“SHIFTING THE FOCUS”: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE FEMINIST MODEL

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Social Work in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By

Amanda E. Stevens, B.A.

The Ohio State University

2008

Thesis Examination Committee: Approved by

Assistant Professor Tamara Davis, Adviser

Assistant Professor Susan Saltzburg

Dr. Beverly McPhail, Director, University of Houston Women’s Center

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, practice with victims and perpetrators of intimate partner violence and sexual assault has utilized some form of a feminist model. Many critiques have been raised within the practice community as to the efficacy of the feminist model as an approach to violence against women practice. This study utilized qualitative interviews to discern what individuals who teach and/or research violence against women think about the application of the feminist model to violence against women practice. Interviews were conducted with 11 individuals in the state of Ohio. Findings support continued use of a feminist approach in conjunction with other practice models. A Conflict Model of Violence Against Women Theory and Practice was developed to describe the pattern of tensions between various actors in violence against women practice. Successes of the feminist model in practice are discussed, as well as implications for social work, critiques and directions for future research.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the support of many individuals. I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Tamara Davis, for believing in my work and my abilities, as well as the other members of my committee: Dr. Susan Saltzburg, for her continued support, and Dr. Beverly McPhail, for sharing her research with me. I would also like to thank my mother, Ann Weddle, and my sister, Brittny Pierson, PC, for making sure I got it done, and Drew Chapis, without whose technical support this document would probably be written on stone tablets.
VITA

November 18, 1981........................Born – Indianapolis, Indiana

1999........................................Volunteer, Coburn Safe Haven

2001-2004.................................Member, Indiana University Feminist Majority
                                   Leadership Alliance

2002-2004.................................Volunteer, Middle Way House

2003........................................B.A. English, Indiana University

2004-2005.................................Team Leader, AWS

2005-2006.................................Program Manager, AWS

2006-2007.................................Case Manager, Dublin Counseling Center

2007-2008.................................Intern, Ohio Department of Health

2007-2008.................................Graduate Research Assistant, The Ohio State
                                   University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Social Work
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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

Violence against women is a pervasive social problem with grave consequences. Violence against women is often addressed through the use of a feminist model grounded in the belief that violence against women results from women’s inequality in a patriarchal society. Many feminists as well as social scientists who do not identify as feminist have offered professional critiques of the feminist model in practice with victims and perpetrators of violence against women. These critiques center on issues of inclusion of diverse communities within feminist practice, the ability of the feminist model to incorporate current research on the phenomena of violence, and the efficacy of the feminist model in prevention and intervention with victims and perpetrators of violence against women. The current study was designed to examine the adequacy of the feminist model as it is applied to violence against women practice through qualitative interviews with academics that teach and/or do research on violence against women.
Statement of the Problem

*Violence Against Women*

For the purposes of this study, the term violence against women is used to indicate specifically intimate partner violence and sexual assault. Violence against women in the form of intimate partner violence and sexual assault is a serious problem in the United States. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is violence occurring between current or former dating partners, domestic partners, or spouses (Golding, 1999). IPV includes physical violence, sexual violence, threats of physical violence and psychological/emotional violence (Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon, & Shelley, 2002). IPV also includes stalking (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a) and economic exploitation.

As many as 29% of women and 22% of men have experienced physical, sexual or psychological partner abuse in their lifetime (Coker, et al., 2002). Nearly 5% of women and 1% of men have been found to have experienced stalking (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000a). The current research does not examine financial oppression and exploitation by intimate partners in isolation of other abusive behaviors. It is acknowledged by advocates that this type of abuse does significantly impact victims. IPV is also commonly referred to as domestic violence (DV). Currently the preference in the field is for the term IPV because the term DV can mean any violence occurring in the home among residents, not just that between intimate partners. In this document, the terms IPV and DV may be used interchangeably unless otherwise noted and refer specifically to violence against women.
Sexual assault includes both aggravated sexual abuse and sexual abuse (Kilpatrick, 2000). The term “aggravated sexual abuse” includes what is commonly referred to as forcible, non-forcible and statutory rape. Sexual abuse includes non-penetrative touching for adults and minors 12-15 (Kilpatrick, 2000). Crimes against younger children are covered by different statutes (Kilpatrick, 2000). Conservative estimates indicate that 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men have experienced rape or attempted rape in their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000b). These numbers do not include non-penetrative acts or unreported acts (Basile & Saltzman, 2002).

Both victims and perpetrators of IPV and sexual assault can be found across all genders, races, ethnicities and sexual orientations. That said women are disproportionately affected by IPV and sexual assault. Most victims of sexual assault are women (Kilpatrick, 2000). While men and women have been found to commit acts of IPV in similar numbers, women are more likely to be physically injured during these exchanges (Ehrensaft, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2004). Women are also disproportionately affected by IPV and sexual assault due to economic and health care disparities. Women on average make only $.77 for every $1 a man makes (Hartman, Sorokina, & Williams, 2006), and women’s health care costs are significantly higher than men’s (Patchias & Waxman, 2007). Thus if a woman chooses to leave an abusive partner, her income is usually affected more than a man’s income would be. In addition, if she has healthcare costs associated with IPV or sexual assault, these costs are likely to impact her more than they would a man.
A significant portion of women who experience sexual assault and IPV develop health problems as a result of their abuse. These can include mental health problems such as PTSD or other trauma symptoms, depression, anxiety, substance abuse and eating disorders (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Campbell, Sullivan, & Davidson II, 1995; Coker, et al., 2002; Danielson, Moffitt, Caspi, & Silva, 1998; El-Bassel, Gilbert, Wu, Go, & Hill, 2005; Faravelli, Giugni, Salvatori, & Ricca, 2004; Golding, 1999; Krakow, et al., 2002). There can also be significant physical consequences to IPV and sexual assault. In addition to any acute physical injury inflicted during an assault, the experience of IPV and sexual assault has been linked with gastrointestinal disorders, chronic pain and gynecological concerns (Campbell, 2002). Many women lose their lives as a result of IPV. 30% of all female homicides are committed by an intimate partner (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

The consequences for untreated mental health problems brought about by abuse can be far reaching and severe. Untreated mental health issues can develop into chronic problems that severely impact the individual and her family and can even result in early death (Coker, et al., 2002; Coalition for Healthy Communities, 2006). Although it is still being studied and debated in the research literature, there is growing evidence indicating intergenerational transmission of violence (Bassuk, Dawson, & Huntington, 2006; Bevan & Higgins, 2002; Ehrensaft, et al., 2003; Kwong, Bartholomew, Henderson, & Trinke, 2003; Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, & Semel, 2002; Markowitz, 2001; Schewe, Riger, Howard, Staggs, & Mason, 2006). Intergenerational transmission of violence is the notion that people who witness and/or experience violence as children may go on to
experience further victimization or perpetrate violence on others throughout their adult life. Therefore what is commonly referred to as a cycle of violence is perpetuated, resulting in enormous costs to the healthcare system (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2003; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003).

The Feminist Model

Early feminists defined women’s risk of IPV and sexual violence as part of women’s unequal status in society. As grassroots efforts sprung up to provide women who had experienced violence with the resources they needed, a framework for this work emerged from the concepts of feminism. The framework for this social change movement was a feminist framework that conceptualized violence towards women as a natural function of a patriarchal society (Brownmiller, 1975; Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R., 1979; Schwartz & D. Keseredy, 1997; Worell & Remer, 2003). The strategy for change within this framework is one of consciousness raising and advocacy: by supporting women in their realization that abuse is not their fault, and simultaneously advocating for increased equality for women at all levels of society, women will become empowered to fight their oppression by men and violence against women will be eliminated (Bograd, 1988; Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R. P., 1992; Dutton, 1992; Humphreys & Joseph, 2004; Schechter, 1982; Whalen, 1996). This classical interpretation is what is referred to throughout this text as “the feminist model.” When applied to male perpetrators, the structure of the model is basically the same: the male perpetrator is expected to take
responsibility for his behavior, recognize the larger context of male privilege to which he belongs, and go on to be an advocate for change when he is no longer violent (Adams, 1989).

The feminist model continues to be used to address violence against women (Dutton, D.G., 1992; Saulnier, 1996; Walker, 1994; Whalen, 1996; Worell & Remer, 2003). Although not always identified explicitly as a feminist model, evidence of the feminist model’s principles can be seen in a variety of practice models (cf. DELTA/Project SAFE, 2006; Hadley, Short, Lezin, & Zook, 1995; Jordan & Walker, 1994; Jordan, Nietzel, Walker, & Logan, 2004; Ledray, 1986; Ohio Domestic Violence Network & Ohio Department of Health, 2003; Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, 2000; Warshaw & Ganley, 1996; Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, 2003). As the forerunners of the 1970s movement continue to run service agencies and work in policy development, their legacy of feminist action in an applied feminist model continues to influence violence against women practice, even as other practice models and theoretical approaches continue to flood the field. The uniquely collaborative nature of the feminist approach, as well as its grounding in political activism and a history characterized by oral transmission and informal writing versus peer reviewed scholarship, make it difficult to cleanly track its influences in the practice field. That is why the example programs listed above are identified as using a feminist model based on their demonstration of the tenets of the feminist model, as opposed to an explicit statement of a feminist approach.
The feminist model is not without its critics. People both within and without the movement to end violence against women have raised issues pertaining to the ideology and implementation of the feminist model. By far the most common critique is that the feminist model was designed by and for white, middle class heterosexual women, and that it privileges their needs and values at the expense of those belonging to women of color, poor women and non-heterosexual women (Bent-Goodley, 2004; Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R. P., 1992; Donat & D’Emillio 1992; Hall, 1992; Kanuha, 1996; Katz, 2006; Saulnier, 1996; Schechter, 1982; Schwartz & D Keseredy, 1997; Yllo, 2005). Critiques about the feminist model’s ignorance of multiple oppressions span the continuum of theory and practice, some focused on the inception of the model and its origins in the feminist movement, others centered on more practical concerns around women of color’s access to services. These critics claim that the model is not culturally relative for use with women who are not white, middle class and heterosexual.

The feminist model has also come under fire for not incorporating current research, particularly that which does not support patriarchy as the primary cause of violence against women (Gilbert, 2005; Straus, 2005). Scholars assert that the feminist model’s theory of causation, that violence is caused by men’s feeling of entitlement and dominance under patriarchy ignores the complexities of women’s behavior. Such behaviors may include an abused woman’s strategies of collaboration and resistance (Donat, 1992), or women’s violence towards men (Renzetti, 1999).
There is also continued debate about medical models of battering that focus on individual pathologies of the abuser and victim. Many feminists resist the trend of diagnosing abused women with mental health problems such as PTSD (Humphreys & Joseph 2004), because they feel that shifts the focus from societal inequality to individual pathology. Other professionals embrace what they see as a more direct causal link to violence against women- individual behavioral concerns (Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R.P., 1992). Included in these debates on practice models and diagnoses is a discussion of victim agency. The so called “victim feminism” of the feminist model is criticized as disempowering because it labels women as victims and oversimplifies their role in an abuse situation (Lamb, 1999). That role includes accountability for the impact of an abuse situation on a victim’s children (Schechter, 1982).

The issue of diagnosis is also symptomatic of a larger critical issue in the violence against women movement, that of cooptation and professionalization. As agencies became established and grew, they needed funds to keep running, and funds tend to come with strings attached. Some practitioners welcome institutionalization of violence against women resources because of the security it offers, others reject the professionalization process as deterring the work from the larger issue of combatting women’s inequality at the societal level (Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R. P., 1992; Schechter, 1982).

Another concern is that the feminist model has an overemphasis on criminal justice interventions and not enough focus on prevention (Schechter, 1996). The notion was that individual liberation coupled with advocacy at the governmental level would trickle down to create a better society for women. Thus the focus was on confronting
male perpetrators with their crimes in order to send a strong message that violence against women will not be tolerated. It was believed that as society processed that message, no one would commit violence against women because it would no longer be acceptable. This approach ignores any other treatment or prevention practices.

Purpose of the Study

The literature on current violence against women practice demonstrates that the feminist model is still the dominant paradigm for this work. Academic leadership in the forms of teaching and professional scholarship, including research, guides treatment and prevention efforts; however over the years feminist theory and feminist practice have gone in different directions. With the development of Women’s and Gender Studies departments at colleges and universities, feminist scholarship has grown with an emphasis on theory development and cultural analysis. Concurrently, professionalization of violence against women practice and increased awareness of the problem of violence against women in the social sciences field has shifted violence against women practice and research away from its feminist roots.

As the rift between feminist theory and feminist practice widens, it is important to search for new insight into this conflict, because there is little hope of stopping violence against women if the language used to describe it is inadequate and incomplete to inform practice approaches. This point is made salient by political slogans handed down from the 1970s movement such as “The personal is political,” “Silence is not consent,” and “End the silence, stop the violence.” Feminists have long understood the importance of speaking out and being heard, from the abolitionists of the 1860s, to the suffragists of the
1920s, to the civil rights activists of the 1960s, to the anti-imperialists of the new millennium. It is important that the relationship between theory and practice remain fluid and the dialogue between academics and practitioners remain open, because it the unity of rigorous research and competent practice will improve efforts to end violence against women. The goal of the present study is to continue the conversation about the feminist model and its efficacy in practice in order to contribute to the theoretical literature on the feminist model. This study is intended to contribute to ongoing efforts at bridging theory and practice.

Research Question

A particularly controversial critique of the feminist model is expressed in Linda Mills’ 2003 book, *Insult to Injury: Rethinking Our Responses to Intimate Abuse*. Mills, a social worker, lawyer, and New York University professor, describes in detail the above concerns about the feminist model. Her treatment of the model is extremely harsh, calling for an abandonment of this practice model for use in violence against women practice. This critique prompted a study by McPhail, Busch, Kulkarni, and Rice (2007) to uncover the opinions of service level professionals regarding these arguments. What they found through a focus group discussion on Mills’ book is that while service professionals did not agree with all aspects of her critique, they did feel that the model as it currently stands is not enough to explain all the aspects of practice with abuse survivors. Utilizing a grounded theory approach McPhail et al. generated the Integrative Feminist Model, a suggested model that allows for integration of diverse approaches to feminist practice as long as they retain a “gendered analysis of violence” (2007, p. 817). The McPhail et al.
study provided the impetus for the current study, which sought to obtain additional
support for the Integrative Feminist Model from the academic community. Driven by a
desire to move violence against women practice forward, and given the negligent decline
of victimization rates over 30 years of practice, this study asks the following research
question: How adequate is the feminist model in describing the problem of violence
towards women, intervention in violence towards women, and the prevention of violence
towards women?

Significance for Social Work

Because of its high prevalence, violence against women is an important issue for
social work and other helping professionals to understand. This study is significant for
social work because social workers interact with victims and perpetrators of violence in
all practice settings. Social work professionals are highly represented in violence against
women practice. Continual examination of current practice models is important to ensure
competent practice by social work professionals in the practice setting. The social work
professional Code of Ethics mandates that social workers engage with current research
for practice efficacy.

Limitations of the Study

This is a qualitative study with a small, purposive sample and thus has limited
generalizability to the larger population of academics who teach and do research on
violence against women. Due to a relatively homogenous sample in terms of
demographics, the study does not provide diverse perspectives in terms of gender, race or
class. As intimate partner violence and sexual assault were examined under the umbrella
term *violence against women*, distinctions between the two phenomena are not explored except when directly raised by participants and in the practice literature.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of violence against women in the form of IPV and sexual assault is a serious issue with far reaching consequences. Violence against women is not a uniquely American problem but rather one that has been documented around the world. The dominant paradigm for addressing violence against women is a feminist model. In spite of 30 years of practice, prevalence rates for IPV and sexual assault have not significantly declined (McCarry, 2007; Rozee & Koss, 2001; Walker, 2002).

IPV and sexual assault are commonly addressed through battered women’s shelters and rape crisis centers. The battered women’s shelter and anti-rape movements came out of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R. P., 1992; Klein, Campbell, Soler & Ghez, 1997; Marecek, 1999; Schechter, 1982; Valentich, 1986). That period of the feminist movement is often referred to as the “second wave” of feminism, after the first wave of suffragists in the early 1900s. The notion of waves to describe the ebbs and flows of feminist thoughts continues to be debated in the activist community. The metaphor is still widely used by those who write on the topic of feminism. As with any social movement, it is impossible to give a definitive account of when the second wave started or what exactly it entailed. Certain
key moments and publications are often cited, such as the protest of the 1968 Miss America pageant (Siegel, 2007) or the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 (Valentich, 1986). The term “feminism” is very broad and means different things to different people. The feminist activism of the 1960s and 1970s was characterized by a belief that women had unequal status as citizens in all spheres public to private, and that direct action was needed to address that inequality.

A review of the literature in African American Studies, Anthropology, Social Sciences (including Social Work) and Gender Studies from the past ten years indicates little research directly on the feminist model. After the inception of the anti-rape and battered women’s movements out of second wave feminist activism, and a veritable explosion of literature on topics relative to the feminist model in the early to mid 1990s, the flow of research on feminist theory in violence against women practice has slowed to a trickle. Koikari & Hippensteele (2000) suggested that contrary to assertions that feminism is no longer viable, “a closer examination suggests that we are experiencing another maintenance phase in which movement participants are taking different, less visible, political strategies and trying to survive in an increasingly hostile environment” (p. 1273), comparing the current phase to that between 1945 and 1960. The state of the current practice literature supports this theory. Many articles make casual mention of feminism as an influence or a practice influence, and some describe studies utilizing a feminist approach, few are actually discussing the approach itself. What research that is out there can be hard to access as it is published in conference proceedings, dissertations, and obscure journals that are unavailable without substantial cost.
As both feminism and violence against women are large, unwieldy topics, the focus of this review is on literature that specifically describes and/or tests the application of the feminist model to violence against women practice. This selection process rendered approximately 50 articles for review. Three main content areas were addressed in the literature:

1. Description of the feminist model- its history, main tenets, and successes to date.
2. Critiques of the model.
3. Issues related to application of the model.

