is the definition of colonial violence. That is to say that colonial violence does not only include acts of physical violence but also emotional, economic, educational, sexual and all other modes by which the colonized have been impeded from self-actualization or self-realization.

**Colonial Violence: Relational Dynamics Between Colonizers and Colonized**

*“The White Signmaker”*

In his essay on *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire (1995) interrogates, “what fundamentally is colonization” (p.163). Césaire encourages his readers to “see clearly, to think clearly” about the dangerous and pregnant
text of colonialism. Césaire steps back to examine colonization. He states that colonization is:

Neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once and for all without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the shipowner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies. (p. 163)

Some people may be aware that for too long “European historians have long falsified African history in order to justify slavery, colonization and the plunder of Africa [and other lands and peoples]” (Hess, 2000, p. 9), Jordan Winthrop (1994) asserts that from the inception of contact with the Africans, the Europeans (colonizers which include the British, French, Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese), specifically the British, set up a racial and cultural binary opposition. Because the African culture was different from the British, there was an us/them opposition (Césaire, 1995, Hall, 1995; 1997; Goldie, 1995; Memmi, 1965). Other binary oppositions included labels such as civilized English/ savage Africans, refined British decorum/rude African manners, white skin British/black skin Africans.
The British colonizers perceived the African culture to be inferior because the Africans dressed, spoke, governed, and worshipped differently. The food they ate and their manner of eating were different. The Africans were considered to look and act ape-like and so perceived to have a libidinous sexual appetite. The British never seemed to think that the other person or group perceived them to be different also. I have experienced this ethnocentric perspective myself as a student in the United States, especially with Euro-Americans. If it’s not my skin colour, it is my hair, but most of all it is my “accent”. I am weary of hearing people say to me “you have an accent. Where are you from?” I can also say the same to them, but culturally I have not been taught to make that a focus every time I meet someone. On the flip side of the coin, when I listen to Americans speak, they have an “accent” too. And depending on which region of the United States they originate, their “accent” differs. In fact, many of them make fun of the “accent” of their American brothers and sisters from the southern United States.

Like me, Equiano a slave, noted that the culture of the British was different from his. In his narration he observed “their complexions too, differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, which was very different from any I have ever heard...I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with the meanest slave in my country” (Gates, 2000, p. 57). Instead of embracing the differences, the British saw the Africans as Other. Because of these differences, the British failed to accentuate the matriarchal society, freedom and unselfish conscious position that existed in Africa. As a matter of fact, British colonizers have distorted the history by referring to the
continent of Africa as the Dark Continent, and by de-emphasizing Europe as nomadic, patriarchal, oppressive, individualistic and violent, and reversing those labels to the African people. The reputation given to the Africans and their descendants by the Europeans was negative. As a result, many of the social concepts such as vandalism, cannibalism, and crab mentality are today's colonial legacy. Because the British saw the Africans as the Other, as more beast-like than humans, they brutally mistreated the slaves. (Bolland, 1998; Gates, 2002; Hess, 2002; Shoman, 1994; Winthrop, 1994). Goldie (1995) concurs that the same can be said of indigenous people. He states,

The indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker…the signmaking is all happening on one form of board, within one field of discourse, that of British imperialism… it would not be oversimplistic to maintain that the play between the white and indigene is a replica of the black and white squares, with clearly limited oppositional moves. (pp. 232-233)

Goldie points out that a parallel perception of the Orient existed. The “Oriental" culture was “overvalued for its pantheism, its spirituality, its stability, its longevity, its primitivism…” until their encounter with Europe. Then “ the Orient suddenly appeared lamentably underhumanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric…” (p. 233). The discourse continues with Fanon’s Black Skin White Masks where there is “this assertion of a white self as subject and the black
Other as object” (Goldie, 1995). Likewise, Hall (1997) aptly concludes that the perception of the binary opposition us/them reverberates as:

The boundaries of difference are continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference… We belong to the marginal, the underdeveloped, the periphery, and the ‘other’. We are at the edge, the ‘rim’, of the metropolitan world- always south to someone else’s El Norte. (p. 114)

In this upcoming section of the research, I explore colonial violence in order to provide a brief historical overview to re-illuminate power relationships, representation, identity, resistance, leading to transformation and social change in Belize and other countries where slavery was dominant. A discursive analysis of traditional perspectives of history is useful to introduce new avenues of inquiry in order to reconnect historical disconnected discourses between the past and present, colonialism and contemporary corporate neo-colonialism, colonial violence, and domestic and interpersonal violence. I will cross reference materials from various scholars, and comparisons from different colonized/formerly colonized countries, but the major part of the inquiry will focus on Belize. I will draw on postcolonial discourses and AfriKanA wo-fem-isms in a restricted way because of the major concentration of the study, domestic violence.
“The Gate of No Return”

The ponderable moments about slavery, brutality, chains and shackles has led me to reflect on how little we as Belizeans know our history, and the 'shackled' mode of instruction by which we are taught history or Social Studies for that matter. Instead of investigating and critically analyzing the subject matter, we are taught to accept the sanitized version of history. I am overwhelmed by the amount of questions tumbling chaotically in my mind as I muse about slavery. So many emotions and questions are stirred that it would take another study to explore them. However, the questions that I am able to address at this point to some degree are:

How were the slaves in Belize treated? What privileges did they enjoy or were denied? What was the impact of the European interaction and control on the slaves and other peoples? How did the slaves and others respond to colonial control? What can we learn from these incidents?

Let me begin by sharing one of my most recent traumatic experiences. In June 2002, I visited two of the numerous slave castles in Ghana — Cape Coast and Elmina. Yes, they are called slave castles which I find an interesting conception. The slaves were imprisoned in the castles which were old European structures built for protection during the gold trade. These castles evolved into trading posts for human cargo.

My recent experience at the slave castles, combined with the inherited
colonial socio-economic conditions of Ghana, and my many years of teaching and reading about slavery, fill me with an abomination for colonialism and enslavement, other injustices. What immediately caught my attention when I visited the castles were the labels on the various doorways. There were labels like *dungeon*, *cell*, and *Gate of NO RETURN*. As I walked through the underground tunnels, I imagined the shackled African women and men as they walked in darkness through the *gates of no return*. At the Castle of Elmina, the strong stench, and gruesome stain of human excretement provoked powerful psychological emotions. The strong odor burnt my nostrils as a reminder of the vast number of slaves who shared that same space over many centuries, despite the fact that there was some refurbishing. I could hear angry waters lashing against a sea wall, as big irrepressible teardrops rolled down my cheeks. I could feel the presence of the ancestral spirits hovering around me miserably, and excruciatingly interrogating what did they do to warrant such heartless, insensitive treatment. I promised them that I would revisit the historical records and uncover the raison d'être, and the impact of this injustice. I will share some of my findings with you as the chapter progresses.

When I visited the West Coast of Africa (from where historical records claim that the African slaves were transported to the Americas including Belize, the Caribbean and the United States) I travelled in an aircraft. Cool air circulated. Food and beverage were served. Toilets were available and accessible. When
I was weary of sitting during the long journey, I was able to get up, stretch, and walk around. Similarly, when I visited the castles in Ghana where the slave transactions took place, I entered the dungeons voluntarily. I moved around without restraint. There were no physical chains that constrained me; however, there was a constant penetrating anguish as I explored the areas where slaves lived and died. Dim light illuminated my path as I walked through the dungeon.

It would be ideal if we would heed the words of this plaque from the slave castle in Ghana.

**IN EVERLASTING MEMORY**

**OF THE ANGUISH OF OUR ANCESTORS**

**MAY THOSE WHO DIED REST IN PEACE.**

**MAY THOSE WHO RETURN FIND THEIR ROOTS.**

**MAY HUMANITY NEVER AGAIN PERPETUATE SUCH INJUSTICE AGAINST HUMANITY**

**WE, THE LIVING, VOW TO UPHOLD THIS.**

Free movement and the privileges that I was afforded during my flight were a sharp contrast from the slaves who temporarily resided in the belly of the castles before travelling through the Middle Passage. For the slaves, it was a grueling, traumatic, and inhumane journey across the Atlantic. Many of the
transportation vessels were small slave ships which carried over three hundred
slaves shackled and packed tightly into small spaces, like sardines in a can, for
several weeks. The slaves’ diet was poor and inadequate, leading to malnutrition.
They defecated and ate in the same eating, sleeping space. These unsanitary
conditions coupled with malnourishment led to a high mortality rate of the slaves.
Those who managed to reach the shores of their destination were then exhibited
for examination as the traders staked their price to the other European
consumers. The slaves were branded and re-branded with the master’s
inscription as they were re-bought and re-sold. “Slavery was arguably a form of
‘social death’ where slaves became ‘dishonored persons’, outside the society
where they lived” (Bush, 1990, p. 23).

The stench that I detected at Elmina Castle in Ghana was certainly not a
hallucination. Olaudah Equiano (Gates, 2002) narrated his barbarous journey
across the Middle Passage. Here is a brief, vivid description of part of his
experiences.

When I looked round the ship too, and saw a large furnace and a multitude of
black people, of every description, chained together …I fell motionless and
fainted… I was soon put under the decks, and there I received such a
salutation in my nostrils as I have never experienced in my life…with the
loathsomeness of the stench, and with my crying together, I became so
sick…on refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands, and laid me
across, I think, the windlass, and tied my feet, while the other flogged me
severely… I have seen some of these poor African prisoners most severely
cut for attempting to [escape], and hourly whipped for not eating… I have never seen among any people such instances of brutal cruelty… One white man in particular I saw, when we were permitted to be on deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the foremast, that he died as a consequence of it; and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a brute. This made me feel fear for these people the more…(pp. 57-59)

**Dominant and Deplorable Conditions**

Whether it was on a cotton plantation in the United States of America, a sugar plantation in the Caribbean or a logging camp in Belize, the colonial masters were in control of the slaves. In the United States, white settlers were fearful of the slaves’ uprising and so they instituted severe slave codes. Slaves on sugar plantations and in the logging industry in Belize and the rest of the Caribbean were organized in gangs. On the plantations they were coerced to work for ten to twelve hours daily for at least six days weekly. The master, as well as other designated slaves used physical force to get tasks done and make slaves obedient.

Even though the slaves in Belize may have had less supervision from their masters because of the geographical landscape and the nature of the economic activity, a hierarchal structure of control existed. The land and economic activity were in the hands of a few British settlers. In the logging industry there were a few distinct, skilled positions. The huntsmen, for example, searched for and located the trees, and then the axe men felled them. After the trees were
trimmed, the cattle dragged them to the riverbank. The cattlemen were in charge of getting the trees to the riverbank and also feeding the cattle. Young children waited at the table, and old people cultivated provisions. Most of the women were the domestic workers who were washerwomen, housemaids, chambermaids, nurses, bakers and seamstresses. Occasionally, women could transition in domestic occupation from a housemaid to a cook, for example.

Although the slaves in Belize outnumbered their white masters, it is claimed that the slaves were “well treated and loyal to their masters…and were “content to be dominated or that they felt ‘devotion’ towards their masters” (Bolland, 1988, p. 20). On the contrary, the historical accounts do not buttress these views. Although it is claimed that in Belize the slaves were treated more leniently than in other countries because they were dispersed in the forest to extract timber, the colonial master still had power over the slaves. Slaves were the master’s "property" and, as such, punishment was inflicted on them. A slave or even free blacks could receive as many as 39 lashes for misconduct. Their masters could imprison them. Rebellious slaves were made examples to others by being burned or tortured to death. A slave who injured his master would be hanged. The masters and mistresses in Belize Town also subjected women to vicious and sadistic punishments. There is an incident of Kitty, the female slave who was whipped and scarred beyond recognition by her free coloured slave mistress (Bolland, 1998).

The abysmal manner in which the colonial masters treated the slaves tells a powerful story about how they perceived them. The food rationed to the slaves
in Belize was far from being nutritious. It consisted mainly of salt pork and flour. The slaves planted ground provisions, which were all carbohydrates, to complement this ration. While the masters ate sumptuous meals, and engaged in boisterous drinking, the hard-working slaves ate "leftovers." The masters ate the pork ribs and tenderloins, while the slaves' protein diet consisted of the most atrocious parts of the pig. Imagine eating the pig's tail (located right above the part of the pig's anatomy from which feces is excreted); the pig's snout that digs into dirt, and maybe even human excreta, and the pig's feet or pig's trotters that tramples through mud. The pig's guts (chitlin is the abbreviated form of chitterlings), or the pigs' intestines are still part of the African American cuisine. The pigs' intestines carry harmful bacteria, and can sicken consumers if not properly cleaned and cooked. Unfortunately, these parts of the pig anatomy remain a colonial culinary pleasure and legacy for the African Diaspora (Bolland, 1988, 1997; Gates, 2002; Rozonski, 1999; Shoman, 1994).

Living conditions were deplorable too. While the colonialists lived in spacious, comfortable houses built on land filled plots of land, the working slaves and their families lived in the mosquito-inhabited swamps in Belize town. Their houses were locally called “lang barracks” and “dawg siddown” because they were on the ground where insects and reptiles could crawl into them, and the ventilation was poor. Bolland affirms the kind of housing, “numerous yards flanked with long rows of what are called Negro houses, being simply separate rooms under one long roof” (1997, p. 65).
**Mutilation and Alienation**

The colonial masters had strategies that denied the slaves the opportunity to make historical and cultural contact from the time they captured or bought them. The dislocation of slaves was part of the Eurocentric plan to destroy part of their identity through “social death” and “natal alienation.” This attempt to alienate the slaves from their culture and ethnic groups can be paralleled to isolation in an intimate relationship. Alienation or isolation causes “cultural and psychic annihilation,” and is therefore, a form of violence. An ethnocentric bias from the colonizers, complemented by their negative perceptions of the African slaves and their descendants led to a denigrated attitude towards them. The colonial masters renamed the slaves and distorted their names; hence, the slaves were identified by the master’s inscription or some other form of scarification. This resulted in a discontinuity in their matrilineal linkage.

Names and naming are of vital importance in several cultures. I can recall the naming ceremony we had when our children were seven days old. My Mestizo grandmother-in-law was adamant that children should be named using the calendar that carried the name of saints. She believed that those who died and did not know the name of their saint-day will not be able to enter the gates of heaven.

When I visited Ghana, I also noticed that names and naming children were also a meaningful part of their culture. Generally, child-naming ceremonies
are an important event in the African culture, for great significance is attached to the name that is chosen. The names chosen are symbolic of the circumstances at the time of birth. The Ga that is a tribe in the country of Ghana, name their children based on fetish names, family names, and tribal names. Children could also be named by the days on which they were born. For example I was born on a Thursday so my Ghanaian name is YAA. Many Ghanaians who I met introduced themselves with their Christian name, and their Ghanaian name. One person introduced himself to me as “my African name is Kofi, and my Christian name is Thomas.” As a matter of fact, the chief of Abrafo-Odumasi, the village where I spent about a month, renamed me. He named me, Bediakoh. He said that it means fighter. At first I was taken aback and said “I do not like violence. In fact, I am currently writing to discourage violence.” So he went on to explain that it meant fighter in the sense of fighting for a worthy cause. Phew! That was such a relief; otherwise the new name and this project would be paradoxical!

Like the African slaves, the Early East Indians who came to Belize as indentured servants were renamed by the colonists. My surname from my East Indian’s mother lineage is Williams. This is an English surname. Similarly, names like Suphala became SUPAUL, Ramcalovinea became RAMCLAM, and Mangharam became MANGAR. Today, many East Indians carry English surnames like Lewis, King, and Edwards (Cardenas, 1991).
Changing the spelling of the colonized name was a common practice of the colonizer. For example African names like Cudjoe became Joe, Quaco became Jack, Phebe became Phoebe. Changing the surnames makes it problematic to trace one’s ancestry. I visited India in the 1990s and was unable to make any contact with relatives. I was not as fortunate as some individuals like Alex Haley and W.E.B. DuBois who had some luck in tracing their ancestry.

Bearing in mind that identity is based on numerous factors like how one perceives oneself, one’s consciousness of where one fits in the world, and that identity is not fixed or closed, several individuals have been working on transforming their identities. In some instances, it is a reaction to resist the colonial legacy of European naming. Some people have renamed themselves or made modifications to their name. Persons of African descent like Malcolm from the United states and Evan Hyde from Belize inserted an X after their first names. So Malcolm becomes Malcolm X, and Evan becomes Evan X Hyde. One of the first Africans in the United States to change his name was Paul Kofi (Friday, the day on which he was born) who discarded his slave name Slocum. Still others have changed their English names to African names. My friend, Paul Collins, changed his name to Kamara Sekou, and Darryn Roberts changed his to Kamautu Ajani.

In September of 2001, I attended a baby shower for an African American
couple in New York. One of the activities was to write five males and five females “Ghetto Names” from which the baby’s name would be chosen. In my naivety, I asked what’s the meaning of “Ghetto Names.” Actually, it is a way for the African Americans to assert greater control over naming their children following the African tradition. Usually, some of the current African American names like Tamika and Shanenna are not found in any conventional naming dictionary. Africans and African Americans can be very creative with naming their children. They may even use virtuous words like Charity, Patience and Justice. Some names may be chosen from the Bible because of the conversion to Christianity; therefore, names like Rachel, or Esther are not unusual.

**Economic Dispossession and Dependency**

The realities of economic dependency are highly entwined in colonial history. During and after the abolition of slavery, coercive labour existed in diverse ways. According to Bolland (1997),

The exigencies of wood-cutting economy, and its associated patterns of settlement and migration, inhabited the growth of the provision-ground system and made the slaves and their descendants dependent chiefly on allowances of imported food. (p. 61)
In Belize there has been an existence of underdevelopment of the people
and nation because during the colonized era by Britain, there was little
opportunity to engage in agricultural activities. The colonial settlers were
engaged in a mono-economic activity, logging, which created economic
dispossession and dependency. The natives chiefly depended on imported food
which has always been expensive.

After the emancipation of slavery in Belize in 1838, there was a movement
from coerced labour to a labour force. An apprenticeship system was set up.
Who benefited from this? Certainly, the colonial settlers did! The emancipated
male slaves were compelled to work for at least forty-five hours weekly without
pay. Apprenticeship was like old wine in a new wine skin because it was a way of
providing labour for the privileged settlers gratuitously under a new name. In the
United States, thousands of freed blacks were left without homes and adequate
resources, and therefore, temporary assistance had to be provided to needy
freed slaves. In Belize, although slavery was abolished and there were sufficient
freed slaves for the labour force, indentured servants (consisting mainly of
Indians from India, and Chinese) were hired. Similarly, the slave trade was
abolished in the United States from 1 January 1808 but illegal slaving continued
for about fifty years later. There was a long and bitter campaign to end slavery in
the United States. The slave trade eventually ended in the United Stars in 1865
(Bolland, 1988; Estell, 1994; Shoman, 1994).

