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PERCEPTIONS OF COLLECTIVE EFFICACY AMONG
ABUSED WOMEN IN RURAL APPALACHIA

by

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Perceptions of Collective Efficacy Among Abused Women in Rural Appalachia

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This qualitative and exploratory study examines perceptions of collective efficacy from the perspective of survivors of domestic violence. The research draws upon a purposive sample of 43 abused women from rural Appalachian communities. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews. The survey taped respondents’ perceptions of community during periods of intimate violence. Findings showed a lack of collective efficacy for rural battered women as well as a web of obstacles that entraps them in cycles of violence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I consider the role of community in the lives of 43 rural women during periods of domestic violence, centering on sexual assaults. The focus of this thesis is on the ways in which collective efficacy, or the social cohesiveness, trust and solidarity of community members, affect the experiences of rural battered women as they attempt to end their abusive relationships. I seek to counter, or at the very least, call in to question the recent resurgence of social disorganization literature as it applies to rural battered women.

Recently there has been a revival in the literature surrounding the way in which community-level processes may contribute to crime within neighborhoods. More specifically the research into social disorganization examines the abilities and capacities of communities to regulate local crime. This research seeks to answer the question: What allows for some neighborhoods to experience very low crime rates while others experience dramatically high levels of crime? Emerging out of the tradition of social disorganization theories, collective efficacy posits that it is the “prevalence and density of kinship, friendship, and acquaintanceship networks and the level of participation in community-based organizations that contribute to the emergence of solidarity and mutual trust, or social cohesion among community residents” that allow some communities to experience low crime rates (Browning, 2002, p 834). This social cohesion combined with mutual trust and solidarity gives way to the development of active community member intervention into crime control. In other words, the residents of these communities are willing to intervene on behalf of their neighbors,
creating an informal regulation of crime in their community and thus the ability to lower crime rates.

While there is extensive literature concerning the neighborhood-level determinants of stranger crime little is known about the extension of these theories to violence by intimates. This is interesting considering that a sizeable amount of domestic violence literature alludes to the role neighborhood-level processes may play in violence against women. As DeKeseredy & Schwartz (1997) indicate, intimate violence is often perpetuated or at least aided in informal support by a batterer’s male peers. Perhaps this notion of social support for violence in the home or the lack thereof could be expanded to the community-level. Second, weak ties between residents are a strong indicator of low collective efficacy and high rates of street crime within communities. This may also translate into the unwillingness of neighbors to intervene in domestic disputes as well or at least “exacerbate partner violence just as it does ordinary street violence” (Van Wyk, Benson, Litton, Fox & DeMaris, 2003, p 415). There is some evidence to support this belief as domestic violence rates tend to be much higher in poor communities with high crime rates (DeKeseredy, Alvi, Schwartz & Tomazweski, 2003). Furthermore, communities that exhibit indicators of social disorganization mentioned above tend to also demonstrate more cases of partner violence (DeKeseredy, Alvi, Schwartz & Perry, 1999). Thus, collective efficacy may also play an important role in levels of woman abuse within communities and certainly warrants inclusion into this paradigm.
Yet more importantly as the research into woman battering grows so does the recognition that solutions to this widespread problem must involve community-based responses (Grama, 2000; Websdale, 1998). The revival of traditions such as social disorganization and collective efficacy in particular certainly facilitates the belief that community and neighborhood-level responses are important factors in the reduction of crime rates. Social cohesion, solidarity, trust, and acquaintanceships are all aspects of communities that exhibit low rates of stranger crime. However, as the enthusiasm into neighborhood-level responses to crime and woman battering grows one class of people remain forgotten and the literature continues to remain silent on, the rural victims and survivors of domestic violence.

Rural communities have long been characterized as being close-knit, friendly, and generally much more cohesive than urban areas (Websdale, 1998). The phrases ‘everyone knows everyone’ or ‘we watch out for our neighbors’ are common within rural neighborhoods, depicting a type of intimacy with neighbors that one would be hard-pressed to find within urban centers. The low violent crime rates found within rural communities are often attributed to the closeness or the high degree of social integration found there (Websdale, 1998). The limited literature that exists on rural woman battering, however, continually points to the high rates of domestic violence within these communities, the same communities that attribute high levels of collective efficacy to their low crime rates. Woman battering does not seem to follow the same statistical patterns as stranger crime. In other words, collective efficacy within rural communities might not operate in
the same manner for violence within the home as it does for violence outside of the home.

The literature on rural domestic violence consistently indicates the extreme social isolation and social humiliation experienced by battered women in small communities, suggesting that collective efficacy may not exist for women forced into solitude. Rural domestic violence research points to the role of rural patriarchy in contributing to woman battering in rural communities (Websdale, 1998) and perhaps to a lack of collective efficacy as well. In this sense, it might very well be that in a community so entrenched in a rural patriarchy or patriarchal notions about a woman’s or man’s place in the community and in the home, where domestic violence is legitimated or disregarded, collective efficacy will simply not be available for certain types of crimes and for certain types of victims, namely abused women.

Morenoff, Sampson & Raudenbush (2001) briefly allude to a negative side of collective efficacy; while it may be that strong social ties are important in reducing crime rates they also may impede a community’s ability to regulate certain types of crime. Patillo-McCoy’s study (as cited in Morenoff et al., 2001) illustrates how a tightly-connected and socially integrated middle-class community was able to informally control the deviance of youth, but at the same time to foster the development and protection of organized criminal enterprises. Although this study cannot necessarily speak to whether collective efficacy facilitates domestic violence within rural areas, it is interested in this negative aspect of collective efficacy whether it is the facilitation of certain types of crime
or, in this case, the exclusion of certain crimes and certain people from collective efficacy. The current study, then, attempts to address the role of collective efficacy in the experiences of rural abused women. Specifically, this research will draw upon 43 interviews of abused women in poor, rural counties of Appalachia, focusing in particular on perceptions of collective efficacy within these communities.

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth review of the relevant literature pertaining to rural communities, domestic violence, and paradigms such as collective efficacy and social disorganization. The focus of this chapter is to underscore the unique experiences of battered women in rural areas and elucidate the role theoretical stances such as collective efficacy may play in the lives of abused women.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the research methods employed in the current study. The research focus and questions are articulated as well as participant demographics, current methodology, and an explanation of all measures and definitions used in this work.

Chapter 4 offers a rich presentation of the voices of abused women in rural Appalachia. The women’s own words will help to illustrate the role of collective efficacy in their experiences with domestic violence.

Finally, chapter 5 provides a discussion of the implications and contributions of this study for policy-makers, researchers, and other interested parties so that they can better respond to a group of people they know little about.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this exploratory study, my goal was to examine the role of community, specifically the paradigm of collective efficacy in the lives of 43 abused women in rural Appalachia. It is my argument that collective efficacy is nonexistent for abused women within rural communities. In order to better understand rural domestic violence and the lives and communities affected by it, I have separated this chapter into two sections and a number of subsections.

The first section, Overview and Background, provides a framework in which to situate the current study. This section will explore aspects of rural crime, rural culture, and theoretical paradigms such as collective efficacy. The purpose of this section is to better understand the interplay of crime and culture. In other words, this section attempts to address questions such as (1) Is stranger crime really lower in rural communities; (2) What are the implications of rural/urban crime research for the current study; (3) And finally, what are the theoretical implications of the literature surrounding rural crime?

The second section, Rural Domestic Violence, furthers the above dialogue by investigating the role of paradigms such as collective efficacy for crime or violence within the home, specifically in rural communities. This section presents a discussion of the prevalence of woman abuse in rural communities in order to illustrate how frameworks such as collective efficacy may not be apt at explaining rates of woman abuse in rural areas. Finally, this section concludes by offering rural patriarchy as a reason why collective efficacy is not applicable to violence within rural homes.
OVERVIEW & BACKGROUND

RURAL CRIME

Contemporary literature into rural crime and rural domestic violence specifically remains relatively scant, which is quite curious considering that in the decades prior to the 1950’s it was particularly difficult to find literature in criminology that spoke of urban areas (Weisheit & Wells, 1996). The bias towards rural locales not only reflected the small-town backgrounds held by many early pioneers of American criminology but also the common belief that rural centers were the “natural social form” and thus the basis from which to judge the expanding urban population (Weisheit & Wells, 1996, p 384). The last five decades, however, have resulted in a decidedly urban mindset, whereby rural communities have remained largely absent from contemporary literature. Weisheit (1993) coined the term “urban ethnocentrism” to underscore this notable absence.

Why and for what purpose this urban bias resulted is important for the current study. Websdale (1998) argues that the lack of attention to rural research and rural woman battering in particular may be due to the fact that rural research is difficult. For instance, rural residents tend to be suspicious of outsiders and thus researchers have trouble gaining access to and then the trust of the citizens. Further, telephone surveys are particularly difficult to conduct considering many rural residents do not have telephones. Yet these are all obstacles that researchers of many poor, inner city communities have also faced and overcome considering the sizeable amount of literature speaking to this area.
Thus, while there may be many reasons to account for the dearth of rural research, the most resonating seems to be the inclination to view rural places as spaces of tranquility and peace in light of the seemingly chaotic and problem-ridden urban areas (Websdale, 1998). Indeed, conventional wisdom would have us believe that rural areas are idyllic, the perfect place to raise a child, a sort of refuge from the violence and crime that plagues urban life (Williams, 2001). Common phrases such as ‘everyone knows everyone’ or ‘we watch out for our neighbors’ imply that rural communities, when juxtaposed to larger cities, enjoy a crime-free life, one where their doors can remain unlocked at night. Furthermore, these stereotypes propagate the belief that rural neighborhoods benefit from a sort of intimacy with their community allowing for informal social controls to manage their members; a closeness that one would be hard-pressed to find within urban centers. The field of criminology itself has perpetuated these rural stereotypes. For instance, early researchers, such as Galpin (1931) argued that small-town inhabitants were more law-abiding than their urban counterparts (as cited in Williams, 2001). In addition, Clinard (1944) asserted that rural offenders were less of a criminal type than delinquents in urban communities (as cited in Williams, 2001).

Criminological literature today continues to focus on the rural/urban distinction in crime rates, although current research tends to provide more contradictory results. Some studies suggest that small town residents do indeed believe themselves to be safer than residents of urban areas (Boggs, 1971; Conklin, 1971; Dinitz, 1973) seeming to bolster the above view that rural places
are more secure or at least are perceived that way. Ball (2001), for instance, studied perceptions of crime in a rural town, finding that, unlike urban residents, rural communities were less likely to view crime or even disorder as problematic, viewing traffic violations such as speeding a far greater issue. Yet researchers, such as Weisheit & Wells (1996) argue that perceptions of rural crime are more complicated than that and the rural/urban distinction is not so clear-cut, indicating that rural residents do fear crime, but are only less likely than urban inhabitants to fear violent street crime. And still other studies indicate that citizens’ fear of crime within rural areas is growing and reaching levels similar to that of larger cities (Williams, 2001; Krannich, Berry & Greider, 1989).

Official statistics also provide contradictory information on the amount of rural and urban crime. For instance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that violent crimes within urban centers tend to be 73% higher than in rural communities (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). Further, urban violent crime victims were 53% more likely than rural victims to be victimized by a stranger. In relation to property crimes, urban areas also report a much higher victimization rate than do rural communities. However, the survey data also show that violent crime rates decreased in both urban and suburban communities, while crime, particularly violent crime increased within rural regions.

These official findings, however, parallel that of some contemporary research that suggests the drop in crime rates is largely a metropolitan phenomenon (Barnett & Mencken, 2002). In addition to violent crime, rural areas are also experiencing increases in gang activity as well as drug use, trafficking
and production (Weisheit & Wells, 1996; Williams, 2001). Yet Bachman (1992) argues that while crime may be increasing within rural areas, it is not increasing at unprecedented rates. In fact, urban residents are still much more likely to be victims of crime than are rural residents. Bachman also suggests that rural communities may be “just as vulnerable, if not more so,” to specific types of victimization than their urban counterparts. For example, rural elderly residents, in particular, have a greater chance of becoming the victim of household crimes than do the elderly residing in urban areas. In addition, rural residents are much more likely to be victimized by someone they know, such as a relative, friend, or acquaintance than are urban victims. Further, assault rates are nearly identical for both urban and rural youth (Williams, 2001).

Yet while rural areas may be experiencing rising crime rates and problems with certain types of crime, most scholars argue that crime within rural areas is still much lower when compared to urban cities (Websdale, 1998). Weisheit, Falcone & Wells (1996) conclude that, “rural-urban differences in fear of crime fit public stereotypes and are consistent with available data on rural and urban crime patterns” (p 91). In other words, rural residents are less fearful of crime and they have a good reason to be. Even still, my guess is that one could find numerous other studies that suggest crime within rural communities is higher than in urban cities; that some urban communities have very low levels of crime; that some rural areas have much lower amounts of crime than urban areas; that people in rural areas fear crime more than people in urban areas; that fear of crime is higher in urban areas; and so on.
The point is that even if crime is generally lower in rural communities when compared to urban ones, violence does still exist there. In other words, rural places are not crime-free and should not be viewed as such. Furthermore, much of the crime research assumes that danger or the threats of danger come to us from elsewhere. The assumption is that crime and violence are those things committed by strangers and not the people that we know and perhaps even love. Thus, in rural communities where it may very well be that everybody knows everybody it is no wonder that fear of crime may be lower in rural places than in urban areas. It is also no wonder that the literature remains silent on rural women’s fear of abuse by their partners and on rural domestic violence in general, because it then becomes plausible to believe that sort of thing just doesn’t happen here.