Themes from these content areas reflect ongoing discussions about the feminist model and its application to violence that have occurred since the beginning of the violence against women movement. A review of the literature supports the need for contributions such as the current study to conduct research on the feminist model’s efficacy in addressing violence against women.

**Description of the Feminist Model**

*History*

Descriptions of the history of the feminist model in the literature are relatively congruent. All situate the development of the battered women’s shelter movement (or women’s refuge movement in England and Australia) in the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The early activities of the battered women’s shelter movement are described as opening shelters, creating hotlines, counseling, coalitions for public education and public policy work, and consciousness raising (Danis, 2003;
McDonald, 2005; Rothenberg, 2003). Rothenberg (2003) and McDonald (2005) describe the goal of this battered women’s shelter movement as getting women out of abusive relationships. Danis (2003) describes the goal of shelters as “providing safety and sanctuary to women and their children when society’s institutions would not” (p. 177). This is an important distinction to make, because the goal of getting women out of abusive relationships assumes an ideal course of action and centers on a liberation motif common to second wave feminist activism, whereas the goal of providing women safety and sanctuary indicates more of a service orientation, focused on each individual women’s needs.

The relationship between these orientations has been the subject of much discussion and will be explored throughout the presentation of the current study. One reason for these two differing interpretations may have something to do with the professional orientation of the authors- Rothenberg is a sociologist, McDonald is in public health, and Danis is a social worker. Danis’ orientation as a social worker may contribute to her description of the feminist model as developed with a service function in mind. In her article, “Social work response to domestic violence: Encouraging news from a new look” (2003), Danis cites the work of Susan Schechter, herself a social worker. These professional perspectives are of note because the work on the use of the feminist model to address violence against women lies at the intersection of multiple disciplines, and academics from these varying disciplines bring their own ideological lens to the table.
Descriptions of the feminist model’s history also discuss how the theoretical foundations of the battered women’s and anti-rape movements complicated activism. Bruckner (2001) describes an aim of the early shelter movement in Germany as a positive celebration of women’s difference from men through mutual helping. She argues that this celebration of differences resulted in a romanticizing of woman as other to man that ended up impeding the progress of the movement. Abrar, Lovenduski, and Margetts (2000) credit the issue of DV for splitting the British feminist movement at the end of the 1970s, into (1) socialist feminists who believed male violence was a product of capitalism, and (2) radical feminists who believed that violence towards women was inherent in men’s biological nature. A description of different feminist orientations and their theories of rape can be found in Martin (2006). These internal splits and debates tie into critiques of the feminist model discussed in the literature and by participants in this study. Individual and organizational theoretical orientation influences the ways in which violence is interpreted and how practice is conducted. Thus how particular practitioners and agencies are interpreting a feminist approach will necessarily impact how a feminist model is implemented by that person or agency.

Tenets

Like its history, the described tenets of a feminist model are also relatively congruent in the practice literature and align with the earlier interpretation of empowering women to realize abuse is not their fault and advocating for women’s equality at all levels of society. The feminist model describes patriarchy as the context for violence against women. Feminists accept patriarchy as given in mainstream societies, where men are
given power and control over women in the community and the family (Danis, 2003a; Dutton, D., 1994). This power leads to a sense of entitlement (Walker, 1989). Violence against women is seen as an encouraged and tolerated means of maintaining power over women (Crawford & Harding, 2000). In this context, violence against women is both actively and passively promoted to maintain the status quo. Violence against women is actively promoted when individuals and institutions openly support IPV and sexual assault, for instance, a social organization such as a business, fraternity, or gang that values sexual assault of women as a status symbol, or a film that glorifies rape and murder of women by men. It is passively promoted when people do not object to or resist violence against women, such as police being reluctant to respond to DV calls because “what happens in the home is private,” or businesses selling t-shirts with slogans such as “dead girls don’t say ‘no.’”

Another component to the feminist understanding of violence against women within a patriarchy is that men as a class benefit from violence against women (Dutton, D., 1994). As such each individual male does not have to be violent to a woman to benefit from men’s collective violence against women. This is a core component to the understanding of any privilege; it functions on a mass scale contributed to by individual acts and codified in social systems. So while most men choose not to perpetrate IPV and/or sexual assault all men benefit from the power men as a class have in a patriarchal system (for example, being paid more on average more than a woman for equal work).
The feminist model not only situates violence against women in the context of patriarchy but focuses on the primacy of gender in the analysis of oppression. Thus gender is more important than race, class or any other distinguishing factor in understanding not only violence against women, but all violence (Sharma, 2001; Walker, 1989). From this understanding, any approach to addressing violence against women must address patriarchy or it will not be successful (Rothenberg, 2003). Not only that, but a focus on individual pathology of either perpetrator or victim is pointless if patriarchy is the root cause of violence against women. Therefore all approaches must be grounded in a spirit of social action whereby the foundations of patriarchy will be challenged at every step, immediately in the family by leaving and/or filing charges against the assailant, and institutionally by advocating for policies and practices aimed at improving women’s status in society.

Along with the theoretical understanding of violence against women as a function of patriarchy, certain practice guidelines or principles are generally supported for use within a feminist framework. These guidelines transcend disciplinary boundaries and are centered around listening to women’s voices, disrupting normal power relationships, and social activism. Brown Travis and Compton (2001) describe feminist principles as acknowledging the importance of women’s equality, inclusiveness, the value of the individual, context, power and privilege, and activism. Black (2003) discusses the National Association of Social Workers’ feminist practice principles which include a focus on consciousness-raising and empowerment, depathologizing, valuing diversity and uniqueness, demystifying the helping process and a collaborative therapeutic relationship.
McClennan (2003) describes a feminist participatory research model as including a critical examination of cultural insensitivity, giving women a voice, rejecting hierarchy, a political and moral commitment to disseminating findings in a way that benefits the community of study, and social action. These principles have a demonstrable link to the tenets of the feminist model as they have been stated, i.e. empowering women who have been abused to understand that abuse is not their fault, but rather the logical result of patriarchy, and a commitment to address violence against women by pursuing equality for women. For the purposes of this study, feminist practice is defined as practice that is situated in a feminist framework; a framework that analyzes patriarchy and its influence on social interactions as well as the construction of gender.

Successes

The feminist model is recognized for many successes in addressing violence against women. These include conceptual ideas and actual products. Feminism is credited with introducing the concept of gender as social construction (McCarry, 2007), identifying power as the root of gender relations, and understanding violence as a gendered phenomenon (Rozee & Koss, 2001). Feminism has also changed how people think about what causes violence against women, initiating a shift away from theories around female victims’ masochistic personalities (Hanson Frieze, 2000; Lancaster & Lumb, 1999; Orme, 2003), and inspiring an application of gender analysis to improve understanding of psychological differences between men and women and psychological tests (Walker, 1989). In terms of products, the application of feminism to violence against women practice has resulted in the creation of battered women’s shelters, rape crisis
centers, rape prevention programs, and DV advocacy coalitions (Abrar et al., 2000; Orme, 2003; Rothenberg, 2003; Rozee & Koss, 2001). The advocacy work of individuals using a feminist model of violence against women has contributed to the revision of rape and sexual assault definitions that more accurately reflect the harmful nature of these acts (Rozee & Koss, 2001).

Critiques of the Feminist Model

In spite of these successes, the practice literature critically examines many critiques of the feminist model and its application to violence against women. Most of these critiques center on issues of inclusion- areas where the feminist model is lacking in its analysis. The other main area of critique is around ways the model has been applied that explicitly or implicitly undermine its effectiveness. These critiques often focus on discursive issues relative to the model’s rhetoric and the ways that manipulation of discourse by feminist practitioners has imposed victimization categories on women who have experienced violence. These categories in turn have influenced the treatment of women who have experienced violence and the ways that the problem of violence against women is portrayed and discussed.

Exclusivity

Critiques of the feminist model based on its exclusivity cite several areas where feminist analysis of violence against women is found to be lacking: diversity and identity; women’s aggression; and power dynamics between women. Many authors discuss problems of the model in terms of its failure to address the needs of women who are not White, middle class, and heterosexual. Issues of culture, diversity and identity are not
limited to violence against women practice but are part of the feminist movement as a whole. The entire second wave feminist movement has been similarly criticized for ignoring issues of race, class and sexual orientation under a banner of sisterhood (Lorde, 1992). Rather than necessarily wanting to reject feminism (although many have), women of color, working class women and lesbians were and are frustrated with how they are silenced by a movement they helped to create and maintain.

There is general agreement in the literature that issues of diversity are a problem. This criticism comes from both within and without the violence against women practice community. The cited areas in need of examination include: race, class, sexual orientation, immigration status, physical ability, and age. In terms of an analysis of power, these identities translate into oppressions experienced by individuals based on their identity: racism, classism, heterosexism, nationalism, ableism, and ageism. To this list one also needs to add imperialism/colonialism, which is an oppression of people from a native culture by an invading culture, such as the Iraqis experience under United States occupation or First Nation peoples experience in the United States and their sovereign lands within and bordering United States territory.

The problem has to do with the relevancy of feminist practice with people in communities who do not reflect the dominant culture. It is not that the tenets of the feminist model are not themselves applicable to work with members of oppressed communities but that those feminist tenets need to be applied in the context of additional realities. In addition to the reality of sexism, individuals who experience violence may be experiencing any and all of the realities listed above. No one is arguing that an analysis of
sexism be abandoned, but rather that it cannot be complete without examination of these other oppressions (Girshick, 2002; Reich, 2002; Schwartzman, 2002) An important understanding is that the theoretical benchmarks of the feminist model are not ‘owned’ by White, middle class, heterosexual women. Women of color, including immigrant and First Nation women, lesbian/bisexual/transgendered women and working class women have been contributing to and developing these concepts in their own communities and alongside White, middle class, heterosexual women.

In their article, Domestic violence at the intersections of race, class and gender, Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) discuss the notion of universalism as erasure. This is often heard in conversations on race. White people say things like, “I don’t see color,” and “Why can’t we all just be American?” Rather than painting a picture of a peaceful utopia statements such as these make some pretty big assumptions. White people do not have to see color if they do not choose to do so. As members of the dominant culture they have cultural capital with which to define their own experience as everyone’s experience. This applies to statements about ethnic identity and nationality as well. As a member of the dominant culture, a White American can pick up or leave off additional markers of their ethnic identity as they choose. These types of arguments are unfortunately translated into discussions of sexism as well. When White women say, “We’re all women, we all experience the same oppression, and sisterhood is powerful!” they deliberately or inadvertently ignore experiences of women of color; experiences that overlap with those of White women but are not the same as those of White women.
The concept of sisterhood has been routinely critiqued in feminist literature for seeking to erase the unique experiences of women who are not White, middle class and heterosexual. Unity and collaboration are worthy goals, they should not come at the expense of each woman’s unique experience. Organizing around common ideals and values does not necessitate assimilation to a dominant culture within that particular movement. Equity does not equal conformity or sameness; we can want equal rights for all women without claiming that all women are the same. The movement to end violence against women is not an oppression competition.

In a school of thought commonly interpreted as resistant to hierarchy, an oppositional hierarchy has formed, one that continually ‘tables’ discussion of issues other than sexism in a patriarchy. Oppressions are multiple and linked: any fight against oppression is a feminist fight. Therefore addressing racism, classism, heterosexism, colonialism/imperialism, nationalism, ableism, and ageism is not a distraction from the violence against women movement or something to be done as a side project, but rather one and the same with addressing sexism. Some authors argue that success in any of these areas will successfully eliminate sexism because women are members of each of those oppressed communities (A. Smith, 2005).

The commonality of women in all human communities has been used as a justification for the primacy of gender in feminist analysis, but the translation of that into practice is often a selectiveness that alienates many women who feel pressure to choose which oppression on which to focus. This is a false choice because no one can be expected to fragment their identity into neat sections (Reich, 2002). African American
women should not be expected to parse out their experiences of sexual violence from a legacy of slavery. First Nation women should not be expected to parse out their experience of violence from a legacy of genocide and colonial occupation. Rather than replacing gender as the site of analysis, the literature indicates a need for the feminist model to more fully embrace additional realities.

The assumption of the feminist model in regards to diversity is that while individual women’s experiences may vary, all women’s experiences of violence are the same. As discussed above, this is a false assumption. The next logical step from this assumption is that what has been conceived of and tested for White, middle class, heterosexual women is generalizable to all women (Ristock, 2003; Sharma, 2001). If all women’s experience of violence is the same, then there is no problem in applying practice models that have only been tested on women from the dominant cultures. It is important that violence against women practice seek to be culturally relevant and competent, meaning that efforts are made to develop practice models that are appropriate for cultures that differ from the dominant culture.

Assumptions based on the dominant culture have led to practices that exclude many women. For instance, the traditional feminist model focuses on criminal justice interventions with violence against women. If violence against women is a consequence of patriarchy, and patriarchy is understood as male privilege at all levels of society, then it is logical to seek to criminalize what is not considered socially acceptable behavior—both to challenge the individual behavior and set an example in order to influence collective behaviors of men as a class. The problem is that implicit in this approach is an
assumption that all women interpret the criminal justice system as one of fairness and safety, and this is not the case. Institutionalized oppression in the criminal justice system deters many women from seeking criminal justice approaches. For example, Black women are often wary of criminal justice interventions because of racism in the criminal justice system (White, Strube, & Fisher, 1998). Women who are immigrants may fear not only racism but additional dangers based on their immigration status, such as deportation (Sharma, 2001).

It is important to note that these issues are not only relevant for the recipients of services but for practitioners, many of whom have experienced violence and who represent many diverse communities. Women of Color Network is a Pennsylvania based national organization to provide training and support to women of color advocates in the violence against women movement (Women of Color Network, 2008). They have described the women of color advocate as “endangered” and have documented a process by which women of color are treated with hostility and passive aggression in violence against women agencies (Women of Color Network, 2007). In a survey that went out to advocates across the country, respondents describe overt and covert behaviors on the part of peers and supervisors that make the work environment unbearable and even push women out of their jobs. Some of the issues seem to be personal (as in directed at the individual, rooted in issues of racism), others are related to women of color advocates’ efforts to get issues of racism and nationalism on the agency agenda. Several advocates bring up the issue of tokenism, and the fact that white agency leaders “talk the talk” about multiple oppressions while simultaneously imped ing women of color’s career.
advancement and refusing to direct resources towards serving communities of color.

More than one bilingual Spanish-English advocate lamented the fact that after being
pushed out of their positions, the agency replaced them with someone who was English-
only speaking, thereby obliterating needed services to Spanish-speaking clients.

Women of Color Network is not the only entity discussing the issue of racism in
the violence against women outside the peer reviewed practice literature. Jessica
White Feminists* (2008), describes the process of exclusion and erasure that she has
witnessed in her own feminist advocacy. Speaking from a place of privilege as a white,
middle class feminist, Hoffman offers a scathing critique of tokenism and lip service to
issues of race and multiple oppressions in the violence against women community that is
not backed up by real action. She gives several examples of times when mainstream (read
white, middle class, and heterosexual) feminist organizations ignored or deliberately
countered important anti-violence work being done by people of color, as well as
highlighting the deafening silence of the mainstream violence against women movement
on highly publicized incidents of violence against women of color. Hoffman’s essay is
deliberately titled to invoke memories of the “Open letters” published by feminists of
color during the second wave feminist movement to draw attention to the problem of
racism in the mainstream feminist movement.

Another public example of women of color being pushed out of violence against
women activism can be found in the retirement of blogger *brownfemipower*.

*brownfemipower* blogged for several years on issues of feminism, anti-oppression,
racism, immigration, and media, among other topics. When white feminist Amanda Marcotte posted a piece on sexism and immigration (Marcotte, 2008), brownfemipower posted a blog about the appropriation of ideas of women of color by mainstream feminists, noting that several of the topics Marcotte wrote about in her article have been treated by people of color and she did not make mention of that anywhere in her piece. Rather than stimulating a needed dialog about exchange of ideas and authorship, or prompting a more critical examination of Marcotte’s arguments, the mainstream feminist community responded with a flood of hostile, racist attacks on brownfemipower, personally attacking her as someone who out of petty jealousy was acting to get attention. As a result of weeks of prolific negative attacks to her person and work, brownfemipower retired her blog (brownfemipower, 2008). This is another tragic example of how women of color activists in violence against women are threatened and intimidated out of the movement. What makes this issue all the more disturbing is that such violence is used by people who are part of an anti-violence movement.

In addition to silences and omissions on issues of diversity and inclusion, the feminist model is also considered to be lacking in its treatment of female aggression. Three types of female aggression are discussed in the literature: female perpetration on male partners, female perpetration on female partners, and female perpetrated child abuse. The controversy of female perpetration on male partners has been raging since the early days of the battered women’s shelter movement. This controversy stemmed from research indicating that women abuse their male partners at equal rates as men abuse their female partners, centered in large part on the use of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS)
developed by Straus (1979). Feminists asserted that the CTS is a faulty measure of partner violence because it does not assess the context in which abuse occurs (Hanson Frieze, 2000). Feminists were also concerned that this research would fuel backlash against the feminist movement (DeKeseredy, 1999; Girshick, 2002).

Critics of the feminist model claim that feminist activists and researchers are reluctant to acknowledge women’s aggression because it challenges assumptions of the feminist model regarding patriarchy and gender (Brush, 2005; Dutton, D., 1994; Hanson Frieze, 2000; Lancaster & Lumb, 1999; Orme, Dominelli, & Mullender, 2000). That is, if violence against women is the expression of male dominance in a patriarchal system, why are women perpetrating violence on their male partners? Why do lesbians abuse their partners? And why do women abuse their children? The traditional feminist response to these types of critiques is that women’s violence is defensive, what is commonly referred to as “fighting back,” and that the use of violence by women reflects an internalization of patriarchal values (Girshick, 2002).