I think the economic system of the late 1800s in Belize parallels the credit
card system in contemporary American society in several ways. It is a neo-
colonial form of keeping consumers tied to the apron strings of the capitalists, and multi-national corporations. In colonial Belize, the "truck and advance system" was established after the emancipation of slavery. The colonial settlers were permitted to hire freed slaves. While this appears to be a positive move, it was intended to perpetuate further economic dispossession and dependency. It was built on a credit system that kept the freed slaves under the control of the colonialists. The men were continuously indebted for food and other items they credited either while in the camps or when they were going home to their families for Christmas. The prices for the merchandise were inflated, and this made it impossible for the ex-slaves to be liberated from their debts. They remained indebted to colonizers long after slavery. To make matters worse, the colonial settlers had a legal system to support them. Workers who were tardy were fined; others who breached their contact were imprisoned. On the other hand, the employers had very few repercussions if they failed to honour any of the agreements (Bolland, 1988; Estell, 1994; Shoman, 1994).

Then the problem of land tenure surfaced. The slaves were never privileged to own a piece of land. However, from the inception, the colonial settlers acquired land by staking their claims. This was gratis. Afterwards, the location laws allowed the principal settlers to acquire their land. The natives, specifically blacks and coloureds, were denied land tenure, but the foreigners and the white oligarchy never had difficulty acquiring land. Between 1858 and 1861, no legal title was necessary for a plot of land to be sold to foreigners. The Belize Estate and Produce Company owned about half the available crown land.
Presently, Coca-Cola and Asians own much of the land in Belize, and the local nationals have the hardest time obtaining even a small plot of land for a residence (Bolland, 1988; Shoman, 1994). From the interviews with two of the women, owning a plot of land is a major problem. If the policy makers are to empower women, they need to break the tradition of male land possession, and provide land for more women, especially since they are the majority in terms of single parent households.

**Voiceless Non-citizens**

Law protected the colonizers while the colonized were removed from their history and their society. The colonized had no say in the decisions that affected their destiny. As a result, the colonized were unable to appreciate what constituted functional citizenship for they were not permitted to have any say, or any vote in the national or local affairs of their new community. In Belize, for example, the qualifications to participate in Public Meetings were unequal. The qualifications were not representative of the Creole proverb which says, *wey good fi cezah, good fi nezah or whey good fi di goose, good fi di gander*. The power-class differential was visible. The requirement for a white British male to participate in Public Meeting was the possession of 100 Jamaican pounds, and one-year residency. Conversely, the criteria were steeper for the free blacks and coloureds who had to possess five times that of the whites. In other words, a free black or coloured person needed to have 500 pounds (English currency), and five-years residency (Bolland, 1988; Shoman, 1994).
Some of the experiences of the slaves, freed blacks, and coloureds in Belize paralleled those of the African Diaspora in the United States. Estell (1995) cites numerous restrictions for the African Americans:

... could not walk on the streets after dark, travel between towns without a pass, or own weapons … were not afforded the privileges of the constitution. At the same time it was generally believed by the whites that people of African descent were racially inferior and incapable of being assimilated into society. It was also widely believed that they were not citizens of the new republic. (p. 11)

**Devaluation of “Other” Languages**

Like the other aspects of the colonized life, the language was also in binary opposition. English has been the language of the educated in countries that were colonized by the British. English is deemed superior. It is categorized as a language, and Creole is relegated the status of a dialect. In Belize and in many other English speaking Caribbean countries, English is recognized as the “Queen’s English,” and as “proper speech.” It is considered the speech of the educated, and used as a weapon to determine and perpetuate classism. English is the tool of power, and thus, it is the language that makes an individual marketable. Comparatively, in the United States, American English is “proper speech,” and Ebonics that is spoken by the majority of African Americans, is devalued.
On the other hand, there is a need to remember that the slaves were determined to be included in all spheres of life despite their monumental struggle to be accepted and integrated. We cannot afford to continue overlooking the historical fact that the new cultural landscape of strangers, that is, the British and the various African ethnic groups resulted in a “cultural action [and interaction] or social process [which] has been defined as creolization” (Brathwaite, 1995, p. 202). The term Creole or creolization, like multiple other terms and concepts I have encountered during the course of this study, is highly ambiguous. Creole has diverse meanings. In Belize, we use the term Creole as the lingua franca spoken mainly by the Creole population (and currently other ethnic groups). Brathwaite (1995) refuses to accept that Creole is not a language. According to Brathwaite, Creole is the nation language, “the language which is influenced very strongly by the African model, the Africa aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage” (p. 311).

Creole is a rich and colourful language filled with nuances and an “attitude” or gesticulation from the speaker. The Creole language can be used as a two edged weapon— to empower or to subvert. The slaves used the Creole language as cultural resistance to the masters’ dominant language. Many Caribbean authors have continued the slaves’ legacy in their literary works. They have used Creole as resistance to the dominant language, and refusal to imitate the colonizer. The "Grand Master" in Belize writes his satirical, political poems in Creole. The Sistren’s group from Jamaica uses Jamaican patwah in their literary works and drama of working class women. Creole and Crenglish are very much
part of the Belizean identity. As you may have noticed, I have also included English Creole, Spanglish, and Crenglish in this study because they are variations of speech in the Belizean culture.

Creole is also used to classify people born of African and European (especially British) origin. Recently, because of the increase of interracial children, some intellectuals in Belize have been redefining the term Creole to include all those born of mixed ancestry. Scholars like Bolland (1997) and Shoman (1988) would agree that the Creole culture is neither African nor European, but instead is the result of the cultural and sexual fusion which occurred between the African and the British leading to a hybrid culture. Bearing in mind that the slaves were from different ethnic groups, Creole or creolization can be defined as the unification of cultures over time. Below are two perspectives to expand on the concept of creolization.

Creolization began with 'seasoning'-a period of one to three years when slaves were branded, given a new name and put under apprenticeship to creolized slaves…'socialization’ –participation with others through the gang system, and through communal recreational activities such as drumming and dancing and festivals… Creolization, then, was a cultural process that took place within a creole society-that is, within a tropical colonial plantation polity based on slavery. (Brathwaite, 1995, pp. 202-203).
Creolization, then, is not a homogenizing process, but rather a process of contention between people who are members of social formations and carriers of cultures, a process in which their own ethnicity is continually reexamined and redefined in terms of the relevant oppositions between different social formations at various historical moments. (Bolland, 1997, p. 25).

**Mis/education to Colonize the Mind**

From the first page of this research I have been using the text education/miseducation or mis/education because I believe that both education and miseducation can occur simultaneously. In the schooling process for instance, we educate our students but at the same time can miseducate them if we give only one perspective, or if we fail to critically analyze the author’s position or thesis. Dr. Carter G. Woodson (1990) wrote a book entitled *The Miseducation of the Negro*. Woodson, as well as several African American scholars, strongly believe that there was continuous effort to miseducate the African slaves and their descendants—Negroes/Coloureds/African Americans. What does it mean to educate or be educated? To be educated seems to fit the description of the teacher being able to train a child through passive modes of instruction, and to be educated meant that the learner or adult would act accordingly without asking “why”. This is an interesting perspective from Ashcroft et al., (1995),

Education is perhaps the most insidious and in some ways the most cryptic of colonialist survivals...
secondary (and alter tertiary) was a massive cannon in the artillery of empire… Education is thus a conquest of another kind of territory- it is the foundation of colonialist power… (p. 425)

The social institutions of the family, school and religious organizations are responsible for the enculturation and indoctrination of individuals. During and after slavery, Christian denominations such as the Anglican, Methodist and Catholic in Belize, the Caribbean and the United States deemed it their responsibility to indoctrinate the minds of slaves and freed slaves. According to Bolland (1997) this was fostered through

[T]he system of teaching, in which rote learning and authoritarian relationships were backed by corporal punishment, promoted passivity and habits of obedience rather than a critical intellect and a sense of self-worth and autonomy. (p.184)

This *indoctrinative* form of education leads to *miseducation*. According to Woodson (1990), schooling for Negroes was a place where they “must be convinced of their inferiority… drilled into him in almost every class… When a Negro has finished his education in schools, then, he has been equipped to begin the life of an Americanized or Europeanized white man” (p. 2 & 5).

What has been the result of this miseducation? Woodson states,

[B]ut the instruction so far given to Negroes in colleges and universities has worked to the contrary… The greatest indictment of such education as
Negroes have received, however, is that they have thereby learned little as to making a living…” (p. 29 & 38)

We have been miseducated and our minds have also been colonized by the imposition of textbooks and their Eurocentric content which in many instances are still used in schools colonized by Britain. The ideas were foreign to the students, and disconnected from their lived experiences. I can recall reading a book that talked about Katie, the snowplow, and the raking of leaves during autumn. This was never part of my experience since I lived in a tropical climate, and as such experienced dry, wet and hurricane seasons. It was not until forty years later that I was able to experience the four changing seasons, and to make sense of what I read as a child. Many people have never experienced many of the ideas they read about in foreign textbooks.

Textbooks are one of the major cultural artifacts, and part of the surrogate curriculum used in schools. The government, publishers and society control the content of these instructional materials; they have the political interests of the dominant culture at heart. Anyon’s (1979) research on American secondary school history books revealed that the textbooks were insensitive to the labour movement, and nationalism was treated insignificantly. Memmi (1965) also argues that the history which students learn in schools is neither related to them nor their heritage. According to Memmi (1965), to the child "the teacher and school represent a world which is too different from his family and environment" (p. 106).
The pedagogical approach used in contemporary schools in Belize is similar to how it was decades ago. It is very teacher-centered, reinforcing obedience through control, and violent control, too. From my grandmother’s generation up until now, the sash cord has constantly been swinging as it hits across someone’s body, regardless of sex. The teaching/learning style has been quite monotonous with memorization being the mode of instruction. There was no place for individual differences and different learning styles. English has been the medium of instruction. Up until the 1990s, the exit examinations from high school were Eurocentric and written in English. When I attended high school, in order to attend a junior college at the end of the four years we had to take for the external examination from England — G.C.E. (General Certificate of Education) Ordinary and Advanced levels. When I wanted to study in the United States, I had to take GRE (Graduate Record Examination). The content and strategies of this exam were even more alien to me. It is noteworthy that the examples provided are some of the ways by which colonial and dominant ideologies and practices have been filtered and reinforced in schools (Ashcroft et al., 1995; Loomba, 1994; Freire, 1973).

According to Woodson (1990), “real education means to inspire people to live more abundantly, to learn to begin with life as they fit and make it better…” (p. 29). While there are attempts to reform the kind of education described by Woodson, miseducation is still a common phenomenon. We cannot continue to repeat this oppressive system of schooling. It is for this reason that the current school system needs to be held accountable, and also play a major role being
part of the solution for liberation. So what does it mean to educate and to be educated? Drawing on the works of various progressive thinkers, I say that to educate means that learners will be involved in a process of thinking about the values, principles, and beliefs that are imparted to them (Apple, 1983; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1998b; hooks, 1994; Luke, 1996; McLaren, 1998; Shor, 1997; Shor & Freire, 1987). As a result, in my opinion an educated person

- possesses general knowledge from which to draw and make informed decisions.
- acquires specialized knowledge, and diversified experiences which are a plus for the world of work.
- is concerned about humanity and the environment.
- is socially, physically, spiritually, emotionally and interpersonally empowered.
- recognizes that they have a voice, an opinion and agency.
- continues to learn during their lifetime.
Chapter Fifteen

Colonial Violence Against Women: Desensitizing, Domesticating, Destructive Strategies

Women’s Invisibility

*Woman has lived under the shadow of man’s ego, even as, in the past few centuries, the black has lived under the shadow of the white. Ivan Van Sertima*

The epigraph above alludes to how “herstory” has been lost in the historical narratology. Pre-and post-colonial historians kept women invisible in history, and when they were visible, they were portrayed as victims or in support roles. They lacked agency. For example, in the early Maya settlements in Belize, Davila raided the Maya villages and raped the Maya women, and took them as slaves. The Pachecos family cut off the women’s breasts, tied their feet and threw them into the lake. During the British colonial rule, the slave women’s involvement and contribution to their community went virtually unnoticed in many instances, leading to the popular myth of women as victims (Bolland, 1998; Shoman. 1998).

Comparably speaking of African women in the United States, Fannie Williams (1995) posits,

Less is known of our women than of any other class of Americans. No organization of far-reaching influence for their special advancement, no
convention of women to take note of their progress, no special literature reciting the incidents ... There has been no special interest in their peculiar condition as native-born American women. Their power to affect the social life of America, either for good or for ill, has excited not even a speculative interest. (p. 106)

Despite this veil which clouds women’s invisibility, Shoman (1994) like many scholars who identify with postcolonial discourses and AfriKanA wo-fem-isms urges us to be reminiscent that women were active. In the Maya and slave settlements, women were responsible for communicating the cultural information, and gendered roles to the children. They were the nutritionists as they planned and prepared the daily diet for the family. They were the wives, nurses, counsellors, advisers, and companions.

**Gender Bias and Anti-family Bonding**

From the beginning of the establishment of a British settlement in Belize, the whites ensured that the males outnumbered the females. As a matter of fact, by 1803, the number of black and coloured males was twice that of the females. They also created a settlement pattern based on the economic activity of logging which impacted families. Gender roles were thus defined. Few alternative forms of employment existed for women. Those women who worked outside the home after slavery did mostly domestic work (Bolland, 1998; Shoman. 1998). Even when I was growing up one of the major occupations of women to earn extra money was to “tek in washing and ironing.” This lack of employment for women
created an economic dependency on men. This has left a persisting impact on the relationships with intimate partners. Thus, lack of employment and economic dependency have caused many women to stay in violent domestically abused situations. It is vital to bear in mind that not only the women are affected by domestic violence. The children’s lives are also heavily impacted.

I shared earlier that the power of intimate male partners is multifaceted. As I explore the conception of colonial violence, it is noticeable that there are many similarities. Colonial violence is multifaceted too. Both domestic and colonial violence can be physical, emotional, psychological, ideological, economic, and/or sexual.

The continuous shifting of location and temporary housing in camps likewise led to the isolation of men from their families, unstable families, rape of women, and mistrust of intimate partners. The long absence from their families left women in charge of family and child rearing. When the men returned to their homes after six months for a short visit, asserting their power was problematic. Most likely, the women reasserted their power, and came to be known as bembeh. This term was commonly used for Creole women. Although they were chiefly employed as washerwomen, vendors or remained at home as homemakers, they engaged in advancing the visibility of women. Bembehs were not afraid to fight, curse or swear. They could become very abusive! (Marin, 1994).

The settlement pattern, and absence of men from their families, also made it easier and more accessible for the church to convert women. This was an
opportunity to reinforce the perpetual traditional myth that women should stand by their men and be committed to them despite the circumstances. This myth continues to be perpetuated, and many women today still say things like “if e noh beat me e noh love mi.” From where did this stem? I suggest strongly that one of the major roots is colonial violence.

One of the most vivid texts I’ve seen lately of separation, alienation, and anti-family bonding interwoven with power dynamics is the movie of Mama Flora’s Family based on the novel by Alex Haley and David Stevens. Flora’s parents were tenants on the Fleming’s’ land in the southern United States. Flora worked on their cotton plantations from very young. Like the slaves in Belize, the Africans came together for a festive celebration at the end of the cotton season. The housing and economic conditions and hardships of Flora’s family were similar to other deplorable conditions to which slaves were subjected.

As an adolescent, Flora went to one of the festivities. One of the other black male tenant asked Flora to have a dance with him but he was shoved away by Lincoln, the Fleming’s grandson, who was a fair-skin mulatto. Lincoln asked Flora if she knew the meaning of her name, but Flora was unaware so he explained that her name meant flower. When he said that, I remembered what my mother used to say about young girls. She cautioned me to be careful because young girls are like flowers, just waiting to be picked. There are all
kinds of men that want to pick the flowers so be careful which one(s) you give in to. In a similar vein, I have heard older women say that women are like flowers in a garden. They need to be watered daily. The “water” they allude to is love and attention to be showered on them by men. Flora was young, and I do not know if she were waiting to be picked, but Lincoln Fleming picked her.

The next day, Lincoln visited Flora’s parents to get her to care for his ailing grandmother. Flora’s parents were not in agreement with her to leave, because I am certain they knew what the consequence would be; however, Flora in her naiveté, decided that she would go with Lincoln. Flora’s initiation into her responsibility at the Flemings was harsh. Light skin Lincoln was privileged and so during the nights he found sexual refuge in Flora’s room and during the day he treated her like a stranger. Flora was definitely raped several times by him. She was impregnated by Lincoln, and was returned to her parents. While the older maids knew what was transpiring, they made no effort to assist or educate Flora; however, when she became pregnant, they made the comment that she would not be the first or the last. I take this to mean that this was a way of life for the males in the Fleming’s household.

The baby was separated from his mother, Flora, at birth, and the Flemings denied her any contact with him. Emotionally and psychologically, Flora was devastated and left that community. The Flemings had broken her mother-
child bond, like the slave masters had continuously done.

**Scared and "Scarred"**

I will share two accounts of colonial violence against women. The first narrative is from the West Indies and is summarized by Henry Louis Gates (2002). He chronicles the experiences of four slaves, Fred Douglass, Oludah Equiano, Harriet Jacobs and Mary Prince. The second narrative that I will share is recorded in Shoman's history of Belize (1994), and was told by an eyewitness.

Mary Prince was a slave from Bermuda. Her father was a sawyer, and her mother was a household slave. When her master died, his slaves and property were divided, and Mary and her mother were sold to a new master. Mary was given to the master's grandchild. She was fond of her new mistress who referred to her as a pet, and often called her, “my little nigger.”