DEFINING RURAL

Although not entirely unfounded, the inclination to view rural places as crime-free or at least not as problem-ridden as urban areas has led to an extensive literature examining rural culture. Discussions of a rural culture, however, are based upon definitions of rural, rurality and exactly what these terms constitute. Thus, an adequate discussion of rural culture cannot begin without first defining what rural means. Officially rural is defined as those areas with populations less than 2,500, making all populations above this mark urban (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Most sociologists, however, find these numerical demarcations problematic, particularly because some communities with
populations of 2,500 are only short distances from large, urban cities (Websdale, 1998).

Sociologically, rural areas have always been considered not just in terms of population size, but also in terms of their cultural and historical differences from urban areas. Communities readily accessible to large cities, despite population size, would more than likely not be considered rural in sociological terms. A more commonly accepted definition of rural within sociology is taken from Websdale’s (1995) work on rural domestic violence. Websdale states that an area is considered rural when “people know each other’s business, come into regular contact with each other, and share a larger core of values than is true of people in urban areas” (p 102). As Websdale points out, there are neighborhoods in Kentucky with populations between 5,000-10,000, where the residents know each other, they have commonly shared beliefs, values, and goals, and families have lived there for generations (Websdale, 1997). While this area might not officially be considered rural it certainly would be sociologically. Thus, the sociologically definition of rural implies that a distinct culture exists there, one that is different from that of urban areas.

RURAL CULTURE

Sociological discussions of rural culture along with explanations for low levels of rural crime can be traced all the way back to Durkheim’s (1964) discussion of traditional societies or what he called mechanical societies. Though his work focused primarily on the division of labor between traditional and modern societies, Durkheim argued that it is within traditional societies where
one could find social cohesion among people, as well as commonalities in
terms of heritage, beliefs and values. Further, within these societies a “collective
consciousness” developed whereby behavior was well regulated through strong
social norms or informal social controls. Indeed when applied to homicide rates,
Kowalski & Duffield (1990) found that less communal areas, such as large cities,
have higher rates of homicide than rural areas where “individualism is reduced,
group identification is strengthened, and the potential for violence is diminished”
(p 86).

Similar to Durkheim’s thesis, Tonnes’ (1940) discussion of modernization
brought forth the notions of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Briefly, this theory
contends that in traditional, rural or gemeinschaft societies, individuals display
strong levels of attachments to one another and their communities are
homogenous and well-regulated, as opposed to gesellschaft or urban
communities that are tenuous, impersonal, and heterogenous. Supporting the
theory that strong bonds are created in rural locales, Hofferth & Iceland (1998)
found that rural communities exhibit higher levels of social capital or the strength
of social relationships than do urban areas. Specifically, residents in rural
neighborhoods tend to have a stronger kin network than do residents within
urban cities. Beggs, Haines & Hurlbert (1996) also suggest that rural
communities exhibit higher levels of homogeneity and stronger social
attachments to both kin and other community members, when compared to
urban personal networks.
Yet Freudenberg (1986) illustrates that perhaps it is not strong social attachment that is necessary, but who you know and how many you know that is important. Freudenberg coined the term density of acquaintanceships to illustrate the tendency of rural members to know a large portion of the community’s inhabitants, whereas this density of acquaintanceships declined among residents in large cities. Consequently, the control of deviance within urban areas was markedly reduced. The density of acquaintanceship within rural communities allowed for a watchfulness and the ability to enact informal social controls on its members. Freudenberg found that as the density of acquaintanceship decreased within urban regions the crime levels increased.

Unlike in urban communities, religion is a central institution of civic life in rural areas. Researchers argue that it is the importance of religion within rural communities that help foster social integration, strong social networks and informal social controls (Lee & Bartowski, 2004). They state that these moral communities assist in creating wider social networks, stronger social norms, homogeneity in community goals and expectations, and interpersonal trust of one’s neighbors. When applied to juvenile homicide rates in rural neighborhoods strongly ingrained in religious tradition, they found a lower volume of juvenile homicides, suggesting the importance of informal social controls created through religious institutions. These “rural religious communities provide an important springboard for the cultivation of social ties and the facilitation of civic engagement” (Lee & Bartowski, 2004, p 1004). Thus, it may not be not so much the role of religion in rural life that promotes lower crime rates, but rather the level
of civic participation, the realization of common goals, and the interaction among communities that religious organizations facilitate that influences the informal control of local crime.

In an era of cable television, Internet access, e-mail, and geographic mobility some argue that these notions of a unique rural culture are waning (Weisheit & Wells, 1996). Yet to eliminate rural-urban distinctions at this point commits the same “textual fallacy of autonomy” as previous research has already done (Williams, 2001, p 385). In the limited literature that exists, there is general agreement that low levels of stranger crime in rural communities can be attributed, at least partially, to a unique social culture that exists there, whether it is through strong social bonds or simply the amount of connections one has. Even in spite of globalization and technology, rural areas tend to exhibit a stronger density of acquaintanceships, social integration, community identification, and civic participation than urban areas, perhaps allowing for the informal social control of deviance. In what follows, I will expand upon the above discussion, bringing forth the theoretical paradigm of collective efficacy in order to better articulate the influence of a rural culture on stranger crime rates.

**COLLECTIVE EFFICACY**

The concepts of social cohesion, social integration, and civic participation are prominent themes in the literature on social disorganization and collective efficacy (Sampson & Groves, 1989). The theory of collective efficacy, which is of central concern to the present study, posits that social cohesion among neighbors is vital to communities with low violent crime rates. Specifically, this
paradigm suggests that it is “social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” that is linked to a marked reduction of violence within neighborhoods (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1997, p 918). In other words, it is the ability of a community to establish social networks and connections with and among community members so as to realize common goals that allow for the prevention of social problems such as crime. Structural conditions that may inhibit these processes are things such as residential instability or population change, economic depression, and racial/ethnic heterogeneity (Barnett & Mencken, 2002).

These structural components affect crime indirectly “through their effects on community social organization,” such as the development of social friendships and the level of civic and social participation (Barnett & Mencken, 2002, p 374). Residential instability, for instance, weakens the likelihood of a community to foster social networks. Communities with high rates of mobility are less likely to have the same density of acquaintanceships as communities that are more stable; people are less likely to know one another and to participate in community activities. Economic hardships also affect the ability of a community to mobilize together. Poverty makes it difficult to protect community interests through organizations and activities that require financial capital to do so. Further, such poor and often uneducated communities are less likely to create and participate in community organizations that help to foster social networks and also to establish common goals (Barnett & Mencken, 2002). According to Sampson & Groves (1989) communication across racial and ethnic populations is difficult,
posing problems for the realization of common goals, values, and beliefs. Communities, then, which experience these structural conditions that inhibit social cohesion, generally also experience high crime rates due to the inability to create social organizations, social networks, and mobilize around common goals.

Violence has long been associated with poverty. Indeed, as the above discussion suggests, poverty is a key indicator of communities with high levels of crime and consequently low levels of collective efficacy. However, when applied to poor, rural neighborhoods this thesis does not retain its validity. In fact, the literature surrounding rural communities generally demonstrates low levels of stranger violence, despite high poverty levels. Barnett & Mencken (2002) suggest that although rural areas tend to be economically depressed they do not experience the same aspects of concentrated disadvantage, such as public housing projects, that pose unique difficulties to urban residents. Furthermore, poverty within urban areas is experienced in conjunction with high rates of residential mobility as well as population heterogeneity, whereas economically depressed rural communities tend to be both stable and homogeneous.

Population instability in poor urban areas limits the ability of a community to create informal social connections. As the population grows, a community’s financial resources are stretched trying to provide services for and to control an expanding population. Controlling crime through informal mechanisms becomes increasingly difficult as both human and financial capital thin. Rural neighborhoods, however, experience little residential mobility which may help to compensate for their lack of financial resources. Social ties and networks take
time to establish and thus rapid population change or high rates of residential mobility tend to weaken these networks and ultimately collective efficacy within the areas. Rural neighborhoods tend to be fairly stable, have long residential tenure, and are usually occupied by people whose families have lived there for generations (Hofferth & Iceland, 1998; Beggs et al., 1996). Consequently, rural neighborhoods also tend to be fairly homogenous. Population homogeneity is an essential characteristic of communities with high levels of collective efficacy. Combined with residential stability, a population that is fairly homogenous is more likely to create social networks and realize common goals than a neighborhood with vast cultural differences between its members.

To date, the most rigorous examination of collective efficacy found that rural youth violence was indeed higher in nonmetropolitan communities that were characterized by residential instability, family disruption, and ethnic heterogeneity (Osgood & Chambers, 2000). Likewise, Reisig & Cancino (2004) found that nonmetropolitan communities characterized by higher levels of collective efficacy report fewer incivilities than neighborhoods with low levels of collective efficacy. Both studies suggest that Sampson & Grove’s (1989) theory of collective efficacy is generalizable to rural areas. As discussed earlier, rural areas tend to exhibit residential stability, and homogeneity as well as a strong network of acquaintanceships within the community, all key indicators of high collective efficacy. Thus, the theoretical paradigm of collective efficacy may help explain the consistently low crime levels experienced by rural communities.
COLLECTIVE EFFICACY & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

So far this review of the literature has focused on crime within rural neighborhoods, yet it has focused exclusively on street crime or crime that occurs outside of the home. Of concern to the present study is intimate partner abuse or violence that occurs in the home, behind closed doors. When one examines Sampson & Grove’s (1989) notion of collective efficacy one finds that there is a glaring omission from this literature, namely that of domestic violence. The theoretical paradigm of collective efficacy only addresses violent street crime and does not look to violent crime within the home.

To the best of my knowledge, there exist only three studies examining the correlates between violence within the home and notions of collective efficacy. Looking at partner violence in a Chicago neighborhood, Browning (2002) found that collective efficacy is only relevant to violence against women in communities where the tolerance for domestic violence is low. Instead the author found that while there may be consensus among community members regarding a crime-free environment this only applies to street crime. Violence between intimates may be understood and interpreted differently than stranger crime, being viewed as more socially acceptable than street violence. Yet the data shows that while collective efficacy helped to prevent intimate homicide, it did not necessarily impede violence occurring behind closed doors. This study also indicated that socially organized communities may still be better equipped to handle partner violence. For instance, Browning’s (2002) study found that women participants perceived socially cohesive communities as more effective in combating
domestic abuse. The women felt that in a tight-knit community they would be more likely and able to confide in others about abusive relationships, perhaps opening up the channels for escaping the conflict.

Van Wyk et al. (2003) also examined partner violence at the community level finding that neighborhood characteristics do indeed play a role in levels of woman abuse, with intimate violence occurring in disadvantaged areas at nearly twice the rate than more well-off neighborhoods. Furthermore, their work revealed that it is a structural disadvantage combined with low levels of social support that “create a situation ripe for violence” (p 434). Similarly, DeKeseredy, et al. (2003) found that in a sample of women from a Canadian public-housing project, those who viewed their neighborhoods as low in collective efficacy were also more likely to report cases of intimate violence. Although this area of the field is still in need of much expansion, these findings do indicate that the role of neighborhoods in intimate partner violence may be quite important and certainly warrant future study. Still the nagging question remains: What are the effects of collective efficacy for abused women in rural communities?

**RURAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

In the above section, I presented research examining rural crime, rural culture and collective efficacy. I considered the relationship between crime and culture in order to better understand the characteristics of communities that exhibit low crime rates. Yet what remains absent from this literature are the effects of models such as collective efficacy for violence within rural homes. At the present time, this author can find no research looking at the relationship
between collective efficacy and intimate partner violence in rural areas. In the scant research that does exist on rural domestic abuse there are many indicators to suggest that collective efficacy and partner violence may not have the same relationship as they did in urban communities; in fact, the relationship may be the complete opposite. Instead of seeing a dramatic drop in rates of woman abuse in rural areas, we find that rates of partner violence are strikingly similar between rural and urban neighborhoods, if not slightly higher in rural communities. Further, other research suggests that woman battering is just as likely to occur in rural and urban areas (Websdale, 1998). What accounts for the high rates of woman abuse within rural communities? Why do these rates differ drastically from the statistical patterns of rural versus urban crime? Finally, how may rural patriarchy contribute to a lack of collective efficacy for battered women?

**RURAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & COLLECTIVE EFFICACY**

Geographically, rural residents tend to be physically isolated from one another. Often, the nearest neighbor is several miles away. In spite of the distance, however, rural communities generally share a social cohesiveness; the residents tend to be friendly with one another and interact together on a regular basis. Thus, although rural dwellers may experience geographic isolation from their neighbors, they do not experience social isolation. In other words, their social activities are not inhibited due to their physical distance from each other. Yet for rural battered women, geographic isolation facilitates the abuse and social seclusion they experience (Websdale, 1998).
Often, a batterer purposely chooses to relocate to the country, moving his partner away from her friends and family into a community physically isolated from other people (Gagne, 1992). Rural battered women consistently report feelings of extreme loneliness and isolation. Many of these women do not know their neighbors and some have not had friends in years (Websdale, 1998). Not only is the geographic isolation damaging to their social connections, but the lack of public and personal transportation further inhibits this (Grama, 2000). Public transportation within rural communities is usually nonexistent forcing women to rely on other forms of transit. Batterers, however, frequently control access to personal vehicles and withhold transportation from their partners, literally keeping women prisoners in their own homes. When women are allowed access to transportation, usually to get back and forth from a job or to transport their children to various activities, they remain under close watch, either through restrictive time limits or through a monitoring of the mileage on their vehicles (Websdale, 1998). In a rural area, where little if anything is within walking distance, transportation is vital to not only engaging in community life, but to escaping the abuse as well.

