How do I Talk to You?: Friends’ Conception of Communication with Victims of Domestic Abuse

Thesis

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Abstract

Social support for victims of domestic violence has been a well-researched topic. Abused women’s experience of abuse and social support has been researched extensively. However, friends’ perspective on the provision of support has not been studied and this renders our understanding of the phenomenon incomplete. Besides, researchers have studied support as an object, given by one and received by another. This study used concepts and processes from the theory of Constructivism to understand female friends’ conception of the communication of support to a victim. Fifteen women were interviewed regarding their beliefs, objectives, and communicative practices in their interaction with a victim of violence. Findings indicate the complexities of the situation from the friends’ perspective. Friends had multiple beliefs about the situation and effects on the victim. They also formed several aims which competed with each other and conflicted with their perception of the wants of the friend. Participants used several message practices to address univalent aims. Strategic messages that addressed competing aims and conflicting aims and victims’ wants were also seen. Communication practices reflected strategies like selection, separation and integration, which have been enunciated in Constructivism. Participants’ communication-related belief systems were apparent in their use of expressive and conventional message design logics. There were some instances of highly person-centered messages which reflected participants’ ability to help the victim reappraise her reality. Instances of rhetorical messages that created a desired reality for both the message producer (participant) and the target (friend) were also seen. Participants also responded on their use of specific communication skills and their recommendations for training in skills that they thought
would help them more in communicating with victims of abuse. Implications for research on
domestic violence as well as multiple goal management through communication are discussed.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Scholars have lamented that there are more questions than answers in domestic violence research (Sullivan, Tan, Basta, Rumptz, & Davidson, 1992). However, review of research suggests that an important question has not even been asked in domestic violence research is, “How do providers of social support conceptualize communicating with victims of domestic abuse?” The purpose of this study is to examine interpersonal communication between a victim of domestic partner abuse and a close friend from the friend’s perspective. Specifically, this study aims to understand how this complex communicative context is negotiated by the friend through messages expressed in conversation with a victim.

Almost one-third of women whose murders are reported to the police are killed by an intimate partner (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2001). This is a staggering statistic, since domestic violence is one of the least reported assaults against women; 80-85% of cases involving domestic violence go unreported, primarily because the general perception is that it is a “private matter” and can and should be solved at home (Frieze & Browne, 1989). In the face of the enormity of the problem, there is urgency to provide victims with access to community resources (Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). However, members of a woman’s social network like friends and family do not want to get involved in this domestic affair (Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2003).

On the other hand, researchers provide evidence that abused women either do not seek support or are dissatisfied with the help they receive from their informal networks (Rose, Campbell, & Kub, 2000). This is especially ironic since social support has significant positive
effects on the physical and mental health of victims of abuse (Coker et al., 2002; Coker, Watkins, Smith, & Brandt, 2003; El-Bassel, Gilbert, Rajah, Foleno & Frye, 2001) and ability to cope with the violence (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Tan, Basta, Sullivan, & Davidson, 1995).

This discrepancy in findings can be explained by evidence that when victims do seek help from members of their social networks, they are questioned and/or blamed (Bosch & Bergen, 2006), and told to stay in the relationship and put up with the abuse (Rose, Campbell & Kub, 2000) or are asked to leave the situation immediately (Goodkind et al., 2003; Ulrich, 1998).

Researchers have found that supporters often fail to grasp the dichotomy inherent in an abused woman’s situation that is defined by the simultaneity of love and violence (Lempert, 1997; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). This is significant, since multiple factors influence how women in abusive relationships experience abuse (Dienemann, Campbell, Landenburger & Curry, 2002; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Mills, 1985; Rusbult & Martz, 1995; Ulrich, 1998), and victims of abuse may take years to cope with it (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Liang et al., 2005). When victims do seek help, they are embarrassed and hesitant (Levendosky, Bogat, Theran, Trotter, von Eye & Davidson, 2004) and minimize the violence (Dunham & Senn, 2000, El-Bassel, Gilbert, Rajah & Foleno, 2001).

Review of the literature on domestic violence and the role and effects of informal networks reveals some significant gaps. First of all, most of the studies have examined the victim’s behavior or victims’ account of the support-provider’s behavior (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Goodkind et al., 2003). While researchers recommend studying friends and family in order to examine their perspective on the situation (Goodkind et al., 2003; Levendosky et al., 2004), this population remains largely unexamined. Secondly, a majority of the research looks at social support for victims of domestic abuse in terms of social networks (Levendosky et al., 2004). Although these studies presume that within a social network, the support provided is dyadic, dyadic communication of social support for victims of domestic violence has not been studied.
Thirdly social support has been measured in terms of its contextual components (Goodkind et al., 2003) and effectiveness (Bosch & Bergen, 2006). Reasons and motivational factors behind support, which mark the difference between its effectiveness and ineffectiveness has not been studied. Finally, the content of communication in terms of the exact messages expressed by the friends has not been studied. Scholars have studied the belief and behavioral intention of support-providers (Nabi et al., 2002); however, the messages that friends express in conversation in this situation remains a glaringly neglected area. Informal interpersonal communication between a diseased individual and an untrained member of his/her social network has been seen to have significant effect on disease outcomes (McGrew, 2008) and sexual violence (Bingham & Battey, 2005). Scholars examining social support in domestic violence situations have stressed the importance of the communication between victims and their helpers, as often even well-meant messages can undermine the victim and reinforce the abuser’s behavior (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). Researchers have also stressed that the processes through which social support is expressed should be studied (Levendosky et al., 2004).

The gap in literature as well as discrepant findings necessitates a deeper investigation of the nature of the support, in terms of the dyadic communication that transpires between abused women and their friends. This study, motivated by these research objectives, aims to study if there are inherent complexities inherent in the support-providers’ situation. The purpose of this study is not to imply that the complexities inherent in the supporter’s situation are parallel or comparable to the complexities in the victims’ situation. The theoretical approach taken in this study, rather, is that the communication of support to a victim is through an interactive process, where there are two communicators with their respective realities. Understanding of the phenomenon of support in situations involving domestic violence is incomplete if the reality of one of these interaction partners is not studied. Thus, the beliefs and perspectives of friends regarding this situation need
to be examined in order to understand why friends do or do not communicate appropriate support, and how their messages might be interpreted by the victims.

This study is also influenced by the interpretivist perspective, in that it is believed that reality is subjective and constructed through discourse (Blumer, 1969). Thus, studying discourse is the only way reality can be understood, and therefore messages expressed by providers would give insights into support-providers’ reality. Concepts and processes of communication from the theory of Constructivism will be used in understanding the communication that friends would engage in if they suspect a friend of theirs to be abused. The impressions friends have about the situation as well as their communicative aims in the situation will also be studied.

To that effect, the following chapter contains a review of current and relevant research on social support and domestic abuse, and an overview of Constructivism and its application to the study of the communication of social support in domestic violence. The next chapter would contain an overview of the method applied in the study. Findings from the study are presented in the fourth chapter. The final chapter contains a discussion of the findings and their significance.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the following five sections, I will review the relevant literature on domestic violence and the communication of social support. First I give an overview of domestic violence as a concept, and the institutional support systems that offer help to victims. Next, I review literature on social support for victims of domestic violence. Following that I review literature on the help-seeking behavior of victims and the experience of abuse for them. In the fourth section I review literature on domestic violence from the communication discipline. In the final section I review the theory of Constructivism and apply it to the context of communication between a victim of domestic violence and her friend.

I. Domestic Violence

In a nationwide survey for research conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice, a staggering 64% of women who reported of being raped, physically assaulted, and/or stalked since age 18 said that they had been victimized by a current or former husband, cohabiting partner, boyfriend, or date (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). With over 1.5 million women being assaulted by intimate partners or ex-partners each year (Miller & Wellford, 1997; Straus & Gelles, 1986), domestic violence is a pervasive problem in the American society (Bybee & Sullivan, 2002). In the social services literature, domestic violence is defined as “economic control and physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse used by adults or adolescents against their current or former intimate partners.” (The Domestic Violence Advisory Council, California Department of Health Services, 1998). In the not-for-profit literature, domestic violence has been
defined as “the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior perpetrated by an intimate partner against another.” (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, ncadv.org).

Scholars studying domestic violence have emphasized that it is a form of domination, both physical and psychological (Cornia, 1999). Scholars have defined the parameters of such violence, explaining that such violence occurs between two individuals (although sometimes domestic abuse may also include child abuse), and is usually conducted in a private environment. The perpetrator has agency in the matter, and the victim has minimal or absolutely no agency (Pathak Bhatt, 2008). Research presents evidence that heterosexual intimate partner violence is largely a problem of men assaulting female partners (Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992).

Domestic violence has been studied as a crime (Hart, 1993; Gondolf & Jones, 2001; Hartman & Belknap, 2003), and as a condition that inflicts mental and physical injuries on the victims (Follingstad, Brennan, Hause, Polek, & Rutledge, 1991; Bonomi, Anderson, Rivara, & Thompson, 2007). Institutional support for victims of domestic violence comes from a tripartite system comprising the legal system including law enforcement officers and court officials (Gondolf & Jones, 2001; Hartman & Belknap, 2003), the healthcare system including healthcare providers (Glowa, Frasier & Newton, 2002) and social services (Payne, 2008). These forms of institutional resources have been studied from both the perspective of the victim needing the support (for the criminal justice system, see Coulter, Kuehnle, Byers and Alfonso, 1999; for the medical system, see McCauley, Yurk, Jenckes and Ford, 1998; for social services, see Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1996), as well as the provider of the support (for criminal justice, see Huisman, Martinez, & Wilson, 2005; for medical system, see Glowa, Frasier & Newton, 2002; for social services, see Payne, 2008). However, scholars studying domestic abuse have found that victims approach members of their informal networks more than formal networks (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Primary researcher programs that have emerged over the past few decades have been from
Sullivan and his colleagues (Sullivan & Bybee, 2002; Tan, Basta, Sullivan & Davidson, 1995), who have undertaken longitudinal studies to assess the effectiveness of community resources for victims of domestic abuse.

Although most batterers seem to have control issues of their own, especially with regards to anger management, they also seem to be overtly controlling of their partner. They may have psychological or physiological problems like alcoholism, substance abuse, etc. (Pathak Bhatt, 2008). Studies with spouses of alcoholics, for example, report that compared to spouses of non-alcoholics, the spouses of alcoholics perceived more danger in their marriage and had trouble relating to their partners (Stanley, 2008). According to domestic violence advocates, however, these factors may aggravate violence, but they are not regarded as acceptable causes of violence (Domestic Violence Intervention Project).

The victim of domestic violence has no power in the relationship and is always at the receiving end of the violence. She may suffer from low self esteem, and mental, emotional illness (depression, fear, anxiety, palpitations, etc.) and physical injuries (Pathak Bhatt, 2008). When one is the victim, domestic violence is related to a lesser sense of control, especially in the case of women (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen, Campbell, 2005). Researchers have said that abused women should be seen as survivors because they are active sensemakers who interpret the violence, counteract the abuse and build defenses (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). I have the deepest respect for and agreement with this reasoning. This study refers to battered women as victims because of an ease of understanding. Since the premise of this study is the provision of social support to a victim of abuse while she is in the abusive relationship, referring to her as a survivor may create confusion. Therefore, in the rest of the document, the woman in an abusive relationship has been referred to as the victim.
II. Domestic Violence and Social Support

Support from informal networks and their role in the lives of victims of domestic violence has received substantial attention from researchers (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Goodkind et al., 2003; Rose et al., 2000; Tan, Basta, Sullivan & Davidson, 1995). Recurring themes of study have broadly focused on the effect of support from social networks on the well-being of victims, and scholars have also tried to understand the help-seeking behavior of victims (El-Bassel, Gilbert, Rajah & Foleno, 2001; Levendosky et al., 2004; Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Narra & Sarah Weintraub, 2005). In this section, I will examine the role of social support in the lives of victims of domestic abuse. I will also examine the help-seeking behavior of victims of intimate partner abuse, what keeps them from reaching out to friends and family for help and consultation, and what they encounter when they do.

Types of Social Support in Stressful Situations

Social support as a construct in the context of conflict and stress has been described as assuring information that leads an individual to believe that he or she is cared for, loved, esteemed, and valued, and belongs to a network of mutual reciprocity (Cobb, 1976; El-Bassel et al. 2001). Social support has been seen to provide an emotional cushion against an individual’s stress level (Cohen & Wills, 1985), and has been conceptualized as a mechanism that provides assistance to individuals to cope with stress (Thoits, 1986).

In research on social support, Cutrona and Russell’s Optimal Stress Support matching is widely used (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Cutrona and Russell aimed to understand the psychological effects of criminal victimization, especially of events out of a person’s control. They suggested that in the case of uncontrollable events, emotional support like the presence of a confidant is most crucial, as it helps in harboring acceptance and support. If the victimization involves loss or damage of material goods, tangible support like replacing the lost good is also
useful. Hobfoll’s “Conservation of resources” model (Hobfoll, 1989) complements Cutrona and Russell’s (1990) model by identifying the types of support that may be available to victims of crime. Hobfoll’s model suggests that if the right kind of social support (emotional, tangible, informational, esteem) can be matched with the loss of an appropriate resource, social support can either prevent the loss of the resource, or recover the lost resource. Thus both Curona and Russell’s and Hobfoll’s models suggest that people with strong and diverse networks are less vulnerable to stress than those without such networks.

Research has shown that social support is helpful in stressful situations that do not fall under the general perception of “victimization,” like immigration (Simich, Beiser, Stewart & Mwakarimba, 2005) and status as a sexual minority (Nesmith, Burton & Cosgrove, 1999; Speziale & Gopalakrishna, 2004). Social support has also been studied in relationship with the psychological consequences of victims of violent and property-related crime. Kaniasty and Norris (1992) found that three types of perceived support (appraisal support that combined emotional and informational support, tangible support and self esteem) fostered well-being in the victims.

**Social Support in the Lives of Domestic Abuse Victims**

In this section I review research on social support in the lives of victims of intimate partner abuse along four broad interrelated themes. First, I review literature on the buffering effect of provided social support on aspects of a victim’s life like mental health, stress levels and coping abilities. Then I review literature on the social support victims of violence obtain, and the factors that determine the provision of social support. I will then review literature on the support-seeking behavior of victims. Finally, I will examine research on the process of leaving for battered women and some theoretical accounts of this process.
The buffering effects of social support on victims’ mental health. The role of social support in reducing the effect of partner violence on various aspects of the victims’ life has been studied over the past few decades. Research has shown that seeking support from the social network significantly prevents victims from developing anxiety and depression (Carlson, McNutt, Choi & Rose, 2002) and social support can protect against the severity of the effects of domestic violence on mental health (Coker et al., 2002; Coker et al., 2003; Kocot, 2000). In addition, low level of perceived social support has been seen to affect self-blame in victims (Barnett, Martinez & Keyson, 1996), and seeking social support improves the way victims address the abusive situation with their partners (Bosch & Bergen, 2006).

Research on the buffering effect that social support has on the impact of domestic abuse on mental health has found that lower levels of perceived social support is related with high levels of depression among victims of violence, and individuals who receive more supportive responses from their social networks are more likely to have better psychological health (Mitchell & Hodson, 1983). Although women who are in more severely abusive relationships are less likely to benefit from buffering factors like social support (Carlson, McNutt, Choi & Rose, 2002), several researchers have found that social support reduces the impact of domestic abuse on the mental health and stress levels of abused women (Carlson et al., 2002; Coker et al., 2002; Coker et al., 2003).

Carlson, McNutt, Choi, and Rose (2002) report that having protective factors like social support in their lives results in less anxiety among women in severely abusive relationships. High levels of abuse seemed to overwhelm severely abused women so that social support often did not protect them from depression or anxiety. However, the researchers argue that having more support cannot go wrong in helping such women. Coker, Watkins, Smith and Brandt (2003) found that emotional or social support played a crucial role in women’s ability to cope with abuse. The authors find that intimate partner abuse could alienate women from their social networks, while
hurting their self esteem and self-worth significantly. Help from the members of one’s social support system could address this by not only improving a victim’s coping skills and general well-being, but also by providing resources to the victim.

Coker et al. in another larger study (2002) found that social support significantly reduced the risk of poor perceived physical health, mental health, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and suicide attempts. Other researchers have also found that social support contributes to mental health outcomes like post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and problem-focused coping (Kocot, 2000). Although there was no moderating effect of social support on the relationship between physical and mental abuse on mental health outcomes, further analyses showed that emotional and tangible support can mediate the relationship between domestic violence and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and between domestic violence and depression. Emotional support was also found to moderate the relationship between victims’ coping skills and mental health outcomes (Kocot, 2000).

**Obtained social support.** In light of the research on the positive buffering role of social support on the effects of domestic violence on the health and well-being of victims, it is important to review the research on the nature of the social support that victims obtain, and the factors that determine the provision of support.