I pause here to talk about the word “nigger.” I cannot recall the use of this text being popular when I was growing up. I heard the term “niggah-minded” (nigger-minded) which referred to people, especially those of African descent, who were selfish. Those who were “always telling on others.” Telling on others—where did that come from? Once again telling on others is one of the legacies of colonialism. Yes, telling on others can “curry favour.” If the African slaves told on each other they could be rewarded. This was a strategy to divide the slaves.
My experience as a student in the United States made me realize that one has to be cautious about the sensitive “N” word. I heard that some books were banned from being using in schools, and that one of them was Mark Twain’s, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, written in the 1950s. This was new information for me. During this study when I came upon the word again, I decided to pause and surf the internet to see what I found about the word “Nigger.” I will share some of the ideas that I gathered after browsing through these websites:

http://www.toptags.com/aama/voices/commentary/nword.htm

http://www.ferris.edu/news/jimcrow/caricature/

http://www.salon.com/books/feature/2002/01/22/kennedy/

The word nigger, the “N” word is associated with blacks, and has a negative, derogatory connotation. When niggers (meaning blacks) were represented in the media, they were always heavy, had very thick lips, bulged out eyes, and ill-mannered. They were neglectful and abusive parents. This is not to say that these stereotypes have changed very much in the 21st century.

According to http://www.ferris.edu/news/jimcrow/caricature/

The etymology of nigger is often traced to the Latin niger, meaning black. The Latin niger became the noun negro (black person) in English, and
simply the color black in Spanish and Portuguese. In Early Modern French niger became negre and, later, negress (black woman) was clearly a part of lexical history. One can compare to negre the derogatory nigger – and earlier English variants such as negar, neegar, neger, and niggor – which developed into a parallel lexico-semantic reality in English. It is likely that nigger is a phonetic spelling of the white Southern mispronunciation of Negro. Whatever its origins, by the early 1800s it was firmly established as a denigrative epithet. Almost two centuries later, it remains a chief symbol of white racism (p. 1).

In the United States calling a black person a “nigger” can start a fight immediately; however, it is worth noting that blacks can call themselves or each other, nigger, without repercussions. Over time the word nigger evolved to Negro, Coloured and now to African American. In Belize, people of African/European (British) descent have been called Creoles. The websites that I have indicated have much more interesting, informative sections to read.

I now return to the plight of slave Mary.

During this time, Mary was hired out. This caused her to be separated from her mother. She was sold a second time. Mary was quite angry at how the women were treated during the sale. She said that many strange men surrounded her and they examined her carefully by handling her similarly to how a butcher would handle a calf or a lamb. The slaver buyer talked about the
women’s size and shape in making their decision about which woman to purchase. Mary also detested the disrespectful attitude of one of the masters she had.

He had an ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked, and ordering me to wash him in a tub of water. This was worse to me than all the licks. Sometimes when he called me to wash him I would not come, my eyes were so full of shame. He would then come to beat me.

(Gates, 2002, p. 272)

As a slave, Mary had many chores to do. She milked cows, fed the master’s horse, washed the clothing and the floors, picked cotton, made the beds, and put the children to bed. Her worst work experience was when she was sold to someone in the Turks island who owned salt ponds. Mary was given a half-barrel, and a shovel. She had to stand in the knee-deep water from four in the morning until nine at night. She and other slaves became very ill, and their source of medicine was hot salt water. Generally, no matter which master they had, the slaves’ diet was mostly sweet potatoes and corn.

Mary was scared and “scarred” by the punishment inflicted on the slaves whether they were males or females. She had the experience of hearing the excruciating screams from Hetty who was pregnant at the time her master was whipping her. Hetty was tied to a tree and lashed until blood oozed out of her body. She lost her baby and eventually died. Mary also had a similar fate. She had a mistress who would slap her and whip her, too. At times the mistress told
the master on Mary, and he lashed out maliciously. On one occasion, Mary was tied to a ladder and given 100 lashes. On another occasion Mary got into an argument over a pig with another slave woman. Although Mary was not at fault, the white magistrate ordered that she be locked up in a cage and flogged.

Then, something very heart wrenching occurred. Mary’s mother was aboard a sloop that docked at the pier. Sadly enough, her mother was insane, and had her four-year-old daughter with her. Just when Mary thought that she and her mother would be bonded, they were separated once more. Her mom was sent back to Bermuda. I pause to reflect on incidents that I never took time for, but flashed in mind as I wrote Mary’s narrative.

I am not usually easily angered, but I did feel some anger and resentment concerning my childhood days after reading Mary’s story. I was not a slave, in the sense described by her, but I was made to wash someone else’s floor. The family lived in my hometown. At the time, I did not think that they were wealthy; in retrospect they would be in the middle class socio-economic bracket. They had a daughter who was much older than I, but she lived in the city with her grandparents. There were four boys, and I think the youngest child who was a girl, was very little or not born yet. But, my mother sent me every Saturday to their house to scrub the two steps, mop the floors inside, and polish them. That was hard work. They had three bedrooms, a bathroom with tub, toilet and basin, laundry room, dining room kitchen, and large living room.
Back then I did not even stop to think that they were rich and we were poor. I never went hungry but we lived in a small two-bedroom house, with a combined small kitchen and dining room, and a very small living room. Downstairs was a larger rotted kitchen that was separated from the house. We baked bread and johnny cakes in there, and sometimes it served as our shower room too. We had an outdoor toilet located several yards away from our house.

I cleaned that family’s house weekly for a long time, and I cannot recall being paid a cent. Paying a child at that time was out of the question. It was more a neighbourly-help thing, a value being instilled in children. Today, that would not work because if children are sent on an errand or do some work for the neighbour or someone, they expect to be paid.

Women in bondage and slavery, and women inflicting pain on other women that they use as slaves are still present with us today. Wensley Clarkson, in his book, *Slave Girls* (1996), relates the stories of twenty women. He claims that the stories are true, and family members, numerous police officers, criminologists and special workers, have provided information. I will share the gruesome experiences related in three of the narratives. I chose these narratives because one tells of a 12-year-old girl which demonstrates that age is not a factor for this kind of illicit activity. Secondly, the United States was a port of importation for the ring of illicit sex. Thirdly, one of the women was unable to bear the conditions and committed suicide. These stories show how destructive engaging in illicit sex can be to young girls and women. There is
also the danger of unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Na was from Bangkok. She was transported to the United States and sold to a brothel run by a gang of Chinese immigrants. The sex cubicles were filthy and drafty, and every night the guard had sexual intercourse with a different woman in return for his work. Na was his favourite. Na experiences many sadistic practices from men who visit the brothel. “Bend over … Bruising was becoming common place. Sometimes they would bite her and she would spend weeks fearful that she had caught AIDS or other diseases…” (pp. 7-8).

Tatip was a twelve-year-old girl from Bangkok whose parents were too poor to care for her. She was sold to people in Thailand and was fed snakes, fried rice, beetles, and frogs. In the end, she was very fortunate because a British journalist bought her, and took her into foster care.

Ana and many other women fell victim to Heidnik who housed women in the cold, filthy basement of the house. The women were shackled and Heidnik wanted to get every woman pregnant so that he could have a large family. After he captured Ana, he had sex with her. Then “after ten minutes of inactivity in bed together, Heidnik started choking the girl until she almost passed out … handcuffed her hands behind her and marched her down to the basement … cold, damp, dimly lit room.” Hygiene was minimal, and Ana witnessed the cruelty to many of the other women who shared the basement. “…he unzipped his pants and ordered her to take his penis into her
mouth. After a few minutes he inserted it into her vagina and pumped away until he climaxed … Later he even forced the women to have sex with one another… women needed to be punished, he grabbed a can of chicken flavoured dog food… eat or take a beating” (pp. 24-29). One of the women committed suicide.

I can recall when illicit sex was very common in Belize City. I remember the 1970s when my mom and I visited her friend in Belize City and we stayed close to "a whorehouse" called Vida Alegre. The presence of the British soldiers in Belize to defend our country against Guatemala also encouraged illicit sex, and produced many children out of wedlock. The sexual activity trickled into my hometown, and even into small remote Maya villages. Most of the British soldiers have left, but today, there is still evidence of prostitution. Most people claim that it's our Central American sisters who are employed under the pretext of barmaids who engage in illicit sex.

Similarly, Peggy was a slave in Belize, and in September 1821, Dr. Mansfield Bowen, a white magistrate, was summoned to court for the pitiless flogging of Peggy. Mansfield’s fellow magistrates who were also white slave owners heard the case. The jury comprised white slave owners as well. Three of the freed black women volunteered to give evidence but the magistrates ruled against this.

It is alleged that Peggy stole some handkerchiefs. Bowen punished her. She was trussed, flogged and then fettered into a warehouse contaminated with
rats for five days and nights. Peggy’s common-law husband promised to pay for
the handkerchiefs but Bowen was unwilling to accept this gesture of good will for
a black woman. Peggy was extremely agonized. She took the matter into her
hands, and she made a complain seeking to rectify the situation. But it made
matters worse. Bowen was irate and inflicted further wounds on Peggy. Shoman
(1994) renarrates what an eyewitness vividly described:

  Peggy was fastened to four stakes placed in the ground, and laying on her
belly, her legs and arms being distended, and tied to the stakes by cords, so
that she had no power to alter her opposition. Her clothes, when I first saw
her, were fastened around her hips, and after she was flogged sometime by a
woman, with a cat [cat-o-nine used to whip slaves and later used to whip
prisoners], her clothes were dragged down until they were below the small
part of the thigh, when the whole of her posteriors were exposed. The woman
again flogged her on the posteriors, at which I was so disgusted that I turned
away. Doctor Bowen was present during the whole of the punishment…She
was occasionally taken outside, chained to a tree and forced to wash clothes.
During this time her ration consisted of two mackerels and twenty plantains
per week. (Shoman, 1994, pp. 49-50)

  The verdict for Dr. Bowen was “NOT GUILTY.”
Chapter Sixteen

“Dismantling that Old Authority”

Slaves’ Responses: Resistance and Rebellion

Memmi (1965) sums up the experiences and impact of colonization and slavery as:

This social, political and historical mutilation gives rise to the most serious consequences. It contributes to bringing out the deficiencies in the other aspects of the colonized’s life and, by a counterfeit which is frequent in human processes, it is itself fed by the colonized’s other infirmities. (pp. 96-97).

In Belize as well as in other colonial societies, “sometimes the colonizers are thrown out but they remain culturally, because they have been assimilated into the minds of people they leave behind” (Arajúo & Macedo, 2000, p. 184). “A core of European – derived institutions-economic, political, military, legal, religious and educational …promoted, nurtured and continued the legacy of colonialism” (Bolland, 1994, p. 70). One of the greatest impacts of colonialism has been self-depreciation or self-hate. Black women, for example, started to uncurl their hair and to bleach their skin. Many colonized people have been conditioned to believe that foreign ideas and products are better because they constantly heard negative stereotypes from the masters. The negative remarks, and sense of being worthless created a Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling
prophecy, which seemed to have been transferred to intimate partner relationships as well.

Violence generates violence, and therefore, the examples provided earlier did not in any way deter many of the slaves from exercising their power to resist. Most slaves did not venerate white masters. In fact, there was a constant cultural interface of power and resistance in slave societies. In Belize there were four major revolts by the slaves within the span of five decades. The men, most of who worked in the logging industry, utilized their geographical knowledge of the terrain to assist them to escape as maroons. Revolts were planned in the southern United States too. In 1817, Denmark Vasey organized a slave revolt but it was aborted, and consequently, Vasey and thirty-four others were hung. Nat Turner and his co-conspirators were more successful in 1831 when several whites around the country were killed. Anti-slavery activities also included the Underground Railroad movement which were ‘stations’ set up at different points rendering shelter and financial assistance as slaves migrated to the northern United States, Canada, and even the Caribbean (Bolland, 1988, 1997; Estell, 1995; Shoman, 1994).

Notwithstanding, women too had to grapple with punishment and legal constraints, yet they participated fully in resisting the master’s dominance. Women committed suicide, aborted their babies, and even had the courage to kill their masters or destroy their property. Bush (1990) adds that many women in the Caribbean resisted by non-accidental drowning, faking illness, extravagance with domestic products, losing clothes and going on hunger strikes. They
occasionally made a concoction to poison their masters. These actions of resistance and rebellion increased the colonizers’ negative perceptions of the slaves, and still live to haunt people of African descent today. For acts like wasting the domestic products or losing the clothes that belonged to the master and his family, slaves were perceived as reckless, incompetent, and mendacious. Malingering would be perceived as lazy and inefficient. Women were also perceived as licentious and treacherous. Interestingly, in the female slave-master relationship, some women used the master’s sexual advances to their favour. By using this strategy, many of them gave birth to lighter skin children, which was an advantage for their children. The lighter the skin, the more privileges the children would enjoy (Bolland, 1988, 1997; Bush, 1990; Shoman, 1994).

“Indigene Violence: A Replica of Black and White Squares”

Slave women became concubines instead of respected wives. Slaves, indigenous peoples, and the natural resources of their settlements were conquered, controlled, penetrated, plundered, pirated, terrorized, tortured, raped and ruptured. The enslaved were in bondage and brutally mistreated. There was massive carnage and genocide through the spread of germs, and gunpowder.

The incidents of slavery are not unique to the descendants of the African Diaspora. Ever since Columbus stumbled into the ‘New World’, there has been evidence of colonial violence. Europeans came in contact with the indigenous Arawak and Carib peoples of the West Indies. The Arawaks are recorded as
having a reputation of obedience and being amicable people. Unfortunately, these qualities were detrimental to their survival, and they and their culture were shortly exterminated. On the contrary, the Caribs were described as hostile, warlike and addicted to cannibalism. The Caribs refused to be enslaved, and resisted European domination. While they survived, they were punished for being subversive. Some of them were driven out of St. Vincent, and had to settle elsewhere in places like Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize in Central America (Bolland, 1988; Shoman, 1994).

The indigenous people were violent and oppressive too, but the level of violence increased with the advent of the European colonizers. The Spaniards and British also violently impacted the lives and the survival of the indigenous Maya living in Belize at the time of their conquest. Disease was a major part of their extermination, but the coercive control also jolted them. The Europeans (mainly the Spaniards) exercised their power over the Indians by instituting the encomienda system based on cheap, tributory labour from the Indians. Repartimento replaced the encomienda system, and the former arrangement permitted the Spaniards to divide large acreage of indigenous land among Spanish settlers who in turn provided Spain with resources from the colonized lands. The Spanish priests were also accomplices through the proselytization of the Indians to Christianity, and in this process they mistreated the Indians in several ways. They destroyed their temples and statues. Occasionally, they burned their villages when they relapsed into Indian paganism (Bolland, 1988, Shoman, 1994). Although, historians and historical records do not use the text,
holocaust, to describe the massive violence and inhumane mistreatment of
African slaves, and the indigenous Indians in the Americas, what in fact
happened parallels the Jewish holocaust because entire communities were
sometimes destroyed.

Consciousness Raising

Shifting consciousness: Transforming the infirmities of colonialism.

Former slaves in Belize were kept dependent in many ways. The
monopolization of owning land, and the dependency on wage labour, combined
with a “truck and advance system” further indebted them. The key ingredient to
maintain stability in the colonies was coercion, and the legal services of
magistrates, and the police were appropriated as disciplinary agents. The social
institutions of school and church, in addition to the family, instilled values and
work ethics, and obedience. Women’s contribution was excluded and many times
their voices and presence were erased from the pages of history. These
impediments have been affecting women locally and globally; however, all is not
lost for the African Diaspora. They struggled and continue to struggle for political
power as a major step towards socio-economic emancipation.

In this section I return to the conception of consciousness mentioned
earlier. The deficiencies and infirmities of the colonial oppression and domination
have resulted in a state of oppressed or dependent consciousness (Freire,
Despite an abundance of evidence indicating that the African slaves were culturally and linguistically different, the white masters attempted to keep them divided and subjugated. The effort was in vain because the slaves struggled for cultural continuities. They demonstrated a strong sense of cultural resistance. Although the colonized slaves and freed blacks lost much of their original cultural and linguistic identity, they resisted and secretly congregated. Thus, a hybridization of cultures and a mixture of cuisine and languages evolved.

Bolland (1997) supports the claim:

The widespread persistence of Afro-Caribbean beliefs and customs, as well as the continuing resentment of and resistance to authority systems of colonial plantation society, are eloquent testimony to the ultimate failure of the indoctrination process among the ex-slaves in the British Caribbean. (p. 185)

While it may take time to eliminate the colonial legacies which still exist in colonized and previously colonized nations, there is a fervency to reclaim and redefine identities. Moreover, there have been movements and a continuous shift towards black politics, black consciousness, and nationalism (Bolland, 1997; Hall, 1995; Hess, 2000; Shoman, 1994). Hall (1995) states,

The first moment was grounded in a particular political and cultural analysis… when the term ‘black’ was coined … and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance… ‘The Black experience’ as a singular and unifying framework based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between the different communities, became ‘hegemonic’
over other ethnic/racial identities- though the latter did not, of course… (p. 233)

Despite the cultural myths dispersed in the Belizean society and other societies, there is overwhelming evidence which contradicts the negative characterization of people from the African Diaspora. If one combs the history of the African Diaspora and the indigenous peoples, there are ample examples of courage, intellectual brilliance, and talents to dispel the myths and mis/conceptions. Several individuals and groups in the African Diaspora have continuously attempted to bury the white man’s legacy of stereotypical images of inferiority and illiteracy, and replace them with positive images of pride, and an independent identity.

Since the 1900s, cultural identity in Belize and the rest of the Caribbean has been redefined in terms of a shared culture, a culture of collectiveness, “oneness’, “Caribbeaness” of the black experience. “Such a conception of cultural identity played a critical role in all post-colonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world” (Hall, 1997, p. 111). New forms of cultural practices and resistance have been developed. Literary works, art and music have become mediums through which resistance has been manifested. There were turbulent years of labour disturbances in the early 1900s, and the emergence of labour unions in Belize and other Caribbean countries. The white colonists’ hegemony was challenged and resisted by vanguards like Marcus
Garvey in Jamaica, John Thomas in Trinidad, Toussaint L’Overture of Haiti, George Price, Philip Goldson, Clifford Betson, and Antonio Soberanis in Belize.

Correspondingly, there was the rise of the Civil Rights movement in the United States, and Booker T. Washington and William Edward Burghardt DuBois emerged as trailblazers in this struggle for black political and civil rights. During the 1960s in Belize the political consciousness persisted with the black power movement for justice and equality by UBAD organization (United Black Association for Development). In the United States, between 1919 and 1926 there was a massive migration of African-Americans to northern cities such as New York City, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. This resulted in The Harlem Renaissance which has been symbolic of black liberation, and an exemplification of talented African American artists and intellectuals.