In addition to physical seclusion rural women also report limited access to telephones. As a whole rural areas tend to have low telephone subscription rates (Grama, 2000), making it difficult for abused women to contact services such as the police to intervene in domestic disputes. When a telephone is available, however, phone calls both incoming and outgoing are usually closely monitored by the abuser. Sometimes, the batterer will disconnect the phone receiver before
leaving for work, leaving his partner with no contact to the outside world (Websdale, 1998). The ability to access a pay phone is also difficult due to the restricted availability of transportation mentioned above.

Because of the geographic isolation combined with the lack of access to transportation and telephones, abused rural women often lose contact with friends and family (Bosch & Schumm, 2004). Sometimes connections with friends and family dissipate due to frustrations of being difficult to get a hold of or not returning calls due to the severe control by the abuser. Other times, it is the abused women herself that cuts off relationships either because of threats made against her family should she keep in contact with them or the brutal beatings received for calling or visiting with people outside the home. Emotionally, it is stressful for women to have people visit their home for fear of what their batterer might say or do while they are there; it is even more troubling to think about what might happen once the guests have left (Bosch & Schumm, 2004). Thus, abused rural women often lose important relationships with loved ones and at the same time are forbidden and unwilling to make new ones, leaving them in complete and total seclusion.

A key aspect of collective efficacy is the social integration of a community, combined with their trust and willingness to intervene on behalf of their neighbors that aids in lowering crime rates. Obviously, this requires interaction among residents. In other words, in order for collective efficacy to operate effectively people must know other people in the community and subsequently visit or see each other regularly. As the above discussion illustrates, rural abused women
are not afforded the luxury of active communication with anyone other than their abusers, leaving the opportunity for collective efficacy virtually impossible.

The irony of rural domestic violence, however, is that while abused women are isolated from the community they still lack anonymity within it. Shelters, domestic violence programs and other service providers are generally inadequate and very limited within rural areas (Kerschner, Long & Anderson, 2001). Oftentimes, the nearest shelter is hundreds of miles away. The rural areas that do have shelters usually have only one and, in a small community, this makes it difficult to keep the location confidential (Grama, 2000). Battered women, then, are unlikely to utilize a shelter when it is probable their abusers will find out their location.

Utilizing the local police department is also problematic in a small town with little privacy. The abuser and the local police officer may know each other, hang out at the same places together, and be friends with one another, making it difficult for women to rely on them for protection (Websdale, 1998). The possibility of the police report being published in the local paper further enhances the lack of anonymity within rural communities and makes it unlikely abused women will ask for professional intervention (Grama, 2000). The professional support that abused women might seek is severely lacking within rural areas and is also problematic due to the lack of privacy that exists there. Therefore, in the absence of social services the support of friends, family and other community members becomes vital to women trying to escape abuse.
Support of community members is also an important aspect of collective efficacy. Although the interaction among friends and neighbors in a community is essential for collective efficacy to work, there also must be a working trust among residents that results in the willingness to intervene on behalf of one’s neighbors. In other words, people in a community must be willing to support one another and look out for each other’s well being. Rural communities generally exhibit these qualities; close interconnections among residents contribute to a sense of belonging and group identity, which leads neighbors to look out for other people in their community and in turn helps to lower crime (Weisheit & Wells, 1996).

While friends in a community may be willing to help manage local street crime, it is very different for crime and violence within rural homes. As Bosch & Schumm (2004) illustrate, “friends and family often rally to provide support in response to stressful natural life events but may be less supportive in response to partner abuse, which often arouses feelings of discomfort or disapproval” (p. 357). Indeed, Gagne’s (1992) study of abused rural Appalachian women describes the willingness of community members to assist one another in most situations, except for issues concerning intervention into family matters.

Although rural women are severely isolated from their community, research points to the fact that the community is often very aware of the abuse, whether it is through small town gossip, physical bruises, or public beatings (Bosch & Schumm, 2004). Yet the witnessed abuse was often ignored and even condoned by friends, family and the community. In many cases, the batterer attempted to rationalize the abuse by undermining his partner’s credibility, further
isolating her from those that may be able to provide support (Gagne, 1992). In addition, previous research suggests that a batterer’s male peers play a prominent role in exacerbating woman abuse; participating in victim blaming and finding ways to condone and justify domestic violence among peers only facilitates the likelihood that abuse will occur and continue (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1997). The abused women often participated in blaming themselves; feeling as though something must be wrong with them since the violence against them was ignored and subsequently supported by the people around them (Bosch & Schuum, 2004).

While disturbing, the social acceptance of domestic violence, particularly sexual assaults, is nothing new. The cultural invalidation of marital rape has a long-standing history, dating back to the early 1700’s in the formation of a marital rape exemption, whereby husbands had legal right to sexual intercourse with their wives whether or not their wives were willing participants (Russell, 1990). Although perhaps not legally this tradition carries on still: many do not consider rape within marriages real rape. In their critical review of rape literature, Bennice & Resick (2003) discuss the propensity of rape invalidation to occur as the victim-offender relationship grows more intimate. In other words, sexual assaults by strangers are perceived as acts of rape, whereas sexual assault by intimates are less likely to be defined as such and recognized as less harmful.

Although in the broader culture the belief in domestic violence as a private matter in which the state has no right to mediate is declining (Salazar, Baker, Price, & Carlin, 2003), rural areas are still strongly entrenched in this patriarchal
ideology (Websdale, 1997). As Van Hightower & Gorton (2002) found, rural service providers and law enforcement officials were quick to blame the women victims for both originating the abuse they experienced as well as for not being able to end it. Furthermore, social norms concerning stereotypical gender roles and beliefs in the privacy of family life preclude many rural women from discussing their abuse with others as well as from other people intervening into domestic situations (Lewis, 2003). In light of the current study, this is problematic for rural abused women. Rural communities that are so often characterized as peaceful, tranquil, close-knit and friendly may not be so serene after all.

**RURAL PATRIARCHY & COLLECTIVE EFFICACY**

Although there is some suggestion that communities exhibiting higher levels of collective efficacy will experience lower levels of domestic violence and vice versa (Browning, 2002; Van Wyk et al., 2003; DeKeseredy, et al., 2003), these studies were conducted in urban areas. The above review of the limited literature examining rural woman abuse, however, illustrates the ways in which rural communities work to conceal, protect, and legitimate domestic violence. Thus, collective efficacy appears to have a very different relationship for rural battered women than for their urban counterparts. The model of collective efficacy argues that it is communities that have common goals, values and beliefs that experience high levels of collective efficacy and, in turn, low levels of street crime. While the majority of the literature has focused on the positive aspects of these homogeneous communities, the literature more or less neglects to mention the effects of communal beliefs that are oppressive in nature. In other
words, collective efficacy does not consider the social context of the areas that it studies.

As we see in the above discussion, commonly-held beliefs concerning the privacy of the home or the gender roles of men and women contribute heavily to whether or not rural battered women receive support. What Websdale (1998) calls rural patriarchy may, in fact, be the key to understanding why collective efficacy within rural areas is nonexistent for abused women. Building upon Sylvia Walby’s (1989) notion of patriarchy, Websdale (1989) contends that patriarchal structures, such as the patriarchal household, paid work, the patriarchal state, patriarchal culture, patriarchal sexuality, and male violence “manifest themselves differently in rural areas, although these structures still constitute a readily discernible set of gender power relations” (p 48). Further, Websdale (1998) draws in Walby’s (1989) private patriarchy, or the male dominance and oppression of women in the household in order to articulate the distinct manifestation of patriarchal ideology in rural homes.

Websdale (1998) goes on to illustrate that in rural areas where marriage rates are high and there are more traditional views regarding the division of labor between men and women, patriarchal ideology is more likely to manifest itself within the home; in urban areas patriarchy tends to take more public forms such as through the actions of the labor market or of the state. Indeed Gagne (1992) found that although many of the rural women in her study worked outside the home, and some were the primary breadwinners, they still were held responsible for all of the household responsibilities, including housecleaning, child-rearing,
and preparing family meals. These gendered power relations and the “norm of women’s deference to men”, so prominent within rural communities, facilitates what Gagne (1992) calls persuasive control (p 398). Persuasive control is the nonphysical forms of violence, such as withholding transportation or isolating women from their friends and family that serve to regulate and control the activities of women.

Of course, urban areas experience these private forms of patriarchy and rural areas are also impacted by public patriarchy such as the wage market. Yet Websdale (1998) argues that, “rural patriarchy exhibits more of the historical vestiges of private patriarchy than does urban patriarchy” (p 49). Furthermore, these forms of rural patriarchal ideology are aggravated by the extreme social and physical isolation, lack of transportation, inadequate shelters and domestic violence programs that are unique to rural battered women. Moreover, a culture of women’s rights, that may help to alleviate at least some of the repercussions of patriarchy for urban women, is not readily available to women in rural areas (Websdale & Johnson, 1997, p 302). Even still, the prominence of religion and religious teachings within rural areas, discussed earlier, heavily influence social norms regarding gender roles and the dominance of men (Websdale & Johnson, 1997).

In rural communities, strongly entrenched in patriarchal ideology, with similar beliefs concerning the role of men and women, it is no wonder domestic violence is often disregarded. While collective efficacy may be beneficial to street violence and stranger crime it seems to operate differently for domestic violence
within rural areas. The purpose of the present study, then, is to examine perceptions of collective efficacy among abused women in rural Appalachian communities. Based on the above review of the literature I hypothesize that:

(1) The women in this study will report collective efficacy to be nonexistent for them.

(2) The women in this study will recount the ways in which the community disregarded the abuse they experienced.

(3) Rural patriarchal ideology will heavily influence the response of the community to domestic violence issues.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature relevant to the current study. I brought forth the literature concerning rural crime, rural culture and collective efficacy in order to better articulate the interplay of crime and culture and the theoretical implications of this discussion. I also discussed the role of collective efficacy for domestic violence and rural domestic violence, in particular. This review of the literature led me to my research questions that, in summary, hypothesize the lack of collective efficacy for the 43 rural survivors of domestic violence of this study.
3. RESEARCH METHODS

In order to explore the relationship between collective efficacy and rural violence against women, centering on sexual assault, I draw upon 43 interviews of abused women in rural Appalachia. By examining battered women’s perceptions of collective efficacy in rural communities we can come to a richer understanding of its implications for rural domestic violence/sexual assaults. Since the current state of scientific knowledge has little to offer in this area this study attempts to offer insight into the following questions:

1. First, based on survivors’ point of view, how has collective efficacy within their community impacted the intimate violence they have experienced?
2. Second, this study is also interested in the contradictions that emerge in survivors’ discussion of crime, domestic violence, and rural communities and how these contradictions help us to understand broader, culturally held beliefs regarding these issues.

METHOD

To adequately gain insight into the experiences of rural battered women, this study has chosen to use semi-structured interviews. Unlike structured interviews, a semi-structured interview allows the researcher to approach the topic of domestic violence with the utmost sensitivity (Singleton & Straits, 1999). To create a non-threatening environment for the participant, it is important to give the researcher flexibility during the interview. Allowing an informal atmosphere and considerable discretion as to the wording or timing of questions can help to create a safe surrounding for discussion. Moreover, interviews provide the
researcher with a richer understanding of women’s experiences for, “it may be the only way to describe a complex reality for which we have few names” (Mahoney, 1991, p 41).

Further, face-to-face interviews help to eliminate the possibility of misunderstandings, by allowing the researcher to condense and interpret the meaning of what the participant is talking about and send it back to the participant. Then, the participant can reply either “Yes. That is what I was talking about” or “No. I didn’t mean that.” Problems with illiteracy can also be countered through interviewing. Unlike surveys that require literate participants, semi-structured interviews not only broaden the scope of the sample, but also enrich the study by obtaining data that otherwise would not have been gained.

While semi-structured interviewing allows for richer data than do surveys or very structured interviews, it is consequently very time-consuming. A lengthier time is needed both for data collection as well as data analysis. Further, the use of semi-structured interviews also requires that the interviewers be well trained to avoid asking either leading questions or not asking the participant enough questions during an interview. To minimize these challenges, all interviewers for this project were trained by both Dr. Walter DeKeseredy, the principal investigator (PI) for this study, as well as Dr. Judith Grant, a professor in a local university. In addition, staff from local shelters also sensitized interviewers to the dominant norms and values of people from rural Appalachia. DeKeseredy & Joseph (2004) provide more tangible examples of the training process all interviewers underwent for this study:
• In-depth briefings on the nature and purpose of the study, the gender sensitive issues involved, and ways of handling potential emergency situations (e.g., respondent experiences traumatic memories).

• Having the interviewers engage in a series of mock interviews under the supervision of the PI and Professor Grant so that any difficulties could be identified and corrected.

• Discussions of appropriate non-verbal communication (e.g., non-judgmental body language) to be used in the interview situation.