The avoidance of lesbian partner violence by feminist researchers and practitioners ties together the issues of diversity listed above and the problem of female aggression. Several authors also raise the issue of female perpetrated child abuse (Benetar, 2003; Crawford & Harding, 2000), saying that a feminist model does not adequately address women’s violence towards their children. In tandem with the critique of the feminist model as ignorant of women’s aggression is the critique that the model fails to address power dynamics among women (Brush, 2005; Schwartzman, 2002). This includes issues of diversity and female aggression; it also includes dynamics between
women in practice. In addition to the issues among professionals discussed above, there are also issues between practitioners and the people they serve in terms of appropriate service models. There are also tensions between practitioners and academics both within and across disciplines having to do with the way theory is translated into practice.

Discursive Issues

Besides issues of exclusivity and inclusion, the other major critiques of the feminist model revolve around issues of language and its shaping of violence against women practice. Premiere to that argument are debates about the word ‘victim.’ The word victim was originally adopted to specify the abusive acts women had endured as criminal acts. To be a victim, there must be a crime, and thus the designation of women who had experienced abuse as victims implied that those who abused them were criminals. This framework was used to justify criminal justice approaches in dealing with violence against women. A companion piece to the framework is that if women who have been abused are crime victims, then they should not be blamed for the abuse that occurred. Society does not expect victims of robberies or other crimes to be responsible for the crime that was committed against them, yet routinely in the legal system and popular culture women are somehow held responsible for the abuse they experience. For example, women are accused of antagonizing their partners, or wearing a short skirt to a bar, thereby instigating or asking for violence.

This notion is referred to as victim blaming (McDonald, 2005). As stated above, an important component of the feminist model is working against victim blaming, and the work of feminists in violence against women has resulted in changes to policy and
practice that hold perpetrators accountable for the violence, not female victims. However, the label of victim does not come without a price, and some consider that price to be the agency of the woman who is the victim. Issues of victim status and its complex relationship to women’s agency is discussed at length in the literature (Brush, 2005; Reich, 2002; Rothenberg, 2003; Schwartzman, 2002; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Although no one wants to abandon examination of victim blaming, it is understood that a pure imposition of the category ‘victim’ onto a woman does indeed modify her level of agency by definition.

The effect of the victim label on violence against women practice can be seen in the debates on pathology in the practice literature. Originally the designation of woman as victim was intended to subvert notions of pathology by situating women’s experience as one of criminal violation by a cruel patriarchy. Mental health practitioners who pathologized women were seen as the enemy by the forerunners of the battered woman’s and anti-rape movements. As the relationship between violence against women and mental health practices improved, and mental health practitioners began to recognize, research and address the problem of violence against women from a mental health perspective, that mental health perspective began to permeate violence against women practice. Prominent feminist psychologist Lenore Walker developed the model of Battered Woman’s Syndrome which she explains in her 1980 book, *The Battered Woman*. This influential text introduced the terms “cycle of violence” and “learned helplessness” into the violence against women lexicon, and those terms are still used today in discussion of the problem of violence against women. As scholarship and practice on trauma was
expanded in the mental health field, practitioners began to use the diagnosis of Post
Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to identify abused women’s experiences, particularly
those of women who had been sexually or otherwise physically assaulted.

Some feminists heralded these psychological developments as a boon for violence
against women practice, because they gave name to the experience of abused women and
provided a framework in which to address it (Humphreys & Joseph, 2004). Other
feminists criticized these models as demphasizing the societal inequality component to

The reality is that both of these assessments are true. It is beneficial for survivors to
receive the benefit of mental health practice when assimilating their experiences. These
approaches also demonstrate a marked shift away from the feminist consciousness raising
of the 1970s (McDonald, 2005). An emphasis on pathology has been criticized not only
as it is applied to victims, but how it is applied to perpetrators. Feminists tend to reject
pathologically-based typologies of male perpetrators as “unhelpful” and having the
potential “to excuse male violent behavior” (Orme, et al., 2000, p. 90-91). On the other
side of the debate, social scientists who are critical of the feminist model believe not
enough attention is paid to individual pathology of perpetrators or victims (Dutton, D.,
1994).

Applications of the Feminist Model

In addition to descriptions of the model and its history and critiques of the model,
the literature on the application of the feminist model to violence against women also
discusses issues related to directly applying the model in practice and the use of feminism
as an analytical framework. Issues related to the model in practice include controversy around the use of the word, ‘feminism,’ issues of reflection and reflexivity in feminist practice, issues related to research and its subsequent uses, structural issues that impact attempts at feminist practice, and the role of men in addressing violence against women.

**The Duluth Model**

A feminist model has been applied in multiple ways to a variety of settings relevant to violence against women related work. Most directly, it is applied to direct practice with victims and perpetrators of DV. One could argue that purest expression of the feminist model is the Duluth model for addressing IPV. This model includes expressions for female victims and male perpetrators. Under a Duluth model, shelters provide 24 hour hotlines and shelter services to abused women in need. In shelters women participate in a support group process aimed at contextualizing their individual struggle in a larger system of patriarchal oppression. Simultaneously, they receive economic assistance and support in pursing criminal justice action against their perpetrator. The Duluth model for intervention with male perpetrators, commonly referred to as “Batterer’s intervention programs,” is based on feminist consciousness raising through education on patriarchy and women’s oppression, and group therapy aimed at confronting male perpetrators with their abusive behavior (Adams, 1989). Both arms of the Duluth model ideally result in a healed person participating in a larger social movement to end women’s inequality and resist violence against women. This model was developed in Duluth, Minnesota by a group of battered women in the late 1970s who are credited with the creation of the Power and Control Wheel, a visual representation of a
cycle of violence in abusive relationships that is used in violence against women programs around the world (Merry, 2001). There is some demonstrated success for the Duluth model as it is applied to female survivors (Wood & Roche, 2001), however statistics for the Duluth model as it is applied to batterers are dismal (Merry, 2001). Nevertheless, the model continues to be the primary one used for mandated batterer’s treatment programs.

Counseling

While perhaps of questionable effectiveness in stopping the problem of violence against women, an emphasis on confronting abusive behaviors as intolerable and situating them in a larger context of female oppression has translated into counseling practices that are safer for women in abusive relationships. At the inception of the battered women’s movement, the dominant model for counseling people in abusive relationships was couples counseling. Feminists have continued to criticize this approach as ineffective and even dangerous for women in abusive relationships because not only is the woman unable to participate fully in the therapeutic process because of control tactics used by her partner, but she may be punished by her partner later because of issues and emotions raised during a session (Bogard, 1984; Crawford & Harding, 2000; Danis, 2003b). While some counselors continue to advocate for a couples counseling approach, increased awareness of the problems associated with couples counseling for abusive relationships has caused social service and helping professionals to critically examine
screening and treatment processes for potential harm to individuals who are being abused. Feminist analysis has also been used to deconstruct exclusionary assumptions in trauma work (Gilfus, 1999) that inhibit a full understanding of survivors’ experiences.

**Macro Practice**

In addition to individual practice applications and therapeutic techniques, the feminist model has been used in macro level community practice and research. Abrar et al. (2000) describe a feminist model used for the development of a successful DV advocacy coalition. In Brazil, a feminist model was implemented in the development of women’s police stations to handle crimes against women (Hautzinger, 2002). Bell et al. (2004) developed a feminist model for collaboration by researchers, practitioners, and survivors in research on violence against women. M. D. Smith (1994) used a feminist model to develop strategies for improving self-report data in survey research with victims of violence against women. McCary (2007) used a feminist model to analyze masculinity studies. As these examples demonstrate, the feminist model is incredibly versatile and suited for applications in diverse practice and research settings.

**Research**

The issue of research is often discussed in literature on the feminist model. There is a general consensus in the literature around the importance of research to practice. Although feminist practitioners are stereotyped as resistant to research findings, such as considering the inclusion issues listed above, studies with practitioners suggest support from practitioners for research and incorporating research findings into their practice (Bell et al., 2004; McPhail et al., 2007). The emphasis on research and its importance in
the current literature may be in part due to the fact that peer reviewed literature is written by researchers, but as Lancaster and Lumb (1999) point out, the distinction between practitioner and researcher is a false dichotomy; rather, the distinction is instead between discursive material and practice material. Many researchers on the feminist model are engaged in practice outside or in tandem with their work as academics. More than that, the act of research is itself a practice, one that informs the day-to-day realities of work with individuals who are victims and perpetrators of violence, as well as coalition building and policy change work. Research also contributes to the discourse on the problem of violence, what it is, what causes it, and how it should be addressed.

Discussions of research in the literature center more on issues pertinent to conducting and disseminating research. One of those issues is that of access. Rather than expressing a disinterest in research findings, practitioners expressed difficulty in accessing the research due to a lack of resources, including time (Bell et al., 2004). In addition to time, scholarly articles generally have a substantial cost associated with them, further limiting their accessibility. In terms of conducting research, several issues are raised in the literature. More than one author discussed the issue of determining a research agenda (Bell et al., 2004; Brush, 2005).

In applying a feminist model to research on violence against women, decisions about what is studied, how it is studied, and how the findings are used are politically charged. For example, the group of practitioners, researchers and survivors in the Bell et al. (2004) study identified the use of language that is not offensive to collaborative partners as an important concern for collaborative research. M. D. Smith (1994) describes
how feminist scholarship rejects the treatment of survey respondents as subjects to be analyzed. Of major concern is the potential misuse of research, meaning a presentation of findings that paints survivors in a poor light or is interpreted in a way that decontextualizes the findings and removes them from the feminist framework (Bell et al., 2004; Brush, 2005; McClennan, 2003; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). This concern is valid, as a good example of backlash arguments supported by oddly interpreted research can be found in Benetar (2003) and D. Dutton (1994). The Benetar piece, published in a peer-reviewed theory journal, in particular exemplifies the ways people misuse research. Called “The second sexism,” Benetar uses social sciences literature to explain how the real victims of sexism are men. These types of articles can make researchers fearful of how their work may be used and cause practitioners to be reluctant to participate in research.

These concerns are understandable, but it is impossible to foresee how one’s research may be used. Once it is public, people are free to do with it what they will, including making contradictory interpretations. In my work on violence against women I have seen the same prevalence and incidence data used to justify seemingly diametrically opposed positions. As opposed to censoring or rejecting research, researchers can be mindful of their methodology and the way they interpret and distribute the findings in hopes that the dissemination of their work can positively influence the field. This does not mean only doing research and publishing findings that clearly support a feminist
model and say nothing remotely critical about participants. What it means is that researchers approach their work from a place of respect and desire for authenticity, being mindful of the politics inherent with violence against women research.

Several authors identify a commitment to social action as part of the feminist research process (DeKeseredy, 1999; McClennan, 2003; Williams, 2004). In the Bell et al. study (2004), participants raised the issue of using research to influence funders to allot more resources to violence against women and modify funding structures to be more conducive to feminist practice. Critics may claim that a methodology which includes a political component is faulty because it mars the objectivity of the study. Both Williams (2004) and Brown Travis and Compton (2001) point out that violence against women research is inherently political, however Williams (2004) does caution that this political reality does not equate with the imposition of a particular outcome on a study.

Violence against women research is uniquely positioned in the ongoing qualitative-quantitative debate in social science research. Feminists are famous for rejecting epistemologies and research methods they see as oppressive to women. For example, “feminists exposed the dominance of the positivist paradigm as stemming not from its objectivity or its universality, but from its privileged location within a historical, material, and social set of patriarchal power relations” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 7). The feminist model in its focus on female empowerment and women’s voices lends itself to qualitative research and sometimes feminist research is equated with qualitative
research. However current researchers in their discussion of the feminist model as it is applied to research recognize a need for both qualitative and quantitative methods (McClennan, 2003; Walker, 1989; Williams, 2004).

There are barriers to conducting feminist research above and beyond concerns of methodology. A key barrier is that sexism is still firmly entrenched in the academic institutions that train and support researchers (DeKeseredy, Schwartz, & Alvi, 2000). Feminist methods are not routinely taught in higher education outside of Women’s and Gender Studies departments, and there is a need for more feminist faculty in social sciences disciplines (Walker, 1989). There are also barriers to feminist research outside of the academic institution. DeKeseredy describes a personal experience where he received threats and intimidation when publicizing research on violence against women (1999). Although this is just one person’s experience, a prospect of hostility from the public and a lack of support in sexist academic institutions could inhibit and discourage researchers from applying a feminist model and conducting feminist research. DeKeseredy identifies a need for social support for feminist researchers.

One thing that may contribute to an unsupportive environment for feminist research is confusion and controversy around the word feminism. In her article “It’s feminist because I say so!: Feminism, social work and critical practice in the UK,” Orme (2003) states that social work students define anything to do with women as feminist, indicating a lack of understanding about the model. Danis (2003b) says that a majority of social workers distance themselves from anything associated with the word feminism. This reluctance to involve themselves with feminism may have to do with
stereotypes about what a feminist is. It also may be symptomatic of a larger controversy in social work about social control versus social change. The current state of social work practice seems more oriented to social control functions, as in helping individuals fit in society, than social change functions, as in working to change society to be more accepting of individuals.

**Issues of Feminist Practice**

Feminist practice is complicated not only by the individual receptivity of practitioners to feminism but the organizational structures within which helping professionals must operate. The early battered women’s shelters and rape crisis centers resulted from grassroots activism as part of a larger feminist social movement. They tended to be volunteer based and informally structured. As awareness of violence against women services grew, shelters and rape crisis centers had to build capacity to meet increasing demands for services. Those capacity building efforts in large part were to obtain and maintain funds that could support staff and facilities. This process is referred to in the literature as professionalization and has been causing problems in the violence against women movement for decades. Part of the institutionalization of violence against women services is being beholden to funders. Thus informal organizational structures have been replaced by formal ones, and these formal structures sometimes have mandates that complicate feminist practice (Bruckner, 2001; McDonald, 2005; Ristock, 2003; Walker, 2002).
The branching out of shelters and rape crisis centers from small, intimate groups of feminist activists to larger, more bureaucratic organizations has carried with it another controversy, that of what role men should play in the violence against women movement. In the early battered woman’s shelter and rape crisis movements the answer was none, except to awaken to feminist consciousness, stop perpetrating violence and go to jail if they did not do so. This exclusion did not last very long as violence against women practitioners sought to address the problem of male perpetration. There is still argument over whether men or women should work with male perpetrators (Orme, et al., 2000). There is concern that male run groups get funded while female run groups struggle to stay afloat (Orme, et al., 2000). In regards to research, there is concern that men’s studies may undermine or sideline feminist knowledge (Merry, 2001). Some argue that men need to be involved in violence against women work, because men make up a large portion of the population and perpetrate the majority of violent crimes, including violence against women. For example White et al. (1998) discuss the need for African American men to get involved in the anti-rape movement.

In light of all these practice concerns and controversial issues for research, feminist researchers acknowledge a need for continual self-reflection and reflexivity in feminist practice (Danis, 2003b; Koikari & Hippensteele, 2000; McCarry, 2007; Orme, 2003; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Williams, 2004). This means being able to critically examine theory and practice models, and then revise them accordingly depending on new research findings and theory development. Ideally the process of reflection and reflexion is happening in all research and practice processes, and these concepts are considered of
special importance to feminist practice. Hesse-Biber (2007) defines reflexivity as “taking a critical look inward and reflecting on one’s own lived reality and experiences” (p. 129). As is apparent from this quote, reflection is the critical process that leads to reflexivity.

Because feminism centers around constructs of gender and power relationships, it is a theory that is directly applicable to every person, as opposed to something easily abstractable to other people’s experience. As applied to violence against women, feminism requires that we engage in a vigilant process of examining our own ideas about gender and violence to be conscious of the effect of those ideas on research and practice. Because of the high numbers of women working in the violence against women field and the high prevalence rates of IPV and sexual assault against women, researchers and practitioners are likely to have had experience with gender violence and need to be mindful of the possible effects that experience could have on their practice.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative, exploratory study examining academic responses to common issues raised by practitioners in regards to use of a feminist model in violence against women practice. Qualitative methods were used because they are “inherently inductive” (Padgett, 1994) and fit within the context of this study. As summarized by Yllo (2005):

The conceptualization of violence as coercive control was not deduced from an abstract theoretical model. Rather, it grew inductively out of the day-to-day work of battered women and activists who struggled to make sense of the victimization they saw (p. 22).

Because of the organic development of the movement to end violence against women out of grassroots feminist activism, the development of an applied feminist model for violence against women practice is characterized by layered, oral histories and diverse, often conflicting discourses. Therefore, the use of an inductive methodology is ideal for analyzing the current state of the feminist model as a theoretical framework, because
qualitative methodologies allow for emergent themes and center the participants’ voice in describing phenomena.

Research Design

As defined by Kvale (1996), “one of the main purposes of an exploratory study is the discovery of new dimensions” (p. 100). The aim of this study is to explore the implications of the feminist model in theory and practice from the perspective of academics who work in violence against women. Qualitative data were collected via one time, individual, face-to-face interviews with academics. Academics were identified as individuals employed in a college or university setting who teach or do research and hold at least a Master’s degree. For this study academics were recruited that teach, research and/or practice in the field of violence against women. The questions asked of participants challenge the assumptions of the feminist model and thus could be construed as controversial. The confidentiality of individual interviewing and reporting allowed participants to explain their opinions more openly. This approach was supported throughout the interviewing process when participants “named names” so to speak, relating their perspectives on the feminist model through the use of personal experiences with colleagues, agencies and institutions. Such participant comments suggested that participants were more comfortable sharing these direct experiences under a cloak of confidentiality.