Bosch and Bergen (2006) found that while supportive people in victims’ social network helped the victims to access resources, non-supportive people who questioned, blamed or dismissed victims curbed victims’ possibility of accessing resources, and contributed covertly to their inability to break free from the relationship (Bosch & Bergen, 2006). Researchers examining the formation of social networks have found a relationship between victims’ personal resources like education and employment and their social networks (Tan et al., 1995; Mitchell & Hodson, 1983). With regards to the effects of the structure of networks on social support, victims were
seen to feel more comfortable disclosing the violence to members of their networks who were
themselves victims of violence (Levendosky et al., 2004). Researchers have also found that
responses from members of victims’ social network abuse receive depends on contextual factors
like victims’ marital status and number of children (Goodkind et al., 2003).

In their study, Mitchell and Hodson (1983) found a relationship between the composition
of the victims’ social networks and the level of supportiveness they offered. For instance,
participants in the study who had more personal resources like education, employment and
professional skills reported that they had more contact with their friends, and received more
positive responses from them. The researchers argued that women with personal resources like
education and employment had personal access to other women, and this helped them build
supportive networks outside of the relationship with their abuser. The researchers also found that
if the victims shared most of their friends with their abusive partners, they were unlikely to get
support from these friends. In fact, mutual friends were more likely to avoid discussing the issue
of violence and minimize its severity because they were reluctant to take sides in a marital dispute
(Mitchell & Hodson, 1983).

Abused women’s perceived social support has been studied in terms of the number of
women in their social network who are in violent relationships. Levendosky et al. (2004) found
that battered women felt more comfortable disclosing their violence when members of their social
network comprised women who were themselves victims of violence. The researchers argued that
this could provide security and a sense of validation for the victims. In a study on the role of
social support in relation with how victims experienced further abuse, Tan et al. (1995) found that
women were more satisfied with their social support when they had at least one or two close and
dependable individuals in their social network than when they had a wide array of acquaintances,
friends and relatives. In studying the people women in abusive relationships disclose the violence
to, Rose, Campbell and Kub (2000) found that when women confided in other women, they used
close friends more frequently than family members as a source of support. Thus, there is evidence to suggest that the nature of the relationship between victims and members of their social network has an effect on the victims’ satisfaction and comfort with the social support.

In examining the contextual factors that determine family and friends’ response to victims of violence, Goodkind, Gillum, Bybee and Sullivan (2003) studied how these responses impact the well-being of women who were abused by their partners. The study examined the extent to which women reported talking about the violence with their family and friends, and the level of emotional and tangible support that they reported receiving. The level of psychological and physiological abuse the women were experiencing, injuries and threat they had received, and their relationship with the abuser were measured. Contextual factors like whether the victim was married to the abuser, how many times she had been separated from her abuser, whether the abuser had threatened family and friends, and the number of children the victim had affected family and friends’ reactions to victims, and this response in turn affects the victims well being. Goodkind et al. (2003) found that the more the women have been separated from their abuser, the less emotional support they received from their family and friends. The researchers concluded that this might be because family and friends were frustrated and felt hopeless and helpless when women repeatedly returned to their assailants, when in fact the family and friends might have advised them to end their relationship with the abuser. Family and friends might simply give up on the woman, thinking that whatever support they provided to her was not going to help her end the relationship and “it is not worth the emotional investment to continue to provide support” (Goodkind et al., 2003, p. 365). The researchers argued that friends and family needed to be non-judgmental and non-critical in order to be effective support providers.

In this regard, however, Rose, Campbell, and Kub’s (2000) findings are significant. These researchers found that women felt physically and emotionally isolated, and they were not comfortable making new friends and relating to old ones. However, when they happened to
disclose the violence to members of their social network, they faced cultural sanctions against leaving an abusive partner and were implicitly told to stay in the relationship and put up with the abuser, because the most important role for a woman is that of a wife and a mother. This further corroborated their sense of isolation.

III. The help-seeking behavior of victims and the experience of abuse

Research on the effect of social support on victims has focused on available social support from advocates and other members of victims’ social network (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Goodkind et al., 2003; Levendosky et al., 2004; Rose et al., 2000; Tan et al., 1995). However, this line of research focuses on available support when victims choose to seek help. The research showcasing positive effects of social support provided by one’s social network in the lives of victims becomes especially ironic when studied along with research that states that victims often do not seek help from their social networks, or minimize the violence when they do (Dunham & Senn, 2000; El-Bassel et al., 2001; Liang et al., 2005). Examining victims’ behavior in obtaining social support will expand our understanding of the provision of social support in domestic violence.

Victims of intimate partner abuse have reported that informal support strategies are more helpful than those one can develop personally (Goodman, Dutton, Weinfert & Cook, 2003). This is especially frustrating since women prefer to rely on personal strategies of coping with abuse like placating or resistance rather than disclose it to family and friends and/or seek professional help (Liang et al., 2005). Liang et al. (2005) provided a theoretical framework for understanding the complex dynamic of domestic violence experience and survival. They examined the socio-cultural and interpersonal contexts in which such decisions have to be made. The researchers found that for the abused women, making the decision to seek help is the recognition that the violence happening in the relationship is wrong and unacceptable, and that the violence will not
cease without intervention from others (Liang et al., 2005). Victims also try every personal means of addressing the violence and coping with it before they seek help from their social networks. Other researchers have also found that victimized women only seek help when they perceive their resources exhausted and themselves incapable of stopping the violence (Lempert, 1997).

There are many reasons why victims may not disclose the abuse to people they know. Abusers often use social isolation as a means of exerting control over victims and battered women therefore do not get physical access to social networks (Dobash & Dobash, 1998; El-Bassel et al., 2001). Social isolation also hurts the victim’s self esteem, resulting in the victim becoming too embarrassed or scared to disclose the abuse to confidants (Levendosky et al., 2004), resulting in impaired social support. Researchers found that victims may be embarrassed of the situation (Dunham & Senn, 2000) and that abused women often describe themselves as loners who “close up” around people (Rose et al., 2000).

El-Bassel et al. (2001) found that the abuser played a key role in isolating the victims from their informal networks from which they could get social support. The study revealed how abusers manipulate victims into dropping contact with their victims so that in the end they not only had fewer people to turn to for help, but they had also alienated those they thought could help.

While victims in studies have stated that they did not think that they would get support from their family and friends even if they asked for it (El-Bassel et al., 2001), other researchers have found that victims often cannot relate to friends, and this prevents them from seeking help (Rose et al., 2000). Prolonged isolation imposed through the abuser’s control also results in the sense of isolation becoming innate, as abused women begin to view themselves as “isolatives”, or hard to get to know (Rose et al., 2000). Although women often described themselves in positive terms like “generous”, “caring”, “enjoyable to be around,” they often curbed this positivity with negative views of themselves, showing an acute lack of positive self-worth. Many women
internalized the violence, adapting their personalities to it. Negative reactions when women asked for support also caused a reluctance to seek support (Rose et al., 2000).

When victims of domestic abuse do seek support from their family and friends, they tend to conceal information about the abuse and minimize it (Dunham & Senn, 2000). The minimization was positively related to a high tolerance for physical abuse, a delay in disclosing information, and an increase in the severity of abuse. Dunham and Senn (2000) concluded that by minimizing the extent of abuse, women increased the possibility of obtaining social support from friends and family, thereby managing the reaction of family and friends to the abuse.

The Experience of Abuse

The difficulty that victims of abuse face in seeking help from informal and/or formal networks can be examined in the context of their experience of the abuse. Battered women are morally conflicted about the implication of abuse in their lives (Belknap, 1999; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995), and experience an abusive relationship in multiple stages (Dienemann, Campbell, Landenburger & Curry, 2002; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Ulrich, 1998). The factors determining their experience of abuse and feelings of commitment have also been studied (Rusbult & Martz, 1995).

In her qualitative study of battered women and the stages of their relationship with the abuser, Trudy Mills found that women adopt multiple strategies in managing the violence, minimizing injuries and justifying their decision to stay in the relationship (Mills, 1985). Women do not involve others because they have an urge to protect their abusers, they think others cannot or will not help them and those who do might get hurt. Belknap’s study (1999) on morally conflicting dimensions to the domestic abuse faced by women also reveals that “the conflict between self and other” (Gilligan, 1982) makes battered women compromise, and even want to help the abuser (Belknap, 1999). Caring for oneself includes concern for one's safety and well

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being, whereas caring for others would comprise concern for family, love for the abusive partner, and most importantly, concern for the children, that results in reluctance to separate them from their father. Providers of social support need to understand this dilemma for battered women before making their decisions about the relative severity of their situation and the kind of help they need (Belknap, 1999; Gilligan, 1992).

Other researchers researching the experience of the abuse for abused women have also found that several factors contribute to the reason women stay (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). Rusbult and her colleagues have applied the investment model to study commitment as a factor in battered women’s reasons to stay in their abusive relationships (Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986; Rusbult & Martz, 1995). The investment model draws from interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) that distinguishes between satisfaction and commitment as reasons why people stay in relationships. The investment model shifts the focus from battered women’s personality traits and dispositions to their strong feelings of commitment that make them stay in their relationships (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). In focusing on the level of commitment as the determining factor in the decision to stay, Rusbult and Martz (1995) also make a critical distinction between satisfaction and commitment. This distinction offers a critical perspective on the issue of intervention from family and friends who seem to make the assumption that it should not be difficult for battered women to leave their abusive relationship if they are unhappy (Levendosky et al., 2004, Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Rose et al., 2000). One’s commitment level in a relationship was determined by one’s satisfaction level (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992), the availability and quality of alternatives to a relationship (Rusbult, 1983), and investments factors, both emotional and contextual. Rusbult and Martz (1995) found that battered women reported feeling more committed to the abusive relationship when they were more satisfied with the relationship and when they had fewer alternatives and resources like education, financial stability and own transportation. Factors like emotional and social investments in the relationship like
marital status, length of involvement, and children also determined their sense of commitment to the relationship (Rusbult & Martz, 1995).

Abused women have also been seen to use these factors that contribute to them feeling more invested in and committed to the abusive relationships to justify staying in the relationship. Ferraro and Johnson (1983) revealed that women use at least one, and sometimes two or more, of six arguments that they make for themselves in order to justify staying on in a violent relationship: the appeal to the salvation ethic, the denial of the victimizer, the denial of injury, the denial of victimization, the denial of options and the appeal to higher loyalties. The appeal to the salvation ethic, or the need to help the abuser, who they perceive as sick and troubled, is consistent with the findings of other research on moral conflict (Belknap, 1999; Mills, 1985). In the denial of the victimizer technique, women attribute the violence not to the abuser, but to some external factor like the loss of a job, mental illness or alcoholism. Victims rationalize that these factors are beyond the control of the abuser, and are controlling him instead. For some women, the abuse is so shocking that they deny that it ever occurred (denial of injury). Worrying about it is less acceptable than putting up with the semblance of a ‘normal’ life, and men often take advantage of this by refusing to discuss the matter. If the victim brings it up, often a man would even accuse the woman of having lost her mind and imagining things. Thus the woman begins to believe that the abuse never happened, and if it did, that it was normal. In an effort to justify the victimization, some women believed that they deserved the violence. This belief that they did something to provoke the abusers blurs women’s ability to defend themselves (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983). Ferraro and Johnson (1983) also found that women mostly tend to think that their options outside of the violent marriage are limited. Prolonged abuse diminishes their self-esteem, and patriarchal oppression often makes them dependent on their spouses financially and socially. However, in the interviews with survivors, the researchers found that women often return to their abusers even after establishing a life for themselves outside of the marriage (Ferraro & Johnson,
Most of them are so emotionally invested in their relationship with the abusers that they cannot conceive of an alternative. This leaves them trapped in the relationship with no willingness to escape. The final technique that Ferraro and Johnson (1983) discuss is women’s enduring loyalty to their religious, cultural or family values that keeps them from ending the relationship. Some women are believers in the Christian faith that a woman must serve a man, while others do not want to disrupt the structure of their family for the sake of their children. Thus, their experience of reality is influenced by their sense of an ideal, and this keeps them from questioning that reality (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983).

Ferraro and Johnson’s (1983) findings on the arguments that victims make in order to justify staying in the abusive relationship are similar to findings in other research (Levendosky et al., 2004; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Rose & Campbell, 2002). There is societal sanction against leaving a marriage, and women are considered responsible in their primary role as a wife and mother for keeping the family together (Rose & Campbell, 2000). As a result, women have to resort to ways to rationalize the violence and their decision to stay on.

In light of the complex experiences of battered women, researchers have found that they are reluctant to talk about the violence (Dienemann, Campbell, Landenburger, & Curry, 2002). Due to their sense of shame and denial, helpers need to extract details from them that they otherwise would not be able to divulge. Women at an initial stage of violence may also feel extremely vulnerable and are paranoid about being judged. They are yet not sure if the violence is anything to worry about, or is a temporary occurrence. More often than not, they feel that the violence is exclusive to them and that they are alone in their predicament. Even at a later stage when victims have accepted that violence is indeed occurring, and they are convinced that they need to confide in someone about the situation, this experience is awkward, especially if the revelation is about intimate personal details like a sexual violation, which in most domestic violence cases, it is. Researchers have suggested implications for these findings for counselors,
who need to be aware of this and be able to employ techniques that will enable the victim to overcome these initial thoughts of embarrassment (Dienemann et al., 2002). Victims have also reported dissatisfaction with counselors who went along with their report that the abuse was not serious (Hamilton & Coates, 1993).

Despite the need for support, Ulrich (1989, 1998) has found that there is a dearth of support from family and friends when women report abuse. Lack of support is communicated in many ways – by asking the woman to stay in the relationship and make it work, by asking her to hit the abuser back, and by encouraging her to find out what pleases him and what provokes him. Some women even report that members of their social network condone the violence by helping her cover their bruises and look presentable (Ulrich, 1989, 1998). Bosch and Bergen (2006) also found that unsupportive people in a victim’s social network ignored the abusive behavior, told the victim to handle her situation by herself, change herself to stop the abuse, questioned her decisions, and did not consider what she wanted (Bosch & Bergen, 2006).

A study done by Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995) provides a new dimension to these findings by discussing the role of language in conveying a lack of support to abused women (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). The battered women interviewed by Merritt-Gray and Wuest reported that the messages regarding financial, sexual and emotional abuse that friends and family expressed to them were confusing. This inhibited them from forming a clear idea about their identity as abused. The women interviewed by Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995) revealed that the language used by well-meaning helpers often undermined the efforts of the victims to leave. Corroborating studies that women are reluctant to speak (Dienemann et al., 2002), minimize the violence when they speak (Dunham & Senn, 2000), this study reports (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995) that battered women do not always find the appropriate and adequate language to describe their experiences. Thus, it is necessary for helpers to listen for cues in the language women use. When women say they are “arguing” or “having trouble,” friends and helpers need to provide
opportunities for expansion and feedback. “The response of the person a woman first tells is critical in her continuing to tell and seek solutions” (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995, p. 410). This finding corroborates research that states that expanding on the woman’s account gives her much-needed validation (Ulrich, 1998).

An interesting point raised by Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995) is the misleading construction of the language of “leaving”. In keeping with research reviewed earlier, the researchers suggest that leaving is a process and not a single act. Women take a long while to leave finally, and many of them return to their abusers repeatedly. As research that I have reviewed earlier (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Mills, 1985; Ulrich, 1998) found, the experience of enduring all phases of the relationship is ongoing and the processes and ramifications of detachment from the relationship and the abuser are acted out in a victim’s mind in multiple ways (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). Researchers concluded that battering is not a simple act of violence that could be ended by a definitive decision like leaving (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983). However, Merritt-Gray and Wuest report that most support providers mistakenly focus on the singular act of the victim’s moving to a different address and communicate their support accordingly (1995).

Summary

Research on the positive direct and buffering effects of social support has been consistent, as has research examining the complexities of an abusive relationship and the inner state of the victim. Literature on the help-seeking behavior of victims suggests that victims do not seek help often, they do not find appropriate and adequate language to express themselves, and minimize the violence. This behavior can be attributed to two lines of research findings. The first reason for victims not seeking help could be because they are embarrassed and undecided about their relationship. The other reason can be explained by research that finds that victims also report being judged and dictated to, when they approach members of their social network.
However, the bulk of the research examining social support in the lives of victims has examined this issue from the victims’ perspective. Several researchers have stressed the importance of studying the phenomenon of social support from the perspective of the friends and family of the victim (Levendosky et al., 2004; Goodkind et al., 2003) in order to understand why they offer the kind of support that victims report receiving. Friends and family have not received much academic attention, and even researchers who study providers of social support do not specify the relationship between the provider and recipient of the support (Nabi, Southwell, & Hornik, 2001). Victims report feeling comfortable with sharing their experiences with one or two close female friends (Rose et al., 2001; Tan et al., 1995). Therefore friends’ perspective on the matter would be especially interesting to study.

Moreover, the language of social support has been seen to be problematic (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). Despite sharing the same speech codes, victims and friends are seen to be using language differently, leading to victims’ overall dissatisfaction with the support. In light of this, there is a disciplinary need to understand how support is communicated. Social support is ultimately conveyed through the messages that individuals share with each other “in the context of a relationship that is created and sustained through interaction” (Burleson et al., 1994, p. xviii). Thus, in order to understand the phenomenon thoroughly and completely, the conversation between the friend and the victim needs to be the focus of research.