From 1920 until about 1930 an unprecedented outburst of creative activity among African-Americans occurred in all fields of art. Beginning as a series of literary discussions in the lower Manhattan (Greenwich Village) and upper Manhattan (Harlem) sections of New York City, this African-American cultural movement became known as “The New Negro Movement” and later as the Harlem Renaissance. More than a literary movement and more than a social revolt against racism, the Harlem Renaissance exalted the unique culture of African-Americans and redefined African-American expression…. 

(http://www.nku.edu/~diesmanj/harlem_intro.html, p. 2)
Similarly, the Pan-African movement was created to foster unity among the African Diaspora. According to Esedebe (1982), Pan-Africanism is an ideology. The major aim of this black ideology is to promote a sense of unity among the African Diaspora. Pan-Africanists work towards promoting pride, Black Nationalism, and self-determination.

**Back and Forth**

Critical research interrogates questions of power relations. The major thrust of this section was power over which resulted in violence, specifically colonial and domestic violence. The chapters reified many statements and provided additional examples of the concepts of power, representation, resistance and agency related to the previous chapters. In my attempt to convey the continuities of past history to the present, I concentrated on the dominant culture, and the shift from dependent to independent thinking, passive representation to active agency, powerlessness to empowerment, and social action to challenge colonial rule. Historicity reveals that discourses do not remain static because “old patterns” will eventually yield to new possibilities. Figure 6 shows a few of the parallels and shifts between colonial violence and domestic violence, and the present and past that I discussed in Section 4.
Figure 6: Colonial and Domestic Violence Parallels and Shifts

- scared
- scarred
- silenced
- voiceless
- domination
- alienation
- mutilation
- invisibility
- devalued
- helplessness
- economic dependency

MAKING THE SHIFT

- to dismantle the “old authority”
- to achieve deepened consciousness
- from dependent to independent thinking
- passive representation to active agency
- powerlessness to empowerment
- passivity to social action
- to new possibilities
Conclusion: Sections 1-4

**Power: Un/normalizing Stereotypes**

The social and cultural reproduction of binary power relationships are maintained through a traditional mode of thinking or approach to teaching. By this I mean that individuals from birth in the family, and at a very young age in school, are ideologically conditioned to the values and moral norms by which they are to abide. The individuals’ roles and patterns of behaviour, especially those that are gender-related, are formed and reproduced. As a result, they begin to form their identity and self-perception. They begin to fit into and believe in stereotypical images about males and females. However, although the binary opposition of power relationships and stereotypical images are reinforced, there are individuals and groups who have challenged and continue to challenge the dominant ideologies and practices which marginalize or oppress people of colour, women, and colonized/formerly colonized societies. Invariably, these challenges have had some mark of success resulting in a new perspective, theory or paradigm shift.

Movements such as feminism, AfriKanA wo-fem-isms, post colonialism, nationalism, and the reconceptualist perspective of curriculum were conceived because of challenges to the dominant ideological narratives in society. A traditional approach to teaching, and a traditional mode of thinking support subordination, oppression, social injustice and the status quo. And hence Lerner’s (1986) argument:
Women have for millennia participated in the process of their own subordination because they have been psychologically shaped so as to internalize the idea of their own inferiority. The unawareness of their own history of struggle and achievement has been one of the major means of keeping women subordinate. (p. 218)

In order to disrupt silenced voices, advocate for new possibilities, and put women in the center of reform instead of the margin, a critical-liberatory approach to teaching is mandatory. This approach will develop and establish critical ways of thinking, will assist in identifying injustices, and will transform colonized consciousness to social action for social change.

Deepened Consciousness

The examples of the trans-cultural studies, and the incidents of domestic violence in Belize illustrate the relationship between violence against women and cultural and religious customs. They serve as a means of stirring some level of public consciousness not only to the magnitude of this social phenomenon but also to the multiplicity of structural issues that exist in society which needs to be taken into consideration for transforming the status quo. Since this chronic social canker of domestic violence and inequalities affects children as well as women, school leaders cannot continue to abnegate their responsibilities to create the teaching/learning environment which will transform the indoctrination of gendered roles and responsibilities. The horrific experiences of the same children from
battered homes coming to the school space, should serve as an impetus to encourage school leaders to resist traditional ways of teaching and thinking, and to gravitate towards critical ways of teaching and thinking. I strongly suggest that school leaders break this cycle by working for transformation within and beyond the school walls.

According to Ashcroft et al. (1995), “education thus remains one of the most powerful discourses within the complex of colonialism and neo-colonialism. A power technology of social control, it also offers one of the most potentially fruitful routes to a dis/mantling of that old author/ity” (p. 427). Similarly, educational activist and teacher, Paulo Freire, among others is very critical of the kind of education established by the colonialists. Freire (1970) refers to this kind of education as the banking concept of education where typically the teacher is the depositor of knowledge and the students are the depositories for holding the transmitted knowledge. There is a reason for this educational approach. It prepares the individual to “fit” into society and the world. This mode of education benefits the oppressors or colonizers because their goal is to keep us in the dark. The colonizers never cared to have the world revealed to us. Neither did they care for us to see the world transformed.

The banking concept of education is an impediment for it deprives the individual of creative and critical thinking, inventing and reinventing/creating and recreating knowledge, and developing a liberating and critical consciousness. (Araújo Freire & Macedo, 2000, p. 69). According to Freire:
Education as the practice of freedom – as opposed to education as the practice of domination – denies that man [and woman] is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world… [we need to] abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world… the problem-posing method presents [the] very situation to them as a problem. (Araújo & Macedo, 2000, p. 75, 78)

Freire worked with adults in Brazil to facilitate their transformation from an oppressed situation, and a shackled mentality to one of criticality and deepened consciousness of their situation. Therefore, I am suggesting that educators begin to use problem-solving, dialogue, and critical-learner-oriented approaches with students from a very young age, and at all levels of their schooling life. It is this kind of transformative education and critical consciousness in schools that has a great possibility for helping women and children from battered homes. This pedagogical reform also has great potential to immensely reduce, or ideally, eliminate domestic violence and gender inequalities.

In Section 5, I revisit the major questions which opened this study. Using domestic violence as the major issue in this study, I draw on the stories of women, my personal experience, and the works of Lois Weis and Jane Roland Martin, among other scholars, as a catalyst to summon schools to be actively involved in the lives of families and children who are victims of domestic violence.
I close with section with a song from Bob Marley of Jamaica who wrote numerous evocative songs. *Redemption Song* (Songs of Freedom Album, 1992) briefly reiterates a portion of the history I captured in Chapter 14. The first verse, “Old Pirates…Redemption Songs” speaks to the strength for resistance, agency and change. The second verse, “Emancipate Yourselves from mental slavery…” speaks to the need for a critical, deepened consciousness that I will be addressing further in the upcoming section.
Old pirates, yes, they rob I
Sold I to the merchant ships
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pit
But my hand was made strong
By the hand of the Almighty
We forward in this generation
Triumphantly

Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs
Redemption songs

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery
None but ourselves can free our minds
Have no fear for atomic energy
'Cause none of them can stop the time
How long shall they kill our prophets
While we stand aside and look? Ooh
Some say it's just a part of it
We've got to fulfil the book

Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs...
Martin and I met on the Belize Swing Bridge again. She talked about her new book, *Cultural Miseducation—In Search of a Democratic Solution* (2002). The major thrust of her new work was the need for societies to avoid the evils that occur as a result of *cultural miseducation* preserved and transmitted by schools, libraries, museums, churches, synagogues and television. Martin strongly argues that we cannot continue to reproduce *cultural liabilities* to future generations. We need to rethink assumptions about teaching, learning, knowledge and social relationships. I had to agree with Martin wholeheartedly. As a matter of fact, I discussed these same issues in Sections 2, 3, and 4 of this study. The results of the study on domestic violence strongly reveal how Belizean women and men come to know about their responsibilities and roles in their home and the society. We are culturally miseducated, and there is an urgent need to break the cycle of cultural liabilities. In this last chapter, I call on schools to get their hands dirty and their feet wet by taking up the challenge to address the issue of domestic violence as part of their everyday school life. This study is directed at every man, woman and child in a community because we need to “watch each other’s back,” but this chapter is primarily aimed at the institution of formal education. If schools continue to pull the blinders over this prevalent, harmful issue then they too are guilty of violence. That’s not even beginning to count in the violence related to corporal punishment and the hidden curriculum. It is educational neglect if the schools continue to isolate themselves from families and society. Like domestic violence, school isolation has psychological and economic consequences. Schools need to build a bridge between the children from battered families, and the abusers and victims, and a bridge between the school and society to assist in this issue. “Cultural miseducation occurs when so many cultural liabilities or such devastating ones [like domestic abuse] are passed down that a heavy burden is placed on the next generation … it occurs when these sins of omission and commission are conjoined” (Martin, 2002, p. 5). In fighting to eliminate domestic abuse and inequalities educators need to *REfocus* and *REconceptualize* their mission and vision.
Chapter Seventeen

Revelations: What’s written on the cultural wall

Individuals cannot be understood without looking at the overall discursive cultural context. Using a critical orientation has enabled me to expose taken-for-granted assumptions which privilege the ruling class. Whether it is a case of domestic or colonial violence, social and/or economic oppression is a result of exploitation. Exploitation can extend beyond the deprivation of natural and economic resources and sexual exploitation, to mediated exploitation (considering how the mediated culture represents women’s bodies).

Using the discourses of postcolonialism and AfriKanA wo-fem-isms from a critical theory orientation assisted me to emphasize the socially created nature of life, and also to uncover fundamental processes of patriarchal power which shape our sense of our world and ourselves. Patriarchal values serve as a starting point for understanding the dynamics of domestic violence. These values are passed down from generation to generation through a historical process of direct institutional and observational learning. The mass media reproduces and reinforces patriarchal values at a cultural level. The impact of reproducing patriarchal values at all these levels is severe. Domestic violence, for instance, has caused women to be victimized, and to suffer both immediate and long-term consequences to their physical and mental well-being.
This study has shown that female adults (including professionals and children) are affected by domestic violence. There are social service agencies available in some communities in Belize that can assist battered women but many of these women are either not aware of the services or embarrassed to report the incidents. Domestic violence should be everybody’s concern. We cannot continue to wait until children are adults and become abusers and victims in order to try and save or remedy the family situation. It may be too late then, and may take a lot of energy and finances. It is better for us to *catch ‘em young*, and I am not suggesting a violent “catching,” but one which involves more focus on productive social-emotional development of our children even before they start school.

This study uses the interviews of battered women, reconstructed narratives of women in abused relationships, folk stories and folk songs as a means of identifying ways in which Belizean males and females have been culturally educated/miseducated. In this study, I also shared my childhood, parental and professional experiences. The results from the various sources in this study confirm that in the socialization process we have been *miseducated*, and that there is a need to fill the gap of that *missing education*.

The *cultural pedagogy* (meaning folk myths, media, curriculum materials, religious teachings, et cetera) over the years has taught women self-deprecation through the many tainted portrayals of being feminine. The tainted representations show that generally women

- are “good-for-nothing”
must be submissive
are men’s sperm banks to continuously reproduce children
must depend on men as the breadwinners.

Contrastingly, men are rational, logical thinkers, and therefore, only men can be scientists and mathematicians. If women work outside the home, they should be teachers and nurses. Girls have not been considered academically competent in Math and Science; hence, teachers and even parents, concentrated on educating males for jobs related to these fields. With this kind of social reproduction in mind, I would be remiss if I do not address domestic violence and gendered inequalities as an issue for schools to consider as part of their mission and vision. It is imperative that teachers work towards a liberatory form of education. They must improve the student-student interaction in the classroom, and move from a praxis of isolation to one of collaboration and cooperation to dissolve gender inequalities. In this section of the study, I use our Belizean experiences as a catalyst to point out the caveat in our schooling, and as a context to place a charge on the schools to intervene in the private family affair of domestic violence and gendered inequalities.

At the very beginning of this research I stated that I was interested in the exploration of four questions. The questions were:

♦ How do the family and folkculture educate/miseducate children and adults about their gendered roles and responsibilities?
♦ How do schools reinforce the education/miseducation of these gendered roles and responsibilities?
What can we learn about the effects of this education/miseducation?

What can schools do differently to bridge the gap between children and families who suffer the experiences of domestic violence?

In this section, I encapsulate my thoughts and findings. I focus on two domains for improvement. One of the domains is **relationality**, and the other is **criticality**. I firmly believe that schools have the potential to eventually transform relational dynamics between males and females. I make this statement based on the results of more than twenty years of being a primary school teacher, an administrator and a teacher educator. As a teacher trainer, teachers and I have collaborated and used teaching as research for improving the social competence of students in their classrooms. Let me say that enabling the students’ social-emotional-relational skills requires much planning, and the use of a variety of activities on a daily basis, and throughout the school year. We have been able to observe more productive collaborative and cooperative learning and interaction about a month after intense concentration on improving social-relational skills. Building these skills requires time, and so teaching/learning time is consciously shared between the cognitive and social-affective domains.

In my work with teachers, I have not focused on the domain of criticality the way I will be defining and explicating it in this section, but I have done work related to improving reading skills using Bloom’s taxonomy, and critical thinking skills. Most of the basal texts we use for reading in Belizean schools do not contain questions which require the use of higher order thinking skills; therefore, teachers and I have collaborated in conducting action research specifically to
enhance students’ reading skills focusing on skills like analysis, synthesis and application. Later in this section, I will expand on the domains of relationality and criticality using a conception of CAREPraxis. I wrap up this final section by concluding with a few lessons I learned from engaging in this study and suggestions for future related research.

_How Does the Family and Folk culture Educate/miseducate_  

_What Can We Learn About the Effects of This Education/miseducation_

A close examination of the previous chapters reveals that domestic violence is not monolithic, and actually it poses a threat to the family’s interpersonal dynamics. As we have seen, the cultural scripts handed down to women and men reinforce and reproduce an imbalance of power. This study is replete with examples of the exertion of power by males.

The study of dating conducted by Sally Lloyd and Beth Emery (2000) substantiates my findings of dysfunctional relationships, and exposes the progression of abuse experienced by the women in their study. Jealousy was one of the catalysts for the intimate abuse. A major reason that caused a relationship to turn stormy was ineffective communication patterns. The portrait of the women’s stories in my study and that of Lloyd and Emery unveiled a tip of the iceberg. Drawing on the women’s narratives, we sampled what happens at the micro-level, meaning the home. However, there is also evidence that women are affected by structural decisions at the macro-level. The power arrangements
at both the micro- and macro- levels speak to the institutionalization of gender inequalities. The cultural pedagogy and the literature review disclosed that:

♦ The family and cultural myths teach, reinforce and reproduce gender role socialization.

♦ The schools, religion and the media play a major role in reinforcing and reproducing gendered stereotypes.

♦ In the instructional and curricula materials used in schools there is an under-representation of females.

♦ Domestic violence is like a natural disaster. It has no fear or favour. It affects all ages, ethnicities, social classes, and educational levels.

♦ Domestic violence transcends local and national boundaries.

♦ Domestic violence is not an isolated incident but repeated patterns of control and gender inequalities.

♦ Domestic violence is a learned behaviour. It is perpetuated from what is modelled in the family, media, and schools.

♦ Pregnant women fall victims of domestic violence too.

♦ Domestic violence in the home impacts children and adults in numerous ways, and so should not be ignored.

♦ Teachers are battered too. Some of the issues children face resonate with teacher’s personal experiences.

♦ Police officers do not desire to get involved in domestic disturbances. Many of them also have domestic problems and cover up for each other.
The women’s narratives also alert us of how they are kept oppressed and marginalized. Those in power in the legal, economic and political system in Belize are accomplices of oppression. They have women’s back against the wall by depriving them of employment, health, nutrition, and land. Another major deficiency in the women’s lives that may seem unrelated, but is very pertinent is the high level of poverty in our nation. Earlier in this study, I mentioned the feeding programme in primary schools as a cosmetic social response to poverty and economic oppression. In the long run, this “cosmetic face lift” takes away the dignity and the responsibility of parents. Worst of all, cosmetic responses from the government keep families poor and dependent allowing electoral candidates to prey on women and poor families for votes. This thesis is supported by Judith Lorber (1994). Lorber posits that gendered parenting, physical violence, and sexual exploitation help to maintain men’s dominance over women. Furthermore, Lorber (1994) sums up the patriarchal components of gender inequality (that I chronicled in the previous chapters) which leads up to the institutionalization of patriarchy:

- Men’s objectification of women in the society and culture
- Men’s devaluation of women in religion
- Men’s rendition of women’s invisibility in history
- Men’s sexual and emotional exploitation of women
- Men’s ideological justification of legal control over women’s bodies.
Chapter Eighteen

How do schools reinforce the education/miseducation

Many scholars and educators have shared their experiences and voiced their opinions about the role of schools. Many of them argue that schools are sites of cultural and political reproduction. In Section 2 of this study, I disclosed my teaching experience in Belize. Eida also alluded to schooling in Belize in her narrative, and although the two narratives speak specifically to schooling in Belize, it is noteworthy that studies done in the United States have comparable results. Schools and teachers sort out children like machines in a factory. They group or label them. Labels such as gifted, mentally retarded, challenged learners, severely behaviourally handicapped and special education are commonly used. At face value, these categories are said to be important so that all children can benefit from formal education. However, a profound examination of the system will reveal that the schooling system benefits those with the material resources and cultural capital (Carlson, 1987; Delpit, 1988; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1981, 1988; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; McLaren, 1989; Shor, 1987). In this section, I will be using the text of schooling instead of education because schooling is formal education, and occurs in the social institutions of schools, high schools, and colleges/universities.

Schools are generally highly organized social institutions, and therefore, consciously or unconsciously, teachers model a certain kind of power structure and leadership. This is manifested in the boundaries they set up in their classrooms. These boundaries include when to talk, who to talk to, what to talk
about and for how long to talk. Goodlad (1990) conducted a comprehensive investigation of schooling in the United States. His description of schooling, and the image of teachers show that the participation structure of the classroom is very orderly and authoritarian. The findings of Goodlad are also predominant in Belize. These findings are also legacies. Goodlad’s study showed that in their everyday professional life, teachers are usually more fixed on the importance of the subject matter rather than the learners’ world. Generally, the subject matter is separated from the students’ experience; but the subject matter and the experience of the child are not oppositional. In fact, they go hand in hand; therefore, teachers should be interested in exploring and understanding how the content they teach can be drawn from the students’ experiences. Schools educate, and at the same time *miseducate*, students through the hidden curriculum, instructional materials and sorting males and females into art, sewing or home economic classes.