Qualitative interviewing is useful for examining the function of language in defining experience (Seidman, 1991). Qualitative interviews tend to utilize open ended questioning and be less structured than the interviews conducted for survey research
(Rubin & Babbie, 2005). As described by Kvale (1996), “interviews are particularly suited for studying people’s understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world” (p. 105). In this study, the “lived world” is the world of academic scholarship about violence against women. This world is defined and maintained largely through the use of discursive formations and vocabulary that is not consistently defined (Loseke, Gelles, & Cavanaugh, 2005). Individual interviews will provide information on the particular perspective of each participant in regards to the use of the feminist model, information that can be used to explore the efficacy of the model in research and practice.

Sample

The sample was obtained using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling strategies. Purposive sampling involves the selection of participants “based on your judgment and the purpose of the study” (Rubin & Babbie, 2005, p. 247). Convenience sampling involves the selection of participants based on access or availability, for example researching clients in the researcher’s practice setting. The researcher conducted 11 interviews, 10 with individuals who have PhDs and one with a JD. Ten of the 11 participants work in a university setting, and one in a practice setting. The primary selection criterion for participation was that the individual teaches and/or conducts research on violence against women in the state of Ohio. The one participant who works outside of a university setting does teach, however her teaching experience consists of community education classes which are considered more of a practice
function than that of academic scholarship. Thus, the decision was made to analyze that interview separately and to cease recruiting participants whose only teaching experience is in the context of community education.

The pool of potential participants was developed utilizing data from a 2004 survey of colleges and universities conducted by the Ohio Department of Health. The survey sought information on which institutions had course work, continuing education, and/or research on sexual assault and/or DV. Using the survey data a list was generated of all schools engaging in at least one scholastic activity in either target area. Each school on this list was examined for the following criteria:

- Geographic location
- Whether the school is public or private
- Size of the school
- Religious affiliation

The list of schools was found to be relatively diverse, although there was a conspicuous absence of schools in the Southeastern portion of Ohio, an Appalachian region. To make up for this lack, referrals were sought from the Ohio Department of Health as to whom in that area does work on violence against women. One contact was obtained who subsequently consented to participate in the study.

Initial recruitment consisted of cold emails, phone calls and postal mailings to the departments identified in the survey as housing faculty doing work on violence against women. An email was sent first, followed by a phone call within one to two weeks. These efforts were then followed up with a postal mailing one to two weeks later. If a
department did not have email, contact began with a phone call and then followed up with a postal mailing. Sometimes the follow up occurred out of the one-two week timeline, for instance over holidays. In these initial contacts the researcher introduced herself, gave a quick description of the study, and asked for names of faculty doing work in the area so that they could be approached directly. Sometimes department heads or administrators provided contacts, other times they replied that they would forward my email to faculty they thought might be interested.

Once potential participants were identified, a similar email, phone call, and postal mailing strategy was followed to recruit participants. Emails and postal mailings utilized the template recruitment letter approved by the IRB in the research proposal (see Appendix A). In an email, the recruitment letter was attached and a short introduction and description of the study was included in the body of the email. If an individual consented to participate, an attempt was made to set up an interview time that was convenient to them and at a location of their choosing. If a potential participant declined to participate but offered a referral, the referral was followed up on. Nine participants were identified through this process, four of whom were unable to schedule an interview. These interviews were not completed because of scheduling conflicts and/or a participant not returning attempted contacts, implying a withdrawal of consent to participate. The five participants obtained through this process with which interviews were completed work at institutions representing north (including north east and north west) and south west portions of the state and ranges in size. Three of the schools at which the participants
work are religiously affiliated. These five participants include the participant whose interview is considered in a separate analysis because of her position. As stated above, in addition to the participants identified through the Ohio Department of Health survey, a participant was recruited who works in an institution in south west Ohio to increase the regional representation of the sample.

At the end of this process six interviews were completed, one of which could not be analyzed with the main data set. This sample size was considerably smaller than the projected goal of 8-10 participants. After consultation with the committee chair, Gender or Women’s Studies departments from the institutions where I had recruited participants were solicited for additional contacts. This process was surprisingly unsuccessful, and ended up supporting some of the findings of my study regarding the relationship between feminists in academia and violence against women practice. An attempt had been made to recruit one participant from a Women’s Studies department in central Ohio in the initial recruitment process from the Ohio Department of Health survey and she declined to participate. In direct pursuit of participants from Women’s Studies departments besides that one, I found that 5 of 7 institutions had no Gender or Women’s Studies department. The two institutions that did have Gender or Women’s Studies departments were contacted again and one participant was recruited through this effort. She teaches Women’s Studies courses but is not in the Women’s Studies department. Seven interviews had now been completed, six as part of the main data set, plus the interview with the practitioner, still short of my desired 8-10.
At this stage a decision was made to switch to convenience sampling using contacts with the Ohio Department of Health Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Prevention Program and the Ohio Family Violence Prevention Project. This effort yielded seven additional participants, four of whom I completed interviews with. The last three interviews were scheduled but canceled due to time constraints of the study. The topic of study is complex, and the additional perspectives would have been of value and possibly provided additional insight, but based on preliminary analysis of the data at hand it was determined that choosing not to go forward with those interviews would not compromise the integrity or rigor of the study.

This is a qualitative study intended to probe participants’ specific perspectives, thus it is not intended to be generalizable to other academics. That said the combination of purposive and convenience sampling was chosen to try and represent a broad array of Ohio collegiate institutions. The institutions with which participants are affiliated cover all corners of the state as well as central Ohio (three of 11 participants are from the same central Ohio university, and two participants were from the same university in the south west part of the state). The institutions also represent a range of sizes from small to large; include public and private schools as well as schools that are religiously affiliated. The study is subject to the bias inherent in purposive sampling and qualitative interviewing, mainly that the researcher is the vehicle of analysis and thus the study is subject to my own bias. Hesse-Biber (2007) raises this issue in her discussion of reflexivity: “Like the researched or respondent, the researcher is a product of his or her society’s social
structures and institutions. Our beliefs, backgrounds, and feelings are part of the process of knowledge construction (p. 129). Also, the selection of participants was not conducted using a scientifically controlled method.

Data Collection

The interviews lasted anywhere from 21 minutes to 73 minutes, with the average interview time being 48 minutes. Two interviews were under 30 minutes; the remaining nine interviews were evenly distributed between 36 and 45 minutes, 46 and 60 minutes, and 61 and 75 minutes. Interviews were held at a location of the participants choosing. Eight of 11 interviews were conducted in the participant’s office. Two interviews were conducted in coffee shops, and one interview was conducted in a participant’s home. The projected interview time was 60-90 minutes. Most interviews did not run that long because the interview schedule was covered sufficiently in less time. Two interviews were interrupted because they were conducted during the participant’s office hours. One of those was cut short because of unforeseen circumstances for both the researcher and the participant. Nonetheless, six of eight questions from the interview schedule were covered, and the participant gave relevant answers that contributed to the study, so that interview is included in analysis. The interview schedule was unavailable for one interview, but the researcher was able to recreate six of eight questions from memory, and a review of the transcript did not indicate a substantial deviation from the interview schedule, so that data was included.
The structure of the interviews was as follows:

- **Introductions and rapport building:** At this point a brief overview of the study was provided and any initial questions the participant had about the researcher or the study were answered.

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were provided with two copies of the consent form (see Appendix B), one to sign and return to the researcher and one to keep. Participants had the opportunity to ask any questions they had about the consent form and confidentiality.

- **Interview:** The interviews began with a series of demographic questions (see Appendix C), followed by the interview schedule (see Appendix D). The operational definition of the feminist model given to participants in this study is a belief that violence against women results from patriarchy, and thus solutions to the problem of violence against women involve consciousness raising to women’s class oppression, empowering women to leave abusive relationships, and working for women’s equality in society. While covering all the questions on the interview schedule (with the two exceptions noted above) the interviewer utilized an open process whereby the questions were asked in a manner that flowed with the participants responses, without stressing a word for word conformity. This method of qualitative interviewing is supported by Mishler (1986). At the end of the interview each participant was given an opportunity to clarify anything she had said, give any additional insights she wanted included in the interview, and ask the researcher further questions.
Interviews were audio recorded using the researcher’s digital audio recording device. The researcher also took handwritten notes during the interviews with each participant’s verbal consent. The participant’s name was not audio recorded, so the only identifying information in the files was that provided by the participant during the course of the interview (such as institutional affiliation). Audio files, once downloaded onto the researcher’s laptop, were erased from the recording device. Backup copies of the files were burned to disc and kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher using Sony Vegas Pro software. Transcriptions were kept on the researcher’s laptop and hard copies kept in a locked filing cabinet. Transcriptions were numbered for confidentiality, and no written legend was kept to indicate what number corresponded with what participant. Interviews were numbered in chronological order of completion so that the researcher knew with which participant each interview corresponded.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using content and thematic analysis techniques, as well as elements of a grounded theory approach. The process of thematic analysis involved doing a “close reading” of transcribed interviews (Seidman, 1991), analyzing both the surface level syntax and the deeper level concepts within the text. Initially an open coding process was used (Charmaz, 2006), whereby the researcher examined each interview independently of one another. During this process particular phrases that participants used to describe concepts were noted, as well as topical areas of discussion on which the participant focused. Each participant used different examples to illustrate their thoughts.
on the feminist model, based upon their practice orientation and personal experiences. These unique perspectives both illuminated aspects of the interview schedule as well as raised new ideas about the application of a feminist model to violence against women practice. At this stage I made a concerted effort not to impose categories or concepts on the data, using the participant’s words whenever possible to code. The transcripts were analyzed in chronological order, and themes that seemed to emerge from multiple participants were noted. Separate notes were made on those possible themes for the next stage of analysis. After this open coding process was complete, the codes from all the transcripts were listed in chronological order.

The decision was made to analyze the community practitioner data in a separate case study. As defined by Rubin and Babbie (2005), “a case study is an idiographic examination of a single individual, family, group, organization, community or society. Its chief purpose is description, although attempts at explanation are also acceptable” (p. 440). Although the community practitioner interview introduces many recurrent terms and themes echoed by other participants, the community practitioner participant’s standpoint as a practitioner and not an academic lent a different perspective to her responses. It would have been misrepresentative to aggregate her responses with those of the other participants.

The list of codes from the other 10 participants was reviewed in chronological order, and the list of codes was refined to be more applicable to the entire data set. Content analysis techniques were used to synthesize the codes into meaningful categories. Content analysis is a process whereby texts are studied in a systematic fashion
and “broken down into ‘units of analysis’” (Leavy, 2007, p. 231). The texts in this case are the interview transcripts. Content analysis techniques were chosen because although the data were collected through qualitative interviews, the subject of the interviews was theory. Thus rather than emphasize participant narratives, the decision was made to focus on the specific concepts participants discussed in regards to the application of the feminist model to violence against women practice. This process resulted in two categories of information:

1. Topic areas: These are the recurring topics discussed by participants. These included topics directly related to the interview schedule (i.e., contrasts between theory and practice) and emergent topics raised by participants in their responses to the interview schedule (i.e. representations of feminism).

2. Emerging patterns and themes: These included preliminary thematic findings relative to the topic areas and notable phrases participants used.

This iterative process of documenting topics and preliminary themes continued until I had reached a saturation point where I felt all pertinent pieces of information in the data had been accounted for in the coding process. Saturation is the point where “new information tends to confirm our existing classification scheme and discrepant cases stop appearing” (Padgett, 1994, p. 79). In the analysis of the data for this study, saturation refers specifically to the point where all the main ideas of the participants were included in the list of topics, patterns and themes.
The presentation and discussion of findings is organized around the topic areas, with relevant patterns and themes noted in the presentation of each particular topic. Within each topic area, participant responses were grouped according to similarities and contrasting or conflicting responses were also noted. The goal was to represent the range of responses, noting commonalities but also differences. The small sample size made it imperative that the comments of participants not be generalized too much at the risk of losing subtle distinctions. It was important to document variations in language to avoid simplistic interpretations of participants’ responses. For instance, four of the eight questions on the interview schedule are closed ended questions. It would be insufficient to present the findings as simply, “x number of participants said yes, x number of participants said no” without using quotations to detail their responses to discern fine distinctions and hidden meanings. While not completing a narrative analysis as described by Mishler (1986), I did make an effort to use lengthier quotes in order to contextualize participants’ responses and ensure that their voices remained intact within each topic area. Shorter quotes were used to illustrate variations in terms or list more straightforward information, such as what theoretical models are employed for use in violence against women practice. Consistent with a grounded theory approach, the decision was made to review the literature upon completion of data collection and analysis, in order to avoid biasing the data collection and analysis process with concepts from the literature.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Demographics

All participants in this study identified their gender as “female.”

Racial/Ethnic Identity

Figure 4.1 depicts the racial and ethnic identity that participants as identified by the participants through open ended questioning. See Appendix C for list of demographic questions. Eight of 11 participants identified their racial identity as “Caucasian/White.” Variations on this term included “very white,” and “pure, white bread, Anglo-Saxon type.” The remaining three participants identified themselves as “German and Polish,” “Appalachian,” and “mixed race…European/White/Latina.”
Figure 4.1 Racial/Ethnic Identity of Participants

Class Growing Up

Figure 4.2 depicts participants’ descriptions of their economic class growing up as identified by participants through open ended questioning. See Appendix C for list of demographic questions. A majority of participants (6 of 11) identified their class growing up as “lower middle class.” Variations on this term included “or upper working class,” “working/lower middle class,” and “working middle class.” Four of 11 participants identified themselves as “middle class,” with variations on the term being “truly middle,” and “smack dab in the middle.” One participant identified her class growing up as “underclass.”
Figure 4.2 Class Growing Up of Participants

*Years of Experience*

Figure 4.3 depicts the years of experience participants have in the field of violence against women. Participants gave a specific number of years of experience they have in the field. Those numbers were grouped into 1-9 years, 11-20 years, and 20+ years to give a sense of the distribution of the sample. The years of experience participants had working in the field of violence against women ranged from three to 25. Four of 11 participants had less than ten years of experience, five of 11 participants had between 10 and 20 years of experience, and two participants had more than 20 years of experience.
Figure 4.3 Years of Experience of Participants

Type of Experience

The two main categories of experience in violence against women that participants had were teaching/research and direct practice doing prevention and/or intervention with perpetrators and/or survivors of violence against women. All participants had experience in both categories, although the level of experience varied (i.e., some participants had less direct practice experience and more teaching/research experience and vice versa). The exception was the community practitioner participant, whose teaching experience is confined to community education.
Bridging Practice and Theory: A Case Study

For the reasons previously noted, the community practitioner interview is examined as a separate case study. Demographically, the community practitioner participant did not differ significantly from the main data set except she is not a faculty or staff in a university setting. In terms of gender, race/ethnicity and years of experience, the community practitioner participant was similar to the other participants. The community practitioner interview provides a bridge between McPhail et al.’s (2007) study with DV advocates and the current study on the application of the feminist model to violence against women practice. The community practitioner participant’s responses introduce many terms and topics that are echoed by the participants in the main data set.

The community practitioner participant used key phrases throughout the interview to describe societal norms around women’s inequality and IPV. These include the belief that the man is “king of the castle” and that women get “the short end of the stick.” The phrase “king of the castle” is used to describe beliefs about man’s place in the home that contribute to tolerance of IPV in our society:

Well I do believe that there, because of inequality there is a societal belief by some people, not everyone, and that’s been changing, that women aren’t equal to men or the man is king of the castle [italics added]…whatever happens in the home is private, that’s his business, that type of thing.

This passage sums up the feminist understanding of patriarchy and its contribution to the tolerance of IPV. It is clear that the community practitioner participant does not confine this set of attitudes to mainstream American culture. She also uses the phrase to describe
patriarchal norms in the Hispanic community: “Their culture is different than ours, the man is considered the king of the castle, they’re very close knit, um, the women are supposed to cater to the man.” It is interesting that the participant uses the same phrase to describe both cultures, although she is asserting differences between the two. This connection demonstrates the transcultural nature of patriarchy from a feminist perspective.

The belief that “a man’s home is his castle” was described by the participant as contributing to harsher treatment of women who kill their intimate partners by the criminal justice system than men who have committed the same crime: “They still have in the back of their minds, you know…the man’s home is his castle, and he made a mistake, type of attitude.” This interpretation hints at the notion of victim blaming: if a man’s place is as the head of household, and his female partner challenges that, it is she who is at fault for abuse or taking action to defend herself. The community practitioner participant indicated a similar line of thinking that can impact clinical practice with survivors: “If [practitioners] have the attitude that a man’s home is his castle and you must’ve done something wrong for him to hit you, somehow you let him do it, that’s absolutely going to affect how they counsel.” These descriptions show how sexism affects the way women who have been abused are treated, and serve as examples of common feminist interpretations of victim blaming.
In contrast to men being “king of the castle,” the community practitioner participant describes the status of women in society as getting the “short end of the stick”:

If a woman kills her abuser…statistics show that she gets a longer jail sentence, the jury is more harsh with her than when a man kills…his significant other or loving person or whatever. So there still is that, in society…women are gonna get the short end of the stick [italics added]. Same thing when they get divorced…he’s gonna yes, maybe pay some child support but…often times it’s not enough to really support the kids, and…she’s gonna end up in more poverty than she was no matter what her situation was when she was married, unless she comes from a very wealthy family or has…an excellent job…but basically saying that women get the short end of the stick with stuff.

This passage describes women’s inequality in economics and the criminal justice system. The participant intimates that both women’s actual inequality in terms of resources and women’s perceived inequality because of individual attitudes have negative outcomes for women. These inequalities are expressions of sexism in society.