**PARTICIPANTS**

43 women participated in the study on separation/divorce sexual assault in rural areas, ranging in age from 22-68 yrs (M=35.30). Most were either single or divorced at the time of the study and the average yearly income ranged from $0-$50,000 (M=$13,558). All 43 women had experienced unwanted sexual contact with either a husband or a male live-in partner while either wanting to, trying to, or leaving their abusive partner. The majority of women had children (M=1.91) and most were either employed in part-time positions or were unemployed at the time of the study. The bulk of survivors had a college background; only four did not receive their high school degree. Most of the respondents lived in the county of the study; the rest resided in nearby rural areas. Tables 1 and 2 on the following page also illustrate participant demographic information.
Table 1: Participant Descriptives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Descriptives (N=43)</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOME</td>
<td>13,588.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILDREN</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Participant Descriptives (Cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Descriptives (N=43)</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MARITAL STATUS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 (35%) DIVORCED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 (42%) SINGLE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (12%) SEPARATED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (12%) REMARRIED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL OF EDUCATION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (9%) DID NOT FINISH HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (26%) FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL ONLY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 (37%) SOME COLLEGE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (9%) ASSOCIATES DEGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (12%) BACHELORS DEGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (7%) MASTERS DEGREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (23%) FULL-TIME</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (26%) PART-TIME</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 (47%) UNEMPLOYED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (2%) DISABLED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (2%) RETIRED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

MEASURES

Of central concern to this study was the domestic violence, centering on sexual assaults, experienced by women wanting to leave, trying to leave, or
leaving an abusive partner. The research focused on the extent and types of sexual assaults as women attempted to seek freedom from their batterers. Thus, a broad definition of sexual assault was used to avoid the narrow definitions of sexual victimization employed by many previous studies. By incorporating a broad definition of sexual assault this research was able to include harmful behaviors that the women themselves felt were “major threats to their physical and psychological well-being” (DeKeseredy & Joseph, 2004). This definition of sexual assault includes the following:

- **Sexual Contact** includes sex play (fondling, kissing, or petting) arising from menacing verbal pressure, misuse of authority, threats of harm, or actual physical force.
- **Sexual Coercion** includes unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of menacing verbal pressure or the misuse of authority.
- **Attempted rape** includes attempted unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of or threats of force, or the use of drugs or alcohol.
- **Rape** includes unwanted sexual intercourse arising from the use of or threats of force and other unwanted sex acts (anal or oral intercourse or penetration by objects other than the penis) arising from the use of or threat of force, or the use of drugs or alcohol.

**SAMPLE SELECTION & RECRUITMENT**

Studying rural woman abuse poses several challenges. Getting the word out to potential participants is difficult, as many rural residents do not have access to phones, transportation or television. In many cases, battered women
are kept in extreme isolation from the outside world by their abusive partners, this is challenging for researchers whose recruiting strategies center solely around snowballing techniques or advertisements such as flyer postings that many women forced into isolation may never see. Additionally, researchers face confidentiality and anonymity concerns of rural women who undoubtedly fear for their lives and do not generally trust outsiders. Anonymity concerns are especially important for abused women in small towns where as one participant put it “everybody knows everybody’s business.”

In an attempt to gain access to a sensitive and hard-to-reach population the following recruitment methods were employed: The advertisement presented in Figure 1 was placed twice in a free newspaper available throughout a rural Appalachian county.²

² The advertisement ran once a week during two six-week periods.
Call for interested women of XXXX, XXXX, and XXXX Counties for participation in an XXXX University research project

Have you ever had unwanted sexual experiences while trying to leave your husband or male live-in partner?

Or, have you ever had unwanted sexual experiences after you left your husband or male live-in partner?

We would greatly appreciate your participation in a confidential interview. Your name will not be given to anyone.

We will pay you $25.00 for your time and transportation costs. Also, we will talk to you at a time and location of your choosing.

If you would like to be interviewed, please call Mae at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or Carolyn at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Figure 1: Newspaper Advertisement

Also, posters about the study were pinned up in public places, such as courthouses, and were given to social service providers who came into contact with abused women. DeKeseredy & Joseph (2004) also list several more recruiting strategies:

- Two local newspapers gave considerable coverage to the project in March 2003.
- A nearby university sent out a press release to newspapers and other locally-based media.
• Three local radio stations and a local university television station carried public service announcements about the study.

• In April 2003, the PI and the Director of a shelter in the county of the study appeared on a local television news show to discuss this project and broader issues related to it.

• Advocacy groups told interested parties (e.g., rural shelter workers) about the study and helped recruit participants.

• Shelter staff, a social worker employed by a local police department, employees of the local Sheriff’s Department, Planned Parenthood, Women’s Center staff at a nearby college and employees of the Sexual Assault Survivor Advocate Program located in the county of the study informed possible respondents about the study.

• A local professor told women who participated in her study about the research.

• Index-like cards with information provided in the recruiting poster were routinely placed on top of newspaper boxes inside stores and on sidewalks in the county of the research.

Women interested in participating in the study were asked to call the above cellular phone numbers 24 hours a day. The cellular phones were carried by two female research assistants who told callers the purpose of the study and then asked a series of screen questions to determine eligibility to be interviewed. There were two main criteria for eligible participation: (1) the callers must be 18 years of age or older and (2) have experienced any type of unwanted sexual
experience when they wanted to end, were trying to end, or have ended a relationship with a husband or live-in male partner. If these criteria were met, the women were then invited to a semi-structured face-to-face interview at a time and place of their choosing. They were paid $25.00 for their time and up to $7.75 for travel expenses. Six interviews were conducted over the phone, five were held off-campus, and the rest were done in a university office.

The interviews lasted about 1-1/2 to 2 hours. All interviews were conducted by female research assistants specially trained in interviewing techniques. At the beginning of all interviews, the participants were once again told the purposes of the study and asked to sign a consent form. They were then reminded that the interview would be kept completely confidential and if they choose to do so can terminate the interview at any time. Likewise, participants are told they do not have to answer any of the questions included in the interview schedule. Throughout the interview and when the interview was completed, respondents were asked whether they had any questions for the interviewer either about the study or about anything they felt important. After the interview, the women were paid for their time, given information about the research team, were invited to contact members of the team with questions or concerns, and given small index cards containing contact information for social support providers in the area.
As stated, this research was interested in domestic violence/sexual assault for those who were wanting to, trying to, or leaving an abusive partner. The study also expanded on male peer support theory, or “attachments to male peers and the resources they provide which encourage and legitimate woman abuse” (DeKeseredy, 1990, p. 130), by looking at how male peer networks operate in rural Appalachian communities and how male peer support contributes to unwanted sexual assaults at the end of relationships. Of interest to this study, is the focus on the role of rural communities in aggravating domestic violence and sexual assaults. The interview schedule itself included only a few questions aimed at the community level, questions that are particularly important to the current study. These questions included things such as:

- How much of a problem do you think crime is in your community?
- Do you think rape or sexual assault is a big problem, in your community, or some problem, or almost no problem?
- How often do you get together with friends in your community in a typical week?
- How often do you get together with your neighbors?
- Can you count on friends in your community to help you with personal problems?
- Can you count on your neighbors to help you with personal problems?
- Who did you turn to for help? Who gave you the best help? Worst help?
- How can other types of social supports, such as counselors or shelters be more helpful?
- How can the criminal justice system be more helpful to survivors of unwanted sex during and after divorce or separation?

What is most striking about the interviews is that participants invoked notions of community throughout their conversations, even when not prompted to do so. The stories of these women, then, are a useful guide to a richer understanding of the role of community in women’s experiences with intimate partner violence.

In order to explore women’s views of rural community and rural domestic violence/sexual assault, this study employs grounded theory. A grounded method allows the data to speak for themselves, whereby the researcher looks to the data for theoretical understanding instead of looking to the data to see whether it fits a certain theoretical approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In other words, the researcher approaches the data without hypotheses instead allowing the concepts and themes to emerge from the women’s narratives and only then generating theoretical paradigms.

Prior to beginning this thesis, I worked on the initial study of domestic violence/sexual assaults in rural Appalachia. I was involved in the coding and analysis of this data. This allowed me to gain great familiarity with the interview transcripts by reading and rereading them several times for the initial coding. During my graduate assistantship on this project, I made rough notes, outlines, tables and diagrams containing phrases or words to capture the women’s answers to each question. This allowed me to go back later and reflect on what
was transpiring in the data. In other words, I approached the voices of these women and allowed their words to generate meaning for me.

After I identified primary concepts and themes running across all of the “living conversations” (Kvale, 1996) I went back to the women’s voices and pulled what Kirby and McKenna (1989) call bibbits (p 135). In this sense, bibbits are passages from the conversations, sometimes as long as two pages and other times only a couple of sentences, that contain possible themes or concepts that I could later categorize along with other bibbits with similar properties (Grant, 2005). Once my categories contained enough information to allow me to make sense of the data I was then able to develop a substantive theory to help describe and explain my research focus (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Grant, 2005).

Throughout the analysis I kept a primary question in mind: “How does community affect women's experiences with domestic violence?” The following discussion highlights the data analysis process.

In order to make the data more manageable I followed a process used by Judith Grant (2005) in her dissertation on women’s addiction and recovery. First, participant’s answers to each question were cut out and put into piles. This was repeated until all of the survivor’s answers were placed under the relevant research question. I then went through each pile, pulling passages that contained bibbits. In order to identify the bibbits I oriented myself towards my research focus, namely discussions of community, which may include survivor's talk of neighbors, friends, police departments, shelters, etc. Thus, community became one category that bibbits were placed within.
I also found that when discussing community survivors would talk about stranger crime and domestic violence in very different ways. For instance, when asked whether crime was a big problem in their community participants would often respond “No.” Yet when asked whether sexual assaults were a big problem in their community respondents would often say “Yes.” This led to the development of two more categories containing survivor’s perceptions and the community’s perceptions of both stranger crime and domestic violence. I continued this process until all bibbits had relevant categories and the categories contained enough bibbits to make sense of the data.

After the analysis, I returned to the literature and began a review of the relevant literature. The characteristics and the theoretical understanding that emerged from the women’s data illustrated the lack of collective efficacy for battered women in rural areas. Unlike stranger crime, where collective efficacy may have positive effects, the women’s discussion of community suggested that collective efficacy may have the opposite outcome for woman abuse. I also linked the women’s voices to a broader literature that exemplifies how theoretical traditions such as collective efficacy and in some sense the discourse of criminology itself has blurred and concealed the voices of battered women in rural communities.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have outlined my method for this study, namely grounded theory. I have given an overview of the research questions of interest to the present study and provided background information concerning the initial
research of abused women in rural Appalachia. I have presented the data collection techniques as well as the sampling method, interview process, interview schedule and participant demographics. The way in which the data were analyzed was also discussed. In the following chapter, the findings will be presented along with a brief discussion.
4. FINDINGS

A findings section can be many different things. For some, it may be a chapter to provide lots of tables, graphs or statistics. For others, it can be an opportunity to give voice to those participating in your research by using their own words instead of substituting numbers for their experiences. It is the latter of these this study finds most apt for qualitative research. As Kirby & McKenna (1989) suggest, a findings section should be the space in a paper where the “voices of participants are given priority” (p 156). It should be here where their words do the talking, instead of a series of numbers or charts that speak for them. Thus, the findings section of this thesis is an opportunity for the voices of these women to finally be heard. While I will present some statistics to provide an overall picture, they will be used sparingly. Instead, by utilizing the language and conversations of these women, I hope to provide a rich description and illustration of their experiences as battered women in rural Appalachian communities.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a thematic analysis of the conversations and lived experiences of 43 survivors of domestic violence/sexual assault. It is an attempt to better understand the role of friends, neighbors, community and society in the daily lives of these women during periods of abuse. In reading, analyzing and working with their narratives, dominant themes began to emerge, ones that were consistent among most of the 43 accounts. These women told stories of extreme control, social exclusion and isolation, forced upon them by their batterers. Most
were not allowed to engage, participate, or even afforded the opportunity to get to know other community members. Their stories will not only describe how their batterers forced them into solitude, but also how their communities and a larger society participated in their exclusion from social life as well.

This chapter will discuss four distinct components of rural battered women’s experiences in order to underscore the web of problems that traps many women in cycles of violence. First, I will consider persuasive control as a tactic of domination often used by the survivors’ abusers in order to isolate and exclude them from their community. Second, I will examine the role of survivors’ friends and neighbors in an attempt to better understand the role of collective efficacy or, more appropriately, the lack thereof in the daily lives of these women during periods of abuse. Third, I will look at the role of the community and, more specifically, community intervention to better understand its part in rejecting battered women from being part of a larger group identity. And, finally, I will broaden our discussion to that of social exclusion and the role we as a culture play in excluding rural abused women (and domestic violence victims in general) from active and legitimate participation in social life.

**PERSUASIVE CONTROL**

While this exploratory study is the first known attempt to look at the role of collective efficacy for victims of rural domestic violence, the limited literature that does exist on rural woman abuse consistently points to the extreme physical isolation experienced by battered women (Websdale, 1998). Gagne’s (1992)
study on the violence and social control of rural Appalachian women resonates clearly with the experiences of the women in this study.

In an attempt to expand the definition of domestic violence, Gagne illustrates how abusers often attempt to control their partners by convincing them “to do things against their will or preventing them from doing the things they wish” (p 398). Gagne coined the term persuasive control to highlight the nonphysical forms of violence that many battered women experience. Persuasive control, in this sense, are attempts by batterers to isolate their partners from the community through various nonphysical means such as verbal coercion, withholding transportation, controlling the finances or by not allowing them to have their own friends. Carol, for example, spoke of how her batterer tried to prevent her from socializing with friends and neighbors by convincing her that her isolation was actually a show of her love for him:

Well, he thought that he was all I needed. Since he was going to fix me, that uh, that I should be grateful for that and I shouldn’t want anyone else. You know a measure of love was that I could get all my needs met from him.

Persuasive control is often facilitated and exacerbated through geographic isolation. This is often a purposeful tactic used by batterers to gain more control over their wives or girlfriends, by relocating from a town or city into the countryside where populations are sparse (Gram, 2000). Geographic isolation makes it difficult for women to have friendships or even be independent in areas

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3 All names used in this study are pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the survivors
where the nearest grocery store or even the closest neighbor might be 15 or 20 minutes away. Jennifer, a 42 year old single mother, underscores the seclusion of living in a rural community:

The place where we lived at the time, was pretty rural, and um, the, I mean I talked to the neighbor that lived right beside us, maybe, I don’t know, not very often. Once every couple of weeks. And the people across the street, I hardly ever talked to them. It was quite a distance between the place where we lived and other homes.