Paulo Freire in his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000), was also very critical of the power dynamics within a classroom, and the concept of “banking education.” He asserts,

A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. This relationship involves a narrating subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)…. Education is suffering from narration sickness.
The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students…. Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher. (p. 67)

The school's curriculum is viewed as an embodiment of the interests, values and norms to support the state as well as other powerful sectors in a society. In the schools, administrators and teachers are selective about the curriculum and pedagogy. There is a scope and sequence to the curriculum, and the emphasis is mainly on the cognitive development of the students. The choices made by the teachers usually give preference and privilege to certain forms of knowledge or instructional material over another (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1993; Shor, 1979). More often than not, the dominant culture is strongly represented, and the indigenous cultures are merely glossed over.

In Belize the curriculum is a Eurocentric one. Belize has inherited a centralized curriculum from being a colony of Britain, and this type of curriculum has its disadvantage. A centralized curriculum has a tightly prescribed content which is defined by attainment levels, assessment methods, and tests which are centrally written. It creates a culture of reproduction that keeps people oppressed. A centralized curriculum reduces the autonomy of the teacher who is
expected to implement predetermined content and instructional procedure
(Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1993; Shor, 1979).

A centralized curriculum usually ignores culturally diverse populations
(Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Davies (1996) believes that in developing
countries what is considered ineffective teaching of the national curriculum does
serve a purpose. “It provides avenues for the few to gain specialist knowledge
while containing the masses in the myth of opportunity and promise… low
examination rates, and high attrition rate which appears random, or at least not
the fault of Government, only of culture” (p. 93). Hansen (1998) argues against
centralization because it is subject-based, objectives driven, and imposed to
ensure teacher conformity.

The Ministry of Education and the Curriculum Department in Belize have
attempted to include local instructional materials, as well as make educational
connections with the some of the other English speaking Caribbean countries.
When I completed high school, I took the General Certificate of Education
(G.C.E.) from England; however, high school seniors today take a Caribbean
regional examination called C.X.C. (Caribbean Examination Council). This
regional move is not to say that we are not dependent on foreign consultants
and expertise. In many ways we still feel that foreign is better.

After independence, things changed very little for Belize. Education has
been neo-colonized. In other words, the curriculum and educational changes for
teacher education, and for the primary school curriculum are dictated, and
influenced by the financial lending agencies/donors like the World Bank and
IMF (International Monetary Fund). The current model for primary school education is adapted from the pillars of education outlined by UNESCO (United Nations Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organization). I will speak to this a little later.

Before I address the implications for schools regarding the matter of domestic violence, I draw attention to the poem which follows. This poem was given to me in the 1990s by a parent. It speaks to the impact of the kind of interaction with which a child lives, and ideally sums up how our children become functional or dysfunctional adults. We need to be careful what we “feed” our children whether they are born to us or entrusted into our care.

**Children Learn What They Live**

If children live with criticism,
    They learn to condemn.
If children live with hostility,
    They learn to fight.
If children live with ridicule,
    They learn to be shy.
If children live with shame,
    They learn to feel guilty.
If children live with tolerance,
    They learn to be patient.
If children live with encouragement,
    They learn confidence.
If children live with praise,
    They learn to appreciate.
If children live with fairness,
They learn justice.
If children live with security,
They learn to have faith.
If children live with approval,
They learn to like themselves.
If children live with acceptance and friendship,
They learn to find love in the world.

(Many years ago, Dorothy Law Nolte wrote the poem above. It has since been translated into many languages. I modified it from its original state where the words “child” and “he” were used to the use of “they” and “children” in order to avoid sexist language.)

**Implications for Schools to Bridge the Gap**

**What’s There, What Else**

Scholars have shown that schools are about depositing and dispensing information rather than engaging students in their learning. The critique of schools as depositories and dispensers of knowledge has implications for things like:

- how pedagogues deliver their lessons
- what is the content of the curriculum
- how is curriculum defined
- how do pedagogues manage and organize their class
- how pedagogues use instructional materials.

The most recent curriculum in use in Belize, prescribed by the Ministry of Education in Belize, uses UNESCO’s four pillars of learning as a framework to construct the curriculum. The four pillars are *learning to know, to do, to be and live*
**together (www.unesco.org)**. Retrieving data from my mental classroom, observation and interaction, the two major pillars which get the least or no attention are learning to be and learning to live together. Learning to know and learning to do get attention but not at a critical level, and I will expound on this as I proceed. When I say not critical, I mean that not only are the higher order thinking skills rarely used but problem posing, problem solving and critical issues of a sociopolitical, economic and cultural nature which affect the society, the child’s family, and the child, are not interrogated.

We need to be reminded that “learning to do” and “learning to be” have to take on new meaning. It can no longer mean what it did when people were trained to perform a very specific physical task in a manufacturing process. Skill training has evolved, and it has become more than just a means of imparting the knowledge needed to do a routine job. There is also the need for a new concept of “personal competence”. For an individual to be personally competent, it is necessary to combine talents and skills complemented by social behaviour, personal initiative and the willingness to be a risk taker. The individual also needs to acquire and demonstrate the use of skills such as people or interpersonal skills, problem solving, decision-making and innovative team skills. There should be less concern over the acquisition of knowledge and more emphasis on learning to understand the world around us.

In “learning to live together”, children need essential educational tools to function in the twenty-first century. Children need to be able to engage in collaborative and social activities; therefore, education needs to be centered on

Figure 7 contains a matrix which outlines some goals and pedagogical suggestions from the NCSS (National Council for Social Studies) in the United States, and the Curriculum Department in Belize. These two bodies of governance require a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. Teachers need to bear in mind that knowledge is connected, and so an integrated approach to teaching and learning is expected. While learning should include global issues, it is vital for students to learn about their self-concept, conflict management, and a variety of skills necessary to function in a productive relationship or interaction, be it at home, in the classroom, in the community, or in the workplace. Since these conceptions are already prescribed, two questions which arise for me are to what extent are teachers using them, and to what extent are schools equipping our learners to acquire positive, productive, proactive social-relational-interpersonal skills?
Figure 7: Conceptions of social studies goals and pedagogy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Council for Social Studies 1997-</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• stimulate and guide learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• constructivist approach to learning/teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• meaningful, integrated, connected learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• encourage opposing views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• commitment to social responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• real life application of knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• support intellectual, social &amp; personal development</td>
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<tr>
<td>• encourage active inquiry, collaborative learning, social interaction in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• opportunities to learn about self and diverse groups</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum Department 1998-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BELIZE</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• how the past relates to the present</td>
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<tr>
<td>• how changes shape our future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• respect for life and the rights of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• leadership skills and team spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• aptitude to communicate with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• positive self concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• conflict management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• exercise and foster independent judgment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
O/mission in School Life

You should do for your children what their parents fail to do for them.

Pestalozzi

Earlier I shared the mission of the four pillars of learning in the Belizean schooling system. However, there is one domain that needs to be re/considered, and that is the pillar of “learning to be.” I suggest that the mission of schooling is to have the students go beyond the pillar of learning to be. Learning to be is a beginning but should not end there. When I think of “to be” I immediately imagine mere existence, a state of being, remaining the same. I am certain that stagnation is not our desire for our children who will become our future leaders and parents; therefore, the mission must be elevated to “learning to become” instead of to be. “To become” infers that there is some kind of change, growth, or progress, an evolution if you will. If as gatekeepers we are to nurture relationality and criticality in the classroom in an effort to effect change, then surely we do want our students “to become,” and not “to be.” It is my hope also that as gatekeepers we “become” and not “be.”

I pause to highlight the term “gatekeepers.” The first time I came across this word was when I did a course in Qualitative Research. The professor required that I write a letter to the “gatekeeper” of the school explaining what my research in order to get permission to use some of the students as my participants. I did as was required but have never stopped to give thought to this word until now.
Jacques Steinberg, a reporter of the New York Times, had the opportunity to study gatekeepers at Wesleyan University. In his book, *The Gatekeepers: Inside the Admission Process of a Premier College* (2002), Steinberg relates his observations and findings about the competition to gain admission into the academy and the power of the gatekeepers. Like Steinberg, I think that gatekeepers are powerful. They control the entrance, exit, admission dissemination, and flow of people and information into their schools. People who work in the media industry can also be called gatekeepers because newspaper publishers, editors, reporters, television producer and radio owners choose, accept, reject, what kind of information their audience or the public will consume.

In this last section I refer to the educators and administrators in the school system as gatekeepers. They have the power to close the gates and control information and teaching practices to maintain the status quo, or to open the gates and allow for more liberatory practices leading to mental emancipation, and societal transformation.

The epigraph above by Pestalozzi conveys one of the omissions of the mission of schooling. Gatekeepers cannot continue to pretend that domestic violence exists in the shadow of the discourse of violence. Gatekeepers must begin to forge a strong link with the families and children of those families who are abused. The mission of schooling should also serve to dismantle the traditional, reproductive role of gender inequities. Gatekeepers must engage in the political work of transformation by supporting gender equity perspectives, and
using non-violent techniques in their everyday interaction with students entrusted to them. I agree with Jane Roland Martin (2002) that the mission of schooling needs to be custodial. Martin espouses:

I argued that because of social transformation of home and family in the last decades of the 20th century, home is no longer able to fulfill the educational responsibilities our culture long ago assigned it. I proposed that schools step into the breach and begin to share responsibility with home for transmitting the domestic wealth that was in home’s keep. In other words, having found no evidence that some other responsible and effective educational agents shared custody of the cultural wealth in home’s keep, I recommended that school and home embark on a joint venture.

Only after writing that book [The Schoolhome] did I fully realize that school is not the only educational agent that should begin shouldering responsibility for stock in another guardian’s keep. Indeed, it now strikes me as imperative that even as school enters into a joint venture with home, it must begin to share some of its present custodial responsibilities with other educational agents. (p. 45)

Like Martin Luther King, Jr. I HAVE A DREAM. A dream that gatekeepers will:

♦ teach by example, and therefore, model positive relationships as much as possible.
♦ create a nurturing environment for the development of social competency skills, shared leadership, participation in decision-making and collaboration.

♦ use constructivist and experiential methods of instruction.

♦ provide ample opportunities for critical reflection, critical literacy, and critical thinking skills.

♦ empower students, and emancipate them from mental slavery.

♦ move students from subordinate consciousness to critical consciousness.

♦ raise questions regarding knowledge and power, identity and representation, resistance and agency.

♦ help students develop a vision to work towards action for change.

♦ create classroom and school communities, and expand the concept of community to include other teachers, parents and the community at large.

♦ create an atmosphere of caring about others, and be sensitive to differences.

I am certain my dream which may seem like an Impossible Dream can become POSSIBLE. There are lessons to be learned from several educators/gatekeepers who are extra-ordinary or ab/normal teachers. I use the word ab/normal because Gruwell’s (who we will read about below) father asked when she was going to be a “normal teacher. “ By that he meant, when would she quit working extra jobs, “moonlighting,” to assist her
students.

In Erin Gruwell’s book, *The Freedom Writers Diary* (1999) she chronicles students’ reflection from their journals. She used created a community of within her classroom walls and used writing as a means to transform the lives of 150 teens, most of whom were from the projects, from low socio-economic status, and from communities ravaged with violence. She was indeed committed to serving her students for she moonlighted in order to earn additional wages to have funding to assist in field trips. She used novels in her class which related to the students' lives. Through their journals she learned about their ecological environments and the fears and anxieties they were facing. This proved to be an amazing, rewarding labour because all the students are now attending university.

There is the superb story of Deborah Meier and her caring teacher leaders I am certain that some people would also consider Deborah Meier and her staff “abnormal” educators too because of the vision, and the time invested to birth this vision. Meier has worked in East Harlem for more than thirty years revitalizing public education. She had a vision of schooling for the under-privileged students who attended Central Park East School - “to help each student find a special talent, or interest, or serious passion” (Bensman, 2000, p. 137).

In the movie, *Stand and Deliver*, Jaime Escalante, a Math teacher, worked
extremely hard with his Latino working-class students. The hard work paid off because the students were outstanding. They received top scores on their examination.

When I returned home to Belize in 1998, after completing my masters’ degree in education at Miami University, one of my best friends gave me a plaque with these words:

Do not follow where the path may lead
Go instead where there is no path
And leave a trail.

I returned home with the zest to do just that! Like the other exemplary teachers cited above, I attempted to make a difference in the lives of gatekeepers so they can in turn make a difference in the lives of the children entrusted to them. Here are some remarks from the reflections of some of the gatekeepers with whom I worked.

“There were many things that I was not including in my [lesson] plans before. I found myself now researching, reading and collaborating with other teachers …It has made me aware of the many things we could have used for children to learn. I realize that I did not fully do justice …” (Ernilda)
“I would recommend other teachers to get innovative and change their methods of teaching because it’s exciting; and one learns many ideas like I did.” (Nellie)

“Good planning takes a lot of time and research. As I plan, I keep my students in mind, and if they are confused, I reteach after reflecting on the lesson … If you have a student like Melto [pseudonym], pay attention to him. Don’t wait until it is too late, and you have lost him. If you do not know what to do ask other teachers or people who may assist you. I know that it was a lot of work and at times you may feel frustrated and tired but you can’t give up.” (Alma)

“Many teachers on the staff were sensitized to new methods which made their teaching more effective and fun-filled for teaching students … As a result of the improvement in planning, teaching and learning became more effective … I became aware of the current trends and issues in Education, not only theoretically but more importantly, seeing it done practically by teachers in the classrooms … I was able to discuss the low points in the school and finding solutions together was very encouraging … I strongly recommend that there should be more coordinated, collaborative efforts and partnerships with the Training College [now Faculty of Education, University of Belize] …” (Anita)

These teachers and I are not alone in finding success at what Jane Roland
Martin encourages us to do “small actions can have big effects, momentous results, transformation does not have to begin with a whole school” (p.208). Jane Roland Martin urges gatekeepers that there is an urgent need to transform the school house to a schoolhome. In order to do that, there is no need for worry if you cannot change the world in one day but start with the corner where you find yourself. There is no single, standard formula, pattern or form that has the magic in it. The transformation is a gradual process, and one has to be willing to persevere and take risks.
Chapter Nineteen

Genesis: Possibility and Hope

When I think of family interactions and relationships, and the cultural pedagogy that children are exposed to when they are growing up, the importance of a nutritious diet comes to mind. Unhealthy eating habit causes health problems such as obesity, hypertension, anemia and osteoporosis. On the other hand, healthful diets can reduce these factors because essential nutrients from various food groups are combined. It is worth noting that no single food provides all nutrients and so it is critical to balance one’s diet, and that there will also be individuals who have special dietary needs.

The question is what does this preamble have to do with schooling, cultural pedagogy or domestic violence? Diet in the sense that I alluded to earlier is related to food, and the physical and mental well being of an individual. But people can be socially, culturally, and psychologically ill too if they are fed an unhealthy diet. I pointed out earlier how the cultural pedagogical diet that is fed to us as children can severely disable us in our adult family and intimate relationship. In light of this I summon schools (K-12) to collaborate in the protest against the unhealthy social-emotional-relational diet causing the chronic social disease of domestic abuse and domestic inequalities. It is urgent and imperative that students be fed a healthier diet to include nutrients that are necessary building blocks to improve social, cultural, relational health problems.

Concurrently, schools need to unprivatize the violent domestic affair by assisting
in the detoxification of parent’s cultural mis/education if we are to relieve future generations of the cultural liability of domestic abuse and gender inequalities. Detoxification can occur through self-renewal and education.

It must be noted that many of the goals in the Social Studies curriculum are related to the social development of the child; however, most of them have been ignored. One of the major reasons for this is because the focus of assessment, and even the definition or description of an educated person, is cognitively-or intellectually-oriented. The missing education, which offers possibility and hope to eliminate domestic abuse and domestic inequalities, lies in the mission of the nurturance of critical literacy (criticality), and productive social-relational dynamics (relationality) in the classroom.

There has always been a struggle about what should be included in curricular guidelines for schools in order to re/produce an educated person. This struggle has been one of the major reasons for the numerous currents of curricular movements over the years. In striving to address the needs of society, scholars and curriculum specialists have identified curricula to serve different purposes. Over the years the emphasis has changed. There were times when the focus was to educate learners to have desired dispositions, to be competent in the 3Rs and moral and religious teachings, to increase economic productivity or to be technologically literate. Curriculum has been conceptualized as a means of transmitting knowledge where the teacher is in total control. Curriculum has been reconceptualized as a process where teacher and students interact with the teaching/learning material. More recently, curriculum has been further re-
reconceptualized as praxis (Adler, 1977; Bobbitt, 1918; Cornbleth, 1990; Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970, 1973; Pinar et al., 1996). In the latter case, the teacher not only provides teaching/learning activities to empower students but also has a commitment to liberate students. The teacher is committed to social action.

Bearing these changes in mind, what should this diet look like if I am proposing transformation in the reproductive processes of life? Educating learners for the reproductive process of life was a major concern of Herbert Spencer and Jane Roland Martin. They questioned the extent to which schools educate learners to productively become child-rearers, and be involved in family life. From this study, the reproductive process, and family life is in crisis, and leading to other social problems (Martin, 1992; Spencer, 1969). I call on the schools to intervene. My proposition is that the diet we feed our learners in school must include social-relational and critical literacy nutrients. These nutrients need to be included in the curricular and pedagogical diet on a daily basis. In order to create this diet, I have combined educational traditions associated with critical theory and liberatory pedagogy. Having combed through the various theories, I call this diet, CAREPraxis. The strands of discourses that I draw from are critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, critical reflective teaching and inquiry, and curriculum reconceptualization.

**CAREPraxis: A Healthier Diet**

**Liberatory Pedagogy** is espoused by Shor and Freire (1987). It is important to note that liberatory pedagogy does not submerse consciousness or
inhibit creativity. It emphasizes just the opposite—an emergence of consciousness and the continuous critical examination of taken-for-granted assumptions. A close examination of Figures 8a and 8b shows that there is an overlap in the goals of critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, critical reflective teaching and inquiry, and curriculum reconceptualization. I call this overlap CAREPraxis.

The big “C” requires the daily inclusion of criticality, meaning critical thinking, critical analysis, critical evaluation, critical assessment, connection of lived experiences with history, and current economic, social and political conditions. This criticality should be blended with other “Cs” like care, concern, compassion, commitment critical reflection and community.

The “A” is a reminder that each child is unique and so teachers need to make every effort to adapt their instruction frequently during the day. Gatekeepers must adapt teaching and learning based on the child’s ethnicity, cultural experiences, and interests.