The community practitioner participant credits the feminist model for improving women’s economic status and raising awareness in the community that DV is a problem:

I think the feminist movement has really helped with women learning that they can become economically independent which is a major way to stay out of an abusive situation…I think also that it has helped with…the education of people in the community that abuse is wrong no matter what.
What is interesting about this passage is that the participant does not credit the feminist movement with actually changing the ability of women to be economically independent, but rather helping them to understand that they can be economically independent. This assertion both supports and contradicts the feminist model. It supports the model by indicating a model where feminists support women in improving their individual financial situation. It contradicts the model by not acknowledging feminist efforts at system level social change in regards to women’s economic status. The success of the battered women’s shelter movement in increasing public awareness of DV is commonly stated, both by the participants of this study and in the practice literature.

The community practitioner participant described the failures of the feminist model as minimizing women’s accountability for how abuse affects their children and purporting essentialist claims that all men are abusive:

Where I think it may have some downfalls is that…sometimes with the feminist model, in the arena of domestic violence people get this whole thing that only women are abused, that it’s never, she never did anything, and I’m not saying she deserved abuse, but I’m just saying she takes no responsibility for the way children have suffered, that all men are abusive…So I think it’s fallen short on that.

The participant implies that people who work in violence against women deny any accountability to women in abusive situations. The participant is careful to say “I’m not saying she deserved the abuse, but [italics added]…” This sentence structure demonstrates how the notion of victim blaming has been integrated into violence against
women discourse. Many participants in the study use similar statements as a caveat when expressing any idea that could be construed as victim blaming. This passage also connects the woman experiencing abuse to the suffering of her children, a complex idea that factors into critiques of the feminist model (see above). A concern many professionals have is that the feminist model lets mothers off the hook for the abuse of their children. A feminist argument might be that the responsibility for children and their care should not rest squarely on the mother. The statement above by the community practitioner participant could be construed as informed by bias; in that it contains an assumption that women are more responsible for children than men. This subtle message contradicts attempts to avoid victim blaming. At the tail end of the passage, the community practitioner participant raises another issue repeated by other participants and in the literature— not all men are abusive. That the community practitioner participant makes this statement while describing failures of the feminist model indicates that in her understanding, the feminist model claims that all men are abusive.

In conjunction with the assertion that all men are not abusive, the community practitioner participant points out that, “we have run into women that are doing the abuse.” Continuing a critique of essentialism in feminist discourse on IPV, the community practitioner participant says, “I think the feminist model sometimes does preclude us from looking at how abuse really affects our families and society, and just society’s norms and that.” This ties into larger critiques on the feminist model as it is applied to violence against women practice. The goal of the feminist model at its inception was arguably to analyze how abuse affects families and society, as well as analyze society’s
norms around abuse. This statement begs a question—what has happened to translate the feminist model from critical analysis of social constructions to essentialist notions of gender, family, and violence?

The community practitioner participant acknowledged the influence of patriarchy on violence against women while stressing the importance of assessing other factors: “Patriarchal society certainly does have some things to do with what’s going on…but they also need to realize that there’s other things that contribute to [violence].” The “they” in this statement is presumably feminists. Although clearly supporting many if not most tenets of the feminist model, the participant never really aligns herself with feminists and describes the traditional interpretation of the feminist model as “radical,” “strict,” “diehard,” and “narrow.” This contradiction between what is feminist according to the literature and what is perceived as feminist by individuals is seen both in the responses of participants in this study and in the practice literature. Two examples in The community practitioner interview of contradictions between theoretical feminism and perceived feminism can be found both in the participant’s discussion of diversity and the importance of women supporting other women.

In discussing diversity issues, the community practitioner participant criticizes the model, saying, “I think the feminist model that’s really the diehard feminist is too narrow and that and we need to start looking at other cultures.” However the process the participant describes is one where the feminist message is translated for use with other
cultures, not one that seeks to collaborate and learn from other cultures. “I try and explain to people within their context of their beliefs you know why this is wrong and why it shouldn’t be going on.” The motivation for this is education:

I think it’s something where not only the females but the males need to be taught, need to be educated, need to understand. They need to look at...how they perceive women’s roles...and that has to be changed. The women need to see how they perceive their roles and that needs to be changed.

The participant seems to be advocating for cultural competency or relevancy, but simultaneously what she is saying is that there is one, correct message about gender roles that needs to be translated so that other cultures can change. The cultures she discusses are “the Hispanic community,” “Muslim culture,” and “extremely religious people.” Religion is an issue raised by other participants and in the literature. The community practitioner participant’s comments illustrate a paradox where people working in the violence against women field want to put forth a certain ideal of equality for women and anti-violence as established by White, middle class, heterosexual women, but also want to work effectively with diverse communities.

Another contradiction between theoretical and perceived feminism is present in the community practitioner participant’s assertion that survivors need to help other survivors. She stresses the importance of abandoning the victim label: “In the domestic violence arena a lot of us just call ‘em survivors, not victims.” She goes on to criticize the feminist model as “narrow” : “I think sometimes that’s one of the things with the feminist model, if you go the strict feminist model, is too narrow [italics added], it doesn’t take in
consideration everything.” The participant goes on to acknowledge the importance of feminism to women’s progress in society: “I think it was a good thing when it started because it needed to be hard, because the way women were treated and still are in a lot of ways.” She goes on to say that “now they need to branch out more,” and the “they” again is presumably feminists. However what the participant goes on to describe is a classic example of the feminist model:

There’s a lot of strong women…in the United States, and in the communities…that have….positions of authority, that have worked out getting out of an abusive situation, making something of themselves. These women really need to speak out and talk to other women, let them know, “You can do it, but it’s a hard path, you need help, we’re there to help you, but we can’t do it for you.”

This passage is curious because it begins by criticizing the model as “narrow” and claiming that feminists need to “branch out more.” What the participant goes on to describe is a very traditional feminist model of women helping women: survivors achieve higher status in society, and then intervene with other women to help them do the same.

In spite of her concerns, the community practitioner participant agrees with the view of some critics that critique of the model opens the door for anti-feminist backlash: “If somebody starts critiquing the feminist model then people, there’s gonna be people out there coming out and saying, ‘Well, yes, we told you that men were abused more than women,’ or ‘[it is] fifty-fifty,’ and it’s not.” This statement presents a dilemma: in acknowledging various failings or critiques of the model, the participant does not seem to
be advocating an exploration of those failings or critiques. In fact, she seems to be advising against such critique. This practice dilemma is discussed in more detail by the other participants.

In summary, The community practitioner interview needed to be separated from the other interviews because of the participant’s orientation as a practitioner, but contains many of the same themes and concepts explored by the other participants as will be illustrated in the next section. The community practitioner participant’s comments support both the critiques put forth in Mills (2003) and the issues raised by practitioners in McPhail et al. (2007). A case study of this interview provides a bridge from the practice literature to the current study and provides evidence for the need for continued research on the application of the feminist model to violence against women practice.

Academic Participant Responses to Interview Questions

Participants were asked a series of eight questions regarding the application of the feminist model to violence against women practice. See Appendix D for a copy of the interview schedule. Participant responses elicited topics directly related to the interview schedule as well as emergent topics within each of those broad categories. Themes also emerged from the findings relative to the various topic areas. The findings are organized around the broad topic areas of:

- Theory versus practice;
- Successes and failures of the feminist model;
- Alternate theoretical models;
- Continuum of agency;
• Self-Critique;
• Diversity; and
• Self-reflection.

Within the topic of theory and practice, the emergent topics of anti-feminist structures and lack of resources are presented, as well as the themes of conflicting tensions, and feminism as a framework. Within the topic of successes and failures, the emergent topics of tenets of feminism and representations of feminism are presented, as well as the themes of changing cultural norms and empowering women.

Theory Versus Practice

Participant discussions around the issue of contrasts between feminist ideology and an applied feminist model centered on two issues: conflicting tensions between academics, practitioners, feminists, social service professionals, and survivors, and the use of feminism as a theoretical framework for practice versus using it as a direct practice model. Some participants felt that there was no contrast between feminist theory and feminist practice.

Violence Against Women Practice: Conflicting Tensions

In describing the contrasts between theory and practice, many participants discussed the presence of various “tensions” or conflicts between the players in violence against women related work. These included tensions between feminists in academia and activism who do not identify as helping professionals (such as social workers) and helping professionals, those between academics and professionals, and those between the feminists and helping professionals and the clients receiving services. Two participants
used the phrase “academic feminist” to describe feminists who work in university settings. This is defined in opposition to “people who come to feminism through sort of their own experiences.” The participant gives the example of environmental activists concerned for their families’ health to describe people who come to feminism through their own experience. Another participant described how some women have feminism inside of them, before the label: “I think that that’s who I was before, I think some of us, we [were] feminist even before the theory was made.” Participants used many words to describe non-academic feminists, such as “feminists in the community,” “practice feminists,” and “advocates.”

One participant described the conflict between academics and practitioners in terms of larger social movements: “Sort of the grassroots movement that I understood…the battered women’s movement and feminist movement, they sort of clashed early on and there were certainly clashes with the…women of color.” She described the clashes as centered around the use of criminal justice approaches to address violence against women. Another participant described the space between academics and practitioners as “slippage”:

In fact there was a great deal of slippage and…feminists in the community who were really involved in violence against women didn’t…really want anything to do with academic feminists and didn’t really care for the perspective that we took on the topic.

The participant feels that the practitioner perspective is necessarily “monolithic” in order to cope with the horrific realities of violence against women. Thus practitioners are
unable or unwilling to engage with what they consider irrelevant theoretical abstractions. Similar to the participant listed above, another participant used the word “clash” to describe the space between academic and practice feminists: “The academic feminist sort of understanding, and then the practical on the ground sort of understanding…that can be really clashing too.” This participant also raised the issue of community feminist activists being frustrated with and uninterested in abstract theoretical analysis from feminist academics. Another participant talked about how “there is a tension between embodying the movement and practicing service provision.”

Two reasons given by participants for this distance between academics and service provision have to do with anti-feminist structures and lack of resources. The concept of anti-feminist structures covers much ground from mezzo structures such as service agencies and academic institutions to macro structures such as popular and mainstream culture. At the agency level, the drive to obtain funds creates conflict for feminist practice. Agencies end up beholden to funders whose mandates and requirements inhibit feminist service provision. Feminist service provision is direct practice guided by a feminist model. The process of seeking funds results in agencies being more focused on survival than on what is best for clients.

At the micro level of direct practice, funding requirements can place worker responsibilities in direct opposition to feminist practice. In a feminist setting focused on empowerment, it would be ideal for clients to be in an environment where they can use
their existing supports to achieve goals that they set themselves. In practice this is not always the case. One participant volunteers at a shelter where many residents have fundamentalist Christian beliefs not supported by the shelter:

Most of the women I worked with were…fundamentalist and…holiness women and they were really deeply faithful women, and the social workers, some of the social workers…just wouldn’t tolerate expressions of that in the shelter…sometimes…for very practical reasons, i.e., federal funding and such things like that.

Another participant discussed the conflict between battered women’s shelter practitioners’ ideological commitment to a feminist social movement and their professional requirements as shelter staff:

I see frontline workers very much struggling with how they came to the work, how they came to be a domestic violence advocate or activist and what they’re asked to do in those capacities. So if a woman says…‘I joined this domestic violence shelter team because I’m a Women’s Studies major, I believe in the movement, I believe in empowering women,’ and then she’s put into a shelter capacity where she is required to evaluate a woman’s progress towards certain goals that have nothing to do with promoting equality in a patriarchal system…I see a tension that emerges. I also see policies and practices at the organizational level that…very much contradicts what people may be coming to the movement for.
In addition to the problems of organizational policies based on funding requirements, the process of seeking funds in and of itself can stifle feminist practice. One participant describes a grant structure that is inherently anti-feminist where the ability to get funds is based on an agency’s level of cooperation as opposed to a mindful approach to successful practice. The setting for the practice she describes is a collaborative relationship between local and state agencies. She says that “a feminist model in theory would be collaborative and from the ground up and include everyone’s voice.” However for “practical purposes” the agencies had to have a way to divide up funds. “The time was very limited,” and “so it was kind of like whoever was the most cooperative was going to get the most out of the project.” As a result of the pressure to seek and maintain funds, this participant posits that agencies may shift their focus to self preservation, rather than keeping the focus on the client problem. She says that “in any kind of social work setting…the ideal goal would be to put yourself out of business. But you know the reality is that we to some extent…perhaps perpetuate the problem so we can continue in our own self-interest.”

Beyond the level of direct service agencies, other institutions such as academia, medicine, and the criminal justice system also inhibit feminist practice and contribute to tensions and conflicts between the various stakeholders in violence against women practice. Three participants discussed the difficulties around practicing feminism in academia, highlighting issues pertaining to teaching, research, publishing, and institutional politics. One participant discussed the problem of trying to prioritize feminist issues when much of what she is expected to teach comes from the accrediting body for
her program. She says that “our program and other CACREP [Council for Accredidation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs] programs don’t really pay enough attention to crisis counseling aspects, which includes domestic violence.”

Another participant feels that master’s programs do not adequately prepare students for certain types of research applicable to violence against women:

[Doing research with] victims and getting it through IRB is a daunting task and one that if you are a master’s level or even a doctoral degree student how much time do you have? Right? Not that much to get a project done…the system doesn’t always…train people to do work, qualitative work, ethnographic research with victims of violence, advocates in domestic violence shelters, and so on.

Participants discussed issues relative to conducting professional research in the academic setting. Conflicting views were given by participants as to the ease in obtaining funding for feminist research. One participant said that,

Any applied or practice based research is gonna be difficult to get funded. It’s an added hurdle. And because of that I know colleagues of mine, a lot of them have left the field of violence against women research and advocacy research and shelter research.

While acknowledging that “if you use a feminist method and that happens to be qualitative you do run into some difficulty,” another participant asserted that, “I don’t know that…having a feminist perspective kills a grant proposal. It doesn’t.”
Participants offered mixed perspectives in discussing the issue of publication. In the “publish or perish” environment of higher education, whether or not an academic will be able to publish findings from a study in a peer-reviewed journal could significantly impact the decision to pursue the research. One participant summed this up by saying, “for academics you have to publish to keep your job….To get tenure you have to publish.” Participants were in agreement that qualitative studies were more difficult to get published. One participant described a “pressure to go into more…clinical or scientific avenues.” In contrast, another participant said, “I don’t know that just because you’re feminist and you use qualitative methods you’re not going to get published.”

Complicating the practical concerns around teaching, research and publication of feminist scholarship, one participant expressed concern about unsupportive institutions discouraging feminist research by faculty. She said that “sexism is alive and well and it’s unfortunate that…I just don’t feel safe enough to talk about it even as faculty.” Another participant did not share the same perspective, saying that she got support from her institutions to do violence against women research.

In addition to academia, participants raised the issue of the criminal justice and healthcare systems as complicating feminist practice. In describing frustration with criminal justice approaches to batterer’s intervention programs, one participant said, “The public and law enforcement and court judicial system doesn’t get it.” Another participant sees backsliding from the gains feminists made in regards to child birthing practices: So we [see] something like…the A-B-C-D package, and you’ll see that…on a board, ‘She’s coming in, A-B-C.’ What does that mean? Induction, artificial
rupture of membranes, epidural, and petosin or C-section, actually the D to tell you, the D is C-section. Totally managed and women have bought it hook, line, and sinker. The let themselves be induced, we have more complications with our babies, we have more C-sections….We’ve been managed again.

These last two comments get at a larger anti-feminist structure- culture. Eight of 10 participants raised issues of culture and socialization and their impact on violence against women practice. Participants discussed how a politically conservative and violence supporting climate inhibit their ability to advance feminist practice. One participant said,

I’ve worked at the university for twenty years and honestly I think the young people who we’re teaching right now, I’ve seen…more narrow thinking and…less sort of, understanding of feminism and its tenets than [I saw] when I first started twenty years ago…I mean certainly we’re in an era right now where you think politically…it’s a very conservative…climate.

One participant stated the problem this way:

We’re getting so many mixed messages that…in order to be a democratic society you have to do it the way we do it, or else we’re going to come in and invade you….Culturally I think we’re very confused.

She goes on to say that “I just think our society’s just so violent, our language is just terribly violent.” Two other participants pointed out the impact that a conservative, violent culture has on perceptions of violence against women. One said specifically that
society lets batterers “off the hook.” The other said that Americans are “deadened” to the tragedy of rape and “there’s plenty of evidence in popular culture to show that um, you know we’re still misogynistic.”

Along with anti-feminist structures, the issue of lack of resources is cited by participants as contributing to the distance between academic and practice feminists. Resources identified by participants as needed for direct practice include money, time, space, protection, community support, and staff. The lack of these resources prevents practitioners from being able to engage more fully in the theoretical work that academics value. One participant described it this way:

I had a great deal of sympathy for the social workers for not…being willing to look at more delicate analyses because for them…they have a very small window of opportunity and they have a lot of serious difficulties getting funding and…there’s all these different facets to…their existence and…their world and…they don’t necessarily have the time, inclination, or believe…in the outcome that more delicate analyses could provide, they just can’t really do it.

Another participant looks at the issue from the other side:

In the space where academic feminism can be discussed and critiqued and thought about…there’s a luxury of time, and space and there’s also the protection of…in this academic setting, our job is to think critically, and so it’s our job to reflect and to think of the nuances and to discuss and…self-critique and all this sort of thing and in the practical arena of actually implementing…programs, I mean there
should be some time for that kind of reflection of what’s working and what’s not working, but it seems that those situations are so often in crisis mode.

One participant said that for batterer’s intervention programs to be more successful, there is a need for time, money, community support, and staff. She emphasizes money is not the only resource needed “because you can’t just throw money at a problem.” For these programs to be successful, this participant feels that the community needs to support their success by recognizing the time and effort required to undergo a change effort with a batterer and provide the necessary resources accordingly. She explains that resource provision is most helpful in the context of a community response informed by awareness of violence against women, its causes, and its consequences.