Geographic isolation, however, is only one form of persuasive control employed by abusers. Becca, for instance, often found herself staying home instead of going out with friends; deferring to the wishes of her jealous partner:

Um he was a very jealous, controlling type person and I…I didn’t do it when I was with him, but when I wasn’t with him I had a lot of friends and was social and got together with people at least a few times a week when I wasn’t working and taking care of my little girl at the time

Cheryl, a single mother with three children, offered a similar account. Illustrating how her batterer’s extreme jealousy prevented her from socializing with neighbors:

I…I wasn’t allowed to go anywhere or you know if I went somewhere I had to be back at a certain time you know I mean even to the grocery store, so with neighbors it was just like maybe once or twice a week I’d see somebody and I’d say “hi” you know and that was about it.
Persuasive control can also take the form of controlling the finances. For example, Susan, a 49 year old women from a small farming town, told the story of a conversation she had with another abused woman in her community over whether they could ever leave their batterers:

And you know it, well one lady in particular, I went and done some wallpapering for her. And she’s in her 80s and she was talking to me and of course her and her husband know my husband real well and she says, “Susan, let me tell you,” she says, “if you can get out, get out. You’re still young enough.” She says, “I’m setting here waiting to die.” She says, “I’m too old to get out,” and she says she takes abuses everyday. And I said, “You don’t have to do that.” And she says, “What am I gonna do?” And these are, these are farming people, you know this community is a farming community. And the way the things are set up with farming and stuff like that, you have no money, access to money. You have nothing. And you know if a woman wants out, she has to have plenty of money hid someplace ‘cause she’s not gonna get no help in this county. I don’t know how it is in other counties, but this county you don’t. It’s a, it’s a disgrace.

Persuasive control can take the form of withholding transportation as well. Jessica argued that her isolation was because, “I didn’t have a car. I wasn’t allowed to go anywhere.” Other women spoke of relocating to be closer to their batterer’s family, while moving further from theirs, a form of persuasive control where the batterers attempt to permanently isolate their partners from friends and even family members. Mandy spoke of getting together with her neighbors, but
acknowledged the difficulty of the situation and lack of support she received because “the neighbors were his relatives, so they was on his side.” Autumn’s batterer also isolated and controlled her by forcing her to have the same group of friends as he did: “Um, my, see the thing is he was one of those guys that was really controlling so it was like my friends were his friends...”

What is particularly important about persuasive control, especially in the context of the current study, is that violence within the home can manifest itself in many ways, physical violence being only one. Further, the tactics of persuasive control employed by the survivors’ batterers are designed specifically to either prevent them from participation within the community or to keep a close watch on who they are socializing with. Persuasive control, then, is meant to impede directly upon social activity in a way that often makes it difficult for women to realize they are being controlled. As Mandy put it, “It’s a brainwashing thing; it really is, it’s like a control. You don’t even know you’re being controlled.”

**COLLECTIVE EFFICACY**

A central concern to this study was the role of collective efficacy in experiences with domestic violence. Again, collective efficacy is understood as the “social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” that aids in lowering crime rates through the use of informal social controls by members in a community (Sampson & Roudebusch, 1997, emphasis added). Collective efficacy, in this sense, is viewed as having a negative effect on stranger crime, whereby
communities with high levels of collective efficacy generally show low levels of crime.

An essential aspect of communities with high amounts of collective efficacy is that community members visit or see each other regularly. In addition, not only are there high levels of interaction with and amongst residents, but there is also a working trust between members, whereby one could count on friends or neighbors in the community to help out with problems. This combined with their willingness to intervene in informal crime control creates a community that has high levels of collective efficacy and, in turn, low levels of street crime.

As discussed in Chapter 2, sociological discussions on the importance of community in rural crime rates can be traced all the way back to Tonnies’ (1940) discussion of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft or Durkheim’s (1964) work on mechanical societies, whereby small towns are generally viewed as communities that exhibit strong social attachments between members and, thus, are better able to regulate their citizens through informal social controls. Present day research such as Kowalski & Duffield’s (1990) study on homicide rates supports these paradigms, finding that less communal areas, such as large cities, have higher rates of homicide than rural areas. Thus, low stranger crime rates within rural communities are often attributed to either high-levels of collective efficacy, social cohesion, strong social attachments, or a collective consciousness.

The questions that arise within each of these paradigms and, in particular, collective efficacy, are whether all types of violence, both family violence and stranger violence, are actually diminished in communities where ‘everybody
knows everybody’ and, furthermore, how do informal controls or community intervention that appear to lower crime rates operate within these communities? As discussed in Chapter 2, family violence rates within rural areas are similar to or exceed that of urban cities, suggesting that collective efficacy does not apply to all types of violence. Further, the findings of this study suggest that the mechanisms necessary for communities or individuals to experience collective efficacy do not exist for rural victims of domestic violence, making it particularly difficult to leave abusive relationships.

For instance, persuasive control, discussed in the previous section, is one way a batterer will attempt to isolate his partner from friends, family and neighbors in the community. Often, batterers will force separation between the friends and family of their partners, so that eventually the only interactions abused women have with other community members is when transporting their children to and from events (Gagne, 1992). As Carrie confirmed she never had a chance to interact with her community because “he didn’t allow me to socialize at all. My place was at home with the children and that’s where I was most of the time. The only thing I went out for was if they had a parent-teacher conference at school.” Similarly, several other women in this study also experienced forced isolation and 67% rarely had contact with neighbors, rendering an essential component of collective efficacy nearly impossible for these women.

Although the majority of the women were forced into seclusion, 55% said they did interact with friends and 30% said they got together with their neighbors. However this interaction was often infrequent and, as one survivor mentioned,
“we wave to each other a couple of times a week.” For the most part, a quick “Hi” or a wave from across the yard was often the only interaction many women would have with the people that lived next door. The majority of these survivors were forced into isolation from their community.

Another essential aspect of collective efficacy is the willingness of people to intervene on behalf of the common good. For the survivors in this study, however, intervention by their neighbors rarely, if ever, occurred. Jessica offered a terrifying account of how her neighbors stood by and watched her “get a beating”:

There was too many of them that stood out of their home and it was really aggravating, really aggravating when, I mean, it took my son to beg for my life. But, here is neighbors out here, seeing this man beat this female, off to the swing set, beating her with his fist, kicking her with his feet, grabbing her by the hair of her head, smearing her face and what…you’re gonna stand up there and you aren’t going to call the law? Or you are going to stand up there and you aren’t going to come down? …. Yeah, we lived in the country. It was probably about, if you walked it, 15 or 20 minutes up the hill before you got to their house. But, they could see clearly to us. And they was outside standing one day and he was just thumping me so hard, so hard. And nobody called the law, nobody did, nobody came down to yank him off of me. Nobody did anything. But, I had the pictures. I had the pictures of the bruises. The pictures of where he caught the house on fire. I had the pictures where he had the marks around my neck trying to kill me.
But, the worst of all was how my kids had seen it all. And, that is what is really sad.

Other women told similar stories of the unwillingness of people within the community to intervene in domestic violence situations. Put simply, “nobody wants involved honey.” Sandy repeated this same sentiment, “No most of ‘em didn’t want to get involved.” Jessica discussed the withdrawal by her friends and neighbors in the community because of the abuse:

... They didn’t like coming around because they know that I would have to get my butt whipped and they...a lot of times people don’t like stepping in, so we never get coming company, knowing that you have a violent husband....

Mandy also highlights the problem of community backlash many survivors of intimate violence experience:

I don’t know what happened really that’s why I’m doing a lot of reading, talking to people. I need to learn why this happened. Why did I get with him and not see it and everybody else around me saw it, you know which even I lost two jobs being with him because people don’t want to get involved or they don’t want to see that. And if you walk around with black and blue marks under your eyes, nobody wants to see that and then they just judge you.

For Corrine, intervention by neighbors or friends into family matters was inconceivable. While she conceded that, “I mean I guess if I had a flat tire or something like that I could go over and ask them if they could help me but…” She
realized asking to intervene within the home was simply too much, “I don't think you know, if it was like a real deep personal issue or something like that, no.” The privacy of the home Corrine alludes to speaks significantly to the stereotypical gender roles often found in rural areas (Little, 2003). For instance, there is often a communal acceptance of male authority and conversely, women’s subordination, within rural towns. This makes it difficult for women to ask others to intervene and ultimately question the behaviors of their husbands or partners in a community that supports, legitimates, and values male dominance (Lewis, 2003). The patriarchal structure of the community then limits the choices a woman has in seeking help. For Corrine, and many others, assistance for something inconsequential like a flat tire does not threaten the accepted patriarchal ideals that exist within her community, whereas intervention into home matters threatens and questions patriarchy itself.

Yet for the majority of women, intervention by community members was unthinkable because as Brittany emphatically stated, “They didn’t even know that I had any [problems].” Their abuse was something that was not talked about with anyone. It was kept quiet, hidden behind closed doors. In Emily’s case, her abuser literally forced her to keep the violence a secret:

Um, I’d be screaming and he would literally put his hands over my mouth because he didn’t want his neighbors to know that we were either arguing or fighting and, uh, he got his neighbors believing that it was me...all my fault.
Mandy’s batterer also tried to prevent the abuse from becoming public:

Um I was only allowed to be around people at work basically. He kept me pretty much to himself. I, like, he even put a stop there for a while, my daughter I get her for visitation every other weekend, she wasn’t even allowed to come and visit at certain times. But I had black and blue marks on me so you know he didn’t want somebody to see that.

But others, like Liz, a 24 year old woman who was raped when trying to leave her husband, argued that she kept the abuse silent for fear of not being believed:

I never mentioned the sexual assault. The first person I ever told was my current husband. Other than that, I don’t know. I guess I just believed that, ah, that who was going to believe me that my husband raped me?

Similarly, Marie stated, “I didn’t want to tell anybody, you know anybody about what had happened. Because I felt like no one would believe me, ‘cause we were, you know, we were married. So, I didn’t think anyone would believe me….” These sentiments expressed by the women in this study are also resounding within the literature on domestic violence. Grama’s (2000) study of rural victims of violence depicts the shame and social humiliation experienced by abused women, arguing that it is at one and the same time the isolation and secrecy of the situation combined with the lack of anonymity in rural communities that “only heightens an already difficult situation for the domestic violence victim” (p 177). Thus, for the rural survivors in this study, it is this deadly combination of extreme isolation and fears of not being believed that render collective efficacy
completely useless; these victims are excluded from even the possibility of being part of a community.

The irony of rural domestic violence is that while abused women experience severe forms of solitude and seclusion they also lack anonymity within their communities. Websdale (1998), Grama (2000), Gagne (1992), DeKeseredy & Joseph (2005), DeKeseredy, Schwartz, Fagen & Hall (2005) and other researchers of rural woman abuse consistently point to problems surrounding confidentiality for abused women within small towns. For instance, Meghan refused to tell anyone about her abuse for fear it would get back to her abuser:

But, um, I was at, while this situation was going on I was too afraid to say anything to anybody because I was afraid it would get back to him. And then after it all happened, the, I, I didn’t want to talk to anybody. I didn’t want to hear what anybody had to say.

Susan also kept quiet about her abuse for fear of stigmas being attached to her family or children: “A lot of women won’t say anything especially if they have small kids, or just like my friend they've got a business in the community, they don't want to be embarrassed or humiliated.” Similarly, Lisa told us that she refuses to date anyone from the small community she is from because of the embarrassment that comes from being in an abusive relationship in a rural area:

Like I won’t go out with anybody from [the town] now. I don’t like to go out in [the town] or to the [nearby town] or anything because I don’t know who
has seen that, who saw everything that he did to me when I couldn’t get out of the restraints that he had me in. (Crying)

Only 16% of the women in this study believed they could count on neighbors in their community to help out with personal problems. Several reiterated the above experiences of community backlash and denial when trying to seek help, while others repeated the notions of the home as a space of privacy that the community refuses to intervene within. Still others discussed fears of not being believed or the shame and humiliation that comes from being an abused woman in a small town that prevented them from actively seeking help from other community members. Collective efficacy, then, was nonexistent for these women. While collective efficacy may be helpful in explaining stranger crime rates, it does not appear to operate in the same manner for family violence, at least not for the abused women in this study.

COMMUNITY INTERVENTION

Although there is a paucity of information concerning community-based intervention for rural battered women, most social scientists still point to the necessity of strong community supports for women trying to leave abusive relationships (Van Hightower & Gorton, 2002). In the limited literature that exists on rural domestic violence, however, it consistently points to the often unavailable and inadequate resources for abused women in rural areas, making it extremely difficult for women to escape violence (DeKeseredy & Joseph, 2005; DeKeseredy et al., 2005; Van Hightower & Gorton, 2002; Websdale, 1998). Community intervention, in this sense, is different than the above discussion on
collective efficacy because it is not necessarily concerned with neighbor involvement, but rather with larger social supports such as the police, shelters, and welfare that can help provide battered women with professional intervention and support.

Historically, though, social supports such as the criminal justice system have a very poor record in adequately responding to domestic violence situations (Weisheit & Wells, 1996). Stanko (1989) discusses the lack of police intervention many abused women receive and the failure of officers to arrest the batterers and remove them from the home. Further, Stanko also illustrates how a domestic violence charge carries very little weight compared to other offenses. Often, the batterer is only charged with a misdemeanor and usually punished with a small fine. The laissez-faire treatment of woman abuse by the justice system affirms and justifies a patriarchal state that does not see intimate violence as criminal (Walby, 1989).

The narratives in this study also reflect the exclusion at the hands of the justice system, revealing its failure to adequately intervene in their abuse. Sandy told of the trouble she had when calling for help during an assault:

If you call 911 and try to explain this to a police officer, their jaw’s going opening up like, “You’re calling me over a sex offense?!” And, I mean when I did it to the girls’ dad, their suggestion was do it out in the county not in the city. We don’t have time to fool with you. And that’s a poor way for police departments to act when you’re being violated. You know,
they’re telling you go out in the county and let the sheriff’s department deal with you, ‘cause city police don’t want to deal with you guys.