**IV. Domestic Abuse and Communication**

Although there is little research on the communication between victims of abuse and members of their social network (for exception see Nabi, Southwell, & Hornik, 2002), intimate partner abuse as a situation has been addressed by scholars of communication from diverse perspectives. Those working in the field of marital and family communication have focused on the way violence is communicated in an intimate relationship, whether it is through actual verbal
and physical aggression (Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1999; Feldman & Ridley, 2000) low warmth or propensity for problem solving (Gordis et al., 2005) or the way it is communicated through narratives and cultural symbols (Pathak Bhatt, 2008; Goel, 2005). Aggressiveness in marriage has been almost always related to unsatisfactory marital communication (Cordova, Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe & Cox, 1993).

Another line of research has tried to delineate the characteristics of marriages and relationships that are associated with aggressive communicative patterns. This body of work looks specifically at communication skills, or the lack thereof, that may differentiate aggressive couples from non-aggressive ones. For instance, Ronan, Dreer, Dollard and Ronan (2004) videotaped the use of effective communicative skills as against non-effective communication skills among twelve married couples while they discussed three different scenarios. The couples had been advised to attend violent reduction treatment programs and they completed self-report measures on anger, skills in social problem-solving and tactics they would employ in high-conflict situations. The videotapes revealed a dominance of ineffective problem-solving skills in high-conflict situations and a prevalence of effective problem-solving skills when dealing with low-conflict situations.

Researchers have also focused on the interaction style of physically aggressive men and how it differs from verbally aggressive or withdrawing men (Burman, John & Margolin, 1992; Margolin, John & Gleberman, 1988). A distinct line of research in communication and applied psychology exists that stipulates that aggression in marital relationships can be associated with a lack of social and communication skills like problem-solving skills. Researchers have found that batterers were more deficient in problem-solving skills than non-batterers (Else, Wonderlich, Beatty, Christie & Stanton, 1993). Scholars of communication have also examined the media representations of intimate partner violence and how it reflects, and at the same time affects, the perpetration of violence (Carlyle, 2007).
A study done by Nabi, Southwell & Hornik (2001) looked at the intention-behavior link with regards to intervention in domestic violence and found that beliefs regarding intervention correlated with intentions to intervene, but did not correlate with actual behavior, that is, talking to the abused woman (Nabi et al., 2001). The researchers defined domestic abuse as the physical abuse of a woman by her husband or boyfriend” (Nabi et al., 2001, p. 433) and interviewed 1250 adults in Philadelphia over telephone. For the independent variables of general and specific beliefs about domestic violence, participants were asked to agree or disagree on a five-point scale regarding three general beliefs about the importance of domestic violence as an issue, perceived severity of domestic violence and explanations for why domestic violence happens. Four specific belief questions were asked pertaining to the two behavioral outcomes of talking to the man and talking to the woman. Finally, one behavioral statement regarding seeking advice from a domestic violence program was made. The dependent variables were behavioral intentions and actual behaviors regarding a specific domestic violence situation. The same individuals were not asked about their behavioral intentions and actual behaviors. Those who had recently seen or heard an incident of domestic abuse were asked about their actual behaviors in that situation. Those who did not know of a recent case were asked about their behavioral intention if they came to know of such a situation. All participants were asked about their behaviors or behavioral intentions pertaining to four specific actions: talk to the abused woman, talk to the abusive man, talk to others regarding what to do, and seek help from a domestic violence program. Those who had seen or heard a recent case of domestic violence were also asked if they had called 911 or directly intervened.

Nabi et al. found that 73% of those who knew of a situation involving domestic violence reported that they had spoken to the abused woman, and the behavioral intention of speaking to the woman had a mean of 4.14 on 5. Nabi et al. (2001) found that beliefs about talking to a woman who is being abused correlated strongly with the intention to talk, but not to the actual
behavior. Most people believed that talking to a friend who was being abused was the right thing to do, would be possible for someone to do, and would help the woman improve the situation. However, the belief that talking to a woman could significantly hurt the friendship relationship was positively correlated with actual behavior, but not with behavioral intention.

The findings of Nabi et al. (2004) are interesting to say the least. Participants were seen to believe that talking to a friend was possible, right, and helpful, and yet the belief could predict the intention but not the behavior. Approaching the issue from the perspective of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), the researchers are able to establish the belief-behavioral intention link. However, the researchers find that the behavioral intention does not translate to actual behavior in the context of communication between a victim of domestic violence and a friend, and this lapse is not explained by the Theory of Reasoned Action (Nabi et al., 2001). As the researchers ask, “Why are we able to predict intentions with some power, but behavior with little success?” (Nabi et al., 2001, p. 443) One explanation noted by the authors is that the behaviors enacted in the specific situation of domestic violence are extremely context-specific. Drawing from the Theory of Reasoned Action, they note that the behavior may not be under volitional control (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) or that the context makes other specific beliefs more salient to the situation (Nabi et al., 2001). They thus conclude that more specified beliefs would have to be measured that correspond more specifically to the situation of domestic violence.

Nabi and her colleagues’ study (2001) open up some interesting possibilities, but fail to address some core issues in the study of communication between a victim of abuse and her friend. While the study (Nabi et al., 2001) captures the link between beliefs and behavioral intentions, it did not extend to the friend’s actual behavior of talking to the abused woman. For the present purpose, these findings can be developed along two lines. Firstly, the predictive link between beliefs and behaviors can be elaborated by studying the goals people have in any social situation,
which the study does not take that into account (Nabi et al., 2004). Some of the questions raised by Nabi et al. (2001) can be explained if one systematically studies the context-relevant beliefs that individuals form about the situation through their perception of the situation (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982) and the interpersonal, identity or instrumental objectives that individuals want to achieve through any communication in a social situation (Clark, 1984). The generation of and conflict between multiple goals in the situation, and individuals’ perceived discomfort in negotiating them can explain the absence of a belief-behavior correlation. Second, although Nabi et al. (2001) refer to behavior as the act of communicating with the abused friend and state that communication in domestic violence is context-specific, they do not study the actual content of the conversation. The enactment of multiple objectives in the actual messages that one designs in the context is extremely potent given the specificity of the context.

The interesting findings from the study done by Nabi et al. (2001) call for a more precise investigation of the communication that happens between a victim of intimate partner abuse and a friend. In this section I will review concepts from the Constructivist theory of communication, and apply these concepts to the context of domestic violence to understand the interpersonal communication that happens between victims of domestic abuse and their intimate friends.

V. Constructivism: A Theoretical Framework

Constructivism provides a conception of communication as an interpretive interplay between a person's individual cognitive processes and shared social processes. Communication comprises at least three processes that together constitute a construction of shared meaning. Communication as codification of meaning is understood as all individuals’ access to similar language, speech act and speech events within a culture and community (Delia et al., 1982). All communicative conduct occurs within the commonality of speech codes within a given speech community (Clark & Delia, 1979). Individuals are born into a world of continuing social
processes and phenomenon and they develop interpretive processes through interacting with this world (Delia, O’Keefe, & O’Keefe).

Communication as cooperation conceptualizes human interaction as a cooperative act that involves one person producing action that has comprehensible implications for another person’s behavior (Delia et al., 1982). While referring to the Gricean conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner (Grice, 1975) or Ciciourel’s interpretive practices (Cicourel, 1974) as central principles to the process of interpretation, Constructivism sees communication as a process that follows conventional practices that are assumed to be followed by individuals engaged in the process (Delia et al., 1982). From this perspective, interactants are engaged in a cooperative process with rules and procedures like politeness forms that each understands and abides by (Delia et al., 1982; O’Keefe, 1988). Communication as a cooperative is process requires a thorough understanding of the other through empathy and the ability to construct the perspective of others within oneself (Hale & Delia, 1976; Delia, 1977) in order for individuals to engage in a coherent and appropriate interaction (Delia et al., 1982).

The sharing of cultural and communal codes and the cooperative practices that allow reciprocity in conversation serve as foundational processes for communication as coordination. In the constructivist conception, communication is the interpretive process in which human action is coordinated through a mutual recognition of communicative intent, and human actions are organized through the adoption of communicative strategies (Delia et al., 1982). The adoption of strategies is guided by one’s own communicative intentions and one’s sense of the other’s communicative intention. In constructivist theory, “communication is a relation among persons that is characterized by the intention to express, the recognition of such intentions in others, and the organization of action and interaction around the reciprocal communicative intentions of participants” (Delia et al., 1982, p. 159).
In constructivist thought, therefore, communication is the process through which the communicative intentions of participants are coordinated (O’Keefe & Delia, 1985). Communication is thus focused on “the process of reciprocally imputing and negotiating intentions and meaning” (Delia, 1977; O’Keefe & Delia, 1985).” Both the coordination between intent and action and the adoption of strategies are dependent on interpretive processes that individuals engage in.

The three communication processes assume that an individual re-constructs realities through a negotiation between meanings acquired through the process of socialization and meanings that emerge from a constant interpretive process an individual engages in (Delia et al., 1982). In communication, each of the interactants is continually engaged in constructing meanings. Social interaction is the process that engenders the sharing of meanings and the recreation of further meanings through interaction (O’Keefe & Delia, 1985).

This constitutes the way meanings that are created through interaction translate into a mutual understanding (Delia, 1977) or intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity has been defined as transcendence, when “individuality is escaped” (Grossberg, 1982, p. 214) in a state of harmony between the individual, the other and the social (Grossberg, 1982). Intersubjectivity is the basis of social communication (O’Keefe & Delia, 1985), and has been conceptualized as understanding (Grossberg, 1982). It is achieved first through reciprocity between the individual and social, and then through synchrony between meanings (Grossberg, 1982). Intersubjectivity is constituted by communication that does not merely reflect, but creates reality for the interactants (Delia & Grossberg, 1977).

The constructivist conception of communication is thus a joint enactment of meaning and purposes. Communication is the means of achieving intersubjectivity. Constructivists define communication as a strategic organization of behavior (Delia et al., 1982), and the choice of strategies depends on individuals’ context-relevant beliefs and intentions and the interpretive
process through which they are formed (Delia et al., 1982). Individuals engage in three interpretive processes to form impressions about the world and communicate effectively. Social perception is the process by which individuals acquire, retain and use information about the world around them. Message reception is the ability to understand the meaning of messages produced by others and their motivations and goals for generating these messages. Message production is the capability of producing messages that achieve social and personal goals.

For constructivists communication is grounded in the situation, and it is a form of interaction in which the focus for coordinated action is on communicative intentions (Delia et al., 1982). The communicative act of producing messages that coordinate intention and action is dependent on the interplay of individuals’ context-relevant beliefs and the aims that are generated from them. However, the constructivist focus is on message production (O’Keefe, 1982).

The constructivists postulate that messages are not static products of beliefs and aims. Messages can embody a simple expression or operate within conventionally defined structures of meaning (O’Keefe, 1988). However, messages can redefine a situation by dynamically creating contexts, negotiating aims, and recreating realities for individuals (O’Keefe, 1988). Constructivists thus postulate a model of messages as strategies that address goals generated from context-relevant beliefs (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). Individuals use their cognitive and social interpretive processes to form context-relevant beliefs about the situation he/she finds him/herself in, as well as the person with whom he/she is engaged in a social interaction. Discussion of each of these concepts is important in understanding how each relates to and drives the other.

**Context-Relevant Beliefs**

Beliefs about the situation and the other one is engaged in social discourse with are crucial in communication. Individuals draw upon what the constructivists call the interpersonal construct system or interpersonal schemas (Delia et al., 1982) to form these beliefs. Highly
skilled individuals with high construct differentiation can form sophisticated impressions about a situation (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). Interpersonal constructs are structures in a person's cognitive system within which social events and people's actions are “interpreted, evaluated, and anticipated.” (Delia, Kline & Burleson, 1979, p. 243) These structures help individuals to engage in social perception processes like attribution and impression formation (Burleson, 2007; O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). O’Keefe and Delia contend that people do not form a generalized impression of their partners in a communicative exchange and that the social perception skill of an individual is determined by how differentiated, abstract and integrated his/her interpersonal construct system is. Constructivists note that people with differentiated interpersonal constructs are able to better form well structured, stable and more complex impressions of people (Delia, Kline & Burleson, 1979; O'Keefe & Delia, 1982). O’Keefe and Delia (1982) further argue that individuals with more differentiated sets of interpersonal constructs are able to understand and accommodate the variability and inconsistency in the other's behavior. Such individuals can form sophisticated and organized impressions of another.

Constructivists postulate that individuals form interaction goals in a situation that are informed by context-relevant beliefs. Individuals can attain a desired state through communicating and coordinating with others, and thus communicative intentions are conceptualized as interaction goals (Clark & Delia, 1979).

**Goals as Situated Objectives**

Interaction goals achieve desirable wants of individuals in situations through communication and coordination (Clark & Delia, 1979). Goals can explain why and how individuals communicate in a certain way (Wilson, 2007), and they are derived through the study of discourse (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982).
The rational “goal-based model of message design” (O’Keefe, 1988, p.82) distinguishes between two senses of the concept of goal: “Goals as generalized constraints defined and activated by social structures and goals as they are recognized and pursued by individuals” (O’Keefe, 1988, p. 82). The first set of goals are not formed as static and clearly-defined products of an individual’s morality or character, but emerge from social situations, and are produced and negotiated through social interactions. O’Keefe (1988) espouses that message production is an organized and rational enactment of goals that are the requirements of “socially codified representations of situations” (O’Keefe, 1988 p. 82), and not as aims that an individual happens to derive out of his/her moral template and impose on the situation. Goals are thus socially constituted, and messages that express these goals therefore fulfill the demands of a social situation (O’Keefe, 1988).

The distinction between socially required goals of any situation and the goals “that are recognized and pursued by an individual” (O’Keefe, 1988, p. 82) can be explained by the fact that some goals are intrinsically relevant to particular social situations and are expected to be adhered to by all individuals partaking in those situations. For instance, all human beings have the interaction goal of face maintenance (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory asserts that human beings in any cultures have face wants which can only be realized through social interaction. Individuals want to maintain their own face, and recognize that their interactional partner has similar wants too (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Maintaining one’s own face and not threatening the other’s face can be a situated objective, as it can be considered as an expectation inherent in cooperative interaction that reflects “the predefined activities of human cultures and the general norms of consideration, self-respect, cooperation, and so on, that govern group life” (O’Keefe, 1988, p. 82).

An individual goal on the other hand refers to a future state of affairs that an individual wants to consciously attain. An individual’s instrumental task goal can be an example of this kind.
of a goal. Persuasion can be an individual goal that an individual recognizes in a situation. Constructivist scholars postulate that in a communicative context, multiple situated aims are possible to pursue (O’Keefe & Shepherd, 1987) and the primary functional difference in message design is the “number and type of goals a message is designed to serve” (O’Keefe, 1988, p. 89).

**Goals in Complex Situations**

The conceptualization of goals as objectives inherent in and circumscribed by the demands of the social situation provides a foundation to the constructivist definition of a complex situation (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). A situation is considered “complex” when by its nature, it can give rise to multiple beliefs and situated objectives, there can be obstacles present that can prevent one from achieving those objectives, and one objective competes with another (Wilson, 2007). One situational objective in domestic violence intervention from a friend can be provision of support, since the situation engenders numerous negative effects on an individual who is the recipient of the violence (Follingstad et al., 1991, Bonomi et al., 2007) and therefore this individual may be in perceived need of support (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). The complexity of the interaction between a victim of intimate partner abuse and a friend is enhanced by the fact that there are several other situated objectives that are intrinsically relevant (O’Keefe, 1988) to a situation involving domestic abuse.

Victims of violence have been seen to have suffered emotional abuse that results in, among other things, attacks at one’s self esteem (Levendosky et al., 2004). Apart from necessitating the provision of support, therefore, this situation generates the need to provide support and comfort while not threatening the recipient’s face by conveying incapacity and dependence (Goldsmith, 1992, 1994). The ubiquitous threat to victims’ physical and emotional safety also occasions the situational objective of attaining safety, thereby necessitating persuasive messages (Clark, 1984). Thus, maintaining the friend’s face and persuading her out of the
situation are not merely end-states that an individual wishes to attain through communication; these aims are moreover what one is expected to pursue and can be held accountable for not pursuing (O’Keefe, 1988). The friend also has context-relevant beliefs about dilemmas within the survivor that can act as obstacles in the way and come into conflict with the friend’s aims. As the context creates a complex tension state where the individual’s situated objectives and individual objectives along with the abused friend’s wants and needs are enmeshed, the communicative task becomes extremely complex for a close friend. The dynamism of the way messages can coordinate the needs and abilities of people is especially relevant to the situation of domestic violence and the communicative context of informal intervention from a friend.