The “R” draws attention to the need for gatekeepers to reflect during and after instruction and make necessary changes for the benefit of the child, and not only to “cover” the annual prescribed curriculum.

The big “E” demands that gatekeepers maintain a classroom environment where teaching and learning engaging at all times. By engaging, I mean create conditions for small group, large group and individual activities. The heart, hands and head should be involved all the time. The gatekeeper’s responsibility is to engage students in intellectual development. Add another “E” for emancipation.
Critical reflection and engagement should also include some plan to engage in action to change the oppressive conditions.

The “P” stands for pedagogy and praxis, meaning that theory and practice goes hand in hand. “P” also reminds gatekeepers to be patient, positive, passionate, and to persevere because changes like the one that I am recommending do not occur overnight. We will be met with resistance but we cannot afford to give in or give up after hearing those powerful narratives from the women who have experienced battering.

*Figure 8a: CAREPRAXIS in Relation to Liberatory Pedagogy*
According to Shor and Freire (1987) liberatory pedagogy is *not about technique but a critical perspective on school, society and learning. It is a window for students to see their own conditions and envision a different destiny.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITICAL PEDAGOGY</th>
<th>FEMINIST PEDAGOGY</th>
<th>CRITICAL REFLECTIVE TEACHING/INQUIRY</th>
<th>CURRICULUM RECONCEPTUALIZATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• take students’ experiences into consideration</td>
<td>• use students’ experiences</td>
<td>• use students’ experiences</td>
<td>• curriculum meaning as the everyday lived experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• goal is one of transformation</td>
<td>• goal of critical consciousness</td>
<td>• goal of transformation</td>
<td>• curriculum as “text” instead of course of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teaching/learning encourages students to be change agents</td>
<td>• cooperative ways of learning</td>
<td>• interrogate existing structures of oppression and domination</td>
<td>• curriculum as investigating social/political/economic and historical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• knowledge is constructed rather than transmitted</td>
<td>• foster self-reflection</td>
<td>• interrogate issues beyond the classroom, such as race, class, gender</td>
<td>• curriculum as racial text, political text, gender text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• structural and systemic oppression or dominance is investigated</td>
<td>• create safe classrooms for girls to speak and develop intelligences</td>
<td></td>
<td>• curriculum as contextual instead of standardized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• question and challenge existing structures which marginalize or dominate</td>
<td></td>
<td>• teachers are transformative intellectuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• understand women’s oppression and promote liberation</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Apple, 1983; Collins, 1993; Clandinin &amp; Connelly, 2000; Freire 1970; Giroux, 1998b; hooks, 1994; McLaren, 1988; Shor, 1979; Shor &amp; Freire, 1987; Weiler, 1988; Weiler &amp; Mitchell, 1992)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CARE, critical adaptive reflective engaging praxis is a practice of thinking and teaching and learning located in the discourse of educational reform. CAREPraxis is both a personal and collective project. CAREPraxis is based on a philosophical belief of teaching and leading from the heart. My perception of CAREPraxis is enhanced by the visions of Palmer and Nodding. Palmer (1998) strongly espouses that “if I care about teaching, I must care not only for my students and my subject but also for the conditions, inner and outer, that bear on the work teachers do” (p. 182). In other words, intellectual development should not be divorced from social-emotional-relational development of the child.

Noddings (1984) suggested the need for pedagogical caring. Gatekeepers must engage in cooperative practices with the learners. Simultaneously, gatekeepers should provide ample opportunities during any one school day for learners to care for other learners, as well as be cared for by other learners. Caring and being cared for is reciprocal; the process is a two handshake. By engaging students in their learning, and the critical examination of issues related to the subject matter being studied, gatekeepers will nurture the development of student’s critical consciousness. Noddings (1984) purports,

Whatever I do in life, whomever I meet, I am first and always one-caring or one-cared for. I do not ‘assume roles’ unless I become an actor. ‘Mother’ is not a role; ‘teacher’ is not a role…. When I become a teacher. I also entered a very special relation - and more specialized caring - relation. No enterprise or special function I am called upon to serve can relieve me of my responsibilities as one-caring. Indeed, if an enterprise precludes my
meeting the other in a caring relation, I must refuse to participate in that enterprise. (p. 175)

**Envisioning a Different Destiny**

hooks (2000) complements the propositions of Noddings (1984) and Palmer (1998). Hooks avers that *teaching is a performative act*. This performative act affords us the possibility and hope for intervention and transformation. I support hooks’ proposition, and firmly believe that if gatekeepers embrace performative acts daily in their classrooms, they can help to alleviate the pain, control, and oppression that women have experienced for centuries. We need to work towards social change and envision a different destiny for our learners. CAREPraxis provides this possibility, and therefore, Figure 8a illuminates commonalities drawn from *critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, critical reflective teaching and inquiry, and curriculum reconceptualization*. Figure 8b outlines the theoretical strands associated with CAREPraxis. For CAREPraxis it is of utmost importance to use and to build on students’ experiences.

As gatekeepers attempt to help their learners construct meaning and connect knowledge, the pedagogical approaches must include interrogation of the social, political, religious, economical, historical structures which are oppressive. The definition of curriculum, then, becomes one of understanding and interrogation rather than only prescribed content with the outcome of standardized tests. Curriculum becomes a process using praxis, and a text
because there is continuous historicizing/dehistoricizing/rehistoricizing of issues like race, class, gender, and land reform policies. While gatekeepers should aim to include all voices, they also want to ensure that they create safe classroom space for females to express themselves and find their voices. Concurrently, gatekeepers want to utilize cooperative learning strategies as much as possible.

Gatekeepers in the schoolhome need to implement interactive dietary changes in the classroom. In order to counteract the imbalance of power that is practiced at all levels of society, and on a micro level in the home and school, I suggest that gatekeepers work towards a model of power based on a combined conception using Chinn’s (2001) Peace Power, and Nnaemeka (1997). According to Chinn, the re/conception of power for social change needs to place heavy emphasize and continuous nurturance on practices which foster power such as:

- a process implying that everyone should be actively engaged
- participation (everyone has a voice)
- coming from within us (gatekeepers can help to strengthen this belief)
- “RESPECT” for self and others
- creating awareness (sharing expertise or talents)
- raising the critical consciousness of everyone
- shared among everyone, empowering others
- the accountability and responsibility of each person
- the ability for each person to make careful choices
- built on *solidarity* (each person is responsible for the goals and success or failure)
- *collective* decision, and action (each person is valued as part of the group).

Figure 9 shows the combination of Chinn and Nnaemeka’s propositions of power.

*Figure 9: Power as Process and Horizontal Relationships*
Basic Building Blocks for CAREPraxis

Figures 10a and 10b illustrate a major nutrient in the diet of CAREPraxis, which is productive relationality. Relationality is a vital component of the diet because people are social beings. They do not exist apart from the world and each other. When gatekeepers operate from a dispensing mode of education, they create a major gap in their learners’ diet. It is critical that all voices are heard and equal opportunities are provided to both females and males. Gatekeepers also have the obligation to help their students and the parents from battered homes learn how limiting, and fatal their unhealthy family relationships can be.

Some children have poor problem posing/solving skills because of deficient cognitive and social skills that are part of their cultural curricula diet at home. This may also be reinforced in schools, if teachers do not make a conscious effort to include the development of these skills as part of their daily instructional procedures. We need to deviate from the domestication of thinking and the assassination of creativity, to the nurturance of social and dialogical skills, complemented with problem posing, problem solving and inquiry. Social skills are acquired, maintained and changed primarily through modeling and instruction. Dialogue is highly based on communicative competence and the ability to use one’s interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Additionally, an issues-centered approach can empower learners, and help them develop ways to solve everyday problems that they encounter in their lives.
Figures 10a and 10b: Relationality nutrients for CAREPRAXIS

**SOCIAL SKILLS:** There needs to be very frequent activities to assist with some of the following:

- getting to know oneself, self-concept
- feeling a sense of belonging
- getting along with others productively
- learning to manage conflict if unable to resolve it
- understanding and appreciating individual differences
- developing self-reflective habit
- developing attentive, effective, reflective listening
- developing prosocial skills such as caring, compassion, honesty, empathy and respect

**Figure 10a**

**WORKING TOGETHER** can be achieved through daily and frequent cooperative and collaborative teaching and learning strategies. Students will require social skills for effective and productive working relationships.

- Use small groups and dyads to increase each child's contribution.
- Encourage active participation from all students.
- Encourage integrating knowledge and skills.
- Focus on teambuilding skills like tolerance, compromise, trust and appreciation.
- Provide opportunities for each child to be a leader.
- Emphasize leadership skills like consensus building, communication skills, motivating oneself and others, negotiating with others, mediating where necessary.
- Emphasize working together without physical or sexual aggression.

**DIALOGUE:** Gatekeepers need to help develop the skills that are necessary for productive dialogue.

- Focus on being assertive by speaking about violating the rights of others.
- Focus on the importance of being attentive, and making every effort to understand the other person's view point.
- Check for clarity by asking questions.
- Identify social cues and feelings by use of prosocial dispositionss.
**PROBLEM POSING / PROBLEM SOLVING** skills are vital to critically analyze and evaluate the societal structures that keep us marginalized and oppressed. Students need to be taught to critically reflective on a daily basis using questions like:

- What is my problem?
- What is my solution?
- What are some alternative choices?
- What are the consequences of each choice?
- Which one seems like the best solution?
- Revisit the situation again and evaluate/assess choice made

**Figure 10b**

**ISSUES-CENTERED APPROACH** is useful in any content area. Use ideas such as:

- problematize a situation
- use multiple sources of information
- focus on the use of social-relational skills, dialogical skills, and cooperative skills
- focus on perspective consciousness- multiple sources, multiple views, respect and tolerance for differences
- use reflective skills

Use historical texts with conflicts to pose questions like:

- What is the controversy?
- Who are the contending parties
- What are the points of contention?
- Why is the dispute of public importance?
- How does it relate to your everyday life?
- What key problems require solution?

**INQUIRY LEARNING** improves the teacher's pedagogical skills and/or students' learning (Sergiovanni, 1996; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998; Poetter & Badii, 2001). The term inquiry can have various meanings. Dewey’s (1938) philosophy is that “inquiry is the life of every science and is constantly engaged in every art, craft and profession” (p. 4). Inquiry is a continuous, systematic, collaborative activity in which students engage after identifying a question, problem or puzzling situation.
Key influences of critical literacy are Freire, Shor and McLaren. In Belize, gatekeepers teach reading comprehension. Unfortunately, the majority of the textbooks used, and the questions created by the gatekeepers are at the literal level of comprehension. Engaging students in a critical reading of the text would mean asking questions related to textual interpretation. Some of the questions would interrogate the author’s thesis, and how it is supported. Then gatekeepers should boost up literacy by fostering critical literacy. Critical literacy calls for schools to help students from a very young age read the word and the world (Freire, 2000). Teaching skills for critical literacy would require investigating a wide array of subject matter because students will need to

- critique social and political problems with the objective of alleviating the suffering of males and females.
- critically interrogate the world in which we live.
- expose the inequalities through critical interrogation.
- illuminate the relationship between the controller and the controlled.
- interrogate practices that serve to preserve political, social and economic interests.
- challenge the status quo by sensitizing people to concepts of representation, resistance, power and agency.
- focus on liberation, equity and social justice by raising people’s critical consciousness.

Paulo Freire (2000) in his culture circle sessions dealt with issues of nationalism, profit remittances abroad, political evolution of Brazil, development, illiteracy, and democracy. He also used generative words like slum, and cement block to critically analyze social, economic, political and historical continuities, and contemporary issues affecting families and labourers.

Others discourses that I recommend for all levels K-12 are:

- self-identity and sexuality
- relating to others, family relationships, relationship with peers and others, caring for others,
- becoming interdependent/independent
- learning to collaborate and cooperate, work roles, managing resources-personal and family
- current issues- social, economic, political, cultural, global
- popular culture –movies, cartoons, music (like rap, hip-hop, calypso, soca, reggae) keeping a critical eye on power, representation, resistance, agency, identity
Figure 11 above continues to explore nutrients to be included in CAREPraxis. Critical literacy is another major nutrient or goal of CAREPraxis. The box with the subject matter provides an example of two scholars’ perceptions, as well as my own.

Figure 12 provides an overview of the components of CAREPraxis that was discussed earlier in this section.

Figure 12: Overview of the Components of CAREPraxis
**Critical Literacy: An Example**

Using critical literacy as a major component of educational reform in relation to domesticated abuse and gendered inequalities has implications for curricular content and pedagogical approaches. I will use one of the folk stories from Section 3 to reify what is expected of gatekeepers if they are to depart from the “banking concept of education,” and implement CAREPraxis.

Mr. Ramu and the Rabbit is an East Indian folk story I recorded when I was doing an oral history research project in the late 1980s in Belize. This folk story was popular in a small East Indian settlement in southern Belize. The early East Indians came from India to Belize (British Honduras) between 1870-1880 as indentured servants. They were an agrarian community. In Belize today there are Indians from Asia too. The majority are Hindu entrepreneurs. I chose to use this story because I can recall working with a group of grade 3 (Standard 1) students in one of the schools in Belize City in 1999, and one of the students said to me, “Miss Cardenas, fi we teachah mi read dah story whey yuh write enah yuh book, and oosh dat dah wan nasty story.” I spent some time talking to her about why it was “a nasty story.” Then I spoke with the teacher to hear how he used the story in his lesson. He had read the story, followed by a few recall questions. I will take time here to replay the folk story (shared in Section 3), and to share some ways in which the folk story can be utilized in a lesson.
Mr. Ramu was an Indian hunter, and he went hunting daily. One day he went hunting and returned with a small young rabbit. Mrs. Ramu, his wife, sang and smiled as she happily cleaned the rabbit. Mr. Ramu returned to his rice plantation. Mrs. Ramu cut up the meat and seasoned it. Then she cooked the meat, and some rice. “Today we will have a tasty meal of tacari rabbit and rice,” she said. Mrs. Ramu was getting hungry and her husband was taking too long to return. She decided to eat some food. After the first serving she decided that she wanted some more. She ate a second time, and this time the young tenderly cooked meat was finished. Mrs. Ramu became worried so she cut off a piece of her leg and quickly stewed it in tacari gravy. She wrapped her bleeding leg in an old cloth. Her long, frilled skirt hid her wounded, bleeding leg. She sat down and waited for her husband to return. Then she heard his merry whistle. She shared his food, and mixed him a tall glass of lime juice, then waited at the door to greet him. She took his “shot beg” (plantation bag) and hung it behind the door. They began to talk while he ate. Mr. Ramu thought that the food extremely palatable and asked Mrs. Ramu what made the food so delicious. But Mrs. Ramu was growing weak from the excessive bleeding. The parrot began to sing:

Ol man eat ol lady leg.
Ol man eat old lady meat.
Ol man eat ol lady flesh.
Chi chi chi chi chee!
Mrs. Ramu weakly demanded that the polly stop talking nonsense. But the polly continued singing. The parrot sang the song three more times. Mr. Ramu was unable to bear the singing any longer. He saw Mrs. Ramu’s head hanging limply on her chest. He lifted her dress and confirmed the parrot’s story. Mrs. Ramu was dead.

***************

In order to explicate what I am conceptualizing, I will use a hypothetical situation. I will pretend that I am a gatekeeper of upper division (meaning grades 6, 7 and 8 or standards 4, 5 and 6). I chose these grades because they are the ones with which I have the most teaching experience. I also taught these three classes in a multi-grade setting. Furthermore, I mentioned that we have a very young population in Belize (15 years and under), and forty percent or so of our 12-14 year-olds do not further their schooling after primary school.

In my hypothetical situation, I have been with the students for a period of time. They have learned that knowledge is connected, and that any issue should be explored through multiple lenses. My modus operandi (after negotiating with the principal) is integration in various forms. That means that sometimes the students and I make a collaborative decision about an issue for an integrated day or an integrated afternoon. Sometimes we do an integrated week ensuring that they get to use as many of their intelligences as possible. In our teaching/learning sessions, collaborative and cooperative are optimal. My students have learned to use a wide range of skills in their groups. One of the integrated combinations we have agreed to use for the exploration of the folk
story, Mr. Ramu, is Language Arts and Social Studies. Here is a sample of initial thoughts that occurred to me as I deliberated on the content of the integrated lessons.

**Critical Literacy—Social Studies**

There is a need to critically interrogate the historical, social, economic and political. In this way students will be assisted to expose inequalities, interrogate practices that serve to preserve political, social and economic interests, challenge the status quo, better comprehend liberation, equity and social justice, and develop action plans to fight to alleviate the suffering of males and females. Here are some of the activities in which the learners and I will engage.

- **Construct a historical reading:** Reading needs to be done within context. This is an East Indian folk story. Students need to investigate how women have been treated in India, and unravel issues related to sati and dowry. (I made mention of some of these inequalities of Indian women in Sections 3, 4, 5).

- There is a need to explore **religiosity** as a means of keeping women submissive. Students will investigate Hindu, Muslim and Christian religion in this regard.

- **Construct a normative reading:** Discuss whose interest is served by this narrative, Mr. Ramu and the Rabbit. Does it serve to maintain the subservient, oppressive condition of women or does it serve to transform the negative stereotypes, and experiences of women? To what extent should Mrs. Ramu be fearful to tell her husband that she ate all the meat? Discuss the act of Mrs. Ramu eating all the meat in relation to the representation of women and what may this signify? What is the role of the parrot in the story?

- **Construct a socio-economic reading:** Investigate intimate relationships in regard to power dynamics, representation, resistance and agency. Explore gender construction, gendered stereotypes and how these have been perpetuated through cultural pedagogy.

- Discuss agrarian society during Mr. Ramu’s time, and job related changes that have occurred since then. Explore/investigate curricular and instructional materials and how they have perpetuated gender biases. Discuss issues related to gender specific courses or subjects in school like vocational schools where females do home economic and males do woodwork, sewing for girls and art for boys.

- **Come up with a plan of action** related to gender issues to implement at a classroom and school level.

- Let students come up with other questions related to the story that they would like to investigate.
Language Arts

From a Belizean educator’s perspective Language Arts includes reading, reading comprehension, spelling, English composition, English Language, and literature.

• Do word critical word study using words like: hunter, hunting, wife, servijng, cut off
• Read the narrative.
• Ask questions at the literal level.

Deconstruct from a literary standpoint. Ask questions like:
• What rhetorical elements (figures of speech, metaphors or physical imagery) can be identified. Discuss findings.