In addition to the conflict between academic feminists and practice feminists, there is a conflict between workers and residents in battered women’s shelters in terms of professional requirements of shelter workers, as well as conflict caused by demographic differences between workers and residents. One participant said that shelter residents have “hostility” and “disrespect” for shelter workers because they “had to follow sort of administrative procedures, and they were often not battered women themselves.” She identifies this differences as “contrary to the early battered women’s movement and the early…shelters” where there was a “feet on the ground perspective.” She summarized by saying that these tensions “had real implications for politics in the shelter.”

Another participant also discussed the demographic differences between shelter workers and shelter residents and how that complicates direct practice in a shelter setting. She describes most shelter workers as having the minimum of “a bachelor’s degree;”
being “white,” “English speaking,” “middle to upper class,” and “young,” and having no “previous victimization experience.” In contrast, she describes most of the women using shelter services as “lower income,” Black/Latino, and likely to have experienced previous victimization. She goes on to give a specific example of how these demographic differences can complicate practice, asking, “So what do you do when you put a woman in a room who’s twenty two, has no kids, to teach twelve women who have different backgrounds in terms of race and ethnicity…a parenting class?”

Feminism as Framework Versus a Feminist Practice Model

All the participants expressed at least some support for feminist tenets, however many highlighted concerns regarding an applied feminist practice model’s effectiveness in addressing violence against women:

I think that the feminist model provides…a good organizing framework for understanding at least a part of violence…against women…In practice, however…you end up dealing with more individual, more immediate, more micro-systemic factors…you’re using techniques that certainly aren’t inconsistent with a feminist model, but…you can’t translate it into practice I guess.

One participant criticized feminist efforts to change patriarchy “outside the system”:

Here was my perspective on it:…in some instances, here’s the feminists, and here’s patriarchy…and they were trying to go about fixing things outside of the system and…[from] my perspective you have to get into the system, as gross as it
is, to really have an effect, to make it change and so, that’s where I think the problem was, at least from the battered women’s shelter movement which had some feminist leanings.

One participant describes a possible path for aligning feminist theory and practice as “shifting the focus”:

When these things were developed they were developed to be liberating, and they may have had their time when we weren’t hypertheorizing them, and now we’re in…a period of deep reflection on the overall involvement but also the violence against women movement and we are self-critiquing a lot and we might…be at the point where, okay this model served us well and it’s strict interpretation isn’t actually…the way we want to go. We’re going to keep the model and change the interpretation. We do that with laws all the time, we keep the law, we change the interpretation, we keep the policy, we change the practice, I mean it’s *shifting the focus* [italics added].

*Symmetry: No Contrasts Between Theory and Practice*

Two participants identified no contrasts between the feminist model in theory and in practice. One of those participants described the lack of contrasts as positive and the other as negative. One participant explained that regardless of the practice context, “If you are a feminist…it would…guide [your] interactions with women at all times.” She described a major feminist principle that she applies to her practice as recognizing the patient or subject (depending on the context) as the “knower” and the practitioner or researcher as “the one who does not know” in regards to the patient or subject’s lived
experience. The other participant had worked for a year with a program that used a Duluth model for intervention with batterers and said, “The setting that I was in, we adhered very closely to Duluth, so we did it even if it wasn’t always really ideal. So in terms of the differences there were very few.”

**Successes and Failures**

Participants indentified many successes of the feminist model as it is applied to violence against women. These successes fell into three broad categories: theoretical understanding, changing cultural norms around violence against women, and empowering women.

**Theoretical Understanding**

One participant identified a main success of the feminist model as linking multiple levels of analysis. She said the benefit of this process is that it shifts the blame for violence away from the victim, situates the work of shelter advocates in a larger feminist social movement, and engages survivors in the fight for women’s equality:

I think [a success] is that..the model links multiple levels- so we can sit down with a woman and talk to her about her situation and then articulate that with local economies, with macro structures that perpetuate gender violence to give her a framework for understanding the situation and move it from that individual blame that happens a lot….when a woman leaves to, “Okay, we’ve got societal problems”….Another success of the movement is…educating women about the history of their foremother’s struggles then engages the women into a larger movement. I mean the shelters became an entry point for activism and that’s what
we’ve seen in the shelters for 40 years now is, you come to a shelter, you become educated about feminism and the feminist social movements and then when your healing process has come to an end, you join in the struggle…..I think it’s really good for…feminist advocates to feel like they have a place in a history….because at the end of a really long day….how do you situate your own struggles? Well if you have a sense of the history then it’s a lot easier to do that.

*Changing Cultural Norms Around Violence Against Women*

This category of successes identified by participants includes both societal attitudes and the ways some of those changed attitudes are evident in practice. Three participants identified increased awareness of violence against women as a success of the feminist model. One pointed out that:

> When I was born…domestic violence wasn’t even a term, and now it is and everybody knows that…I mean *everybody* knows that and everybody knows what domestic violence is. That’s a huge success I think…just in bringing it to the consciousness of the country.

Two participants emphasized a change in attitude around why DV happens, that it is not the victim’s fault. One participant addressed this notion in terms of societal attitudes:

> There has been some progress in terms of…popular ideas about…domestic violence and…I think things that were considered unspeakable or deserved twenty years ago are no longer that…I think that…at least as a society we get more at the very least lip service to an idea that this kind of behavior isn’t ok.
Another participant linked this notion directly to practice: “Certainly one of the successes if you use the feminist model to guide your work is that it takes away the stigma and the blame…for violence from the victim and I think that that’s certainly really important.”

One participant also credits the feminist movement with decreasing misogyny in popular culture: “There’s plenty of evidence in popular culture to show that…we’re still misogynistic but…comparing it to…before the women’s movement I think there has been some progress.” These cultural changes in affect have resulted in several practice changes that improve violence against women practice including “changes in the definition of sexual assault,” “the reform of rape laws,” “programs at schools that focus on…partnering in relationships and…trying to minimize the stereotypes about relationships,” “domestic violence shelters” and “funding from the CDC to work on violence against women.”

**Empowering Women**

The feminist model is credited for empowering women to improve all aspects of their lives, including giving women a voice: “If you use it to guide your work [it] should serve to empower the woman, give her a voice.” One participant cited the feminist movement as improving women’s economic status: “The feminist movement has been obviously very important for helping women gain more equal access to jobs, more equal access to…income and things like that…work outside the home…” Another participant credits the feminist movement for improving child birthing practices:

In practice I see it really does reflect society. For example, there was a time we were totally oppressed in OB. Women could not have their husbands with them, it
was a controlled situation…The medications we gave were an abomination. And women loved it because they were amnesiac so they didn’t know what happened as long as we didn’t tell them. We kept the rooms dark and we got them washed up from what they did to themselves during labor before they woke up….And out of that…feminism at the same time raised this Lamaze or prepared childbirth or more involvement in it and it really was a win-win situation for everybody.

For this participant, empowerment is about regaining control over various aspects of one’s life. In that context this quote describes a shift from control of child birth by physicians to control of child birth by mothers and their partners, and the participant sees that as a positive for everyone involved.

Failures of the feminist model described by participants also fell into three categories: theory, method and practice. Only one participant felt there were no failures of the feminist model in practice.

\textit{Theory}

One participant criticized the feminist model for driving infighting in the feminist movement that allowed critics to gain a foothold in setting the practice agenda:

The worst thing that feminism has done for us, and we’ve done it to ourselves, is that we have splintered into a million different factions, and…we’re stereotyped as angry man-haters. And therefore…it just has distanced us, it’s broken us down and nursing has done the same thing to itself, by the way, we have so many different levels and we all fight with each other. We don’t have to worry about
anybody else putting us down, we’re busy putting ourselves down and that has happened to feminism in general and it’s a big disappointment because we have allowed people to stereotype us.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, another participant expressed concern that a trend towards inclusion has obscured authentic feminist practice:

Another major…failing I think of sort of the feminist model would be sort of this idea…that…feminism can be all things to all people and that for example you don’t have to be pro-choice to be feminist…I perceive that argument and others like it to be a sort of a third wave sort of idea that…‘Oh, we’re all feminist because there’s no problems anymore and women are equal and we can be whatever we want to be, we can be doctors and we can be lawyers and we can be professors and so…there’s no real need for feminism and so…I can be feminist and still have whatever views I want to have,’ and that to me is one of the ways in which specifically third wave feminism I don’t think is really feminism.

These two comments introduce two emergent topics from the data: tenets of feminism and representations of feminism.

The operational definition of the feminist model used for this study is a belief that violence against women results from patriarchy, and thus solutions to the problem of violence against women involve consciousness raising to women’s class oppression, empowering women to leave abusive relationships, and working for women’s equality in society. Although the participants worked with the operational definition for the purpose of the interview, all of them shared personal perspectives on what feminism is and what
constitutes feminist practice. Two participants used the word “feminisms” to connote the multi-faceted nature of feminism. One of them made sure to clarify, “There really is no ‘the’ feminist model. I [went along] with you because…the way in which you’ve defined it, but even within that there’s plenty of room for difference.” Another participant also asserted, “I teach feminist theor-IES you know, feminism is a plurality, it’s not…one thing.” This terminology seems to indicate an acknowledgment of the variance of women’s experiences as well as the varying ways in which feminist theory and practice are interpreted. Feminism is sometimes described using various adjectives to position a particular feminist understanding within the larger theoretical framework of feminism (e.g. liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, womanism, ecofeminism, and postmodern feminism to name a few).

Participants descriptions of the feminist model fell into two categories: what feminism is, and what feminism is not. Three participants talked about feminism in terms of “an analysis of power.” One said “feminism is all about the balance of power and equality.” Another used the term “power imbalance” as a possible euphemism for feminist philosophy. Understood in these terms, feminism as a philosophy is applicable to any population, including men and women. One participant said, “Feminist principles…are just as respectful for working with men…many times what’s good for…women is also good for men.” Another participant said, “It’s neutral! It can be applied to African Americans just as easily as it can be applied to the poor.” One participant says of men, “they’re just as much a victim of patriarchy as we are.” As a neutral power analysis applicable to any work, feminism complements the use of other
theories and models, and shouldn’t “stop us from being open to other disciplines.”

Another participant said that “feminism works well with other theories,” for example, social ecological models that examine the interplay of factors from the individual to societal level.

In addition to this neutral power analysis, “the feminist model’s based on…equality of women.” One participant emphasized that “if we look at…the crux of the feminist model is, what is it?….People should be equal in relationships.” One participant defined some feminist tenets as “listening to women’s voices” as well as analyzing issues of “who owns women’s bodies.” For one participant, this translates directly as “reproductive rights.” She described reproductive rights as “a key tenet of feminist ideology because it’s related to women’s oppression. I mean if women cannot control their own fertility, they cannot be full participants in society.”

One participant discusses the spectrum and scope of women’s choices in a broader context as “this generation’s feminist dilemma”:

Now, we tell young women that they can do everything they want and we give them the idea that they have every opportunity in the entire world. What their feminist conflict is today is that they have to choose what they want to do and they have to be at peace with those decisions. So you can tell a young woman she can do everything she wants to, well indeed that’s not true. She can do many things throughout her lifetime, she can do pretty much anything she wants to, but she can’t do everything….I am critical of the idea that we can tell little girls they can do everything, ‘You can do everything.’ Well now they actually feel like they
have to do everything and that becomes this generation’s feminist dilemma: how to work themselves out of the ideology that they have to do everything and they have to do it well, that they can be a CEO and have three kids and come home and put dinner on the table.

This concept is described by Courtney Martin in her book *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters: The Frightening New Normalcy of Hating Your Body* (2007). Martin addresses this issue from the specific perspective of body image and eating disorders, but grounds that in a larger cultural problem of the daughters of the second wave feeling pressure to ‘do it all’—have a successful career but still work the ‘second shift’ of housework and childcare; balance being ‘sexy’ with political consciousness and activism.

What is not feminist is defined by the participants in opposition to what is feminist. For example, one participant says that, “I don’t think it makes sense to be anti-choice and call that feminist…it’s not logical.” She also uses the example of real men campaigns to point out that defining masculinity is anti-feminist:

One way of sort of encouraging men not to be violent against women is to sort of…prop up their masculinity and say…‘A real man wouldn’t hurt his girlfriend, and don’t you want to be a real man?’…Where you’re saying…‘There is such a thing as a real man and here’s what…real masculinity is,’…and defining it for him I think is very anti-feminist.

One participant described different types of research that she considers to be anti-feminist, including, “psychologist,” “randomized clinical trials,” and “research that tries to talk to both the husband and the wife.” The participant feels that psychology research
assumes an expert position over the subject, and that is not congruent with the feminist emphasis on the primacy of women’s voices. She describes randomized clinical trials as anti-feminist because they do not involve full informed consent: a woman in a control group is not fully aware of the details of the study and how the research may be affecting her. This participant considers research on intimate partner violence that talks to husbands and wives as anti-feminist because the perspective of a male perpetrator and the control tactics he exercises on his partner could skew the research to show more responsibility on the part of the woman who is abused.

Along with describing what is and is not feminist, participants discussed representations of feminism and how they can complicate feminist practice. Four participants talked about how people do not know what feminism is. One participant said that, “People don’t know what feminism means anymore.” In her work with female college students, another participant finds that “some of the tenets of feminism, they’re really far from understanding it or believing it.” When I asked a particular participant about this issue, she said:

In general college age women resist identity titles- they don’t want to be called anything at all…but when it comes to feminism and calling themselves a feminist they are particularly reactive, and I think that’s because they don’t know what it really means.

Another participant says that, “I think sometimes the word feminism puts up defensiveness…with people who really don’t understand…and have only had witness to maybe…radical feminism.”
That participant’s comment touches on another issue with regards to representations of feminism: the word feminism. One participant said, “It’s still I think a dirty little word.” Another call’s it “the f-word”:

When I even bring up the word feminist in my classes, I call it the f-word…which you’ve probably heard…and I laugh about it but…the more polarized our culture becomes…with the Fox News’ of the world and then the rest…it’s like we’re just getting farther and farther and conservative talk and conservative ideology has linked the f-word to them.

One participant said that, “in the rural areas…they’re especially sensitive to the word feminism.” Another participant said that “young women today fear the word feminism because it has been such a divisive mechanism throughout their mother’s generations.” She goes on to say that “feminism and calling oneself a feminist is a label that since it is so ambiguous and so politically charged…on all fronts, they avoid it.”

The participants themselves were not always comfortable with the label feminist. One participant said, “I really struggled with calling myself a feminist as well because it seemed that the, that feminist was painted in a really radical way.” One participant said, “when I hear the word feminism I mean I kind of wrinkle up a little bit myself and it’s because of those radical impressions.” Another participant said, “Am I a feminist therapist now? No. I wouldn’t describe as such. I would have in the past.”

These comments raise the issue of the “radical feminist,” a stereotype five participants described using similar adjectives. Attributes, actions, and attitudes are attributed to the stereotypical “radical feminist.” In describing the radical feminist
participants raised notions such as she is an ugly, angry, lesbian who does not shave her armpits, burns her bra, and hates men. She is crazy, resistant to male authority, and unacceptable. She is associated with a political movement that advocates abortion, leaving your husband and neutralizing gender. Many people may be familiar with this stereotype. What people may not understand is the power it still has in the violence against women field. One participant said that a peer in her department told a student to take the word “feminism” out of an internship application to improve her chances at getting selected. Another participant said that “funders have that same knee-jerk reaction when they hear the word feminist.” One participant points out that these stereotypes could still influence academia “given the age of our…academicians.”

Method

Failures of the feminist model in terms of method had to do with approaches to practice. One participant criticized feminist practitioners for working outside the system:

I think the very failure…is again this idea that, ‘We’re gonna fix it out here,’ and not being able to infiltrate….If we’re going to make [feminist practice] have an impact on violence against women it’s men that need to be impacted, not women.

One participant touched on a similar issue when she said, “One of the negative things about feminism is it has to be always female and again, I think we’ve lost on that.”

Another participant said that, “The problem is, I think [feminism] is sometimes…hard to translate into practice…I think that someone has to be ready to hear the message.”

Another participant raised the issue of diversity as a failure of the feminist model in practice:
The major limitation that I know of at least of the feminist movement is that many women of color say that it’s neglected their needs and values and...it was really focusing on promoting the agenda of white, middle class women, white middle class to upper class women and...leaving out women of color.

**Practices**

The failures in theory and method of the feminist model translate into practices participants identified as failures, such as an overemphasis on Lenore Walker’s Cycle of Violence model or medical practices where doctors and nurses discuss violence in front of *friends* who could be the patient’s abuser. One participant criticized the Walker’s Cycle of Violence as potentially disempowering:

When we look at...Walker’s Cycle of Violence, fundamentally that cycle requires someone to help the person exit the cycle. The cycle cannot be broken without outside help which is at once empowering, but also disempowering...how do you as an advocate deal with the idea that a person won’t be able to break the cycle of violence without you or without someone? But then if you’re a woman reading...the cycle, how do you come to terms with the idea that the movement doesn’t trust you enough to remove yourself from the battering? Right? So there’s this kind of philosophical strange place where the cycle puts us...and...the cycle isn’t true for everyone, so then if you have a woman who is trying to figure out her situation and she doesn’t fit into that cycle then how do you explain it away?

Another participant cited a practice issue particular to ob/gyn practice:
One of the things [feminists] fought real hard for over the years is for women to have a friend in…during their vaginal exams and…sometimes, healthcare providers think they can ask [about violence] in front of a friend…and she’s the one who’s…abusing this woman so…that kind of has backfired for us in that way.