Further, Kathy discussed how the police officers that responded to several of her 911 calls were more empathetic towards the abuser than they were towards her: “They have this whole attitude that they never give up, so that when they respond to a woman, they’re apologizing to him as they lead him away.”

Pam was also concerned about telling anyone in her community about the abuse but, in particular, the local police officers because “well…this is a rural area and all the cops know everybody and they’re all family and they’re very redneckish.” Researchers such as Gagne (1992) and Websdale (1995) suggest that many rural police departments consist of “ol’ boys networks” that makes it very difficult for women to rely on them for protection. Additionally, these studies also point to accepted patriarchal ideals within rural communities where even the police officers value a man’s dominance over his wife or partner.

Social supports such as shelters, aimed at giving women a safe place to stay, are also very ineffective and inadequate within rural communities. The issues surrounding persuasive control and collective efficacy discussed earlier impact the effectiveness of domestic violence advocacy programs or shelters. Some of these factors include, geographic isolation, lack of transportation, lack of domestic violence programs or shelters in general, and perhaps the most troubling, lack of anonymity within rural communities. As Grama (2000) suggests, rural shelters are rarely effective and rarely safe for women trying to escape abuse. Often, if there even is one, there is only one home designated as a “safe
home” and many in the community, including the batterers, know exactly where it is. Indeed, Emily was insistent that the shelter in her rural community needed to be more secure, “a facility where no one can get in” and much more confidential because “everybody knows where it’s at, they’ve had to relocate it like 2 or 3 times.” Even still, “they can find out very easily just by, you know, word of mouth.” Thus, safe houses within rural communities might be more dangerous to turn to not only for the abused woman, but also for the staff, volunteers and other residents of the shelter.

A shelter designed to provide intervention for women trying to escape abuse is only a temporary safe house, one that as I discussed faces many problems. Eventually, women and, in many cases, their children must leave and try to establish “a normal life.” However, as Brittany discussed, trying to go “back to your normal life” after living in a shelter is often very difficult when you have no job, no money, no place to live and no advocacy programs to help:

They have all of these subsidized housing developments all over the country, you know, but it’s hard to get in as a woman because they want a single woman with children especially. They want income verification. They want employment history. They want deposits that women in my situation at least didn’t have. So there’s no place to go so you have to go back home to the guy because usually he’s taken all your money, mine always took mine, he even took my son’s savings, we didn’t even know. So make it possible for a woman who has literally nothing but the clothes on her
back and an interest in protecting herself and her children, make it possible for them to have somewhere to go that has a door with a lock…

As Brittany observes, programs like welfare or subsidized housing, that might at least give abused women a chance at escaping the abuse, are full of “confusing requirements and complicated procedures” that make it difficult for women to use (Hays, 2003). As she goes on to argue, the Personal Work and Responsibility Act or the welfare reform act is a combination of “rules, values, and concerns” that have complicated more than benefited the lives of poor mothers. And, as Brittany realizes the failure of these programs gives many women no other choice but to go back to their batterers.

Whether we consider persuasive control, lack of collective efficacy or community intervention into domestic violence, we are discussing battered women’s exclusion from social life on two different levels. On one level there is the individual, the abuser himself, who purposely isolates and controls his partner through her exclusion from society. But on the second level is the community, acting in various ways to exclude battered women from being part of a larger communal life, perhaps due to shared values held by the residents concerning marriage, domestic life or the privacy of the home. Still, there is a larger, cultural force of exclusion at play here as well that can be expanded from the community level to the broader society.

**SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

Social exclusion, or the role of culture in excluding battered women from participation in social life, is relevant to the discussion of collective efficacy. In
some sense, collective efficacy appears to be a privilege afforded to only
certain members or groups in society, those that have the supports and statuses
necessary to be welcomed by their community. If this is true, then it is important
to understand society’s role in the way woman abuse is articulated, understood
and experienced by both individuals and communities. It is to this we now turn.

There are no official measures\(^4\) of the extent of violence against women in
the United States (Jones, 1994; DeKeseredy, Rognness & Schwartz, 2004). The
Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) that gathers police data on the most serious\(^5\)
crimes (i.e., robbery, rape, murder, etc) does not include a category for domestic
violence. Thus, at least officially, it is unclear exactly how much intimate partner
violence occurs each year.

Although there is not a specific domestic violence category in the UCR, it
does measure for crimes such as rape, aggravated assault, and murder. Thus,
domestic violence is measured only in that it is grouped into one of the above
categories. Unfortunately, lumping domestic violence crimes in general
categories does not provide a clear picture as to that violence which is random or

\(^4\) In the 1980’s, the Bureau of Justice Statistics began a program called the National Incident
Based Reporting System (NIBRS) in an attempt to expand the information contained in the
Uniform Crime Reports (Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.). The NIBRS does pay attention to
domestic violence and the relationship between victim and offender. However, according to one
researcher, “only three states have implemented NIBRS statewide, though jurisdictions in 19
states are using this data collection model” (Melbv, 2004, p 1). Further, “only three cities with
populations over 500,000 use NIBRS” (Melbv, 2004, p 1). Thus, NIBRS is not widely used and
probably not given too much attention. For the purposes of this study, then, the UCR’s are
considered as the most widely used official measurement of crime and the most popular source
of crime statistics in the United States today.

\(^5\) In the 1930’s, the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) were developed as a way to measure crime in
America. Built upon recommendations made by the International Association of Chiefs of Police
(IACP), the original UCR’s contained a crime index of what was considered to be the major or
most serious crimes in America (Schmalleger, 2004). The seven offenses included: murder,
forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. In
1979 an eighth category, arson, was added to the crime index.
committed by strangers and that which is committed within the family. In other words, the UCR does not pay attention to the relationship between victim and offender. It is not too difficult to believe, then, that when UCR statistics are cited, quoted, or discussed in any manner that most people associate that data as referring to stranger crime. How would our picture of crime change if the relationship between victim and offender were more clearly articulated? Further, what impact does our current measurement and image of crime have on domestic violence and its’ victims?

Although one could argue that generally domestic violence crimes are contained in categories within the UCR, it does not include all types of violence against women. Specifically, the UCR does not take into account violence that often takes nonphysical forms, such as persuasive control, that can be just as detrimental and incapacitating to its victims as physical violence. This lack of specific information concerning domestic violence statistics is of course itself very concerning, but what is perhaps more problematic is the exclusion of domestic violence and its many forms from an official source that claims to measure the most serious crime in the United States. If woman abuse is not considered a crime or at least not a serious crime how does that impact women's experiences at both the individual and community level?

This cultural theme, that domestic violence is “no big deal” or at least not considered on the same level as say stranger crime, was very apparent in the women’s accounts. For instance, when asked whether crime was a “big problem” within their communities 63% of the women stated that their community had very
low levels of crime. Yet 81% of these women would also later respond that they believed rape and sexual assaults within their communities were a “huge” problem, illustrating that they do not associate crime and sexual assaults as one and the same thing. Instead, rape/sexual assault becomes a separate category, which these women definitely view as problematic, but still do not associate as a crime. For example, Tiffany stated that crime within her community was not a problem, but later when asked about rape/sexual assaults responded that it was “huge, absolutely, one of the biggest problems in our society today.” Autumn also told us, “I feel completely safe.” She believed crime was very low within her community, but later would say that rape/sexual assault was a problem and, in fact, “I think…almost every woman will probably be in some way.” Thus, even though Autumn believed that probably every woman would be sexually assaulted at some point in her lifetime, she did not associate it as being criminal.

25% of the women, however, were unable to answer whether unwanted sex, rape/sexual assault was a big problem in both their community and society, because they simply did not hear about it. For instance, Stephanie said, “It could be a big problem, of course, somewhat now I guess. I don’t really hear about anything from other people.” Brittany also could not answer the question because:

…no one ever talks about it. I didn’t, when I was in the relationship, I didn’t even think about it. I didn’t know you were allowed to say no. I knew I didn’t want certain things to happen, at least not at certain times, but I
didn’t know I had a choice. And I’m a pretty smart person; it just was not in my social upbringing.

Over the last thirty years domestic violence has received massive attention both in public and academic circles and is now considered to be an epidemic in American society (Hilbert & Krishnan, 2000). Yet the survivor’s accounts of not hearing about other battered women, not knowing whether their reality existed for others indicates the normalization of domestic violence in the United States today. In other words, perhaps the reason many of these women have never heard about other survivors is because violence against women is considered acceptable or, at least, normal. This is evident in the survivors’ accounts in the previous section illustrating how intimate violence is made both invisible and acceptable through the lack of neighbor intervention into woman abuse.

The normalization of abuse is also apparent when the women discuss their batterers’ and their batterers’ friends. Several studies indicate that violence against women is legitimated and perpetuated at least, in part, by an abuser’s male peers (DeKeseredy et al., 2005; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1997; DeKeseredy & Joseph, 2005). Attachments to a group of men that also engage in the degradation and violence of women helps normalize abusive behaviors for both the abuser and his victim. In this study, 67% of the women discussed the role their batterers’ friendships played in perpetuating the abuse. Consider the following account:
Well, him and his friend got me so wasted. They took turns with me and I remembered most of it, but, um, there was also drugs involved where not as much on my behalf as theirs. I was just drunk. And I did remember most of it and the next morning I woke up feeling so dirty and so degraded and then it ended up getting around that I was the slut…And in my eyes that was rape due to the fact that I was so drunk. And I definitely didn’t deserve that. And I was hurting. I was hurting the next day.

Friends of the abuser also normalized the abuse by attempting to shift blame from the batterer onto the victim: ‘Cause he…he thought it was okay for Jim to do it and I just wonder why he would think that. He would say, “Well it’s your own fault, “ stuff like that.” Other times it was the batterer that would blame the women for engaging in forced sex with his friends:

He ended up bringing someone into the relationship, which I didn’t want, but he told me that if I didn’t do it he would leave me. And I ended up staying with him. He was more into group sex and, and uh trying to be the big man. He wanted sex as a group thing or with his buddies or made me have sex with a friend of his. See one time he made me have sex with a friend of his for him to watch, and then he got mad and hit me afterwards. I mean he tied me up so I could watch him have sex with a 13-year-old girl. And then he ended up going to prison for it. So, I mean it was nasty.
Still, other women spoke of the normalization of abuse and degradation of women on a much broader scale, pointing to the patriarchal society as legitimating the abuse. Tiffany explained how violence against women was accepted by society:

Um, I think that our society, um, that, um, this community that we live in and the society that we live in is, um, male dominated in general. And so, um, everything from our media to our family and peer experiences influences the way we, the way women view ourselves. I see many, many, many women submitting to men …submitting to what they, their men want them to be. I have had many, many discussions, over hundred, of two women, saying to me, my boyfriend wants to have sex, but I don’t want to have sex, but I am going to do it anyway to please him. And so, I consider that unwanted sex, because yes these women are consenting, but they don’t know any other out, they have no other option. And that is what I find sad. And there is so much peer influence … about being cool, about being heterosexual, you know?

Similarly, Carol tried to explain how social norms might be responsible for her sexual assaults and the difficulty she had in leaving the abuser:

So there might be some entitlement that the husband feels. The woman feeling that it’s easier to give in, especially for the kids. A lot of social norms I guess, social pressure to where the woman takes on a passive role sexually, it’s not a big deal, it’ll be over soon, that’s not addressing a solution other than a marriage counselor or someone that she goes to for
help could address that issue of where you’re going to be and how 
you’re gonna handle and come up with a plan.

Feminists have long argued that domestic violence is rooted in a 
widespread struggle over gender power and male dominance and control 
(Anderson, 1997). Feminist scholars contend that it is a series of societal 
structures, values, beliefs, and traditions that perpetuate male violence against 
women and maintain their authority and privilege. Though discussing the role of 
the patriarchal state in India, Ahmed-Ghosh (2004) illustrates how patriarchy is 
reflected in state-sanctioned values, traditions, and even laws. Ahmed-Ghosh 
(2004) asserts that it is the legitimation of male privilege and power by the state 
that not only reinforces violence against women, but also helps articulate and 
interpret the experiences of individuals by legitimizing woman abuse.

Further, when patriarchy is reflected in state laws it is important to ask 
what impact this has on individual and community notions of domestic violence. 
Take, for instance, a recent article from a newspaper in Ohio discussing Ohio’s 
new gay marriage amendment. The amendment, which denies legal status to all 
unmarried couples in the state of Ohio, is now being used to defend abusers 
against domestic violence charges. Defense attorneys are arguing that all 
domestic violence charges against unmarried clients must be dismissed because 
they are in violation of the new amendment for affording marriage-like legal 
status to unmarried victims of abuse (Kropko, 2005). One can only interpret the 
manipulation of laws like this as further normalizing woman abuse in America; 
only justifying male privilege, dominance and power. It is no wonder that Susan
was concerned about reporting any abuse for “fear of not being believed” and also for fear that the sexual assaults against her would be minimized and viewed as just a normal “extension of the relationship.”

Aside from state laws, culturally held beliefs and values can also influence the way women interpret their abuse. What was perhaps most striking about the women’s stories was how American beliefs surrounding individualism often controlled their decisions about whether or not to seek help. For instance, several women believed they could not turn to friends or neighbors for help with personal problems because it was not anybody’s responsibility but their own. As Lynn put it: “This person who moved in … I … you know I feel like I can talk to him, but solving no. I mean I think you have to solve your own problems for the most part. I don’t think anyone else can help you…” Lacey stated, “Um I could count on them to support my mind, but I couldn’t support on them for a ride or to help me in my situation. I found my own way. You know?” Cindy also believed that the only help she could ask from friends in the community would be emotional support: “Um, help me solve, I don’t know. I think solving my problems is up to me, but I certainly have them to support my thoughts and decisions.” The American dream of hard work, ownership and responsibility are frighteningly apparent in these accounts: Solve your own problems; take responsibility for your situations.