Example: I identified the mortar. When I think of the mortar, I see someone pounding rice, plantain or cohune in it. In other words a violent act is performed in a mortar—beat rice, beat fufu, pound plantain. Thinking of Mrs. Ramu and sitting in the mortar after she injured herself, makes me ponder the relationship between her and the performative act that occurs in the mortar. Does her husband beat or pound her? Bearing in mind that domestic violence has been prevalent, spend time discussing and investigating this social phenomenon.

After Mrs. Ramu injured herself, she tied the wound. Think of tying. Why do we tie? With what do we tie? Implicitly is Mrs. Ramu’s tying a reminder of the bondage, shackled life she has lived with Mr. Ramu? What makes me think of the tying in this way? Investigate foot binding in the Chinese culture.

• Take time to explore the language for sexism. One example is “Mr. Ramu returned to his rice plantation.” For whom is the plantation? Why? How can Mrs. Ramu become a partner in owning the plantation?

• Other questions could be related to comparing this narrative with other narratives which speak to male-female relationships. Section 3 has several examples that can be used.

• Ask students to come up with other ways of representing Mrs. Ramu, Mr. Ramu.

• Ask students to come up with criteria to judge or evaluate a healthy intimate, family, friend relationship.
In my solo deliberation of schooling and its role in reforming students’ knowledge, skills and attitudes, I had a vivid flashback of an afternoon in October of 1992. I was supervising a student teacher who was on internship. The teacher was teaching grade one (Infant 1). There were twenty-six children in the class—the majority of them were girls. The lesson was a literature lesson using the nursery rhyme, *The Old Woman in The Shoe*. The teacher had written the rhyme on a chart, and then placed it where it was visible for all students to observe. The teacher pointed to the words as she read very slowly. She read the rhyme twice.

*There was an old woman*

*Who lived in a shoe,*

*She had so many children,*

*She didn't know what to do.*

*She gave them some broth*

*Without any bread.*

*She spanked them all*

*Soundly and sent them to bed.*

The teacher proceeded to interrogate the students. The first question to the students was: Who lived with the woman n the shoe?

One little girl raised her hand, and the teacher asked her to respond. The child said, “ih man, teachah. Ih. man.” (Her man, teacher). The teacher turned red with
embarrassment, and said to the child, “I don’t think that you were listening to the question. Did the rhyme say anything about man? I will ask it again. Who lived with the old woman?” This second time around instead of raising their hands, several children shouted in unison, “ih ma, teachah.” At this point I could sense the level of frustration as the teacher said, “let me read the rhyme for you again.”

At the time, I had worked with various grade levels, and I had never heard this response. Despite the teacher’s attempt to remind the students of what she was looking for or expected, the students refused to regurgitate the answer. They were sending a strong message. The message had implications for how we teach, and how we respond to students’ responses. The message had implications for our teacher training institution. There are so many ways that the teacher could have dealt with the response. I can understand the teacher’s dilemma because I am sure that the response was unexpected. Besides, the teacher was teaching in a church-state school and exploring the nursery rhyme using the first response given by her students could have backfired. However, that teacher’s lesson is a reminder of a teacher’s reflection-in action, the need to be flexible, and the need to make use of children’s lived experience. As gatekeepers we need to be reminded that teaching innocently is dangerous to a child’s intellectual health. This can even be considered a type of violence, educational violence. Bearing this incident in mind, I decided to take time to explore a popular form of literature used in our primary schools, that is fairy tales. I will provide examples of how we can foster critical literacy skills. Once again I
will use my hypothetical class of grades 6, 7, and 8 (Standards 4, 5 and 6). It is worth noting that these are initial thoughts that are not carved in stone.

**Fairy Tales**

Cultural scripts prescribed through our family’s diet or the school’s formal and hidden curriculum diet shape our understanding of who we are, how we think, how we act, and as a result affect how we see the world. The combined ideologies provide us with a reproductive script which mandates our gendered roles and responsibilities. Two strategies that can be implemented to unnormalize these scripts which encode tenets of representation, domination, submission, et cetera are narratology and reflexivity. Gatekeepers need to bring these two strategies to bear on their teaching/learning procedures. They, themselves, need to make reflexivity a daily part of their professional and domestic life if they are to assist in fracturing, reducing, dissolving or ideally eradicating/eliminating the gendered stereotypes and inequalities.

One idea that comes to mind at this time is the use of fairy tales and nursery rhymes. While novels may be hard to come by at the primary school level, I am sure that gatekeepers can lay their hands on a fairy tale book. Whether the gatekeepers teach the younger children or adolescents, these fairy tales can always be revisited and interrogated in new ways. Because this study is about families, family relationships, gendered roles and responsibilities, when I
use the fairy tales, it will be to investigate issues related to what I just suggested.

Fairy tales can also be used beyond the school walls to empower women too.

Let me provide a brief example of what I am trying to say. As a gatekeeper I can take a single text like *Rapunzel*, or a trilogy like *Rapunzel, Snow White*, and *Cinderella*, and use them for a critical read of gendered roles and responsibilities, and family relationships. I can use these fairy tales to empower women, enhance critical awareness, and draw out different perspectives on issues related to gendered inequalities. I can use an integrative, interdisciplinary approach as I did with the story of Mr. Ramu. Many of the ideas from the *Critical Literacy — Language Arts, and Social Studies* example are applicable here to examine fairy tales, and other texts. Here are some initial thoughts.

♦ *the magic kiss, love at first sight, and living happily ever after:*

Is this how relationships, productive relationships work? One version of the Cinderella story (Lowe, 1924) states, “The Prince was overjoyed to find Cinderella; and they were married at once with pomp and amid great rejoicings” (97). Similarly, Rapunzel’s first encounter with the Prince terrified her for a short while until “when he asked her if she would have him for her husband, and she saw that he was young and handsome, and she thought, ‘He will love me more than the old woman does.’ So she consented…” (p.84). What made the Prince so overjoyed to see Rapunzel? Shouldn’t this joy be reciprocal? Talk about this in relation to real life. Critically explore the dangers of "love at first sight," and the importance of getting to know someone. Does being young and handsome
guarantee happiness, or a productive social-emotional relationship in marriages or dating?

Use these fairy tales to discuss issues related to **productive dialogue**, attentive-effective-reflective listening, asking for clarification, reading body messages and having equal airtime. Students will practice these skills using collaborative activities.

♦ Do a critical read of the *Prince’s words to Snow White*. One version of Little Snow White states that the Prince cannot live without her, and will honour and prize her as a dear possession. After the witch abandoned Snow White in the desert and the Prince eventually found her, Lowe (1924) writes, “The Prince answered, ‘you are safe with me.’ And he told her what she had suffered, and how he would rather have her than any other wife, and he asked her to accompany him home to the castle of the King his father. Snow White consented…” (p.26). Spend time discussing these bolded and underlined texts. Bring in relevant popular culture to be deconstructed.

♦ Here is one of the most recent examples of popular music that I came across. The video to this song, *Come Close To Me*, by Common and Mary J Blige is interesting too. Here is part of the lyrics that speaks to what I am suggesting that students explore. You can go to http://www.dapslyrics.com for the entire song.
SONG

...Are we living in a dream world?
Are your eyes still green girl?
I know your sick and tired of arguing
But you can't keep it bottled in
Jealousy, we got to swallow it
Your heart and mind baby follow it
Smile, happiness you could model it
And when you feel opposite
I just want you to know
Your whole being is beautiful
...Come close to me baby
Let your love hold you
I know this world gets crazy
What's it without you
nothing, nothing...

Though this love may hurt a bit
We dealing wit this water love
You even give my daughter love
I want to build a tribe with you
Protect and provide for you...

You help me to discovery me
I just want you to put trust in me
I kind of laugh when you cuss at me
The aftermath is you touching me

Its destiny that we connected girl
You and I we can affect the world
I'm tired of the fast line

I want you to have my last name...

I know what your thinking
You run my mind
Your right, Your right, Your right

You promise so fast you just might take flight,
Open up time
Tonight, Tonight

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

What are some constructive alternatives that could replace arguing?
Do we really have to swallow jealousy?
What is jealousy? How does it manifest itself? What danger does it pose to a healthy relationship?

What will we solve by coming close and holding each other after a conflict?

What does it mean to give love to someone else's child? What are the pros and cons of step-parenting and blended families? What is suggested by building a tribe, and the male partner protecting and providing for the female?

What does a trusting relationship look like? Is it “ok” to just laugh when someone cusses you? Do we get into a fight with someone and then laugh it off as if nothing happened? Talk about domestic violence, and the cycle of violence in relation to domestic violence.

What is destiny? What is meant by you and I can affect the world? What is the fast lane that this male has been traveling on? Why might he be tired of the fast lane?

What are some of the responsibilities connected to having the man’s last name—marriage or even cohabitation?

Continue to deconstruct these words.
♦ Rapunzel let down her hair for the prince to come up to the tower where she was hidden:

Use this an opportunity to investigate child abuse/child neglect.

It is a violent act for the Prince to use Rapunzel's hair as a ladder or step to get into the tower. Explore this further. Discuss this issue of the representation of women and clandestine relationships. There are examples of this in section 3 of this research. What could be the consequences for Rapunzel when she allows the Prince to enter the tower with her (and here I mean things like rape, getting pregnant by chance and not choice, et cetera)? Discuss the dangers of young, unmarried couples being together in secretive or dark places. Cinderella was disobedient too. She sneaked out to go the ball. Spend time discussing, and providing activities which focus on decision-making skills. Talk about sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, safe sex, abstaining from sex, et cetera.

♦ Snow White’s mother had been wishing for a child:

Discuss what are the implications of having a child. Explore caring-rearing practices. Discuss whose responsibility is it to care for the children. How are these decisions made? How is it done in society, or at home now? What needs to change and how can this be done (my subject position in Section 2 provides examples of engendered roles for males and females and the impact they have)?

♦ Snow White’s mother became pregnant, and she had the child but there is no mention of a male or of some sexual intercourse:
Does a woman need to have sexual intercourse to be impregnated? Can she choose to get pregnant without the desire to be married to the man? What would be the response of the church for women who make such choices? Is this healthy for nurturing families in a society? What about women who choose not have any children at all, to remain single, or those who choose alternative lifestyles? Spend time discussing issues like these to raise critical consciousness.

♦ There are blended families, and stepmother-stepdaughter relationships to explore in Cinderella and Snow White. Introduce the experiences of Hansel and Gretel to extend the issues. In Cinderella there is a father-stepdaughter relationship to explore. In Hansel and Gretel (1924) in the decision making process of how to resolve feeding the family, the stepmother said, “we will lead them away quite early in the morning into the thickest part of the woods … we will go to our work and leave them alone … we shall be freed from them” (Lowe, 1924, p. 28). Interestingly, after the abandonment, Hansel and Gretel were freed from the witch’s claws after many years of captivation. They found their father’s house. The stepmother was dead. When the children and father met, “all their sorrows were ended, and they live together in great happiness” (Lowe, 1924, p. 38). There are many taken-for-granted assumptions in the fairy tales which need to be interrogated. Some ideas from Section 3 of this work speak to family relationships. Discuss these
issues in relationship to students’ lived experiences. Rewrite the fairy tale stories to fit real life experiences. Discuss issues related to conflict management/conflict resolution, power over, sibling rivalry, sibling power, favourites, black sheep in the family, abandonment, alienation, child abuse/neglect, power-over, power to, negotiated power.

♦ The females’ gendered stereotypical roles related to being a homemaker need to be investigated particularly in Cinderella and Snow White. Discuss the social construction of gender and the reinforcement and the consequences of these cultural impediments.

♦ Use intertextuality to investigate issues and examples of domination, submission, resistance, agency, identity politics, conflict, tension, changes, socio-economic status, the curse of being poor, cultural expectations, alienation, abandonment. Rewrite different story endings to include re/presentations of females and males, females’ agency and resistance. Rewrite stories to illustrate power and relational dynamics. Show females using their circulatory power, negotiating power and exerting power to. While we want to raise the critical awareness of females to the issues of control and to empower them, we also want to educate the males so they can also be transformed. Unification, and not separatism, is the goal of AfriKanA wo-fem-ists. Develop a plan for women to share the centre space with men instead of being on the periphery.
Use the fairy tales to examine socio-economic status. Cinderella came from a rich family. This privilege was taken away from her in the blended family. Magically, she was elevated to a high socio-economic status and privileged position again. Talk about /explore/investigate/ critically assess the reality of losing or gaining socio-economic status in real life, include privilege, marginalization, objectification, oppression, wages, and power.

Disney Videos:
As an extension of teaching and learning, I will juxtapose Disney’s videos (which are from the United States American culture but is part of the Belizean “screen” culture too). As gatekeepers we need to view the media’s hidden agenda more critically, “… the Disney empire [and popular culture in general] must be seen as a pedagogical and policy-making enterprise actively engaged in the cultural landscaping of national identity and the “schooling’ of the minds of young children” (Giroux, 1999, p. 114).

Supplements for the Relationality-Criticality Diet
Parents alone are not responsible for their children’s development but they are usually the children’s first teachers. Teachers alone are not responsible for the students they teach. Both teacher and parent(s) must collaborate for the welfare of the child. Parents and teachers are not the ones solely responsible for the children. The other partners of the wider society are too. “We all have to bear
a responsibility for the ethical perfection of others. Moral education is then, community-wide enterprise and not a task exclusively for home, church, or school” (Noddings, 1984, p. 171). Raising our children appropriately comes back to the concept of “it takes a village to raise a child.” Therefore, domestic and gender inequalities which perpetuate abuse must be a concern of everyone because the abuser or abused can be our son or daughter, our mother or father, our brother or sister.

In order for gatekeepers “to engage in true dialogue with our students, we educators will first have to engage in true dialogue with parents “ (Noddings, 1984, p. 184). Schools need to actively disrupt the negative, disabling lessons that children learn from home, and feed them a healthier diet to break the habits associated with domestic abuse. Counselling is one way of dealing with children and families where battering is prevalent. A child cannot be treated in isolation. He or she must be examined within the context of family and community. I am in agreement with Nel Noddings (1984) proposition,

The primary aim of every educational institution and every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring. Parents, police, social workers, teachers, preachers, neighbors, older siblings must all embrace the primary aim. (p. 172)

This calls for schools to be involved in advocacy. By this I mean that children who have witnessed domestic abuse cannot be treated in isolation. They must be assisted in conjunction with the family and the community. Schools need to reach
out to families and connect them to service providers for abused families and women. Figure 13 provides a few suggestions to help gatekeepers make the connection between school and home by drawing on resources in the community.

It is always a wise idea to have *additional sources of nutrients*. In Appendix H I have provided several other resources that can aid in the mission of CAREPraxis.

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**Figure 13: Dietary Supplements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNSELLING</th>
<th>ADVOCACY</th>
<th>LINKAGES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counselling for children and parents from battering homes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• develop self-awareness</td>
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<td>• develop self-understanding</td>
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<td>• learn to express feelings non-violently</td>
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<td>• build group skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>• manage anger and conflict</td>
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<td>• express feelings about fear, abuse, emotions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counselling can be on a one-to-one basis or small group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools need to make an effort to consult with agencies and service providers for expertise. These organizations and individuals have the training to work with at-risk children and families. They can provide training and education for teachers as well so that they will be better equipped to deal with children and families from abused relationships.</td>
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<td>Schools need to work with community</td>
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<td>• to strengthen social networks</td>
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<td>• support useful after school programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• encourage civic activism by asking private sector, business people in the community to sponsor educational programmes for battered families and children</td>
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CONCLUSION

Change is a predominant theme in this study. I have transformed many of the ways by which I have been acculturated. In this study, several of the women who were victims of battering came to a level of consciousness about themselves and their domestic situation. They acted to change the abusive situation. Change or reform has also prevailed in education too. School reform has been ongoing with the preoccupation to make societies better. Some of the broad issues addressed in the impulses of educational reform with the hope of increasing excellence, equity and efficiency are curriculum standards, professional development, higher order thinking, innovative teaching practices, university-school partnerships, multicultural education, culturally relevant, and technological teaching.

The conception of change or reform means different things to different people. It can have negative or positive results. For instance, when I think back to schooling for my grandmother, my mother, myself, my children and my godchildren (since I do not have grandchildren yet) which is five generations or approximately one century of schooling, very little has changed. Change in my perspective is to challenge the status quo, to challenge people’s comfort level or to get them to “leave the safe harbor” (attributed to Carlson, 2000), to create disequilibrium in people’s thought process, to cause conflict, to and trouble the calm waters.
Future Research

In this study, I was interested in understanding and problematizing the social issue of domestic abuse. Research on this subject is very recent, and it is still an issue *under the covers* in the educational discourse of school reform. The issue of domestic violence emerged as a scholarly issue in the work of Lillian Rubin (1976) about twenty years ago. Since then there have been a number of ethnographic studies which have unearthed ways in which schools serve to reinforce gender hierarchy and inequalities (Weis et al., 1998).

Using critical theory as the framework for this study was useful to help uncover many inequalities between men and women that have been socially constructed. These differentials, be it power or economic resources would not have surfaced if this study were examined through an interpretive lens. A critical lens was an enabler to make epistemological connections from various disciplines in order to problematize the issue of domestic violence, as well as to point out that schools are accomplices of gendered inequalities too. In this study, I have attempted to fit various pieces together by examining the oppressive condition of women who suffer from domestic violence, and by providing a possible solution for schools to serve as change agents, there are other areas which should be addressed for future research. Figure 14 provides an outline of the areas of research which can extend the understanding of this complex social phenomenon.
Figure 14: Directions for Future Research

- Interview intimate male partners
- Interview women from around the country
- Interview + emancipatory sessions for abused women simultaneously
- Study of children from battered homes
- Study of battered Belizean males by their female intimate partners
- Longitudinal study of a single family (or a few families) who suffers from battering (counseling to rehabilitate their relationship, etc.)
- Study about the legal interpretation of abuse or oppression affecting women
- More extensive examination of cultural artifacts available in Belize about women (representation, power, resistance, agency)
- Longitudinal study using CAREPraxis to monitor challenges, successes, and modifications
- Multi-sectorial collaboration and accountability
- Confidant, therapy and counselling sessions for battered teachers

Domestic violence is everybody’s business. Let’s each do something about it.
I want to pause here to echo what some of the women who were interviewed said. The school system has failed them. They are calling for a chance to succeed. They want to be educated. They want to return to school to acquire skills that they lack in order to improve their status in life. The women have been denied access to critical resources like land, education, medical treatment, and support services. The inability to access the resources have impacted their children as well. I call upon the government of Belize, the private sectors and business community, and the highest institution of learning in our country, University of Belize, to collaborate tin order to empower our women. We cannot continue to turn our women and their children away with empty hands and heads.