Alternate Theoretical Models

Participants identified many theoretical models that could be used in violence against women work. No one said that these models were in opposition to feminist principles, although they did deviate from a strict interpretation of the feminist model. The consensus among participants was that various practice models could be used in conjunction with a feminist framework or feminist practice model to improve effectiveness and deepen understanding of the phenomena of violence against women as well as intervention efforts. A few participants discussed how the feminist model is preferrable to certain other models. The models identified by participants were psychopathological, systems theories (including family systems and ecological models), and social learning models.

Psychopathological models were discussed as applying to both victims and perpetrators of violence against women. Issues related to psychopathology included trauma, behavior and batterer typologies. Three participants raised issues related to trauma: “I have seen plenty of women at the shelter…who are clearly traumatized and would have physical reactions…the classic…post traumatic stress things.” Another participant highlighted several behavioral techniques that can be applied to work with batterers including cognitive behavioral therapy and Prochaska & DiClemente’s stages of
change model utilizing motivational interviewing. She also discussed the concept of batterer typologies. Although criticizing batterer typologies as “oversimplified,” she did say that “when you think about a diagnosis we’re looking at a personality disorder in most cases.” This participant connected the issue of trauma to batterer pathology saying that by ignoring issues of trauma the Duluth model may be ignoring neurological issues batterer’s may have as a result of experiencing or witnessing DV as a child.

Another participant supported the use of perpetrator typologies:

There are…different types of perpetrators undoubtedly…some men are…psychopathic, sociopathic, they’re…raised in families that are conducive to that, which contribute[s]…violence against women. You know all men are raised in this patriarchal society and not all men are actually aggressive so the feminist models don’t account for all the sexual aggression that you’re likely to see.

Another participant also supported the use of batterer typologies: “I know there’s evidence now that there are different kinds of batterers…and some are just pathological but…it’s more than patriarchy, not that patriarchy is a good thing but…it’s more than that.”

Beyond the level of individual pathology, several participants discussed various systems theories that are used in violence against women, those that revolve around couples and families, and more macro systems approaches. Participants expressed both support and disagreement with models utilizing family systems approaches. One
participant said that “theories that came out of family dynamics [were] very disrespected in the community.” Another participant mirrored this statement in her own views on a “family reunification model”:

When it comes to domestic violence it seems to me, and I guess I’m not an expert in terms of practice but it appears to me that…the dominant model is a family reunification model…and that certainly implicit within that are certainly anti-feminist understandings of what’s going on.

One participant seemed to see the trend toward family dynamics as a positive:

If I’m looking at…domestic violence in particular, and the domestic violence movement…or the domestic violence prevention movement, I think that often times…now the focus is on family dynamics…and including children in…whatever the interventions are or the preventions are and those messages. I think that’s a success.

Other systems theories mentioned specifically were Bowen family systems theory and attachment theory. Both of these theories center on patterns of relationship and how they impact coupling and affect abusive relationships.

In addition to the family system, participants discussed theoretical models and frameworks that look at larger systems, such as the social ecological model. Particular authors cited in regards to the social ecological model were Heise and Brofenbrenner. Social ecological models were identified as very consistent and complimentary to a feminist framework because they identify factors from the individual to societal level.

Other larger level system or social theories specifically mentioned by participants include
critical social theory, social disorganization theory, social interactionism and social
construction. These types of theories were described as similar to feminism in that they
are more useful as guiding frameworks than as practice models. Social theories describe
relationships between and among communities that can be applied to examine the
relationship of cultural norms to violence against women. Participants also discussed
social norms approaches, particularly in regards to prevention. Two participants who
have done work in sexual violence prevention at the college level described the emphasis
in the practice community right now on social norms approaches. These approaches look
at social messages about sexual violence and how those influence individual behaviors.
From a prevention standpoint the goal is to change the cultural scripts around sexual
violence. For example men are encouraged to practice good bystander behavior, meaning
that they confront sexist behaviors of other men.

Continuum of Agency

Participants’ perspectives on victim agency within the feminist model varied, with
most participants asserting that they did not feel that the feminist model really denies
women agency. One participant said:

It’s more complicated than just a simple dichotomy between thinking of yourself
as a victim and thinking of yourself as someone with agency because we all move
from context to context in which…we have more or less degrees of agency [and]
use it as best we know how in that situation.

One participant said that victims could be denied agency based on how you were using
the model: “If you would only use a feminist model perhaps yes but I think if you use it
as an overarching framework, I think no.” Three participants said that the feminist model does not deny women agency. One of them emphasized, “I don’t think the feminist model absolves women from anything….I think that’s ludicrous.” One participant feels that the feminist model does deny women agency:

I would say yes…women stay for a reason and it’s not just economic and it sucks to get beat up but there’s something…in that cycle of violence that’s…very seductive…there’s that contrition phase and this idea… that comes from patriarchy, [of the] strong, silent type [of man] and [some women think], ‘Here’s this guy, he always talks to me, I can help him,’ kind of idea but it’s very attractive to them and not all women fall for it so there’s something going on with them that I think they need to be responsible for….They didn’t cause the guy to beat them up, and that’s not what I mean at all by being responsible, but they’re responsible for the interactions. So yeah, I think if you just simply label it patriarchy then it sounds like we’re all doomed.

Self-Critique

While varying in their perceptions as to whether or not self-critique of the feminist model by feminists opens the door for anti-feminist backlash, most participants see self-critique as a necessary function of effective feminist practice. One participant asserts that “self-critique is built into the feminist way of thinking and so…we must do that.” Several participants considered anti-feminist backlash to be a given reality that should not affect the willingness of feminists to self-critique, as evidenced by statements
such as “God, there’s backlash from all corners anyway,” “it’s always faced backlash,”
and “there’s always going to be backlashes.” One participant described the benefits of
self-critique this way:

> It’s always important to revisit...scholarship areas and political
> movements...nothing is static, things always change...it’s important...to allow
> things to evolve and I think without going back and looking more closely at what
> models do and don’t work, we’re doing a disservice to people, to ourselves and to
> people in abusive relationships and I think most importantly to the kids, the kids
> in those families.

Another participant gave a similar assessment: “You can’t just stifle all questioning or
criticism or the model’s not going to grow and continue to be appropriate. I mean
censorship won’t get us anywhere. I think it’s a strong enough argument to stand on it’s
own.” One participant said, “Self-critique is always necessary and evaluation of our work
in whatever capacity is always necessary.”

**Diversity**

More participants felt that the feminist model is diverse enough for culturally
relevant practice approaches than did not. One participant said:

> Depending on how you define diversity...feminism is all about balance of power
> and equality and certainly I think you could take many of the tenets of feminism
> and apply it to...someone who’s disabled versus non-disabled or someone
> who’s...black versus white or...homosexual or straight and so...I definitely think
> that many of its tenets can be applied to issues of diversity.
Another participant felt that overall the feminist model has done well with diversity, with the exception of religion:

    Academic feminism really has done its job well but I think religion is huge and…I don’t think we really know how to deal with it yet.…We’ve done really well with class issues and…we’re getting better at race issues…ethnicity…we’re thinking globally…but I really think that feminists don’t know what to do with religion.

One participant disagreed that the feminist model has dealt with class appropriately:

    One of my issues is that when we talk about analysis of power we rarely talk about socioeconomic status and class and…so that’s something I know when I teach cultural diversity I am always talking about class because I feel like that’s ignored.

One participant said that the model in theory is diverse enough but that we need to “practice the diversity in the model.” Another participant issued a caution regarding diversity and feminist practice:

    On one hand the feminist model should be open to as many different perspectives as possible but, I don’t think it should be open to perspectives that harm children or harm women under the guise of, ‘Oh, that’s just a cultural difference.’

Self-Reflection

Almost all participants acknowledged the importance of self-reflection to empowerment practice with survivors of violence against women. One participant identified self-reflection as an “unavoidable” component to direct practice with survivors:
When you’re actually working with the women…who have been assaulted, raped…I think [self-reflection] becomes unavoidable….I just sort of happened into the shelter to do some volunteer work… and…I never left that shelter. I mean, I kept going back, and it changed my research…it changed the way I spent my time, and…it changed me!

One participant said that self-reflection is “critical to anyone who’s going to be a therapist.” She went on to describe how working with offenders while going through a divorce really made that salient to her: “Even though I wasn’t involved in a battering situation per say…you can’t separate the person from the practice altogether.” Another participant described self-reflection as “essential,” and another as “distinctly feminist to be constantly reflective and reflexive.”

In addition to being “unavoidable,” one participant explained how self-reflection improves practice for the client:

The more empathetic you can be, the more you’ve reflected, and the more your reflection can filter into…the choices you make about how you talk to people and…how you present yourself, how you represent yourself, I think all of that is good and…as a researcher…I know that the more you can present yourself with humility and empathy…the better work you can do…with people.

Another participant also described the benefits of self-reflection to the client’s experience as:

Every practitioner needs to check in with their perspective and their worldview…and I think that you use that reflectively so you understand where
you are, and when you’re a practitioner it’s not about where you are, it’s about where your client is, and so if you listen to your client and you know where you are you’re less likely to react to your client in a way that will make them feel…embarrassed or…guilty or whatever.

In contrast, one participant did not see self-reflection as important to empowerment practice: “If I’ve lived my life as if I respect other women and I present in that way…that’s been good enough.” She may have been conflating self-reflection with self-disclosure, as evidenced by her statement, “It’s easier for me to think how to deal with my own issues and bracket them than to bring them into the mix.” Her concern is that “a woman who’s been abused and terribly damaged may bring that perspective into her presentations and research and it really doesn’t belong there, because it is about the other person.”

One participant identified barriers to self-reflection for direct practitioners:

In theory it would be important for…social workers, prevention workers, case workers, to be reflective of their own experiences with violence and perhaps their own complicity in a larger system of…systemic violence or institutional violence….But again on a practical level, doing that requires energy and resources…the resource of time and a safe environment and those things are not always there I don’t think.

To illustrate the noted conflation of tensions and relationships a Conflict Model of Violence Against Women Theory and Practice was developed (see Figure 4.4) by the author. This theory development used elements of a grounded theory approach, meaning
Figure 4.4 A Conflict Model of Violence Against Women Theory and Practice
that the theory emerged from the findings and then was supported by literature, as opposed to being developed before data analysis and applied to the findings. During the course of data analysis it became incredibly difficult to describe the overlapping nature of the various actors in violence against women practice as the various influences that impact those actors. A list was made of the various binaries identified by participants, such as “academic feminist vs. practice feminist.” Once this list was completed a figure was created to try and demonstrate the various spheres of violence against women practice actors and how they relate to one another.

In order to title the model, the researcher consulted the dictionary to determine if this picture fits the definition of the term model, and it does. The next question to be answered was, what is this a model of? The term conflict was settled on and confirmed by a justifying dictionary entry. The model was then titled a Conflict Model of Violence Against Women Theory and Practice. The descriptor theory and practice was chosen to emphasize that this model illustrates tensions described in the practice and theoretical literature as well as in the findings of this study.

The researcher then Googled the term conflict model to see if there were other conflict models in use with violence against women or other practice areas. The search yielded several web pages describing conflict models for political science and economics. A review of some of these sites indicated that the Conflict Model of Violence Against Women Theory and Practice is similar to other conflict models with one important difference: unlike a traditional Marxist conflict model, which assumes dominance by a
particular group over others, the Conflict Model of Violence Against Women Theory and Practice is one where dominance shifts according to relationships and trends. For instance, in the case of a woman who has been abused seeking services from a social worker in a shelter, the social worker is in a position of dominance over the client. In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist theory was the dominant discourse on violence against women, whereas now the majority of theoretical literature on violence against women is dominanted by non-feminist approaches. As this model illustrates, the relationships between women in violence against women work are not linear and vary relative to the power dynamic in a particular relationship. This model visually depicts the complex relationships between the various agents impacting and impacted by violence against women, and can be applied to both males and females.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to analyze academic perspectives on the feminist model as it is applied to violence against women practice to determine whether the feminist model is adequate in its description of the problem of violence towards women, intervention in violence towards women and prevention of violence towards women. While the findings support the continued use of a feminist model in violence against women practice, they do not support an exclusive use of the feminist model to address the problem of violence against women. Overall the participants did not agree with severe critiques of the feminist model in the practice literature, however they did identify areas where the model was lacking or not as helpful. Only one participant described an exclusive use of a feminist practice model. The remaining participants described varying degrees of commitment to a feminist theoretical orientation to practice that incorporates alternate theoretical models as necessary. For example, some participants identified only applying a few key tenets of feminist analysis to their practice, such as an examination of power or deconstruction of gender roles. Other participants expressed a clearer commitment to feminist practice that informs all of their teaching and research efforts.
Arguably my most important finding resulted in the creation of the Conflict Model of Violence Against Women Theory and Practice. This model was developed to demonstrate the dynamic tensions and conflicts between feminists, helping professionals and survivors identified by my participants and supported in the practice literature. Although many helping professionals may identify as feminist, for the purpose of the model feminist refers specifically to academics in Women’s and Gender Studies and feminist activists who do not also identify as helping professionals. Helping professionals may include social workers, counselors, psychologists, health care professionals, etc., and includes both direct practitioners and academics who research and teach on the helping professions. Survivors is meant to identify the recipients of violence against women practice and could include the general public in terms of prevention work. A model was necessary because it was nearly impossible to describe in words the ways in which these communities interact. Within the categories of feminist and helping professional exist both practitioners and academics.

What is important to understand about the conflict model is that the membership within the categories is not static; an individual can occupy any and all of those categories simultaneously. Thus academics outside of Women’s Studies or Gender Studies departments can identify as feminist, for example, and a feminist helping professional may also work in academia. That said, the current state of the practice is such that individuals are forced to align themselves with one category or another based on situational factors. For example, all of the academics interviewed for this study are
also practitioners. In various contexts they lean more heavily on their academic role or
their practice role, even though those roles inform one another. One participant talked
about how in her practice role as a nurse in a hospital setting, she automatically reports
any situation where a child might be unsafe, including IPV situations. However in her
research she deliberately constructs her studies to avoid obtaining information she would
have to report to protect participants.

Feminists can also be social workers. The history of feminism and social work is
complicated and often antagonistic (Orme, 2003). That said, there is a growing area of
social work practice (Saulnier, 1996). The academic-practitioner dichotomy was
anticipated by the researcher, but the researcher did not anticipate the feminist
activist/academic-helping professional practitioner/academic dichotomy. The literature
and the findings indicate that there is little conversation between feminists in Women’s
and Gender Studies departments and helping professionals in academia.

During the recruitment process for the study it was surprising to the researcher
that no academics in Gender or Women’s Studies chose to participate. The one Women’s
Studies faculty who was contacted during the recruitment process said she did not think
her perspective would be relevant because her focus is theory. When it was explained to
her that the study would be examining feminism as a theoretical orientation for violence
against women practice, she said that she did not see a connection between her work and
mine, even though she teaches courses on violence against women. This exchange was
alarming to the researcher. The feminist model for violence against women practice is a
feminist model arising out of the second wave feminist movement that also gave birth to Women’s Studies as an academic discipline. That a feminist academic could not see the connection between her feminist theoretical work and social work practice with survivors is a testament to the breakdown of or resistance to communication between feminists and social workers.

Another possible reason for the lack of participants from Gender or Women’s Studies departments is the noticeable lack of these departments in the universities from which I recruited participants. As an undergraduate from Indiana University, home of the Kinsey Institute, I entered graduate school with the assumption that every university has a Gender Studies department. Sadly, this is not the case. To improve violence against women practice, a collaborative strategy between feminists and social workers must be developed to strengthen feminist scholarship on the college campus. There is a need for more feminist faculty, and those faculty need to feel safe to conduct feminist research and teach feminist methods. Just as it is unreasonable to expect violence against women practitioners to subsist on low pay in an unsupportive environment and still provide excellent practice, it is unreasonable to expect researchers to compromise their personal and professional safety to conduct feminist research without social support. From an academic perspective, promoting a climate of safety for feminist scholarship in the violence against women field is a priority. Without that, there is a danger that the lack of communication between feminists and helping professionals will continue, proving detrimental to improving feminist practice.
There are also conflicts between feminists and social workers at the practice level. Feminist activists, loyal to second wave feminist thought and the origins of the battered women’s shelter and anti-rape movements, remain suspicious of social workers and their professional practices. Unfortunately, the things that social workers are criticized for are often out of their control and have to do with their administrative and professional requirements. In addition to a collaborative strategy to improve interdisciplinary feminist scholarship, direct action is needed to mobilize resources for violence against women practice, and continued advocacy needed to resist anti-feminist funding structures designed to perpetuate inequality and inhibit an actualization of the feminist vision of a violence free world.

Another constellation of the conflict model is one where feminists and practitioners are aligned against survivors of violence. Throughout the history of violence against women practice survivors have been disserviced by certain scopes of feminist and social work practice. The liberation model of violence against women emphasizing the criminalization of violence and pursuit of a feminist political agenda has left many survivors wanting for services that are more relevant to their needs. The US criminal justice system is fraught with concerns of racism, classism, sexism, and nationalism. Criminal justice approaches take as a given the ability of the criminal justice system to deliver justice to survivors, and many times it does not. Many women do not want to pursue criminal justice options for a variety of reasons. Survivors of IPV may be uninterested in delivering their abuser to the criminal justice system, particularly
survivors who identify as racial and ethnic minorities. Beyond a conscious resistance of the system, women of color may simply not trust the criminal justice system because of the legacy of state perpetuated racism. Women who are immigrants may fear deportation and/or separation from their children if they involve the criminal justice system in their situation.

Women who do attempt a criminal justice remedy may find that the system does not protect them: for all the advocacy feminist activists have done around protection orders, the fact remains that they are simply pieces of paper that do not afford survivors any real protection. One participant shared a tragic story of how a survivor who followed a traditional feminist model was murdered by the man who had been abusing her.