**Message production.** O’Keefe and Delia (1982) contend that the ability of an individual to anticipate and interpret the needs of the listener does not automatically lead to the production of listener-centered messages. In refuting the line of research that merely assesses the ability of individuals to produce different messages to suit different listeners, O’Keefe and Delia espouse the active relevance of the context in the process (1982). The importance of the context, as discussed earlier, is further elaborated by O’Keefe in her 1988 work. Thus, from the constructivist viewpoint, message production is not merely dependent on skills, nor is it a mere selection of one strategic message from a set of predetermined strategies to address the needs of a situation. Messages are enactments of purposes that develop both from the individual’s immediate task as well as the implicit situated objective latent in any communicative context. Thus, in drawing on the idea of a complex situation, a message produced in order to address the needs of such a situation has to satisfy conflicting objectives in the situation and the challenges such conflicts engender.

According to O’Keefe and Delia (1982), the communicative process of message production thus comprises multiple steps of generating intentions and objectives, adjusting
competing or conflicting objectives by devising an appropriate strategy, and actually designing the content of the message based on that strategy. O’Keefe and Delia’s theory of message production gives primacy to the active process of generating and reconciling message objectives (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982) or message integration (O’Keefe, 1988). Differentiation and abstractness of one’s interpersonal construct system enables a person to figure out the combination and interrelation of interpersonal objectives in a complex communicative situation, and this in turn leads to the production of complex and sophisticated messages that can accommodate these objectives.

**Message Design and Intimate Partner Abuse**

O’Keefe and Delia (1982) focus on the communicative action inherent in messages; in other words, what people want their messages to do. They also postulate that individuals with differentiated interpersonal constructs are able to recognize the multiplicities in a situation and reconcile conflicting objectives being generated by them. O’Keefe and Delia (1982) then argue that more differentiation, abstraction and integration in one’s interpersonal construct system will result in one’s ability to produce messages that address multiple tasks concurrently. O’Keefe argues that there is a need to theorize on how this can be achieved verbally (O’Keefe, 1988). The complexities involved in intimate partner abuse necessitate that communication between the victim and the friend be truly synchronous through a “reciprocal and emergent creation of meaning as a joint product of a social shared code for the expression of thought.” (Delia, 1977, p. 70) Prior to the discussion on the ability of messages to transcend beyond carrying conflicting objectives, it is necessary to elaborate on the types of communication a friend may be seen to engage in with her friend.

Based on the context-relevant beliefs about the situation (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982) and the discussion on the situational objectives they generate (O’Keefe, 1988), messages designed in this
context have to be supportive, relational and persuasive. The broader domain of supportive messages can be discussed in terms of person-centeredness as its key feature. Relational messages can be discussed in terms of trust as a key feature. Finally, persuasive messages can be specific, realistic and strategically initiated. In the next section, I elaborate on each of these types of messages that are relevant to the context of the interaction between a victim of domestic abuse and a friend.

**Supportive messages.** Supportive messages have been defined as “specific lines of communicative behavior enacted by one party with the intent of benefiting or helping another.” (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002, p.386) Supportive messages have been seen to perform multiple functions including alleviating the distress of the other (Kaniasty & Norris, 1992) and increasing coping skills (Thoits, 1986). However, there is some inconsistency regarding the helpfulness of all messages; sometimes people with good intentions fail to provide support or are unable to say the right things (Albrecht, Burleson & Goldsmith, 1994). This is confirmed in research reviewed earlier that provides evidence that the type of behavior from close ones affects the way women cope with the violence (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Coker et al., 2003; Rose, Campbell & Kub, 2000) and also affects their well-being significantly (Goodkind et al., 2003; Levendosky et al., 2004; Tan et al., 1995). It is thus important to conceive a template for effective communication in the complex context of domestic violence intervention. For instance, research on supportive communication would describe the behaviors that friends are reported to exhibit to victims as low in person-centeredness, as they criticize the other’s feelings and challenge the legitimacy of those feelings (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). This is unfortunate, as the situation requires the friend to produce supportive messages.
The person-centeredness of supportive messages. Theorists of supportive communication propose that the level of a person-centeredness orientation to message production would determine the effectiveness of a message (Burleson, 1982). Person centeredness has been defined as the extent to which a message “reflects an awareness of and adaptation to the subjective, affective, and relational aspects of communicative contexts.” (Burleson, 1987, p. 305)

Thus messages low in person-centeredness are critical, dismissive, judgmental and authoritative. They deny the legitimacy of a person’s feelings, question those feelings, criticize the feelings and dictate to the person what s/he should do. Messages moderately person-centered implicitly recognize the other’s feelings by diverting the other’s attention from the severity of the situation, consoles and sympathizes with the other, or gives an explanation for the occurrence of the situation that is aimed to help the other feel better.

Messages that are regarded high in person-centeredness are reflective activities that explicitly recognize and validate the other’s distressed feelings, urge the other to express those feelings, elaborately state the reasons why the other could be feeling that way, and gives the other perspective by helping place the other’s feelings in the broader context (Buleson & Samter; Burleson, 1994; Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). Thus highly person-centered messages help the other get a more elaborate comprehension of the situation, and the target may obtain a new perspective on it including being able to see new possibilities in the situation. Highly person-centered messages elicit detailed and descriptive discourse on the problematic situation and the emotions one felt in it, to the effect that such elaboration imparts coherence to the problematic situation. (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002) This helps the hearer to be able to reappraise the situation and its meanings and therefore view the events in a broader perspective. (Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002)

Burleson and Goldsmith (1998) elaborate on the way the process of comforting engenders this reappraisal. They argue that comforting as a process is not one person awarding
comfort to another, but rather comforting messages offer a reevaluation of where a person finds him/herself in a situation (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998). Burleson and Goldsmith (1998) thus offer a nuanced perspective on the process of comforting by situating it against the nature of distress. They explicate that since distress occurs when an external state of affairs is evaluated in the context of personal goals, highly person-centered comforting is successful when it offers reappraisal through the construction of active discourse and not by the imposition of a predesigned form of support on a predefined situation. Thus, there are no ideal words or phrases that convey comfort, and that the process through which comforting messages work is interpretive; comforting messages are successful only through the effect they have on the other person’s reappraisal of the situation (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998). Burleson and Goldsmith’s elaboration of the comforting process as contextualized reappraisal supposes the interpretive process inherent in what is considered supportive and what is not. In other words, if one assumes that a message is high on person-centered supportiveness when it offers the target a reappraisal of the matter, one is focusing on the interpretive process involved.

The validity of cognitive complexity measures as a predictor of communicative performance was studied by Kline, Pelias, and Delia (1991). Their study investigated social perspective-taking and person-centered counseling as skills that help others solve their interpersonal problems. Person-centered counseling was seen as useful in responding to others’ interpersonal dilemmas. The coding system employed showed that messages that demonstrated the highest level of person-centered counseling achieved a reconciliation of the hearer’s inner conflicts and placed the experiences of the hearer in a broader perspective Kline, Pelias, & Delia, 1991).

**Relationship messages.** Recent thoughts on relationship messages have been primarily attributed to Steve Duck, a primary relationship and communication researcher. Relationships are
constituted in talk, and talk about the relationship has been seen as evidence of the personal meaning of a relationship (Duck, 1994). Everyday talk in relationships reveals not only a speaker’s individual meaning, but also his/her attitude toward others (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). As Duck puts it, “Daily talk is not only a neutral medium or a simple expressive act but also an organizer of relational worlds in ways that sustain, maintain and perpetuate them” (Duck, 1994, p. 142). Views about the relationship are expressed through everyday talk. Relationship talk thus constitutes the experience for both the listener and speaker both as individuals as well as partners in a relationship (Duck, 1994). Partners’ grasp over each other’s meaning is also strengthened through talk, and this grasp is extended through talk as the relationship progresses (Duck, 1994). Relationship talk is thus not only an expression or transmission of information, but is a social enactment in a relational context (Duck & Pond, 1989).

Everyday conversations offer relationship partners opportunities not only to express themselves, but also to realize profound truths about the relationship (Duck, 1994). The interaction between a victim of violence and her friend takes place within the context of a relationship. Theorists of relational communication have stated that communication is “the generative force” in relationships (Parks, 2007, p. 25). The relationship between two friends and their interpersonal needs are negotiated through communication, and thus messages shared by the friend of a victim of abuse carry strong relational meanings and will result in significant relational consequence (Parks, 2007). Relational messages therefore can be said to be precipitated by the interpersonal objective of the friend of the victim. Research has shown that one’s basic interpersonal needs of inclusion, control and affection are executed through interpersonal relationships (Schutz, 1966). Inclusion is “the need to establish and maintain s satisfactory relationship with people with respect to interaction and association” (Schutz, 1966, p. 18). Inclusion constitutes the feeling of mutual interest with others (Hale & Burgoon, 1984). Affection
is the perception that others desire close personal relations with oneself (Schutz, 1966). Control is the need to establish a comfortable degree of interpersonal influence over the relational partner and the influence that is exercised over oneself (Schutz, 1966).

Research comparing close friends and lovers has highlighted the similarities between the relationship between close friends and that between lovers (Davis & Todd, 1982). For instance, friends enjoy doing things together (Davis & Todd, 1982), there is a high level of acceptance between friends (Fehr, 2004), friends report being able to trust and depend on each other (Pearce, 1974; Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985; Larzelere & Huston, 1980; Rotter, 1967), and friends in close friendships enjoy a high level of self-disclosure with each other (Fehr, 2004; Guerrero, 2007). Researchers have found that friends play a crucial supportive role in the face of crisis and stress (Adelman, Parks & Albrecht, 1987). Similarly, it has been seen that victims of violence seek support from their social network (Bosch & Bergen, 2006) and that supportive behavior from close ones is helpful for the victim (Carlson et al., 2002). Researchers have found that victims of violence feel emotionally isolated and that they feel that their need for inclusion and affection are better met by friends than family members (Rose et al., 2000). In their study Rose et al. (2000) also found that although victims of abuse carefully considered their decision to look for support, most of them identified one or two friends who were helpful to them and who they could relate to (Rose et al., 2000).

However, in the context of communication between a victim of domestic abuse and a friend, almost every characteristic of a close friendship (Davis & Todd, 1982) can be disturbed. This is especially true for the control dimension, also studied as dominance. Control entails “who has the right to direct, delimit and define the actions of the interpersonal system in the presently experienced spatial-temporal situation” (Millar & Rogers, 1976, p. 91). Control is manifested in the communication of one partner’s expertise and knowledge affording him/her greater influence within the relationship. Conversely, communicating less competently accords greater control to
the partner (Hale & Burgoon, 1994). However, the context of friendship between a victim of
domestic violence and a friend strips the victim of the ability to negotiate control in the
friendship. The shame and guilt associated with abuse has been seen to affect other aspects of a
woman’s life and women feel emotionally distant from their friends and family (Rose, Campbell
& Tub, 2000). In the context of intimate partner abuse, victims are emotionally reclusive and they
also refrain from disclosing detailed information about the state of their relationship or the extent
of the abuse with their friends because they are embarrassed (Dunham & Senn, 2000; El-Bassel et
al., 2001). Thus the friend loses control in the friendship, and the nature of the context makes it
impossible for her to claim it back or even believe that she deserves it. Restoration of the control
through communication is thus a necessity; however, the context demands that it be done subtly
as explicit restoration of control can have the reverse effect of making the victim more
embarrassed.

Research has shown that the status of one’s romantic relationship is the most common
topic one conceals from one’s social networks (Baxter & Widenmann, 1993). For instance,
dimensions of an intimate relationship that are considered the most important like self-disclosure
(Darlega, Wilson & Chaikin, 1976; Dindia, 1997; Fehr, 2004; Guerrero, 2007; Miller, Berg &
Archer, 1983) and trust (Hale & Burgoon, 1984; Johnson-George & Swap, 1982; Larzelere &
Huston, 1980; Pearce, 1974; Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985) have to be negotiated through the
decision to initiate the conversation as well as the content of the messages. The sensitivity of the
topic and the possibility for an unrest in the friendship can be reasons why friends may hesitate to
initiate interaction with a victim of intimate partner abuse.

**Self-disclosure.** Researchers emphasize intimate self-disclosure as an important aspect of
intimacy (Fehr, 2004; Guerrero, 2007); however, in the context of domestic violence intervention
from a friend, self-disclosure is complex, as it involves revelation of one’s intimate thoughts
about the friend’s situation. All these factors are heightened in domestic violence intervention, as the relationship with the partner is the context for the violence (Bonomi et al., 2007; Follingstad et al., 1991), the romantic partner of the victim isolates her from her friends (Lloyd & Emery, 2000) and intimate partner abuse results in several changes in the victim’s personality (Dunham & Senn, 2000; El-Bassel et al., 2001; Rose et al., 2000). However, intimate revelation of one’s feelings about the friend’s situation is a means of conveying support, which, as discussed earlier, is an inherent feature of messages in this situation.

Trust. Researchers have stated that friends show emotions through their interaction and trust is an important positive emotion in friendships (Adams & Blieszner, 1994). Trust is an important affective concept in interpersonal relationships and communicating trust to the other and coming across as a trustworthy person is a desired outcome for most individuals (Pearce, 1974). Trust includes both behaviors that indicate one’s vulnerability and dependence on the conversational partner, as well as trustworthy actions that indicate that one would not betray the trust that one has been given by exploiting the other’s vulnerability (Hale & Burgoon, 1984). Especially in the delicate situation involving domestic violence, trust between the victim and a close friend assumes significance, as the inability to trust the friend would prevent the victim from communicating with her in the first place, and any breach of trust on the friend’s part can have actual physical or emotional consequences for the victim as well as the friendship. Victims of intimate partner abuse have been seen to report an inability to trust easily (Dehart, 1996). Given its value for the victim and its potency to achieve relationship maintenance or destructive effects, the friend’s ability to create or develop trust through communication is instrumental.

The depth of intimacy has been seen as an important determinant of the sharing of highly personal information (Parks, 2007). Although the high level of intimacy shared by the friends makes it possible for this interaction to take place, as seen before, the nature of the exchange can
also pose serious threats to the relationship. In friendships where interpersonal needs are supposed to be reciprocal, this creates unrest, as the victim may have more need, and yet be unwilling or unable to self-disclose to, or trust a friend. The friend on the other hand may want to design messages stressing the closeness of the relationship (Parks & Floyd, 1996). The negotiation of the relationship that is expected to happen in the context of the dialogue makes initiating talk as well as navigating it problematic. The friend has to disclose strategically and include messages that create or develop trust in the relational messages that enact the important situated objective of maintaining the relationship.

**Persuasive messages.** Reviewed research on the threat of intimate partner abuse on the physical and mental well-being of victims (Bonomi et al., 2007; Follingstad et al., 1991) provides evidence that it is important for the victim to make a change to the situation. Research on the social support available to victims has reported that victims are often told to stay within the relationship and endure the abuse (Rose et al., 2000) or leave the abuser (Goodkind et al., 2003). The instrumental objective of convincing the friend of the necessity to leave thus seems to be an important instrumental task for friends. While scholars have found that well-meaning messages are often undermining (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995), the need to design persuasive messages without threatening identity and interpersonal objectives has been stressed (Clark, 1984).

Persuasive messages have been defined as “discourse consciously intended to influence others” (Clark, 1984, p. 4), as the core element in the study of communication is interpersonal influence (Parks, 2007). Clark identifies a persuasive situation as one where someone has identified a problem that needs to be changed (Clark, 1984). The urgency of the problem determines the need for change, and the need for change distinguishes a persuasive situation from any imperfect situation.
Scholars of persuasion also acknowledge that the one being persuaded may or may not acknowledge the need, urgency or suggested method of change (Clark, 1984). This is especially relevant in situations involving domestic abuse, where factors like commitment (Rusbult & Martz, 1995) and denial (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983) often make victims reluctant to leave. Scholars have studied the stages of leaving a survivor goes through and the way she negotiates the violence (Dienemann et al., 2002; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1985). Thus domestic violence intervention necessitates the design of persuasive messages that appeal to a survivor at any stage of her relationship and her decisions about it. Scholars of communication have emphasized that different persuasive contexts require different strategies (Clark, 1984; Delia & Shepherd, 1987) and constructivist scholars have scaled persuasive messages on listener-adaptedness (Clark & Delia, 1976; Delia, Kline & Burleson, 1979). The dichotomies involved in situations involving intimate partner abuse make it complex for persuasion. However, the friend can devise strategies that can overcome these difficulties by demonstrating that the problem needs the victim’s attention and also by suggesting the way the victim’s action can be coordinated with this need. As with all persuasive situations, making a persuasive case for the solution can be more effective than merely giving directives.

Scholars emphasize that persuasive messages need to develop the problem and defend the proposed action in order to be effective (Clark, 1984). In this specific context, the victim’s situation is the problem, and leaving the situation is the action that is being proposed. In developing the problem, a friend has to focus on the reality and argue for its magnitude and urgency and the susceptibility of the target to be affected by it. The friend can focus on the enduring effect of the problem, and emphasize the tangible impact it has on the victim. The latter needs to be reminded that some of her central values like independence and self-respect are being threatened. While adopting a persuasive line of reasoning, message producers may stress that
issues that are assumed in human existence like safety and well-being, and values that define relationships like mutual respect, are being undermined in the relationship (Clark, 1984).