The way in which culture impedes social inclusion for battered women is important to understanding collective efficacy. When violence against women is normalized as part of a culture, it ultimately precludes legitimate participation in
social life at both the individual and community levels. Collective efficacy, then, 
cannot exist for abused women in a culture that permits their violence and 
degradation. Instead, they are excluded as individuals from both their community 
and a larger culture that refuses to acknowledge or recognize their realities. 
Whether it is the justice’s system lax treatment of domestic violence offenders or 
the variety of ways culture normalizes abuse, there is a backlash and denial of 
those battered women. Even the women themselves reinterpret their experiences 
in culturally acceptable ways that furthers their exclusion from the community. 
Thus, if collective efficacy or community intervention is ever to be a reality for 
battered women, we as a society need to change first. As Susan put it, the 
problem is a societal one “’cause it’s like we see it, but we don’t. It’s like three 
monkeys: don’t see, don’t hear, don’t speak.”

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Chapter 4 presented a thematic analysis of the narratives of 43 survivors 
of domestic violence/sexual assaults. The analysis was concerned with the webs 
of violence survivors’ experience during episodes of abuse. The analysis found 
that persuasive control, lack of collective efficacy, community intervention, and 
social exclusion exacerbate an already detrimental situation for rural abused 
women. These women experienced social exclusion on three different levels: 
individual, communal and cultural. The following chapter will present an overview 
of the significant findings of this thesis as well as discuss other findings that are 
more apt at capturing the experiences of rural abused women. The following 
chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research and public policy.
5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I offer an exploratory study of 43 rural, Appalachian women’s experiences with community during periods of domestic violence, centering on sexual assaults. Using a qualitative and grounded theory, I attempt to illustrate how community affects women’s experiences with abuse. I present these findings using the women’s words and personal perspectives. The data in this study were gathered using semi-structured interviews completed both in-person as well as over the telephone.

The research question addresses the relationship between collective efficacy and violence within the home. Collective efficacy posits that, generally, communities with lower crime rates can be characterized as socially cohesive and share a willingness to intervene on behalf of one’s neighbors. Although this perspective seems applicable to stranger crimes, the question of concern to this study was whether this paradigm is applicable to family violence as well. I argue that rural abused women do not have collective efficacy and, in fact, experience of web of obstacles when trying to leave their abusive partners. Overall, this thesis hopes to broaden the understanding about a group of people we know little about and to expand awareness about the cycles of violence that entrap many women.

In the preceding chapters, I have examined the role of collective efficacy in the experiences of abused women in rural communities by presenting both relevant literature in the area as well as the findings of my own study. In this chapter, I begin by giving an overview of the significant findings of this thesis. I
discuss collective efficacy, the principal aim of the current study, as well as additional findings that seem more apt at capturing the experiences of rural battered women rather than a simple explanation centered in the collective efficacy model. Then, I consider both the limitations and contributions of the study. Finally, I conclude by offering recommendations for future research and public policy in this area.

**OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS**

**COLLECTIVE EFFICACY**

Although previous studies on collective efficacy and domestic violence have found some correlation between rates of woman abuse and rates of collective efficacy, the findings of this study did not support this research (Browning, 2002; Van Wyk et al., 2003; DeKeseredy et al., 2003). For the women in this study, collective efficacy was nonexistent. Batterers attempts at isolating them and controlling their community interaction and various other forms of persuasive control impeded their opportunities to create ties with friends and neighbors in their communities. Many of the women lived “20 minutes away” from the nearest neighbor, while others rarely spoke with those that lived next door. These women were often kept in extreme social isolation and seclusion and most were severely controlled by their abusive partners, not allowing for the type of interaction necessary for collective efficacy to operate effectively.

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6 It should be noted that this was a very selective sample of women who self-identified as victims of assault.
Although many of these women were kept under close scrutiny and not allowed contact with other community members, the women insisted that many in the community still knew of their abuse. For instance, Jessica’s account, offered in the previous chapter, illustrates how her neighbors witnessed a particularly brutal beating and still “nobody called the law, nobody did, nobody came down to yank him off of me.” Jessica went on to discuss how her neighbors and friends “didn’t like coming around” to visit, because they might witness her “getting her butt-whipped.” These sentiments of lack of neighbor intervention and community withdrawal expressed by Jessica were similar to many of the stories the women in this study told. Most acknowledged that friends and neighbors knew about the abuse, but “didn’t want to get involved.” Others substantiated the community knowledge of the abuse, by conveying the difficulty of being an abused woman in a small town. Many women were embarrassed, ashamed, and humiliated that so many in their community witnessed or, at the very least, knew of the abuse.

Despite the fact that batterers sometimes made attempts at keeping the abuse hidden, such as in Mandy’s case when her batterer would literally cover her mouth so the neighbors could not hear her screams, the majority of the women in this study expressed both anger and embarrassment that their community knew of the abuse and yet did nothing. One would be hard-pressed to argue, then, that collective efficacy was absent for these women because the violence was hidden behind closed doors. While this may be true in some cases, such as Brittany’s who insisted her neighbors knew nothing of her problems, a large portion of the women’s abuse was made public whether it was through
beatings that took place outside of the home or the “black and blue marks” that many women were forced to endure publicly or yet still the boasting of the abuse by the batterers themselves.

The absence of collective efficacy for these rural Appalachian women may lie in the patriarchal culture that often exists within these communities. For instance, in Gagne’s (1992) study on abused Appalachian women, she points to the willingness of neighbors to assist each other in “emergency situations,” but when it came to matters in the home neighbor involvement was hindered due to strongly held values concerning the sanctity and privacy of the home. This was similar to the accounts of the women in this study who believed their neighbors would assist them with something like a “flat tire,” but if it involved a “real deep personal issue” that help would no longer be offered.

The privacy of the home is one example of the patriarchal ideology often found within rural homes. Stereotypical gender roles are strongly held in rural communities (Websdale, 1998). Men are typically viewed as the providers while the women tend to domestic chores such as child-rearing and housework. Further, male authority and dominance is generally accepted and revered within rural areas, while female subordination is expected and, sometimes, demanded (Lewis, 2003). These gendered power relations speak significantly to the privacy of the home many women in this study allude to. Intervention into home matters was unthinkable due to the communal acceptance of male authority within the household. Requesting help for something inconsequential like a flat tire does not threaten or question male dominance or patriarchy. Thus, in communities with
strong patriarchal structures women’s choices in seeking or getting help for domestic violence are severely limited.

Collective efficacy is not a particularly useful paradigm for explaining rates of domestic violence, at least not for the women in this study. While rural communities are generally viewed as socially cohesive and as exhibiting high levels of collective efficacy, the rates of family violence within these areas are often similar to or exceed that of urban areas (Lewis, 2003), illustrating that collective efficacy is not applicable to violence within the home as it may be for street violence. Furthermore, the lack of collective efficacy for the women in this study only aggravated their situation. In a rural area with few people to turn to and even fewer people willing to intervene, these women were often trapped in households of violence.

Perhaps, the collective efficacy paradigm must take into account patriarchy and the socio-cultural context of communities in order to more effectively study domestic violence. In the very few studies that exist on collective efficacy and domestic violence, the researchers did find a correlation between levels of domestic violence and levels of collective efficacy, seeming to suggest that within some communities collective efficacy may benefit domestic violence victims (Browning, 2002; Van Wyk et al., 2003; DeKeseredy et al., 2003). The question that needs addressing is exactly what do these communities look like? Indeed, Browning (2002) suggests that collective efficacy may only be applicable to domestic violence in communities where the tolerance for domestic violence is
low. Thus, future studies concerning the role of collective efficacy must take into account patriarchy and its role in exacerbating violence against women.

**FOUR-THEMED APPROACH TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

It seems that the only usefulness of collective efficacy for the women in this study was to illustrate why it was so difficult for many of them to escape abuse. In a community that was often willing to stand by and “watch a beating” instead of actively trying to stop it, it is no wonder that women like Susan often expressed feelings of hopelessness at their situation. However, in reading and working with their narratives, other themes began to emerge that suggested lack of neighbor involvement was not the only difficulty women have when thinking about or trying to leave abusive partners. In fact, throughout their conversations four themes surfaced that helped illustrate a web of obstacles women face in leaving abuse. Thus, while lack of collective efficacy is one hardship abused women may experience it is one of many. Instead, this section will consider a four-themed approach that is more apt at capturing the cycles of violence that ensnare many battered women.

*Theme 1: Persuasive Control*

Persuasive control, a term coined by Gagne (1992) to describe the various nonphysical forms of violence that abused women experience, was a theme found throughout a large portion of the women’s conversations. Persuasive control consists of attempts by batterers to control their partners by convincing them to “to do things against their will or preventing them from doing the things they wish” (p 398). As illustrated in the previous chapter, the women in this study
experienced several forms of persuasive control. Many found themselves without transportation, money or the ability to socialize with friends and neighbors. Carol discussed how her abuser convinced her that if she really loved him, she would not want or need to go out with her friends. This form of control is often made easier through geographic isolation, whereby the batterer relocates his partner to an area that is often far away from friends and family. This allows him to gain more control over her and makes it much more difficult for her to leave or for others to intervene.

What is frightening about nonphysical forms of violence such as persuasive control is that it is often very difficult for women to recognize it as abuse. As Mandy put it, "It's a brainwashing thing; it really is, it's like a control. You don't even know you're being controlled." This form of control is meant to impede directly upon social interaction; if a batterer can isolate his partner through verbal coercion it becomes that much more complicated for a woman to leave. Until recently, forms of violence that manifest itself in ways other than through physical contact have not been associated with domestic violence. Thus, as Mandy realizes, persuasive control is a very effective form of violence that manipulates women in a manner that is difficult to see.

Theme 2: Collective Efficacy

As discussed above, collective efficacy or the "social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good" was absent for the women in this study (Sampson & Roudebusch, 1997, emphasis added). 67% of the women stated they rarely had contact with
neighbors. Further, only 16% of the women believed they could count on their neighbors to help with personal problems. Thus, for these abused women, essential components of collective efficacy were both impossible and useless.

There is no doubt that, for the majority of the women, the communities they lived in were socially cohesive. Many women discussed their embarrassment at being an abused woman in a small town. Indeed, researchers such as Websdale (1998), Grama (2000), Gagne (1992), DeKeseredy & Joseph (2004), DeKeseredy et al., (2005) and many others have pointed to the irony of domestic violence in rural areas whereby women are at one and the same time severely isolated and secluded and yet lack anonymity within their communities. This social cohesiveness, a vital aspect of communities with high levels of collective efficacy, presented obstacles for the abused women in this study. Meghan discussed her fears of relaying her abuse to others out of concern that it would somehow get back to her abuser. Susan also refused to tell others of the abuse because of the stigmas often attached to battered women and their children in small communities. It seems, then, that along with persuasive control, collective efficacy and the lack thereof is yet another barrier abused women must confront when wanting to, trying to, or ultimately leaving their batterers.

Theme 3: Community Intervention

As I discuss the various ways women become entrapped within cycles of violence, it is important to recognize that abused women experience obstacles at a variety of societal levels. For instance, the first theme, persuasive control, was concerned with the way individuals, or the batterers themselves, effectively
prevent or, at the very least, make it difficult for women to escape abuse. The second theme, collective efficacy, also dealt with the ways neighbors and friends refuse to intervene or withdraw their assistance from battered women. Yet as suggested, patriarchal ideologies strongly held within rural communities may contribute to the unwillingness of community members to interfere with matters of the home. This insinuates that values, beliefs, and norms held at a larger level, specifically that of the community, also affect women’s chances in escaping abuse. The third theme, community intervention, is yet another obstacle faced by abused women. Community intervention, however, is not concerned so much with the actions of specific individuals, but rather with the response of larger social supports such as the police or shelters that can provide battered women with professional intervention. Specifically, it is dealing with the difficulties that present themselves to abused women at the communal level.

The criminal justice system, specifically the police, is one social support that many abused women turn to for professional intervention. Researchers such as Weisheit & Wells (1996), Stanko (1989), Walby (1989), Gagne (1992) and Websdale & Johnson (1997), however, all note the continual failure of the police both to provide adequate intervention for abused women and, in many cases, to take domestic violence seriously. Sandy, for example, told a story of the time she called the police for help after a beating. As soon as she told the 911 dispatcher what she was calling about she was told to call the Sheriff's department, “cause city police don’t want to deal with you guys.” Kathy was also furious with the
response of the police officers in her town when the police officers ended up “apologizing to him as they lead him away.”

Some women, like Pam, refused to call the police however out of fear of both the police and her abuser, because “this is a rural area and all the cops know everybody and they’re all family and they’re very redneckish.” These “ol’ boy networks”, that Pam alludes to, make up many rural police departments. Furthermore, police officers, like many others within small towns accept a man’s dominance over his partner or wife. Thus, patriarchal beliefs impact the way a police officer may respond to a domestic violence call.

Domestic violence advocacy programs, such as shelters, are another form of social support that is often ineffective and inadequate within rural communities. Persuasive control and collective efficacy concerns (geographic isolation, lack of transportation, etc) severely impact the success of shelters. Lack of anonymity, in particular, is very detrimental to how safe a shelter is for a battered woman trying to escape abuse. As Emily discussed, in a rural area people tend to find out the location of “safe houses” just by “word of mouth” and in her area it became so problematic they had to relocate the shelter “like 2 or 3 times.” Thus, shelters, for many women, are simply not a viable option to escape their batterers.