Let us teach our women, especially those who are plagued by poverty, to fish instead of giving them a fish which can only feed them for a meal or a day. Giving them a fish continuously will eventually take away their dignity, and social responsibility to care efficiently for themselves and their children. Giving several fishes definitely reproduces the colonial legacy of dependency and feeling of worthlessness. Let us help our women to help themselves intellectually, socially, emotionally, financially, and spiritually so that they in turn can help to nurture mindful and not mindless individuals for our society.
Researchers’ Responsibility: Tackling Language, Theoretical Framework, Problematizing the Issue

In concluding, I want to reiterate three points which I consider essential to this study, and any other study related to domestic violence and women’s oppression (1) tackling the use of language to define or describe a situation, (2) problematizing issues and incidents, and investigating them in more complex ways, and (3) understanding that schools are social institutions, and as such they are intricately connected to society.

One of the challenges that feminists and scholars are faced with is what appropriate linguistic currency would reveal and not conceal the mal-treatment of women by their intimate male partners. In chapter 3 of this work, I alluded to the need for the reformation of the language we use to identify the oppression and abuse of women. We need to ensure that when we speak of domestic violence we not only illuminate the impact on women, but on the children as well. The question is what should we call this abuse – domestic violence, domestic abuse, patriarchal violence, private violence, domestic inequalities, child abuse, or domestic terrorism. Should we rename rape as the invasion of personal or sexual privacy? Do we need a concept (or combined concepts) that not only exposes physical abuse, but also makes visible the other forms of control, domination, and abuse that women experience in their intimate relationships? The issue of what language or concept best describes or defines domestic violence against women will always be contested, especially when using a critical lens. Most likely, there may never be a set language platform that scholars may agree on;
however, differences of opinion should not keep us from working towards the goal of eliminating domestic abuse.

As researchers, we should not conduct inquiry innocently. We need to problematize the issue(s). A compartmentalized view of an issue in research robs the researcher and the readers of the historical and social context within which taken-for-granted assumptions were conceived. Researchers need to be mindful of the theoretical frameworks that they use to conceptualize and frame issues related to domestic violence and inequalities. Feminist theory, and in my study, particularly AfriKanA wo-fem-isms, have been integral to illuminate how black women and women in general have been treated by their masters, and generally by males. These theories have been pivotal to help me better comprehend feminists' investigation of patriarchy, race, class and gender, and how understandings of such important constructs have provided them with fundamental epistemological tools to counter women's endemic oppression.

Stories about women need to be explored more because for too long “herstory”, and “theirstory” have been hidden behind the veil of “history.” In the case of domestic violence, researchers need to make connections with the other layers of violence. There is a need to incorporate the complexities of the issue of domestic violence as we conduct our investigation. We need to look for struggles and successes. Women should not only be represented as victims, but as agents too. Although power is exerted over them, they exert power too.

When interrogating issues of violence, domination and oppression against women, there is a need to use a multifarious lens because of the complexity of
the issue. We need a lens which examines the social context for cultural mythos, cultural expectations, family socialization, and subordination based on cultural stereotypes. We need to look through a different lens to demystify how the legal and religious institutions have been upholding the systemic oppression and control of women. The historical context cannot be ignored, and so we need another lens because the history will assist in articulating an understanding the systemic structures that have created and sustained the unequal terrain, and structural inequality for men and women. Working within a historical lens will help deconstruct social and historical constructs and stereotypes which continue to plague us, and are barriers to the action plans of feminists and activists.

Finally, I have issued a mandate for schools to become involved in this private domestic affair because looking through an educational lens, I see schools as a reflection of the sociopolitical and structural norms which for centuries have been allies of a patriarchal system. The ideas I have offered call for a reconceptualization of school-leadership, curriculum, home-school relationship and the intersectionality of home-school-society. Like the theories, and scholarly work that I have drawn on to illuminate the phenomenon of domestic violence, there needs to be a continuous dialogue regarding the different currents of opinion. This calls for constant re-negotiation and re-evaluation of the various perspectives.
Women: Looking Forward to Something Worthwhile

My work for this part of the journey has come to an end, but it seems like a rewarding and timely one because of this recent piece of news from Belize, Gov't Unveils Gender Policy, (www.Channel5Belize.com). The news article read:

[The Gender Policy document] touches on issues ranging from job opportunities to rape, and it aims to promote gender equality as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. After two years of research, National Women's Commission President, Joan Musa today presented the National Gender Policy to Minister of Women, Dolores Balderamos Garcia….

But as far as the issue of education is concerned, although there are more women than men enrolled in schools, studies conducted as a part of the policy show that the females are still the marginalized group….

So how do we change this mentality of "living in a man's world"? Garcia says by introducing the Gender Sensitising Manual to teachers in primary schools.

Dolores Balderamos Garcia : "Because if in the primary school, the women teachers, and mostly our teachers in primary school are women as we know, but they would put the boys to go outside and to pick up the garbage in the yard, but they put the little girl to sweep inside the classroom. If you would change that from very young that would develop a more equitable society because girls would go into areas of professional education, for example, becoming a doctor or a computer specialist, but
also you can see women in non-traditional areas, but it has to start from very, very small."

And while attitudes must change from small, those who are big cannot escape the issue, especially those called upon as mediators.

(Monday, Feb. 3, 2003)

Domestic violence is everybody’s business, and “feminism is for everybody.” We need to avoid the tradition of privatizing domestic abuse. While I have mandated that schools join the struggle to remedy this chronic social ill, the possibility of redemption and change can be more rapidly achieved if everyone marches in concert with the schools—feminists, male and female activists, policy makers, government officials, legislators, and entrepreneurs. I urge women to heed Bob Marley’s words:

Get Up, Stand Up, stand up for your right

Get Up, Stand Up, don't give up the fight

Get Up, Stand Up. Life is your right

So we can't give up the fight

Stand up for your right, Lord, Lord

Get Up, Stand Up. Keep on struggling on

Don't give up the fight.

The possibility of change for the better can happen if everyone is willing to make a conceptual shift. Then we will be able to make what seems like an
Impossible Dream become Possible. I am optimistic that one-day domestic abuse and inequalities will be a rare occurrence, if not eliminated, and will be replaced with productive domestic relationships. I close with lyrics of the song, *Impossible Dream*, from the movie, *Man of La Mancha*, as a source of encouragement for possibility:

To dream the [possible] dream  
To fight the unbeatable foe  
To bear the unbeatable sorrow  
And to run where  
The brave dare to go  
To right the unrightable wrong  
And to love pure and chaste from afar  
To try when your arms are too weary  
To reach the unreachable star  
This is my quest  
To follow that star  
No matter how hopeless  
No matter how far  
To fight for the right  
Without question or pause…  
And I’ll always dream  
THE [POSSIBLE] DREAM

Figure 15 graphically summarizes the major components of this research about domestic violence and the implications for schooling.
Figure 15: Overview of this Study

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SCHOOLING

OVERVIEW


INTERNET SOURCES

http://www.dapslyrics.com

http://www.edc.org/WomensEquity/

http://www.ferris.edu/news/jimcrow/caricature/

http://www.nku.edu/~diesmanj/harlem_intro.html

http://www.saloon.com/books/feature/2002/01/22/kennedy/

http://www.toptags.com/aama/voices/commentary/nword.htm
Dear ______________:

As you and I know, domestic violence is very prevalent in our Belizean society. Having been one of the founding members of the Shelter for Battered Women in the early 1990s, I would like to continue to make a contribution to the lives of women.

I am in the process of writing about domestic violence and I want to focus my study on Belizean women who have been abused. The major aim of the study is to better understand how battered women in Belize make meaning of their childhood, and their battered lived experiences. Because of the scanty literature we have on Belizean women, and specifically, battered Belizean women, this study will be a useful contribution to the literature and field of women’s studies.

Since understanding and representing intimate violence through the lived experiences of Belizean women is still in the embryonic stage, this study will provide the battered women an opportunity to share their experiences, and voice their concerns. Because the phenomenon of domestic violence is interrelated to other social and cultural traditions, the study can pose many questions and suggest possibilities about the structures in the Belizean society.

Thus, I am seeking your assistance to identify battered women who would be willing to be interviewed and participate in this study. The subjects in this study should be women who are over eighteen years old and younger than forty, who are living/ have lived in an abusive intimate relationship for two or more years. I hope to study three women, hopefully of different ethnicities. The women should volunteer to participate in the study without coercion or threats, and no payment will be offered. They will be free to drop out at any time and may decline to answer any question with which they are uncomfortable.

I will conduct structured and unstructured interviews and engage in informal conversations with them over an extended period of time (at least 3 conversations), each lasting not more than an hour. The time(s) will be negotiated with each subject. The interviews and conversations will be related to their childhood experiences in the family and at school, and how they have dealt with the abuse relationship. I will be the only researcher and the research will be conducted in Belize City in a safe place to be agreed upon by the subject and the researcher.

Because of the sensitive nature of the study, the women should know that there are potential risks of emotional discomforts when narrating their experiences. I will be sympathetic towards the subjects, seek professional assistance immediately (if they request), cease the interview, or conversation if the subject becomes distressed.

If there are any questions, kindly contact me at the above address. If the women who volunteer to participate, or your agency have any questions, please feel free to contact the Office for the Advancement of Scholarship and Teaching at (513)-529- 3734 or e-mail at humansubjects@muohio.edu and /Dr. Sally Lloyd, Director of Women’s Studies (my advisor) at (513)- 529-4616 or E-mail her at lloydsa@muohio.edu.

Thanks in advance.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth J. Cardenas
Appendix B: Information for the agencies to distribute to battered women

I am Elizabeth Cardenas, a doctoral student at Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio. I am a Belizean and I am seeking women who have been battered (abused) by their intimate male partner with whom they live or have lived to do my study about domestic violence in Belize. As you and I know, domestic violence is very common in our Belizean society. Having been one of the founding members of the Shelter for Battered Women in the early 1990s, I would like to continue to make a contribution to the lives of women.

The reason for conducting this study is so that the Belizean public and myself can better understand how battered women in Belize think about what they learned when they were growing up, and what women’s abused experiences with their intimate partner are like. Because of the scanty literature we have on Belizean women, and specifically battered Belizean women, this study will be useful.

In order to participate, you need to be over eighteen and less than forty-years-old, and should have lived or live in an abusive relationship for two or more years. You should volunteer to participate in the study without being forced or threatened, and no payment will be offered. You will be free to drop out at any time and may decline to answer any question with which you are uncomfortable. You can alert me of any information you do not wish to have documented. I will immediately erase the information from the audiocassette. Once you alert me about the questions you do not want to answer, I will respect your request, and move on to the next question.

If you agree to participate, I will be asking you questions about when you were growing up, and about your experiences with your intimate male partner during at least 3 conversations, lasting not more than an hour. The time(s) and meeting place will be decided between you and me.

Please inform the office if you agree to volunteer for the study by signing your name on the sheet provided. I will be making contact with you by December 10. You can also contact me, or any of the other contacts below with any questions or concerns that you may have.

(Address, telephone & and e-mail)
Appendix C: Consent form for participants

I am willing to take part in a study about women who have experienced abuse by their intimate partner with whom they live or have lived. I understand that my children or intimate male partner with whom I live or lived will not be interviewed. I will not be paid to be a part of the study. My participation is completely voluntary.

I understand that Elizabeth Cardenas will be the only researcher, and the research will be conducted in Belize City in a safe place that the researcher and myself will agree upon.

I understand that there will be structured and unstructured interviews and I will engage in informal conversations over an extended period of time (at least 3 conversations), each lasting not more than an hour. The time(s) will be negotiated with me. The interviews and conversations will be related to my childhood experiences, and my experiences of the abusive relationship with my intimate partner.

The following risks may be associated with participating in the interviews. I may find myself crying when I tell my story. I may get emotionally upset because some of these memories may be painful. If this happens I will be free to stop the interview, and to request assistance from a social agent. I will not be forced or threatened to talk about anything I do not wish to disclose. I will alert the researcher of information that I do not want her to record, and she will ensure that she does not record the information. I can refuse to answer any question that I am uncomfortable with. Once I alert the researcher about the questions I do not want to answer, she will respect my request, and move on to the next question.

The interviews will be tape-recorded and my story will be used only to write your research. The signed consent form and all other materials will be kept separate under lock and key. She will be the only person to access them. A fake name will be used instead of my real name on any notes or in the research paper. Elizabeth will destroy the tapes as soon as possible. If my words are used in the report, any details which might help someone figure out who I am will be changed.

I understand that a study about domestic abuse, which is common to Belizean women, can be very beneficial. Women who are afraid to share their stories may be more willing to tell theirs. In this way more women can get help. My stories can help schools think about what they can do to help boys and girls learn to live in a more cooperative and harmonious way. It can remind publishers that they need to think more carefully about what they draw and write in books that the children use in school.

I give my permission to use this information in your study about domestic violence and I understand that the public will be able to read it.

I, _________________________________________________, volunteer to participate in the study and interview that Elizabeth wants to conduct about women who have been abused by their intimate male partner.

Elizabeth, you have my permission to contact me.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________
Appendix D: Maeti’s narrative

Maeti’s Story- Sword and shield: He had many chances but he did not change
My children are grown now. The second youngest, a son, added this
extension to the house. These are photos of my oldest daughter. She lives in the
United States. She is married and has two children. Her American husband
provides well for her. Ralph is married to a girl from one of the churches. The
oldest son is a police officer. He beats his woman just like his dad to me. The
one who attended school with your son is working. He makes good money, and
helps me very much. My daughter sends some financial assistance too.
At this time I am looking after this piece of land that the company wants to take
away from me. I went public with the problem, and I recently put the matter into
the hands of a lawyer. I will not give in or give up easily.

I do not wish to talk about abuse. Life goes on and I need to move on with
my life. I live with my boyfriend, and he treats me well. I still sell cooked food in
order to earn some money. When my husband called to wish the children merry
Christmas, he informed me that he did not build a house for a boyfriend. If the
boyfriend doesn't leave he will kill both of us.
Appendix E: Donay’s narrative

Donay’s story-Regret and reform: Leave a dysfunctional relationship as soon as possible

My first child, daughter, is not for my current partner. The other three children are his. The relationship was smooth until he turned to drugs. He was not working. He sold everything we had to get money to purchase drugs. We did not have food. Many times we had only bread, and sugar and water for our meal. When the food is insufficient, I leave myself without food so my children can be fed. Many times I don’t send the school-age children to school because of the lack of food. Sometimes when I get something for them to eat, it is too late for them to go to school.

I did seek employment until I became pregnant with the last child. After he was born it was difficult to afford a babysitter so I quit working and we faced terrible hard times again. I have been to the state representative from my constituency but he has turned me away.

I stayed in this abusive relationship because I was hoping my partner would change his ways. In the beginning, I blamed myself for the conflict. I also witnessed my mother remaining in an abusive relationship. She took it like a woman. My partner beats my oldest girl because she thinks he looks wild when he is on drugs. She is afraid of him. She stares at him and he gets angry and beats her up. She becomes nervous and wets the bed, and as a result he beats her again.

Do you see these marks? He stabbed me in my hand when I was shielding my face from being cut by the knife. He said that he wanted to scar me for life so that no other man would want me. When he fights with me, I fight back. The knife went through my hand. This little finger is crippled. After this last fight in Christmas, I decided to seek shelter. I do not want to return to him.
Appendix F: Folk stories

STORY 2
During the logging season, men left their female partners to go into the forest to work. They were uneasy because they always had the feeling that the woman would engage in a clandestine relationship with another man. One day, one of the labourers pretended that he had forgotten some money. He returned shortly after he left home. Sure enough, JOE GRIND, this anonymous man was having a relationship with the labourer's woman (who was in their house already). When the couple heard the man in the house, Joe Grind climbed into the storage area. The woman's partner accused her of taking some money that he had stashed away. She denied taking the money, and the woman said to her partner, "God knows. You can ask the man above. I have not stolen your money." Joe Grind was hiding above, and he responded, "no, sir. Don't ask me, I do not know about the matter."

STORY 3
On a similar note, this other male partner worked in the forest cutting timber. His woman was having an affair with another man. They had a parrot that kept singing, "mistress had a another man." The male partner did not pay attention, but when he returned to work the woman chopped the parrot in its head and threw it into the outdoor toilet. She was hoping it would perish there. She had forgotten about this incident and when went to the use the toilet, the parrot remarked, "misses, if you can live that big chop (referring to her vagina), I can live with this small one you gave me in my head."

STORY 4
A man was walking through the neighbour's yard one day. Although he was gazing, he could smell a fishy scent as he passed through. He figured that some ladies were sitting nearby so without looking up, he said, "good morning ladies." When he did not receive a response, he looked up and to his amazement there were no women, but a line full of salted fish left by fishermen to dry in the sun.
Appendix G: Folk songs

FOLKSONG 1

A materially grudging woman brings much trouble for a man because she always wants everything.
Although her eyes are like those of a toad, she wants eye glasses
Her ears like a quarter, yet she wants earrings
Her lips as thick as liver, yet she wants lipstick
Her waist as wide and thick as a barrel, yet she wants hip fitting pants and skirts
Her feet are the size of a barge, yet she wants to wear shoes with high heels

Folksong 2

I interpret this song to be an admonishment from a mother, father or another family member to a prostitute daughter or another female relative. Fan me soalja man means fan me soldier man. I never spent time to think about this song until now. I interpret it to allude to a prostitute having sexual intercourse with a British soldier in order to get money to buy nice clothes, and to go to the beautician.
Belize was a British colony, and the British soldiers remained in this country up until the 1990s. Several women, especially from Belize City were prostitutes. Some of them had children for these soldiers. A few women also got married to British soldiers and migrated to the United Kingdom. Several of them have also divorced their British husband and returned home, sometimes alone or with children.

Folksong 3

When police officers are paid on the fifteenth of each month, and at the end of each month, women are happy. They say today is my man’s payday.

Folksong 4

The females living in the Freetown division of Belize City are unable to get water in order to take a bath. Before there was running water in the homes, women line up their buckets and wait until water pours from the public standpipe. When they were eventually able to get water, they pushed and got into fights in the lines. Maybe they were frustrated from the long wait, or they thought that the water may stop pouring any minute again. So there is a call for the police to come and arrest them.
Appendix H: Resources for Implementing CAREPraxis


Internet sources:

http://www.coopcomm.org/w7a1toc.htm

http://www.vibs.org/children.htm