In advocating for the proposal suggested, the inclusion of details that are relevant to the audience’s willingness to accept it will be effective (Clark, 1984). It has to be established that the proposal is the best solution to the problem, and the problem situation for a determined course of action. The persuader has to convince the audience that additional consequences of the proposal are desirable, and the disadvantages regarding the proposed solution are tolerable. Advocacy also involves advancing a proposal that the other is expected to value as the proposal being advanced is consistent with both the speaker as well as the listener’s value structure (Clark, 1984).

**Integrating Conflicting Goals in Message Design**

O’Keefe stresses the situated objectives that are inherent in a situation and those that an individual follows (O’Keefe, 1988). Domestic violence intervention is a context that generates multiple situated objectives for a friend. In this context, friends of the victim may consider support, relationship, persuasion, and face maintenance as situated objectives (O’Keefe, 1988) as well as instrumental task objectives (Clark, 1984). The complex communicative situation of domestic violence intervention engenders support, relationship and persuasive aims for the friend, which are in competition with each other.

Moreover, these goals often are equally dominant and cannot be traded off (Brown & Levinson, 1978) without significant risk. They are also in conflict with each other, in that one can only be realized at the other’s cost. For instance, research has found that victims of abuse are embarrassed (Dunham & Senn, 2000). As the victim loses control in the relationship by being on the receiving end of help from the friend, relationship messages from friends have to be strategic in restoring control to the friend without threatening her face. Too much support and inclusive comments (Hale & Burgoon, 1984), however, can threaten a person’s face. Similarly, scholars
have found that the context of supportive communication engenders underlying face threats (Goldsmith, 1992, 1994). Advising by its nature is a negative face threatening act, in that it impedes upon a person’s autonomy with the implicit supposition that the message-producer has a perspective that is superior to that of the message receiver (Goldsmith, 1994).

Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory (1978) shows that bald-on-record face threatening acts like advice are redressed in two ways. Positive politeness strategies cater to positive face wants of people by expressing compliments to the target, sharing an awareness of the target’s wants, and asserting solidarity with the target. Negative politeness strategies on the other hand cater to negative face wants by minimizing the imposition and expressing uncertainty (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Off-record face-threatening acts are indirect and ambiguous statements that offer the possibility of denial.

Each of these conflicts can be addressed in the way a friend constructs the message. The interpersonal objective of maintaining the relationship with the victim may result in the friend designing relational messages that strategically self-disclose (Fehr, 2004) and create or develop trust (Hale & Burgoon, 1984; Pearce, 1974).

O’Keefe and Delia (1982) have argued that interpersonal construct differentiation influences the number of goals message producers can address simultaneously in the same message. O’Keefe (1988) suggests that messages can be classified in terms of their functional differences. The first one is as per message goal structure, or the number and type of goals that are addressed in the organization of the message. It relies on functionally defined units (Saeki & O’Keefe, 1994) and is classified into message strategies (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). In order to deal with competing aims within oneself as well as the conflict between one’s own aims and the wants of others, individuals have three available message strategies (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). The other classification of messages is along the message design logic, or the message producer’s communication-related belief-system which determines the reasoning from the goals sought to
the message created. These are based on substantive, content and theme. You might try to make this flow more easily to this next section.

**Message strategies.** Individuals can *select* one over the other among competing aims (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). In the communicative context of domestic violence intervention, a friend can select the persuasive objective over the relational objective and make an argument to the survivor regarding the necessity to leave. When designing a message, two competing aims or an aim and a conflicting obstacle can be *temporally separated* in the sequencing of the message (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). For instance, a friend can make a request to the survivor to consider a suggestion and either precede or follow the request with an apology in the same message structure. The third technique available to individuals is *integration*. Messages can integrate two competing aims or integrate the advancement of an aim and the removal of an obstacle. One way to do this is compromise, where there is a tradeoff between two message objectives (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). Asking a friend what her idea of a perfect relationship is, for instance, is a compromise through an off-record face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1978), where the objective of clear communication is compromised for the objective of not threatening face. The other method of integration is synthesis, a message strategy that deals with two competing aims or conflicting aims and objectives in the same message (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). A friend can persuade the friend to leave, but emphasize that she is saying it only because she is a friend who wants the very best for the survivor.

**Message design logic.** O’Keefe hypothesized that a person can rely on three communication-related belief-systems in reasoning from the aims addressed to the messages produced (O’Keefe, 1988). O’Keefe’s 1988 work proposes the three belief-systems that message producers operate with. In Expressive Message Design Logic, language is a medium of
expressing one’s thoughts and feelings. Communication is a means to express oneself in order to enable others to know about one’s thoughts and feelings. Expressive message design logic is predicated on the understanding of communication as codification of meaning. Language is a code that is learned and employed to express. Messages do not serve any other goal but expression, and messages are seen as independent units and not part of an interactional process. A person who relies on expressive message design logic recognizes that messages have effects on people, but this effect comes about through the hearer receiving and straightforwardly understanding the messages. Strategic designing of messages that cause particular reactions is not important, nor desirable, to a person employing message design logic.

A person employing Conventional Message Design Logic operates with the belief that communication is a game that is played cooperatively, and follows socially conventional rules and procedures. Messages are designed as per the social effect the message producer wants to achieve with them. The message thus is socially appropriate, and the communication between the speaker and hearer is determined by what they are socially supposed to do. The conventional message design logic is constituted by the understanding of communication as cooperation between the two interaction partners. Competence is defined and determined by appropriateness. A conventional message is considered successful if it can be used to achieve a socially desirable place for the producer, and if the producer can use it to cooperate with the hearer. Such messages have a specific structure and content. The core goal of the message is clear, and is generated out of the context.

The Rhetorical Message Design Logic is based on the premise that communication is the creation and negotiation of social selves and situations. Reality is not fixed nor conventionally determined; it is created through interactions. Messages are the enactment and negotiation of meaning. The rhetorical message design logic includes subtlety as a design element of messages. Such messages convey knowledge about the situation, thereby enacting a social reality. The depth
of reality is also interpreted. The conventionality inherent in a given context is thus subsumed by the emphasis on innovation, creativity and subtlety. The constitutive communication process of the rhetorical message design logic is coordination. Meaning is indefinitely created through communication, and message producers can select from infinite ways of speaking. Context does not generate meaning; it is rather created and managed through communication. Communication is determined by the multiple goals one wants to achieve, and messages create reality rather than merely respond to the needs of others. Messages that are rhetorically designed are not in response to some predetermined situation; they emphasize the joint action of communication in initiating movement toward a shared reality for the interaction partners.

The Constructivist Conception of Skill

Constructivist theorists have accounted for the way interpersonal construct differentiation affects an individual’s ability to form complex context-relevant beliefs about the situation as well as the interaction partner, to generate multiple objectives in the situation, and to recognize the obstacles that the partner’s own wants, needs and conflicts can pose to one’s fulfillment of those objectives (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). O’Keefe and Delia (1982) have further stated that individuals with highly differentiated interpersonal constructs will not only form detailed, organized and stable impressions about the other, they will also be able to “retrieve cross-contextual information as well as information generated in or relevant to the immediate context” (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982, p. 64).

In postulating how cognitive complexity can determine individual difference in the processes of belief formation, goal generation and message production, Constructivism offers a theoretical explanation of individual difference in the ability to communicate skillfully. Theorists of Constructivism emphasize that the theory provides a framework for understanding different functional competences (Clark & Delia, 1979; Kline & Delia, 1990; Burleson & Caplan, 1998).
and successful communicators have an understanding of the activities produced through discourse (Kline & Delia, 1990). The constructivist perspective integrates the cognitive and cultural perspectives in the study of the development of communication competence (Clark & Delia, 1979). They postulate that successful communication requires a variety of competencies.

Successful communication requires linguistic competence, whereby communicators need to have the linguistic capability that would let them express and interpret messages in a particular language (Burleson, 2007; Clark & Delia, 1979). This competence accentuates communication as a codification of meaning (Delia, O’Keefe, & O’Keefe, 1982). As part of a speech community, one needs to learn language as a social code and be competent in communicating with it.

Successful communicators also need to know social rules that influence the use of language in social situations and with different people. The expression and interpretation of messages in correct and appropriate ways within conventions is referred to as sociolinguistic competence (Burleson, 2007). Successful communicators have to know how to address their individual and social aims effectively through messages. Skillful communicators should be able to produce messages that “inform others clearly, persuade others convincingly, and comfort others sensitively” (Burleson, 2007, p. 107). Knowing how to interpret others’ messages to understand their underlying meanings and purposes and express one’s own messages accordingly is referred to as functional and rhetorical competence (Burleson, 2007). This includes the communication activities of social perception, or interpreting social situations and the inner states of others, message reception, or interpreting the messages produced by others, and message production, or the expression of messages (Burleson, 2007; O’Keefe & Delia, 1982).

O’Keefe and Delia’s (1982) discussion on interpersonal construct differentiation lays the foundation for individual differences in social perception, message reception and message production skills (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). Individuals with developed (in terms of differentiation, abstractness and integration) interpersonal construct systems are seen to possess
advanced social perception skills with which they are able to retrieve and organize information about situations and persons (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982; Burleson & Caplan, 1998). Such individuals are also able to interpret the communicative behavior of others and are able to understand the complexities and disparities in that behavior (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982; Burleson & Caplan, 1998). Skillful communicators must be able to recognize the nuanced messages produced by others and be able to extract the intended and unintended meanings of these messages (Burleson, 2007). Finally, individuals with highly differentiated interpersonal construct systems are able to determine the needs of a situation (Delia et al., 1982) to address multiple situated and competing objectives, as well as adopt reconcile the conflict between a conflict between their objectives and obstacles posed by the interactional partner’s aims, needs, and wants (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982).

VI. Study Rationale and Research Questions

The majority of existing literature on social support available to victims of domestic violence has focused on studying the phenomenon from the victim’s perspective, and the need for studying friends’ perspective is strong. Several researchers have emphasized that the provision of support needs to be studied from the providers’ point of view (Goodkind et al., 2003; Levendosky, 2004); yet so study has been undertaken to understand what motivates providers to offer support, or prevents them from doing so. Moreover, researchers studying providers have homogenized the population, ignoring the effect of the relationship between the provider and receiver of support on the support (Nabi et al., 2002).

Moreover, reviewing the literature on the positive effects of available social support for victims and research on the support-seeking behavior of victims exposes substantial gap in research. First of all, most of the available literature has examined social support in terms of the structure of social networks (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Levendosky et al., 2004). Dyadic
communication between a victim and a friend has not been studied. Scholars working in the area of supportive communication argue that while sociological perspectives imply that social networks are maintained through communication, and psychological perspectives assume that communication is the medium of enacted and perceived support (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987; Burleson, Albrecht, Goldsmith, & Sarason, 1994; for review see Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002), social support is ultimately conveyed through the messages that individuals share with each other “in the context of a relationship that is created and sustained through interaction” (Burleson et al., 1994, p. xviii). Social support is not a commodity given from one to the other, rather it is expressed and interpreted through messages. Thus, in order to understand the phenomenon thoroughly and completely, the conversation between the friend and the victim needs to be the focus of research.

Secondly, research on social support and domestic violence has examined the support in terms of its effects on victims. Research has not examined issues that inform and influence the support that causes these effects. While the causes for victims’ support-seeking behavior have been researched thoroughly (Dunham & Senn, 2000; El-Bassel et al., 2001), the causes for friends’ support-providing behavior have been insufficiently studied (for limited exception, see Goodkind et al., 2003). In the context of the social interaction between the victim and a friend, we understand one half of the puzzle. However, in order to make sense of what the victim is interpreting, and to help her more, it is crucial to understand the motivations and possible struggles of the friend, and the way these are reflected in her communication.

This study aims to fill the gap in literature by examining the communication between the victim and the friend from the friend’s perspective. The focus of the study is on the conversation that happens between a victim of domestic abuse and a friend and the way it reflects the situation from the friend’s perspective. Scholars examining support provision in situations involving domestic abuse have suggested that response from the first person a woman confides in
determines her subsequent support-seeking behavior (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). It is important to understand the initial conversation from the friend’s perspective. Thus my first research question is:

RQ1: How will a female friend of a victim of domestic abuse initiate conversation with the victim?

Applying constructivist concepts to communication in a domestic violence situation, it can be said that communication is informed by context-relevant beliefs the friend of a victim would form would be regarding domestic violence as a situation as well as the inner state (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982) of the survivor in the context of her relationship. These would inform the conversation between the friend and the victim. Literature reveals that victims of domestic abuse suffer from physical and mental illnesses (Bonomi et al., 2007; Follingstad et al., 1991). Research suggests that victims blame themselves (Miller & Porter, 1983) are morally conflicted (Belknap, 1999) and may be committed to the relationship despite the abuse (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). All these factors could form part of the phenomenal field (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982) and inform the conversation. This leads to my second research question:

RQ2: What context-relevant beliefs would female friends have about domestic violence as a situation and about the inner state of a victim in the context of conversing with her?

It has been shown that complex situations generate multiple goals that often compete with each other and are in conflict with obstacles (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982; Wilson 2007). In an interaction between victims of domestic violence and friends, victims report being supported (Mitchell & Hodson, 1983) and dictated to (Rose et al., 2000). In order to understand this interaction from the friend’s perspective, it is necessary to understand the multiple situated objectives the friend would have, and the way they would compete with one another. Victims
have been reported to experience abuse in stages (Dienemann et al., 2002) and take time to make sense of it (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995) and the process of leaving is often long and painful (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Miller, 1983). The friends on the other hand expect the victim to leave quickly and definitively (Goodkind et al., 2003). Thus there could be conflict between a friend’s aim and the want of the victim.

In order to investigate a friend’s univalent aims, competing aims and conflicting aims and obstacles in the conversation with a victim, my third research question is:

RQ3: What multiple aims, competing aims, and conflicting aims and obstacles would female friends have when conversing with a friend who is being abused by her intimate partner?

My next intention would be to understand how the friend could address multiple objectives through her communication with the survivor. Scholars examining the process of leaving have found that battered women do not always find an appropriate language to describe their experience, and that there exists a rift in the language constructed in the context by the victim and the friend (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). I would therefore want to know what messages a friend communicating with a victim of intimate partner abuse will design in order to address the multiple situated objectives in the context. To this effect my fourth research question is:

RQ4: How will a female friend communicate with a victim of intimate partner abuse?

Trust (Hale & Burgoon, 1984; Pearce, 1976) and self-efficacy (Clark, 1984) are key elements of a relational message and persuasive message respectively, and empathy and perspective-taking (Davis, 2004) is a cooperative process of social interaction whereby individuals can assume the other’s point of view in order to be seen as a competent and effective communicator (Hale & Delia, 1976). It is therefore important to know what message strategies
would be used by the friend to build trust, communicate empathy, and express self efficacy to the victim.

RQ5a. How will a female friend communicate trust?
RQ5b. How will a female friend communicate self-efficacy?
RQ5c. How will a female friend communicate empathy?

Since the communicative task in this context involves addressing competing aims and conflicting aims and objectives, the next step in understanding this process is what message strategies people would use in dealing with competing aims and conflicting aims and obstacles. This leads to my sixth research question in the study:

RQ6: How will a female friend of a victim of intimate partner abuse use message strategies to deal with competing aims as well as conflicting aims and obstacles?

Sophisticated and effective messages have been conceptualized in two ways in Constructivist thought. Messages high in person-centeredness help an individual to reappraise the situation (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998). The constructivist perspective on message design also provides a theoretical conception of the relationship between message, context and goal. O’Keefe’s 1988 work on message design classifies a message into expressive, conventional and rhetorical and elaborates each in terms of the way it aligns with, and creates context respectively (O’Keefe, 1988). While all communication is interpretive and communicative competence is beyond the mere acquisition of linguistic codes (O’Keefe & Delia, 1985), the circumstances and conflicts of the victim as well as the dichotomies within the friend’s mind lends especially well to a study of rhetorical message design in this context.

In this complex communicative context, designing a highly person-centered message that helps the victim by alleviating her distress and offering a contextualized reappraisal of the situation will be effective. This context also serves as an interesting venue to study the features of
a rhetorical message that illustrates a depth of interpretation and initiates movement toward a desired context for both the victim and the friend through the joint action of communication (O’Keefe, 1988). To this end, my next research question is:

RQ7: What will be a highly person-centered message and a rhetorical message in the interaction between a victim of domestic abuse and female friend?

The sensitivity and complexity of the subject necessitates an understanding of friends’ conception of specific communication skills that they think are relevant for use in this situation. For instance, one complexity in the situation is that battered women do not always find the appropriate and adequate language to describe their experiences (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). Thus, it is necessary to use listening skills in order to interpret the cues in the language that battered women use. Also, women have reported that friends they turned to for help have often been offended when they did not take their advice (Goodkind et al., 2003; Lempert, 1997). Others have reported that they are often told to put up with the abuse as that is the right thing to do for a wife and mother (Rose et al., 2000). Thus, what female friends think about their advising skills is also necessary to examine.

Understanding female friends’ perspective in this context needs to include procuring their recommendations for training in communication skills, which could be used to design an intervention program. To this effect my next research questions are:

RQ8: What communication skills will female friends use while interacting with victims of domestic violence?