The worst story I ever heard is this woman who got out of her relationship, worked at a battered women’s shelter, became one of the counselors at a battered women shelter, divorced the guy, got police and her brother to escort her to the house so that she could get her stuff out of the house, the guy was there, he shot her, he shot her brother and himself.

This participant cited this as an example of why patriarchy is not the sole cause of violence against women saying, “That’s not patriarchy, that’s something else.” A feminist interpretation might identify the murder of this woman as an example of the power and pervasiveness of patriarchy, and cite this example as evidence for the need to keep the focus on perpetrators and their behavior to avoid blaming the victim.

Survivors of sexual assault may also be reluctant to utilize criminal justice approaches, for ideological reasons or because it is very difficult to get a conviction in a
rape case. Despite gains in terms of court practices, the fact remains that women are often put on trial to defend their character when seeking redress for sexual assault, particularly if the case is highly publicized in their community. Sometimes women are forced to file criminal charges in order to access victims services funds. At a Take Back the Night rally in Indiana, a survivor who is an anti-prison activist shared that she was forced by the hospital to file charges in order to access victims services funds to pay for her emergency department bills. Not only was she forced to go against her beliefs to avoid debt, one can presume that she was put through the process of evidence collection which can be highly traumatizing and could have been declined if she had no intention of pressing charges. These examples illustrate how disempowering a liberation/criminal justice focused feminist model can be.

Social workers have also shown disservice to survivors in their professional capacities. The need to maintain funding sources often translates into organizational mandates that involve social workers pursuing certain treatment agendas regardless of the needs of the individual client. Social workers are often required to apply a psychological diagnosis to survivors to obtain Medicaid funds, even if a psychological diagnosis is not the most appropriate for that particular individual. Social workers usually have to develop some type of service plan that may include certain goals that are not congruent with the client’s needs but rather what the organization or the funder thinks the client needs. In agency settings, social workers are put in a position of enforcing rules that may infantilize women or otherwise limit their agency. For all the lip service given to empowerment in the social work field, social workers have fallen short on empowerment
practice with violence against women. Funds are often described as the tie that binds, giving social workers an easy excuse as to why they conduct practice the way that they do. Each individual social worker may not have the power to eliminate organizational mandates their first day on the job, but our Code of Ethics compels us in our pursuit of social justice and client empowerment to find ways of changing the structures that oppress our clients.

This study provoked me into a re-examination of empowerment practice. The researcher defines empowerment practice as an approach to practice that emphasizes the strengths of each client and encourages the practitioner to advocate for the client’s needs to help ameliorate the effects of external barriers as the practitioner supports the client towards goals the client has identified. Different practitioners may define empowerment practice differently. Social work in particular as a helping profession emphasizes client empowerment. The expression of intended empowerment practice does not always result in client empowerment. There is a conflict inherent in the term ‘empowerment’: are we supporting clients in their exercise of power they already have? Or are we giving them power? It may seem like an issue of semantics but the distinction is critical- one interpretation is congruent with social justice and service, the other with social control. Because if we are giving the power, that means we have it, and that means we are giving it in a manner of our choosing.

One participant described how “advocates engage in strategies that resist the models they don’t like so that they can maintain their own identity…within a larger feminist social movement that wants to eradicate violence.” While on the surface this
statement seems to be describing a positive process worker autonomy in support of social justice, what the participant described was not clearly positive. She talked about “the 24 hour rule,” a common rule in battered women’s shelters whereby if a client is absent from shelter for more than 24 hours without notice she is put out, because there are other people who need her spot:

In practice that is one of those areas where advocates have the 24 hour rule when they need it or they could subvert the 24 hour rule when they need to. So if they have a woman who is engaging in a number of other activities that isn’t helping the other women in the shelter, empower themselves to leave their partners, make decisions on their own, then the advocates do have a way to create [an] empowering environment at the mezzo and macro level and remove the micro politics from it, that micro decision making because you can point to the rule and say, ‘I’m very sorry but this is the fourth time you’ve done this…’ On the other hand and we see it all the time if someone is gone for 24 hours, they had a bad day at work they…went out, whatever it may be, whatever they did and they come back to shelter, they’ve been promoting the community of empowerment, they’ve been working with the other women…they’re really engaged in the process, then advocates can resist the rule or the guideline.

This participant is describing common practical concerns. She is also describing a process where feminist activists and social workers literally hold the “keys to the kingdom” and can choose to punish or reward a woman based on her level of
cooperation. In the opinion of the researcher, safety of the residents should be the top priority in a shelter, the next should be client autonomy. That level of values is consistent with the social work Code of Ethics (National Association of Social Workers, 2005). If there is a 24 hour rule, it should be enforced every time, otherwise a power dynamic is created that inhibits empowerment practice.

Empowerment practice is made more effective by examining issues of diversity. Embracing diversity and a commitment to unifying the battle against sexism with that against other oppressions in violence against women practice is not a choice, but an imperative. As long as the feminist model is perceived and practiced as a white, middle class, heterosexual model it will be unsuccessful. The fact that a majority of the participants in the study identified the feminist model as diverse enough for culturally relevant practice may be more telling of their own privilege as primarily white and middle class than an honest and trustworthy assessment of the model. On the other hand, their emphasis on the theory as diverse enough as opposed to the practice is astute. Feminist theory as an analysis of patriarchal and gender oppression should not inhibit culturally relevant practice, but the literature indicates that the purest expression of the theory has not been realized. Continued attention to this issue is critical to realigning feminist practice with feminist theory.

There is paternalism inherent in the notion of liberating women in oppressed communities by members of the dominant culture- perhaps the noun inclusion is even an inappropriate descriptor of what needs to happen in feminist discourse. Women in
oppressed communities do not need to be included- that very term denotes bringing someone who is outside in, and women in oppressed communities are already here, in the movement and the practice. Instead of being included, they need to be heard. As long as there is a false sense of ownership by White, middle class, heterosexual women in the model, women in oppressed communities will not feel ‘included.’

This study found support for McPhail et al.’s (2007) Integrated Feminist Model. Only one of ten participants indicated an exclusive use of the feminist model, although two participants said that the feminist model guides their work and their research. Participant responses indicated a commitment to tenets of feminism coupled with an understanding that feminist analysis alone is insufficient to handle the pervasive problem of violence against women. These findings are compatible with the use of an Integrative Feminist Model where feminism is the lens through which other theoretical models are applied, theoretical models that are congruent with a feminist approach. One participant highlighted the fact that patriarchy does not account for all violence, particularly women’s violence against partners and children. She claimed that patriarchy provides the context for continued tolerance of violence, rather than being a causal factor for violence itself. Another participant pointed out that:

We all live in the same society and we’re not all sexually assaulted and not all men are sexually aggressive and so I think that you can use the feminist model to guide our thinking but it’s not the only model that we use either to prevent or reduce violence or treat violence.
One participant identified her approach to clinical practice as “nested in the larger social context.”

Participants also sent a clear message that there is “more work to be done” in terms of moving a feminist agenda forward. One participant cited as examples the need for all college campuses to have a women’s center, as well as RA training on sexual assault and rape myths. Other examples given were the fact that women still aren’t equal, that there are still “incredible burdens” placed upon rape victims in the courtroom, and that violence against women is still tolerated in society. Participants discussed the need for continued education on violence against women and continued development of feminist consciousness-raising two participants specifically identified the need for feminist consciousness raising. Another said that “public education” is needed to combat continued anti-feminist practices specifically in criminal justice approaches. One participant said that “people aren’t really ready for the message [of feminism].” These examples indicate support for feminism and continuing to utilize a feminist approach.

There is support for the feminist model in the literature (Angelique & Culley, 2000; Hightower & Smith, 2006). Researchers have documented successful applications of a feminist model to DV advocacy coalitions (Abrar et al., 2000), collaboration between academics, practitioners and survivors (Bell et al., 2004), analyses of rape (White et. al, 1998), the work of advocates with their clients (Black, 2003) and therapy (Sharma, 2001). Researchers have found support for the feminist assertion that issues of gender are related to violence (Martin, Vieraitis, & Britto, 2006; Melander, 2005; Yodanis, 2004;
White., 2001), and health (Brown Travis & Compton, 2001). The literature also highlights areas where there is less research to support the model (Brush, 2005; DeKeseredy et al., 2000; Dutton D. G., 1994; Lancaster & Lumb, 1999; Walker, 2002). Hautzinger (2002), found support for a middle ground between abandoning woman as a site of analysis and the claim that woman is an adequate foundation for a unified feminist method.

That the literature demonstrates support for the feminist model but also places where it is lacking provides further evidence that an Integrative Feminist Model could be a valuable practice approach. Some authors have already begun to identify practice models that are congruent with a feminist approach, including Revolutionary Black Feminism (Neville & Hamer, 2001), profeminism (DeKeseredy et al., 2000; Orme et al., 2000), and a Feminist Identity Model (White et al., 1998). Crawford and Harding (2000) describe guidelines for integrating systems theory and feminist theory. Additional research is needed to build support for the use of the Integrated Feminist Model in violence against women practice.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study include those associated with qualitative approaches, the homogeneity of the sample and lack of distinction in the study between IPV and sexual assault. In general, because qualitative research “is less concerned with normative data than with the wide range of life experiences, the validation of findings via replication is not an overriding concern” (Padgett, 1994, p. 91). In other words, the study is not generalizable and generalizability was not desired in the quest to reflect individual
participant’s unique perspectives. That said, the current study is an examination of theory, and the topics covered were relatively standardized. The combination of purposive and convenience sampling did allow for some geographic representation in terms of institutional affiliation as well as representation in terms of religious affiliation of the institution and whether the institution was public or private. Participants reflected a variety of different practice disciplines. The sample is relatively homogenous in terms of demographics, and this may reflect a bias in the practice field. Thus, I believe the results to have some limited generalizability, at least to academics in the dominant violence against women practice culture in the state of Ohio. The study is limited by the lack of diverse perspectives, and future studies would do well to examine the perspectives of academics in the field who do not identify as white and middle class. It also important to point out that the sample size is small and limited by the scope of the study.

An additional limitation to qualitative research is that of researcher bias. While all studies are subject to research bias, in a qualitative study, the researcher is the main instrument of data collection and analysis, and thus all findings are filtered by the researcher’s own experience. It is important that the researcher’s standpoint be acknowledged before making bold claims from qualitative data. To minimize researcher bias, qualitative researchers work from the participants’ words, returning again and again to participants’ terms for phenomena and narratives of their experience. There are additional techniques employed by qualitative researchers to minimize bias, but due to the scope of the present study they were not used.
My standpoint uniquely positions me to study this topic. As a feminist activist, a social work professional and a survivor of DV (having been raised for 15 years in a household typifying Walker’s Cycle of Violence), I occupy all the spaces of the conflict model. I do have race and class privilege, but being bisexual I have some limited experience of feeling erased not only by mainstream culture but by much of the literature on sexual orientation minorities. These experiences and identities inform my research and give me an “insider” access and perspective. At the same time, bracketing becomes very important to ensure that my own opinions and agendas in regards to violence against women do not overtake an honest, thoughtful interpretation of the findings. Throughout the research process, I utilized journaling and supervision from my committee to explore the ways in which my passion for the work could inhibit the emergent process of data analysis.

A final limitation to the study is the lack of distinction between IPV and sexual assault. Violence against women is often used as an umbrella term covering both crimes, and there are similarities between the two: they are both influenced by patriarchal norms and disproportionately impact women. Practitioners and researchers often specialize in either IPV or sexual assault and are less likely to be approaching both problems equally in their practice setting. Because the distinction was not made by the researcher, there may be some distinctions between the two areas that were lost. However, if a participant made the distinction or a distinction was made in the literature, effort was made to note it in this presentation of the study.
Implications for Social Work

The high prevalence of violence against women in the form of IPV and sexual assault indicates that social workers will be dealing with perpetrators and survivors of violence against women in all practice areas. In addition, these high prevalence rates indicate that many social workers are themselves perpetrators and survivors. In this context, it is critical that all social workers be aware of violence against women, its posited causes and documented consequences, as well as what types of theoretical approaches are most beneficial in addressing violence against women. The reality is that because of those posited causes and documented consequences, perpetrators and survivors of violence against women are likely to be overrepresented in social work practice settings, such as mental health, alcohol and other drug addiction services, healthcare, and housing and income assistance. Social workers in these settings need to be prepared to handle violence against women as a concern of their clients. This study contributes to the research on dominant models for violence against women practice.

Effective practice necessitates a fluid, constructive relationship to theory. Practice often lags significantly behind research due to issues of dissemination, as well as the length of time and resources needed to conduct quality research. Practitioners need access to helpful theories that assist them in providing service in a framework consistent with the ethical values of our profession. Social workers must continually engage with both theory and practice to ensure that theoretical approaches are still applicable to particular concerns. By examining academic perspectives on a current practice model, this study
continues to bridge theory to practice by connecting the concerns of practitioners to researchers.

It is important that social workers participate in and promote interdisciplinary scholarship. Unfortunately, social work is still looked down upon as not being a ‘legitimate’ field of research, despite years of competent research done by social workers. Collaboration between social work academics and those in other departments will deepen social work practice while simultaneously building support for social work research as comparable to that of other disciplines. Violence against women is a social problem that touches many practice areas. The participants in this study have backgrounds in fields as diverse as linguistics, counseling, community counseling, nursing, public health, sociology, anthropology and marriage and family therapy. Each of these fields is unique and brings something to the table in terms of effective practice, however none of them have the unique perspective of social work. Situated at the intersection of social service and social justice, social work is an ideal field for violence against women practice and social workers can make valuable contributions to that practice. It is hoped that this study will provide continued support for a social work perspective on violence against women.

The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (1996) compels us as social workers to perform ethical research, engage in competent practice, and pursue social justice. Continued attention to theory is a mandatory component of these objectives. To ignore violence against women as a pervasive social problem constitutes negligence on the part of a social worker. Although every social worker does not choose violence against women as a practice focus, every social worker will serve individuals
who are perpetrators and survivors of violence against women. Consideration of women’s voices and experiences is part of ethical research, examination of practice models is part of competent practice, and working to end violence against women is a part of pursuing social justice. As such, this study supports the continued use of feminist approaches to end oppression. This study also supports the need to look deeper, to use feminism as the lens by which we examine many useful theoretical tools and practice models to effectively end the problem of violence against women.

This study supports the continued use of a feminist model in violence against women practice. The findings also support the need for other theories to supplement places where the feminist model is lacking. Findings from the study support the use of McPhail et al.’s (2007) Integrative Feminist Model. Finally, this study also demonstrates a complex constellation of tensions, conflicts and relationships that complicates feminist practice in the field of violence against women. These conflicts provided the impetus for the development of a Conflict Model of Violence Against Women Theory and Practice. This model may prove helpful in illustrating the ways that violence against women scholarship and service provision is made difficult due to unresolved, shifting conflicts between agents. Taken together, the Conflict Model of Violence Against Women Theory and Practice and the Integrative Feminist Model may be used to clarify how and why a feminist theoretical orientation improves violence against women practice, as well as provide tools for addressing inadequacies in the feminist model as it currently stands.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Sharma, A. (2001). Healing the wounds of domestic abuse: Improving the effectiveness of feminist therapeutic interventions with immigrant and racially visible women who have been abused. _Violence Against Women, 7_ (12), 1405-1428.


Dear [Name]:

My name is Amanda Stevens and I am a Master’s of Social Work student at The Ohio State University. I am working on a thesis study of the feminist model as it is applied to violence against women. Dr. Tamara S. Davis is serving as my thesis chair. I am writing this letter to request your participation in this study. You have been selected for participation based on your experience in teaching about and/or conducting research on violence against women.

The interview will ask questions about the feminist approach to treating and preventing violence towards women (by feminist approach I mean one grounded in the belief that violence towards women is caused by male oppression of females in a patriarchal system). The questions will explore implications and applications of this model to theory and practice. The purpose of the study is to contribute to the dialogue about efficacy of the feminist model in intervention with and prevention of violence towards women.

Participation in the study entails a one time interview at a location of your choosing. The interview will be audio recorded for data analysis. Your name will be removed from the data during the transcription process and all recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the transcription. No personally identifiable information will be included in any written report of the findings. The findings will be presented in my thesis and may be put into an article to be submitted for publication.

I will be calling you within the next two weeks to request your participation in this study. I hope you will consider participating and sharing your thoughts on the feminist model with me.
Sincerely,

Amanda E. Stevens
MSW Student
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participating in research entitled: A Qualitative Study of the Feminist Model.

Tamara S. Davis, Principal Investigator, or her authorized representative has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ___________________________   Signed: ___________________________

(Participant)
Signed: ____________________________  Signed: ____________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)  (Person authorized to consent for participant, if required)

Witness: ____________________________

*HS-027E Consent for Participation in Exempt Research*
APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. What is your gender?

2. How would you describe your ethnic and racial identity?

3. How would you characterize the economic status of your family growing up?

4. How many years would you say you have worked in the area of violence against women?

5. Describe your level of involvement in teaching, practice, and/or scholarship in the area of violence against women.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What contrasts, if any, do you see between feminist ideology in theory and implementation of the feminist model in practice?

2. What do you believe are the success and failures of the feminist model in practice?

3. What other theoretical models are incorporated in work with victims of violence against women? What do these models offer that the feminist model does not?

4. Does the feminist model’s commitment to equality for women preclude it from being able to analyze violence objectively?

5. Does an open critique of the feminist model open the door for antifeminist backlash that will threaten all the good work done over the past thirty years?

6. Is the feminist model diverse enough to support culturally relevant practice approaches with individuals across nationalities, classes, races, religions, genders, sexual orientations and family systems?

7. Does the traditional feminist model deny women agency by labeling them as victims and citing patriarchy as the source of their problems?

8. How important is it for practitioners to reflect on their own attitudes about and experiences with violence when they are engaging in an empowerment practice addressing violence against women?