Welfare or subsidized housing, are other important social supports in helping women “get on their feet” again after leaving violent households with little or no possessions. Yet Brittany told of how complicating and confusing the rules and regulations were in trying to get subsidized housing and then she ended up not meeting the criteria anyway. Hays (2003) also discusses the failure of the
welfare system to adequately support single mothers. Often, the system ends up being more of a detriment than a benefit to poor women. As in Brittany’s case, the story usually ends with “no place to go, so you have to go back home to the guy.”

**Theme 4: Social Exclusion**

The fourth theme is concerned with social exclusion, or the role of culture in excluding battered women from active and legitimate participation in social life. I looked at the impact of individuals, such as the batterer or friends and neighbors, on battered women’s experiences in leaving violence. I also looked at the role of the community, specifically community supports, such as police, shelters or programs such as welfare that frequently play a negative role in the experiences of women wanting to, trying to, or leaving their abusive partners. Now, I will turn to the role of a broader society in excluding battered women from participation within it and how society itself aids in entrapping women in cycles of violence.

In the preceding chapter, I argued that the way in which crime is measured ends up obscuring violence against women. For instance, the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) does not pay attention to the relationship between victim and offender\(^7\), giving the impression that crimes such as rapes, assaults, and murders are committed by strangers rather than someone we might know and even love. Furthermore, the UCR that claims to measure the most serious crime

\[^7\text{As mentioned in a footnote in the preceding chapter, the National Incident Based Reporting System is a new program designed to expand the information contained in the UCR that does pay attention to the relationship between victim and offender. However, it is not as widely used or as popular as the UCR's.}\]
in the United States does not include a category for domestic violence and its many forms, including persuasive control or unwanted sex\(^8\), both of which can be equally as detrimental to women as violence. The question of concern to this study was how this impacts women's experiences with domestic violence.

The blurring of domestic violence within official measurements such as the UCR frequently creates a belief that "crimes" are those things committed by strangers. For instance, when the women were asked whether crime was a "big problem" within their communities 63% of the women stated that their community had very low levels of crime. Yet 81% of these women would also later respond that they believed rape and sexual assaults within their communities were a "huge" problem, illustrating that they do not associate crime and sexual assaults as one and the same thing, particularly when the perpetrator is a boyfriend or husband. Thus, our image of crime and the way it is discussed generally sans the relationship between victim and offender, certainly impacts how women reinterpret their experiences.

25% of the women, however, could not answer whether unwanted sex/rapes/sexual assaults were a problem because it was something they did not hear about or it was something they did not believe was criminal: "I didn’t know you were allowed to say no." The fact that a large portion of the women in this study were unaware if their reality existed for others indicates the normalization of domestic violence in the United States today. Indeed, studies looking at the

\(^8\) Unwanted sexual intercourse arises from verbal coercion, pressure, or the misuse of authority; "if you loved me you’d have sex with me" might be a phrase used to pressure a woman into having sex even if she did not want to. Rape, on the other hand, generally involves threats of violence, violence, or forced penetration.
role of batterers’ male peers in perpetuating woman abuse certainly suggests that the normalization of domestic violence aids in facilitating it (DeKeseredy et al, 2005; DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1997; DeKeseredy & Joseph, 2005). 67% of the women in this study also pointed to the role played by their abusers male friends in perpetuating the abuse.

Other women, like Tiffany, however, pointed to aspects of society as the reason why domestic violence is normalized:

Um, I think that our society, um, that, um, this community that we live in and the society that we live in is, um, male dominated in general. And so, um, everything from our media to our family and peer experiences influences the way we, the way women view ourselves.

Social institutions, social norms, patriarchal laws, beliefs and values were issues many women pointed to in contributing to their abuse and also in the lack of help they received when trying to leave. Ultimately, the role of culture impacts women’s experiences at both the individual and communal levels. Intervention, both by neighbors or larger social supports, will continue to either be nonexistent or at the very least ineffective in a culture that permits the violence and degradation of women. Even the women themselves reinterpreted their experiences in culturally acceptable ways. Thus, the role of culture affects the way communities, individuals, and batterers respond to violence within the home.

**A Four-Themed Approach vs. Collective Efficacy**

Women experience a variety of obstacles from a variety of social levels when wanting to, trying to, or leaving their abusive partners. While collective
efficacy or the lack thereof is certainly a factor in hindering the options a battered woman has, it is only one among many. For the women in this study, four obstacles seemed to impact their experiences the most: persuasive control, lack of collective efficacy, lack of community intervention, and social exclusion. To focus on only one of these obscures the reality of woman abuse and the web of violence that many women become tangled within. I have no doubt that this four-themed approach only captures a portion of the obstacles abused women face, but, at the very least, it provides a more complex picture of the reality of family violence and the difficulties women experience in escaping it.

LIMITATIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Although this study enhances our understanding of rural family violence/sexual assaults, future research is clearly necessary. Only 43 women participated in this study and, while this is still a significant amount considering the methodological obstacles discussed earlier, it is still premature to speculate too much about the significance of these findings. A representative sample of rural domestic violence survivors is needed in order to more clearly understand the role of community in the experiences of rural abused women. In addition, this thesis did not focus on rural abused women of color. The sample in this study was homogenous, consisting mainly of poor, Caucasian women. It is crucial then, that future research look at the role of race/ethnicity in domestic violence within rural areas. Certainly, race/ethnicity compounds the difficulties battered women face when trying to leave abusive relationships and presents, perhaps, a more dire situation for immigrant and minority women. Further, future research should
look at the ways in which other rural income groups may experience domestic violence differently than the poor women of this study.

Furthermore, as with any project, there are always methodological insufficiencies that need to be revised for a future study. For instance, future research should more specifically gear the interview schedule toward the four themes presented in this research in order to broaden our understanding of the ways these may operate for women trying to leave abusive homes. In addition, more work needs to be done on collective efficacy and looking at the social context of communities as an important factor in whether this paradigm will be effective for violence against women.

Nevertheless, this exploratory study has paved the way for future research in this area. While this research is only, perhaps, a stepping-stone to a larger study it has provided a clearer picture as to the role of community and culture in the experiences of domestic violence victims. Perhaps the most important contribution of this study, though, was its ability to act as a voice for abused women in rural Appalachia.

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY**

In the preceding sections and chapters, I have drawn attention to the unique difficulties experienced by rural battered women when exiting their relationships. It should be apparent by now that domestic violence within rural communities is a serious problem, one that requires attention to both a cultural and a geographic context if it is ever to be solved. The absence of adequate responses by law enforcement; the lack of support of friends and family; the lack
of effective social services; the severe isolation and lack of anonymity within rural communities; the role of poverty and welfare; and the widespread acceptance of patriarchy all contribute to the lethality of woman abuse in rural areas.

Of course, if public policy is ever to benefit rural abused women it must take into account the unique experiences discussed above and in the preceding chapters. Furthermore, any considerations and recommendations for effective public policy must be premised on the societal need to not only acknowledge the severity and importance of this problem, but to condemn it as well, for without the acceptance of men’s dominance over women both the physical and nonphysical forms of violence become less effective and less constraining. As Gagne (1992) states, “Violence within a context that condones men’s control of women and offers little hope for escape or protection is the threat that ensures submission” (p 413).

More needs to be done to address the concerns surrounding rural law enforcement discussed in Chapter 4. An agency whose motto is “to protect and serve” must learn how to adequately protect and serve victims of domestic violence, particularly in rural communities. Of course, notions of education and awareness are an important step in addressing these issues, but in rural communities that are often entrenched in patriarchal ideology this may be difficult. Effectively training rural officers on domestic violence issues must, as Websdale (1998) puts it, “transcend the mechanics of dealing with the disturbance itself” (p 195). Instead, their education should focus on the broader
condition of woman abuse and the societal implications that arise from it. Helping rural police officers to understand broad gender relations and power dynamics can then provide a context in which to understand the specific disturbances they deal with. In this sense, it becomes much more difficult for police officers to revert to victim-blaming or sympathizing with the offender, even if it involves someone they know. Educating rural police departments, if they are ever to be successful, must account for and incorporate the specific cultural context and ideologies of that area. If training is not designed to address these cultural issues, sensitizing officers on woman abuse will continue to fail.

In addition to more awareness, public policy must also consider the problems associated with rural policing that may compromise their ability to sufficiently respond to family violence cases. For instance, Websdale (1998) illustrates how widespread unemployment and the likelihood of economic depression within these regions encourage illegal activities such as gambling, marijuana growing, or fencing stolen property that the police officers themselves may be a part of. This makes it much more unlikely that they would arrest an individual that may have knowledge of their own illegalities.

Further, rural police departments usually lack funding and consequently an adequate amount of police officers. Thus, rural police officers are expected to fulfill several roles at once and deal with a vast amount of activities ranging from acting as the local dog-catcher to investigating a burglary. As Payne, Berg and Sun (2005) point out a rural police officer is required to be (1) an enforcer of the law (2) a friend (3) a social worker (4) a mediator for dispute resolution (5) and an
animal control officer. These massive responsibilities are often left to a police department consisting of only a few individuals. Certainly, easing these sorts of tensions may provide a context in which rural police officers can afford to have the time, energy, and understanding that is required of family violence cases.

The safety of rural abused women must take the forefront in any effective public policy. Addressing law enforcement concerns noted above would, without a doubt, aid in making the lives of women much more secure. Yet ensuring the safety of women also requires the ability to provide money to women and children escaping abusive situations and furthermore to provide safe houses in which they feel comfortable staying temporarily. Often, women do not feel comfortable going to shelters in their local communities because “everyone knows about it.” This can create a dangerous situation for both the victim and the other tenants and staff of the shelter. This is also compounded with beliefs about the privacy and sanctity of the home, importance of family, and fear of shame and embarrassment within the community that make it so difficult for women to escape abuse.

It is easy to point out what public policy needs to consider, but it becomes much more difficult when trying to come up with effective solutions that will actually work. This points to a broader problem in the social sciences concerning the translation of theory into practice. Often, what sounds good on paper is horribly unrealistic in the lives and experiences of real people. The questions that come to mind for this thesis are (1) How realistic is it to even attempt to provide anonymity for abused women in small, close-knit communities? (2) In addition,
how can patriarchal beliefs that contribute to violence against women be expected to drastically change in communities with long-standing patriarchal traditions and widespread acceptance centered on male dominance? It seems foolish for policy-makers to attempt solutions that focus on making rural shelters more secure or more anonymous, because the reality of small communities is that confidentiality is just not possible. Further, implementing pro-women or feminist policies in areas deeply-rooted in patriarchy are doomed for failure unless the reality of resistance to “liberal” ideology and change are taken into account. Although I am not suggesting you cannot teach an old dog new tricks I am suggesting that it is going to take time, effort, and a lot of “baby” steps to teach that old dog new tricks!

Lack of anonymity within rural areas can work in favor of abused women instead of against them. This requires, though, a supportive community that denounces family violence, which may be difficult in rural communities that are patriarchal. The first step, then, must be to invert the language and belief systems of patriarchy that promote violence against women. Specifically, since it is language that defines our reality for us it is important to understand how the structure of language constitutes and shapes both our interpersonal relationships and ourselves. As Foucault would argue, in order for dominant discourses such as patriarchy to operate effectively they “require activation through the agency of individuals whom they constitute and govern” as subjects (as cited in Weedon, 1987, 112). This also requires that the discourse and the subject position within that discourse align fully with the individual’s interests, wants, and desires to
efficiently constitute and govern that person. The opportunity for resistance comes, however, when “there is space between the position of subject offered by a discourse and individual interest” (p 113).

Foucault argues that the exercising of power through discourse is effective because it is able to “mask” itself. For instance, the family unit offers the images of “material security,” happiness, and stability and masks the patriarchal structure and power differentials behind conventional family life (Weedon, 1987, p 16). So the exercising of power in these cases remains, for the most part, invisible. But, even though power is often “masked,” these discourses still allow for resistance in the form of reversing the discourse itself. For example, a woman could still view the conventional family unit as “natural,” but demand recognition of her rights as a wife and mother. Furthermore, if the man is the head of the household, the caretaker, the one that dominates and controls his family, this also means that he and only he is responsible for the strength of his family, physically, spiritually and mentally. When patriarchal beliefs are inverted in this manner, a community cannot support violence against women, for if they do they ultimately recognize men as failures in their positions within the community. Thus, using language systems to redefine and ultimately topple patriarchal beliefs may be the best option in communities so entrenched within it.

In a study of domestic violence within rural Alaskan communities, Shepherd (2001) illustrates how the culture and traditions of the Inupiat community must be incorporated into programs designed to combat woman abuse if they are to ever to be effective. One shelter in her study provides cards
and flyers listing the values of the Inupiat culture. Respect, cooperation, family, community and tradition are highly valued within the Inupiat culture; values that can also work against the abused women in the area unless they are redefined in a manner that makes it difficult to do so. Shepherd (2001) discusses the attempts by the shelter, through distributing these cards to redefine their culture in a way that condemns violence against women. Furthermore, the shelter within the area recognizes the value placed on family and, thus, their philosophy revolves around the need to strengthen families and not to divide them as is so commonly perceived. If community-based supports are designed in culturally appropriate ways there is more of a likelihood they will be accepted by the community and successfully protect and heal the women in them.

The difficulty surrounding effective public policies is the attempt at universal application. When historical, cultural and even geographic contexts are not considered public policies are doomed from the start. The first consideration of any policy must be aimed at the specific needs of the people in that region. Applying urban domestic violence programs onto rural areas is simply ineffectual because it does not recognize the unique experiences of the individuals residing there.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter I presented an overview of the major findings of this study. I discussed how a four-themed approach to domestic violence is more apt at capturing the obstacles of exiting abusive relationships than is a method
centered in collective efficacy. I considered the limitations of this study as well as provided suggestions for public policy.
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