RQ9: What communication skills will female friends believe they will need training in?
Chapter 3: Method

This chapter describes the methods and procedures used to answer the research questions. I describe the research design of the study and the procedures that were followed for collecting and analyzing data. I also describe how the credibility and trustworthiness of the study were established.

Research Design

Given that there is scant research on support for victims of domestic abuse from the perspective of the friend providing the support, my approach in this study was interpretive. I have operated with the belief that reality is subjective and constructed (Blumer, 1969). Each person constructs their reality socially through interaction. This social reality can be studied is through how people articulate about it. My methodology was a qualitative field interview study. The specific type of qualitative approach I used was Grounded Theory, combined with a phenomenological perspective.

Grounded Theory, a methodology developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, is “inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). It is a good method to use when a process cannot be explained by an existing theory (Creswell, 2007). Theorists using grounded theory believe that people play active roles in shaping the world, and theory representing a phenomenon should be grounded in reality by studying the people engaged in that phenomenon.

This research aimed to understand the communication between victims of domestic abuse and their friends from the friend’s perspective. Concepts like belief, aim and message from the
constructivist theory of communication was used to guide my research questions. To answer my research questions for the study, I used semi-structured interview techniques (Patton, 1987) to interview participants about their conception of communication with a friend suspected of being in an abusive intimate partner relationship. The interviews were conducted on the telephone and were audiotaped. A questionnaire comprising survey items from existing instruments was also designed to collect information that might not be elicited in the interview. This questionnaire was administered to the participants following the interview.

**Participants**

Fifteen women took part in the interview. Thirteen of the participants returned the completed questionnaires. All participants volunteered their participation. Their age fell between 20 and 59. Participants were required to read and converse fluently in English to take part in the interview. Other than this, no restrictions were placed on race, as it was assumed that people from any community or racial origin could have a close friend in an abusive relationship. Ten women identified themselves as Caucasian/European American, two self-identified as African American and one responded to Other. An item on the questionnaire required the participants to report on their age along ranges of age that were given. The options were 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69 and 70 and above. Most women’s age fell in the range of 30-39. Most women held fulltime jobs and the number of women in their social network ranged from 0-10 to 31-40, with most reporting that they had 21-30 women in their social network.

**Participation criteria.** Only women were recruited to take part in the study. Despite the scholarly debate on the similarities and differences in men and women’s supportive communication (MacGeorge, Gillihan, Samter, & Clark, 2003; Burleson, Holmstrom & Gilstrap, 2005; Basow & Rubenfeld, 2003; Michaud & Warner, 1997; MacGeorge, Graves, Feng, Gillihan,
& Burleson, 2004), the focal reason for choosing female participants was research that has found that women outweigh men as victims of intimate partner abuse (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) and that female victims of intimate partner abuse are more likely to reach out to a close female friend than any other group for support (Rose et al., 2000).

In order to lay out the contextual conditions for communication in the particular situation involving domestic abuse, women who volunteered participation were asked to complete a brief qualification checklist that asked a) if they had a friend in an intimate relationship, b) if they would consider their relationship with the friend as close, and c) if they engaged in one-on-one conversations with the friend.

Participants were not required to have a friend in an abusive relationship. The purpose of the study was to understand any woman’s conception of effective communication with a friend who might be in such a situation. Lay theories, or the everyday “naïve beliefs of people of the way things work” (Cole & Bradac, 1996; p. 58) have been used to represent people’s views ( Furnham, 1988) in diverse contexts like alcoholism (Furnham & Lowick, 1984), disease (Furnham & Hume-Wright, 1992), unemployment (Furnham & Hesketh, 1987), and homosexuality (Furnham & Taylor, 1990). Scholars of communication have postulated a lay theory of satisfaction in close friendships (Cole & Bradac, 1996). The purpose of this study was to gauge the instinctive responses of common, untrained women. Participants were required to have never undergone a training session on domestic violence intervention and a specific question was put forth to them on this criterion.

Two participants informed the interviewer at the time of initial contact that they had friends in abusive relationships, and although this did not over-qualify them for the study, it did not disqualify them either. One other participant disclosed that she had been in an abusive relationship herself and also knew others in abusive relationships.
Procedures

Recruiting began following approval for the study from the Institutional Review Board of The Ohio State University. The study was announced to members of the interviewer’s social network, and they were asked to announce the study to members of their social networks. Two participants were recruited from members of the interviewer’s social networks who fulfilled the recruitment criteria. Others were recruited using “snowball” procedure from the initial participants or from other individuals known to the interviewer. Participation was voluntary, and no remuneration was awarded to the participants.

Once participants contacted the interviewer, recruitment scripts were emailed to them, followed by the consent form. The participants were required to send confirmation of their willingness to participate in the study. Participants were then contacted regarding a preferred time for the telephone interview. Once the participants told a preferred time and a telephone number, they were called at the set time. The interviews lasted for about 45 minutes to an hour. All interviews were audiotaped. After the interview participants were thanked and sent the questionnaire via email. The participants returned the completed questionnaires via the email.

A pilot interview with a member of the interviewer’s social network (who was not among the participants) was conducted to ensure participant comprehension of questions. The wording of some questions was changed based on this interview. All the interviews for the study were conducted personally by the interviewed over the course of three weeks. Interviews were audiotaped using a digital audio recorder and stored in the interviewer’s computer.

Interview

Qualitative interviewing presents in-depth inquiry into a phenomenon. The subjective experiences of the interviewee are elicited through the interview (Charmaz, 2002). The sensitive nature of this study required the interviewer and the respondent to work in collaboration to
produce information that would be useful to understand the phenomenon. The sensitive nature of the subject also required mutual respect for each other’s integrity (Weiss, 1994), and it was mentioned to participants at the beginning of the interview that no judgment would be made on their expertise as communicators or their sensitivity as friends.

The purpose of the study was to capture as complete a picture of the perspective of the providers of social support as possible within a limited amount of time, and not on any particular aspect of their experience or any particular communicative practice that they would adopt. The primary instrument used for the study was The Standardized Open-ended Interview (Patton, 1987, 1990) as its structure befit the theoretical framework used for the study (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982) and the research questions. However, semi-structured interview methodologies were also followed as necessary in keeping with the immediate conversational needs. For instance, the sequencing of questions were altered for each participant as necessary, and some probe questions were added or omitted based on the prior information provided by the participant.

**The standardized open-ended interview.** The Standardized Open-ended interview is defined as “a set of questions carefully worded and arranged for the purpose of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words.” (Patton, 1987, p. 112). The method is useful when participants can be interviewed for a limited period of time and when it is desirable to obtain the same information from all participants. Both these conditions were appropriate to the study. The nature of the subject and the research questions required that each participant be interviewed only once and for a limited period of time, and it was desirable to obtain participants’ answers to the same research questions. Using the Standardized Open-ended Interview also minimized researcher bias, since the same questions were asked of the participants. Interviewer discretion was applied to ensure
the free flow of conversation, and researcher bias was further reduced at the time of data analysis, as all similar questions and answers as per the structure of the interview were analyzed together.

The communication activities of social perception, message reception, and message production as laid out by Constructivism (Delia, 1976; Delia et al., 1982; O’Keefe & Delia, 1982) guided the interview questions. The process of social perception generates one’s context-specific beliefs about the situation as well as about the person one is conversing with (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). The other’s beliefs, goals, needs and wants constitute one’s perception of the other and will be considered obstacles if in opposition to one’s own objectives, and agreement if they are in agreement (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). Since the interview asked participants to report on an intended conversation, message reception was not dominant in the guiding of the questions; rather, participants’ thoughts on the friend’s objectives constituted the participant’s phenomenal field constructed through social perception. A few questions in the interview that asked the participants to report on their friend’s response aimed to tap into their message interpretations. Questions were asked in the interview about participants’ initial conversation, their context-specific beliefs, their situated aims, and the subsequent communicative practices they would use based on those beliefs and aims. Each of these concepts and examples of the interview questions is discussed next. The complete instrument used for the interview is presented in Appendix A.

**Initial conversation questions.** RQ1 asked how participants would initiate conversation with a friend who they suspect of being abused by her intimate partner. The interview questions addressing this research question asked participants about their initial thoughts in the situation when a friend of theirs was suspected of being abused. They were then asked what they would say in such a situation, how direct they would be, if they would have a strategy in talking to their friend and how much detail they would want. Illustrative questions about the initial conversation are presented below:
I’d like to you consider a situation where a friend has been showing some emotional and/or physical signs of abuse. You have seen these signs a few times, and yet you have not spoken with her about any of this. What would be your first thoughts in such a situation?

This question aimed to understand participants’ initial response to a situation involving domestic abuse. This was followed by the questions:

Would you think about talking to her? If so, at what point would you say something? What would you say? How would you phrase that?

These questions aimed to study the conversation between the participants and their abused friends.

**Context-relevant belief questions.** RQ2 asked what the participants’ context-relevant beliefs would be in a situation involving a friend in an abusive relationship. This research question was addressed through questions in the interview that asked about participants’ context-relevant beliefs about the situation in general, about the friend’s position in it, about possible dilemmas she may be facing, about how she was handling it, about the communication between the participant and the friend and about relational elements like trust and control. Illustrative questions about context-relevant beliefs are presented below:

As a friend in a situation like this, can you talk to me about what you may think of the situation your friend may be in?

This question aimed to understand participants’ perceptions of the situation and the abused friend’s position in it. This question also aimed to tap at participants’ understanding of possible complications in the situation that may generate dilemmas for the friend.

What would your thoughts be about how your friend was handling her situation?

This question followed the previous question and aimed to elaborate on participants’ context-relevant beliefs about the friend’s action that were caused by the specific circumstances
of the situation that were asked in the previous question. This question also aimed to urge the participants to reveal their beliefs about dilemmas the friend faced that would make her handle her situation a certain way.

How do you think she might feel about talking to you?

Drawing upon O’Keefe and Delia’s notion about obstacles that qualify a complex situation, this question could elicit participants’ beliefs about possible obstacles between their own objectives and the friend’s objectives. This question was neutral, as participants could also reveal beliefs about possible unity between their objectives and those of the friend.

**Goal questions.** RQ3 aimed to understand what objectives people would have in the context of intervening with a friend who is being abused by her intimate partner. Two specific identity and interpersonal goal questions were asked to tap at participants’ objectives in the course of the communication with the friend. These were: “What would you want to come across as in your communication with the friend?” and “What would you want your communication to achieve for your relationship?” However, it was assumed that the communication between the two friends would generate more context-relevant beliefs and objectives for the participants. Thus these questions were asked to tap at the participants’ beliefs about the outcome of their communication with the friend. In constructivist theory, people’s objectives in a situation are implicitly situated and expressed through their message design (O’Keefe, 1988). Other goals were therefore expected to be revealed through participants’ responses to context-relevant belief questions and communication questions.

**Communication questions.** Each context-relevant belief question was followed by a communication question. Specific questions about the communication of interpersonal objectives
like establishing trust, communicating control and communicating empathy were also asked.

Some instances of communication questions are as follows:

- What would you say to address these issues that you just mentioned?
- What would you say to your friend to communicate these thoughts about how she was handling her situation?
- What would you say to build trust with your friend in these circumstances?

**Skill questions.** Constructivism conceptualizes communication in terms of interpersonal competence (Burleson & Caplan, 1998; Kline & Delia, 1990; O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). Competence is conceptualized through social perception, message reception and message production skills. However, the purpose of this study was not to evaluate individuals on their skills; rather my aim was to understand the multiplicity of objectives individuals would have, the dilemmas they would face due to competing and conflicting goals, and strategies they would adopt to address these individual objectives separately as well as those adopted to address competing objectives or conflicting objectives and obstacles. I was therefore interested in understanding participants’ conceptualization of specific skills like listening and advising and which skills they thought they would use and need the most in communicating with their friend. Then I wanted to obtain their views on communication skills as conceptualized by constructivism. So I gave them a description of a competent communicator and asked them to share their thoughts on this definition as it pertained to the context of domestic violence intervention. An illustrative question is as follows:

- What are your thoughts about listening in such a situation? Can you describe how you would listen to your friend in this situation?
- What communication skills do you think people need the most in this kind of situation?

**Communication skills training questions.** The final questions were used to understand participants’ thoughts on communication skills training with respect to domestic violence intervention. These questions aimed to generate findings that could be used to develop an
intervention training program for women. My final aim was to understand which skills participants felt that they lacked and what kind of training they thought they would benefit from. These final questions were meant to elicit details of what the participants thought about themselves with respect to this context of intervention. I also wanted to understand if and how taking part in the interview had an impact on what they thought about the context. A sample question is:

What training in communication skills would you recommend to empower women to interact with friends who might be victimized by an intimate partner?

**Questionnaire**

A questionnaire was designed to generate information on constructs like trust, empathy and listening, and also elicit participants’ responses on constructs like communicative responsiveness and person-centered messages that would be difficult to measure from direct questions asked at the interview. The questionnaire had 29 items that were taken from existing instruments and used a 7-point Likert response format. Two specific items were created for this study that tapped at the construct of low person-centeredness. Each construct and the items used to measure it is discussed below. The complete questionnaire is presented in Appendix B.

**Empathy.** Empathy was measured using eight items from Davis’ 45-item Empathy Questionnaire (1980). This questionnaire was chosen because it examines multiple cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy (Davis, 1980) that were relevant to this study, specifically perspective-taking abilities and emotional reactivity (Davis, 1980). Items that were especially relevant to domestic abuse were chosen. Two items were taken from the perspective-taking taking sub-scale (e.g., “I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both”), three items were taken from the sub-scale on Empathic Concern (e.g., “When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them”), and three items were taken
from the Personal Distress sub-scale (e.g., “I sometimes feel helpless when I’m in the middle of a very emotional situation”).

**Communicative responsiveness.** Four Communicative responsiveness items were taken from a five-item scale (Stiff, 1984; Miller, 1988) that tapped at a person’s perception of his or her own ability to respond to distressed others. This scale had items ranging from one’s self-perception of communicative behavior (e.g., “I usually have a knack for saying the right thing to make people feel better when they are upset”), as well as one’s perception of the effect the behavior has on others (“Others think of me as a very empathic person”).

**Trust.** Four Items measuring trust were taken from The Specific Interpersonal Trust Scale (Johnson-George & Swap, 1982) that measured trust on dimensions of overall trust (e.g., “My friend would be able to confide in me and know that I would want to listen”), emotional trust (e.g., “A friend of my social network could tell me things she worries about knowing that I would not think her concerns were silly”) and reliableness (e.g., “If I promised to help someone, I would follow through”). All these constructs were relevant to the specific context under examination, and the items were reworded to imply trustworthiness and not the ability to trust.

**Listening.** Ten items were designed using DeVito’s 8-item Listening Scale (DeVito, 1998). Items relevant to listening in the context of domestic violence intervention were adjusted (e.g., “I focus on the logic of the ideas rather than on the emotional meaning of the message”).

**Person-centeredness.** Finally, drawing from social support and domestic violence literature that has found that survivors are often asked to leave the situation immediately by members of their social network, and that friends and family are frustrated when survivors do not
follow the advice (Goodkind et al., 2003), three items were designed specifically for the study. These items aimed to measure participants’ thoughts on looking for solution for a problem (“I am likely to look for a solution readily if a friend reported a problem in her life”), the act of leaving (“If a friend reported being in an abusive relationship, I will respond by telling her to get out of it”), and the act of giving conditional advice (“If a friend reported being abused, I will give her my opinion of the situation and want her to listen to me”).

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed completely using Dragon speech-to-text software. This software recognizes voice and transcribes it into text. It does not recognize audio files. Consequently, I heard the interview and repeated every word, which was then recognized by the software and transcribed. I then checked the interviews manually to ensure accuracy. Transcriptions were verbatim except for filler words. The approximately fifteen-hour-long interviews took ten days to transcribe and generated about 150 pages of transcriptions. The data was then analyzed inductively using grounded theory analysis.

The interviews were open coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) for concepts. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define open coding as “the part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). The unit of analysis in open coding was a phrase containing a thought unit. This was operationalized as an independent clause. If a sentence contained a single independent clause, it counted as a thought unit (Saeki & O’Keefe, 1994). If a sentence contained more than one single independent clause, then each clause was counted as a separate thought unit. Complex sentences which had one independent and one or more subordinate clauses were considered one thought unit. If a single subject was associated with more than one predicate, each predicate was considered a single thought unit (Saeki & O’Keefe). Each clause was first unitized across each
question for all fifteen interviews. Similar units were then grouped into categories where each
category was defined by a belief, objective, or communicative practice. Open coding was guided
by the theoretical concepts of belief, aim, and message (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982).

The next step was categorizing the data. At this stage, units are sorted into “categories
that provide descriptive or inferential information about the context or setting from which the
units were derived” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; p. 203). Data was then categorized using “constant
comparative methods” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Corbin & Strauss,
2008). In other words, after grouping units into categories for the first question in the first
interview, all subsequent interviews were analyzed for units that could be grouped into the
categories for the first interview. Units that could be included in existing categories were added to
these categories, and those that could not were categorized afresh. These new categories were
added to the list of categories. This process was repeated for all questions in each of the fifteen
interviews.

The next level was axial coding, or collapsing and connecting the categories. Axial
coding is “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding
by making connections between categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). At this stage I
looked for relationships between categories based on their shared properties (Charmaz, 2009).
Axial coding is the strategy for bringing data back together in a coherent whole (Strauss &
Corbin, 1990). At this stage categories were sorted and synthesized based on shared properties.
Categorization was guided by the theoretical concepts of belief, aim, and message. For instance,
in analyzing participants’ responses to context-relevant beliefs about the friend’s situation,
categories that were related to the participants’ general beliefs about the situation were grouped
together. Categories that were characterized by participants’ responses on the friend’s dilemmas
were synthesized, and so on.

Axial coding was conducted for the same theme across all fifteen interviews, as well as
within each interview. Categorization of data pertaining to the three theoretical concepts of beliefs aims and messages was done for all fifteen interviews as well as for each interview. Categories that shared the same property were combined. Constant comparison of data was done both across as well as within interviews.

The purpose of axial coding is to draw concepts from the text (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 2007). Participants’ context-relevant beliefs and situated objectives characterized the categories that emerged from their responses to relevant interview questions. The communication addressing these beliefs and aims connected categories emerging from communication-related responses. This process was repeated across all fifteen interviews and within each interview.

The next stage of analysis was selective-coding, or “the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). At this stage I integrated categories from related questions to make thematic analysis. Then I went over my literature review and my research questions to make sense of the overall story that was emerging from the integrated categories. This process of conducting analysis at an abstract level yielded a core category to which I then integrated all the relevant categories.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Validity for qualitative research is used to determine whether the findings are accurate from the researcher’s, reader’s or participants’ standpoint (Creswell, 2003). Lincoln and Guba propose that validity for qualitative studies should include three methodological criteria: credibility, dependability, and transferability. Each is defined below and the techniques that were adopted to ensure trustworthy findings.
**Credibility.** Credibility is the extent to which the findings represent the respondents’ construction of reality (Lincoln & Guba). I employed the following techniques to ensure credibility of my findings: Triangulation, Negative Case Analysis, Peer de-briefing, and Self-reflexivity.

**Methodological Triangulation.** Triangulation of information from different data sources by examining evidence from the sources and using this information to build a coherent justification for themes (Creswell, 2003) was achieved by obtaining data from a semi-structured open-ended interview as well as a closed-ended questionnaire. Data from the two sources were compared and contrasted to provide a triangulated representation of the respondents’ views.

**Negative case analysis.** Negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes were searched for during the analysis. While developing categories I constantly kept revising them to account for negative cases. This was done until there were no negative cases. All categories thus captured responses from all fifteen participants. This has been seen as a way of establishing trustworthiness.

**Peer de-briefing.** In order to protect the analysis from my personal bias, peer de-briefing was conducted through routine discussions with the interviewer’s academic advisor. Discussions were conducted on ideas before, during, and after analyzing the data. Discussion topics included categories that were emerging from open coding, the themes and properties of categories at the stage of axial coding, and the synthesis of categories at the stage of selective coding.

**Self-Reflexivity.** Subjectivity includes the monitoring of the researcher’s own biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I believe that my deep belief in the subject made me sensitized to it. My
study was motivated by the literature that I reviewed and questions this review generated in me. However, my personal background and interests have deeply influenced my passion for this study. I have a friend who was in an abusive relationship, and although she is one of my closest female friends, I could not find the words to talk to her. We have had intimate discussions on all possible personal topics except this one. I hoped that through the study I was also going to find my voice to talk to her.

A few years back I also volunteered for a not-for-profit organization that provides support to sojourner women of South Asian origin who are victims of domestic abuse. During my association with the fellow volunteers, some of whom had been victims themselves, I came to realize the dichotomy inherent in the situation for a victim. From this experience I realized that women in the society should be mobilized to be prepared to address domestic abuse, and it should be treated as a contingency. This experience sparked my reading on the topic, and has colored the way I designed my study, selected participants and analyzed my data. Throughout the study I have tried to be conscious of my own thoughts and biases, and documented them in memos when they arose.

**Transferability.** Transferability is the extent to which a study provides sufficient data to enable the reader to judge if the findings can be applied to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research is context-specific, and so its applicability depends on contextual factors. By providing a rich and thick description of the experiences of women, I have tried to establish its transferability. Categories describing the experiences of the participants were analyzed in detail. The thick description given may transport the reader to the setting of the experience, and give the discussion a sense of shared experiences (Creswell, 2003). All research procedures undertaken have been described in detail so that readers can transfer the study to a different context if they so desire.
**Dependability.** Dependability lies in the way the research procedure is carried out systematically and documented so that they can be traced by the reader if necessary. All data, including recruitment scripts, consent forms, interview instrument, questionnaire, interview recordings and transcripts with analysis notes have been diligently maintained. These data can be made available for perusal. The interview instrument and the questionnaire are attached.
Chapter 4: Results

In the following four sections I report the findings of the study pertaining to the research questions. In the first section I analyze participants’ initiation of the conversation with their abused friend as a context that illustrates the complexity of the communicative task in this situation. In the second section I summarize participants’ context-relevant beliefs about the friend’s overall state in the violent relationship, and participants’ situated aims that were generated from their beliefs. In the third section I present the communicative practices that participants adopted to address each aim. In this section, I also present findings from participants’ responses to trust, empathy and self-efficacy. In this section, I also present findings on message strategies that participants would adopt in order to address competing aims within themselves, and the conflict between their aims and obstacles they anticipated based on their belief about the friend. In the fourth section I present participants’ use of communication skills and recommendations for skills training that they believed would help them and other women to address the needs of victims better. I

The findings in each section report on particular research questions. The categories reported for each research question represent responses from all fifteen participants. Thus, there was no negative case found for a research question.

I. Initiating Conversation: The Problematic Act of Communication

RQ1 in the study was about what a female friend of a victim would say in the initial conversation with the victim. All participants were asked the following questions: “I’d like you consider a situation where a friend has been showing some emotional and/or physical signs of
abuse. You have seen these signs a few times, and yet you have not spoken with her about any of this. What would be your first thoughts in such a situation?” The next question asked was:

“Would you think about talking to her? At what point would you say something?”

Responses of the participants reflected their dilemmas regarding initiating the conversation with their friend and the deliberation on the exact content of communication. These communicative dilemmas intrigued all fifteen participants. In the following two sections, I present results from the interview with regards to the initiation of the conversation. The first section reports findings on the conditions that would result in the initiation of the conversation. The second section reports findings on the communicative practices that participants would use in the first conversation with their abused friend.

**Conditions under which participants would talk**

The conditions for communication put forth by participants were categorized into three broad groups – “I would mark an unnatural behavior on the part of a friend but would not say anything to her immediately,” “Even if I saw a sign, I would wait for confirmation that it was due to intimate partner violence,” and “I would say something as soon as I saw a physical sign of abuse”. In relation to this categorization I was interested in analyzing the sequence of communication for each of these groups and examining if the sequence would cause any temporal delay in their intervention. Table 4.1 presents the condition and sequence of the responses under all three categories, and the possible delay it would cause in the initiation of the conversation. Responses from all fifteen participants are represented in the three categories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Response</th>
<th>Sequence of Communication</th>
<th>Example of responses</th>
<th>- Possible delay</th>
<th>- Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I would mark unnatural behavior but will not say anything immediately</td>
<td>- Behavior suggests stress - I will ask general questions - I will think they’re having an off week/day</td>
<td>- If I just noticed their body language suggested that they’re stressed out, I’d say, “Hey, what’s going on, you seem stressed out.” - If I saw a behavior one day that I hadn’t seen before, I would think she’s having an off day.</td>
<td>- Significant</td>
<td>- As participants themselves noted, serious abuse could have only behavioral manifestations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- (even if I saw a sign) I would wait for confirmation that it was due to intimate partner violence</td>
<td>(Condition) Signs appear</td>
<td>- I would want to make sure that the signs I’m seeing are being caused by their partner. - “Are you okay, what’s going on?”</td>
<td>- Significant</td>
<td>- It may take a long time for physical signs (proof) to appear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would say something as soon as I saw physical signs</td>
<td>(Condition) Signs appear</td>
<td>- If I saw a physical sign, or if she had a bruise on her somewhere, or she spoke in some way that it was obvious that she was getting depressed, I would say something.</td>
<td>- Relatively less</td>
<td>- Intervention begins with question -- invites friend to talk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I may say something even before, if I saw warning signs</td>
<td>- If I saw something that could escalate into violence, like too much jealousy, I’d say something.</td>
<td>- Talking before physical signs appear may help.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1. Sequence of participants’ thoughts on initiating conversation

**I would mark unnatural behavior but not say anything immediately.** This category represents the condition of initiation of conversation characterized by the participant marking any unnatural behavior on the friend’s part (like being afraid or depressed), but not saying anything. Participants said that they would initially think that the friend might be having an off day or week. One of these participants said that she does not “like to push people into talking, I like to
let them talk to me as needed.” She would definitely engage in communication if her friend vocalized her stress. All of these participants said that they would be cautious and look out for a pattern of behavior. If such conditions appear, they would definitely say something. They would thus delay their intervention until there was consistency in the friend’s behavior.

I would wait for confirmatory signs. In this category, confirmatory signs were seen as a condition for initiation of conversation. Several participants said that they would wait even after they saw physical signs to make sure that those signs were caused by the physical partner and could not be attributed to any other reasons. One participant said that she would only talk “if it was say, a bruise on her face that I hadn’t seen, and the only person she had seen in between is her partner.” Another participant said that even if she were suspecting something, she would take a roundabout approach about it. She would first ask how things were with the friend, then mention the signs she had seen that caused her to be concerned, and then ask the friend if she needed any help. The approach taken by these participants would also cause significant delay in intervention.

I would say something as soon as I saw physical signs. Under this condition, a physical sign would warrant immediate initiation of conversation. When asked about the point at which participants would initiate communication with the friend, several participants responded that a physical sign of abuse would warrant communication. A few participants said that they would directly ask the friend about the cause of the bruise, while others said that they would begin by asking relatively indirect questions about the friend’s well-being. Only one participant said that she would ask her friend if her partner was hurting her. Two participants said that they were aware of early warning signs of domestic abuse that could escalate into abuse and they would say something if they noticed these early signs.

Participants responded that initiation of conversation with a friend would mostly depend
on physical evidence of abuse. Participants would mark an unusual behavior and wait for more confirming signs to appear, delaying intervention significantly. Some participants would ask indirect questions even if they saw physical signs. Participants were concerned about making assumptions about the signs and being proven wrong. In the third condition, some participants said that they would speak very directly as soon as they saw physical signs of abuse. A few participants said that they would look out for warning signs and speak up if those signs appeared.

**Common communicative practices seen in initial conversations**

The question asked to the participants was what they would say in their initial conversation with a friend. Table 4.2 summarizes responses from all fifteen participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I would not speak directly at the beginning.</td>
<td>- I probably wouldn't be forthright and say “Hey are you being abused?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I would not confront immediately and would wait.</td>
<td>- I don’t want to confront her and say, “You know it’s really bad, you need to get out of here, you need to realize that he is treating you like shit.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I would make general inquiry.</td>
<td>- I would offer it up as a general, “are you okay, what's going on?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I would refer to signs that I have seen that have caused my concern.</td>
<td>- “I've seen some bruises on you, I know that you've been pretty depressed lately, are you okay with your boyfriend, what's going on? Is it anything you need to talk about?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I would respond further based on what they said.</td>
<td>- Saying anything else would depend on what they said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I would ask my friend if her partner is hitting her.</td>
<td>I would just say, “What's going on, is he putting his hands on you, is he hitting you, is he threatening you in any way, these marks don't come from nowhere, what's going on?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. Communicative practices used in the initial conversation
Table 4.2 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I would ask for details once friend talks.</td>
<td>- (If she mentioned the violence), first thing I would say would be, “do you want to stay with me tonight?” Okay, and then the second thing is, “can you go stay with your mother?” or just find a place for them to be safe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I would probe even if she denies/is quiet.</td>
<td>- If she denied it, I think I would still pursue it, I think I would still say, “Well it's really obviously been something that I've noticed, and if it's not him and it's somebody else, then you really need to talk to somebody about that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I would tell my friend you need to get out.</td>
<td>One of the things I tell her is, “Honey you need to get out of this situation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I would be emotionally supportive. - I will offer resources.</td>
<td>- I want them to know that we're friends and that they should feel fine coming to me and you know that I'm there for them and basically that I'm supporting them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I would ask friend how she is feeling.</td>
<td>(If there are physical signs), I'd say “He's kind of been attacking you, how are you feeling about that, what do you think should be happening right now?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several participants stated clearly that they would not want to be direct in their initial communication with their friend. Several others said that their preferred mode of communication would be general inquiry about the participant. One participant said for instance, “I would kind of approach it by asking, “Are you okay, what's going on?”” Another participant said that she would “try and talk to her may be about just the situation in general, and then try and talk to her from there about how she's feeling about it and how she's considered getting help, and then go from there.” Participants using this communicative practice were seen to conduct off-record face-
threatening acts, in which they asked a question indirectly with opportunity for multiple interpretations (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

Several participants who responded that they would talk to the friend upon noticing a physical sign said that they would ask a question either indirectly about the participant’s well-being (“How are you?”) or directly about the relationship (“Are you being mistreated, how is he treating you?”) and then make a reference to the physical sign as a condition that warranted their communication. Participants thus used a positive politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1978) by giving reasons for the on-record face-threatening act of asking a question. This would be also an instance of a conversational script sequence in which the speaker mentions a speech act (question), and then gives its rationale by doing the second adjacency pair (providing evidence).

Several participants said that they would expect their friend to respond to their invitations and that her response would determine what they said next. While this is an example of a cooperative act of turn-taking, it is significant in light of participants’ context-relevant beliefs revealed during the interview that a friend who is being abused by her intimate partner will be hesitant to speak about it because she is embarrassed.

**Summary**

Several participants believed that initiating a conversation in such circumstances is a communicative dilemma because of the nature of the topic. One participant said for instance, “I don't know, I mean it's hard, because you're in a position where you don't want to get in between ... I mean, I think I'll be in an incredible quandary about this, I would have to say something, but then again I would have to wait and see.”

The sequence of the conversation had some interesting findings. While participants’ responses included some conventional practices like asking indirect questions and referring to the physical signs as evidence, these responses are attached to a set of dilemmas that are revealed in
the way the practices are sequenced. Participants’ beliefs about the situation and the effect talking about it would have on their relationship are connected to these sequences. The sequencing of responses also reflected participants’ aims of not appearing inquisitive or judgmental, not threatening the friend’s face, and not disrupting the relationship. This caused their dilemmas about initiating conversation with the friend, resulting in delay.

The next section enunciates these dilemmas by examining the beliefs and aims of the friends. The conditions for initiation of communication, as well as the sequencing of initial conversation can be explained by a close examination of these belief and goal complexities.

II. Context-Relevant Beliefs and Aims

This section reports study findings on two research questions, and is divided into two parts. The first part reports study findings on RQ2 that asked what female friends’ context-relevant beliefs would be in this situation. Context-relevant beliefs that participants held about the situation were apparent throughout the interview. They reflected participants’ beliefs about domestic violence as a situation, the effects of domestic violence on the victim, and reasons why the victim is staying in the situation. Participants also formed context-relevant beliefs about the friend’s inner state (her dilemmas and face concerns) that they saw as possible obstacles to their own communicative goals.

RQ3 asked what participants’ goals would be in the communicative context. In the second part I present participants’ multiple situated objectives that were generated in the context and the way these objectives competed with each other within the participants as well as came into conflict with obstacles faced from the friend.

The six categories regarding participants’ context-relevant beliefs are presented in Table 4.3 and discussed below. Responses from all fifteen participants were accounted for in these six categories.
Context-relevant beliefs about the situation

1. General beliefs about domestic abuse as a situation
   - It is dangerous and poses significant threat to the victim’s physical safety and mental well-being.
   - It is unpredictable and can escalate suddenly.
   - It can do great damage very quickly.
   - It is hopeless and will not get better.

2. Situated beliefs about effects of situation on friend
   - Friend may be completely controlled by abuser and not making decisions for herself.
   - Friend is emotionally abused and isolated from friends and family by abuser.
   - Friend is compromising and settling for whatever she thinks she can get.
   - Friend wants to improve partner/herself/situation to keep the abuser from hurting her.
   - Friend may not want pressure from friends to leave.
   - Context-relevant beliefs about reasons friend is staying in her relationship

3. Beliefs about contextual factors in friend’s situation
   - Friend may be financially dependent on partner/ worried about finances.
   - Friend may be married.
   - Friend may have children.
   - Friend may not have a support network.

4. Beliefs about friend’s emotional state
   - Friend is scared of the partner.
   - Friend feels that she does not deserve better.
   - Friend does not want to be alone.
   - Friend is afraid of retaliation from partner, and that the abuse could get worse.
   - Context-relevant beliefs about possible obstacles

5. Beliefs about dilemmas friend may have
   - Friend feels torn/in a dilemma and is ambivalent about the situation.
   - Friend denies the abuse.
   - Friend feels attached to the abuser and does not want to get him in trouble.
   - Friend has fallen into an abuse cycle of being abused and defending the abuser.
   - Friend feels guilt for wanting to stay with the abuser.

6. Beliefs about face issues for friend
   - Friend will be hesitant, embarrassed, or feel guilty.
   - Friend will be hesitant or will not admit unless it’s really bad.
   - Friend feels uncomfortable talking with married/happy friend.
   - Friend may want friends to have a good impression of her.
   - Friend may feel that she’ll be judged.

Table 4.3 Context-relevant beliefs about friend’s situation
**General beliefs about domestic violence as a situation.** This category was characterized by participants’ beliefs that domestic violence as a situation posed threat to the victim’s physical and emotional safety, was unpredictable and volatile, and could never get better. One participant who has a friend in an abusive relationship said that she believes that “he’s going to kill her, I think it's very, very serious”. One participant said that she believes her friend “needs to walk away and not look back” because:

“…no matter how good she will be, no matter what she does, that he'll still gonna act out and he’s still gonna do these things. Because he wants her perfect and that’s not going to happen. He wants her to be perfect in his eyes, and that’s not going to happen.”

This participant expresses her belief regarding the cyclical order of violence is established through behavior attribution by the abuser, resulting in the victim’s effort to placate the situation by striving hard to improve conditions, and the imposition of new conditions by the abuser.

**Situated beliefs about effect of situation on friend.** This category represents participants’ understanding of the effects of domestic violence on the friend like social and emotional isolation, effects on self esteem, and not wanting to leave the situation yet. In referring to the social isolation that her real-life friend faced from her partner, one participant stated:

“…a lot of her female friends are very smart intellectual women who don't put up with shit, and automatically those were the women that he just did not like … he was very open about it, he was very rude to them, and soon after, like in a few months she did not like her group of friends, and right now it's a point where she has no friends but me…”

This participant refers to the contagion effects of a violent relationship in which the partner’s opinions about the victim’s friends eventually resulted in her evaluating and altering her decision of continuing her friendship with her existing group of friends. Despite the severity of
the situation, several women pointed out that “if she is not ending it then she probably doesn't want pressure to end it from other people.”

**Beliefs about contextual factors that are keeping the friend from leaving.** In a third category participants referred to contextual factors in the friend’s life, like financial dependence, her status of being married and having children, and the availability of supportive networks as reasons that may prevent her from wanting to leave the partner. Many of them believed that relational responsibilities would make her more invested and committed and she would want to put up with the abuse for the sake of her family. One participant said: “I think a lot of it depends on if she is married to this person, then there are obviously so many more issues (that are) going to come into play. If they have children, again even more issues…”

**Beliefs about friend’s emotional state factors that are preventing her from leaving.** Participants identified the friend’s emotional state factors like low self esteem, apprehension about alternatives, fear of the abuser and escalated abuse that would keep her from breaking away from the relationship. One participant said in this regard, “(leaving is) dangerous because it sometimes makes the abusers so angry that it escalates the situation.” Another participant, who has a friend in an abusive relationship, said, “I think she's afraid of being alone, and that's why she's staying in this situation.”

**Beliefs about dilemmas friend may have.** This category represented beliefs about conflicting psychological states for the victim like feeling attached to the abuser, being torn between acceptance of the abuse and hope for the situation to improve, loyalty to the abuser and a consequent defensive attitude about the abuser. Participants’ criticism was seen to cause the functional damage of further social isolation for the victim as the abuser would use the criticism
as a reason to prevent interaction between the friend and the victim. Several women felt that women often get drawn into relationships and it takes them a while to overcome denial of the abuse. As one is grappling with ways to understand the abuse, the abuser is crippling one’s self-image and hindering ways of getting out. One participant said, “(it’s) just something that you slip into, you know, because the person seems so great at first, and you just fall into this pattern of toleration, and beginning to say oh, they let that slide, but the abuse is getting worse and worse, but by then you are already drawn into this relationship.”

One participant whose close friend is in an abusive relationship said:

“…she’ll say I know, I know it's not rational but I just feel this way and I don't know what to do about it and I can’t… she’d say the same thing every time, I can’t live without him, I can't leave him, I understand what you're telling me, but I can't do it.

When asked why she thought the friend was unable to leave the abuser, she said, “she's become so dependent upon him for her well-being that she doesn't take care of herself.” She went on to describe how “I've known her for so long and I've seen her change into a different person” in the course of her relationship with the partner and “it breaks my heart to see that.” This participant became aware of the acute dilemma that victims of intimate partner abuse face – the abuser is also their lover, and they have the relational need to draw their strength from one who depletes it.

**Beliefs about face-related concerns friend may have.** This category describes participants' beliefs regarding face-related concerns for the victim. Participants said that the friend might be hesitant, embarrassed, and/or feel guilty because she might be thinking that the abuse was somehow her fault and also that she was weak because she was still in the abusive relationship. Most participants recognized that victims of domestic abuse are often concerned about being judged by people, and this causes them to retreat and refrain from discussing the
relationship with others. One participant spoke about a friend who was in a tense situation with her partner but it was unclear to the participant whether it was physically abusive. She said:

“I feel that she's not telling me everything right now because she doesn't want people to judge her on her relationship or think badly of it or judge her for staying in it. I think she thinks that the relationship has to be real bad until… she’d admit to her friends that something's wrong, that she should leave.”

The participant’s use of the word “admit” in this context highlights the face-related concerns of the friend that cause her to conceal information from the participant. The participant’s belief also accentuates the fact that victims of domestic abuse often do not reveal information about the abuse until it is “real bad,” and by then other issues have compounded the situation. Another participant said that a friend who often fights with her partner does not tell her details of the relationship because the participant is in a happy relationship with her own partner. While taking the perspective of the friend, the participant said:

“… she might look at me and say, oh how can I talk to this person, this person is in a healthy relationship and, and somehow I've gotten myself into a situation and I’ve allowed myself to be emotionally and physically abused, and I'm embarrassed and I don't want to tell her because she’s not in that situation!”

From the participant’s response it was apparent that she recognized the multiple layers of the victim’s apprehension and embarrassment, resulting from her belief that she has “gotten” and “allowed” herself into that situation. Her embarrassment is intensified by the belief that she would be judged by the friend because the latter is “more successful” in her relationship.

**Summary**

This section reported study findings on participants’ context-relevant beliefs about domestic violence as a dangerous situation, as well as several implications it may have in the lives of a friend who might be a victim. All participants believed that this situation makes victims feel isolated, fearful, and guilty. Their self esteem would be torn down and they would feel that they don’t deserve any better. Participants also believed that there may be contextual factors like
monetary issues and children, and emotional state factors like fear of retaliation and low self esteem that would prevent the friend from leaving an abusive relationship. Participants’ perceptions about the situation and the friend’s condition in the situation generated situated aims for them that they wanted to accomplish through their conversation. Participants also had context-relevant beliefs that the friend may still be attached to the abuser, be in denial or ambivalent about the issue, or be embarrassed and hesitant to talk about it. Participants saw these beliefs as possible obstacles to their situated aims.

Participants’ Situated Aims and Conflicting Aims

RQ3 asked what participants’ goals would be in the communicative context. This section is divided into two parts: the aims participants had based on their context-relevant beliefs, and instances where participants’ goals either competed with each other or conflicted with the victims’ wants and/or goals.

Situated Aims. Participants were asked how they wanted to come across in their communication with their friend, what they wanted their communication to achieve for their friendship with the friend, what they wanted to convince their friend to do and how they would provide resources and material support to the friend. In response to other questions that have been discussed in the previous section, participants also revealed their goals as were generated from their context-relevant beliefs. Moreover, some participants expressed their conceptualization of their friend’s corresponding wants that were in agreement with the participants’ goals. The goals of the participants and their perception of the friend’s corresponding wants are presented in Table 4.4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Aims</th>
<th>Situated aim for participant</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Participant’s perception of friend’s wants</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>I want to be seen as caring, non-judgmental</td>
<td>I would just want to be a listener for her; I just want her to know that I'm a non-judging friend.</td>
<td>She does not want to be seen as weak.</td>
<td>She doesn’t want me to judge her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face</td>
<td>I want to be correct in my assumption. I want to come across as non-imposing</td>
<td>I don't want to say to that person, hey I think you’re being abused, and then it turns out that I'm completely wrong.</td>
<td>She wants to be seen as capable of taking decision.</td>
<td>I want to (leave), and I'm trying to look at how, a way that's comfortable for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>I would refer to instances of domestic abuse that I know of. I would refer to resources.</td>
<td>I’ll try to give her a story about a family member who had been previously abused. Do you need help, do you need a place to stay, do you need extra cash?</td>
<td>She wants to give details of abuse.</td>
<td>She writes it down, puts it in an e-mail, and e-mails it to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>I want to be a friend</td>
<td>I don’t want to alienate her</td>
<td>She wants me to be there.</td>
<td>She's told me that she’s happy that she has a good friend in this city in me, someone to vent to and to hang out with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Appear available, supportive, comforting</td>
<td>I want to be there for her.</td>
<td>Friend needs support, does not need solution/directive</td>
<td>Maybe that person at that point doesn't need ideas or sorts, they just need someone to listen to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive</td>
<td>Talk her out of the situation</td>
<td>You need to get out of this situation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>Want her out of the situation</td>
<td>I want results.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4. Types of aims for the participant and the corresponding want of the friend
In the following section, I report findings on each goal for both the participant as well as the friend and provide instances from the interview where these were revealed.

**Instrumental aims.** When asked what they would want their friend to do under the circumstances, all participants said that they would want to persuade the friend to end the relationship as soon as possible. One participant who has a friend in an abusive relationship said, “I think she needs to leave the situation immediately.” However, all participants had relationship and identity and face maintenance goals that were equally instrumental to them at different times. With reference to asking the friend to leave, for instance, one participant seemed to be aware of the effect it could have on their friendship and she stated that she would not want that, “I guess in my head I wouldn’t wanna say something that could potentially ruin our friendship … and so I am going to stay standoffish and yet caring.” One other participant’s instrumental goal was never to appear judgmental.

**Identity aims.** Participants conceptualized valued identities for both themselves as well as the friend. Participants responded that they would want to come across as caring, supportive and non-judgmental. One participant said that her communicative goal would be, “to build that encouragement and start to rebuild the confidence in her.” Participants recognized that their friend would also have identity goals that she would want to achieve through her interaction. One participant said that victims “are scared that people will judge them,” and that she thinks that it is a valid concern because “people think things like oh, how could she let that happen, or why doesn’t she stand up for herself, sometimes they would probably think, oh what did she do to deserve that!”
**Face maintenance aims.** Some responses showed participants’ awareness of the need to maintain their own face as well as their awareness that the friend might want her face to be maintained. One participant, whose friend has been in an abusive relationship for a long time, referred to the countless instances when she has asked the friend to leave the situation, and the friend has responded saying that she cannot. While referring to recent decisions her friend has taken to consolidate her future, the participant said, “It used to be I want to, but I can't, now it is I want to and I'm trying to look at how, a way that's comfortable for me.” Her reference to “a way that’s comfortable for me” highlights her friend’s negative face want of not being impeded and having the time and freedom to work out a solution by herself.

**Informative aims.** Sharing information regarding their own experience with domestic violence or the experiences of people they know was identified as a goal. The further purpose of this goal was to encourage the friend that leaving the relationship is an achievable goal on her part. Some participants also wanted to establish trust and credibility through the sharing of information. The friend’s informative goal, on the other hand, as conceived by the participants, would be to give details of the abuse where intended and/or possible. One participant said, “… she's been open with it, so it's been more of an open dialogue…”

All participants also referred to the informative goal of providing instrumental resources to their friends. All of them thought that it was important to offer support in the form of a place to stay, money, a telephone, and a car to friends, and they said that they would also be willing to research and identify resources in the community that friends would be able to use.

**Relationship aims.** Consolidation of the relationship through communication with the friend was identified as a goal. Most participants said that their aim was to “leave the line of communication open” with the friend, and anything they said or did would be driven by the
ultimate goal of not wanting to alienate her, as that would have a deterrent effect on the instrumental task goal of helping the friend out of the situation. For instance, one participant said that she would tell her friend, “I want to be friends with you, you know I want to stay friends with you … I want to be able to be there for you if you need me.” Participants also recognized that the reason a friend would want to share the abuse going on in her life is because she valued the relationship the two of them shared, and would want the participant to be available for her.

**Persuasive aims.** Convincing the friend to leave the situation was identified as a goal by all participants. One participant said, “My number one focus would be to get her out,” while another participant said that she would tell her friend to “find love elsewhere or find happiness elsewhere.” Some participants said that they would argue that the friend should leave the situation before it gets worse. Some participants also recognized that their friend could persuade them instead that the situation was not urgent enough, or defend the abuser to the participant.

**Competing and Conflicting Aims**

Given the complex nature of the situation and the multiple goal structure resulting from it, participants’ situated aims competed with each other. Participants also envisioned their aims being in conflict with the obstacles they perceived from their friends. Table 4.5 presents the competing goals within all fifteen participants in the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competing Aims within Participant</th>
<th>Questions pertaining to competition</th>
<th>Examples that revealed competition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship v. Persuasive</td>
<td>How do I talk her out of the situation without alienating her?</td>
<td>I'm afraid I'm going to alienate her if I go too far off pushing her to leave him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity v. Clarity</td>
<td>How do I appear non-judgmental, yet tell her clearly what I think?</td>
<td>If you're not too careful of word choices it's quite easy to come across as being very judgmental or very patronizing as a person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive v. Support</td>
<td>How do I convince her of situation’s urgency, yet be available while she takes her time to deal with it?</td>
<td>When I’m trying to talk about leaving him, or anything about him, I (have to) use kid’s gloves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive/Advising v. Face</td>
<td>How do I advise her what she should do without making her feel that I am thwarting her autonomy by rushing her?</td>
<td>I was really pushing her to leave, and you could tell that she was withdrawing from me and was irritated with me, so I had to stop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support v. Face</td>
<td>How do I show her my support without hurting her privacy?</td>
<td>I just want to wait until she comes to me or when she wants to bring it up. I don’t want to overstep my bounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship v. Instrumental</td>
<td>How do I come across as caring and yet let her know my key concern?</td>
<td>I’ll support you in whatever decisions you make, although if you continue to stay with someone who’s that abusive then I can’t necessarily support that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5. Competing aims within participant
**Competing aims.** Several participants said that they would find it difficult to voice their opinion about the relationship and their concern for the friend without being apprehensive about overstepping their boundaries. One woman whose friend is in a severely abusive relationship but does not think it’s serious enough to leave said, “it's really hard for me to know where to draw the line with her because I'm afraid I'm going to alienate her if I go too far off pushing her to leave him.” The desire to persuade the friend is an instrumental goal for this participant. While recognizing that this goal competes with the relationship goal of not alienating the friend, the participant realizes that the only way she can eventually help her friend out of the situation is by achieving her relationship goal. Other participants also referred to their apprehension about being too direct and “shutting down” or “scaring away” their friends. Most of these goal conflicts would arise as the participant and the friend might have different notions of a relationship and different value systems. It would therefore be difficult for them to be persuasive without sounding non-judgmental. One participant said in this regard:

“I would have my notions about how would relationship works, and I think that would come into play there and I would be coming from my own place where I would say, I very much feel like you can always get out even if you rely on them for money or whatever, even if you have kids with them, there's always a way to get out. I think it would definitely be hard to communicate with somebody that's saying I absolutely, there is no possibility, there is no, I have no choice but to stay. “

In her effort to persuade the friend to leave, this participant found it difficult to understand her friend’s assertion that it was not possible for her to leave, because that did not correspond to the participant’s belief about a relationship. This causes a rift between her persuasive goal and her own identity.

**Conflicting aims.** At certain points in the interview, participants also revealed information that could explain a possible conflict between a participant’s goals and her friend’s needs and wants. These conflicts are presented in Table 4.6.
Conflict between participant’s aims and friend’s need | Issues over which conflict may arise
---|---
Need for Support v. Persuasive goal | Friend wants to vent and seeks support, while participant wants to talk her out of the situation.
Need for Support v. Face | Friend wants support from participant, while participant wants to maintain diplomacy.
Face Want v. Persuasive | Friend wants to wait and decide for herself, while participant thinks she has a perspective that friend does not in seeing the urgency of the situation.

Table 4.6. Conflicts between friend’s aims and participants’ needs

Participants frequently raised concern over alienating the friend when persuading her to leave the relationship. In their eyes this would create a rift between their persuasive goal and the friend’s need for support as the friend might not have made up her mind. One participant said, for instance:

“Maybe, yeah … she doesn't want her friends to gang up on her and try to influence her relationship or try to get her to end it because if she is not ending it then she probably doesn't want pressure to end it from other people …”

This participant mentions that if the friend has not made up her mind and is confused about the situation, the participant would offer help, but would also say, “I believe that this is abuse and that this is completely unacceptable.” The participant also mentions that she has a perspective on her friend’s relationship that her friend may not have. Thus there is a rift between the participant’s persuasive goal and her friend’s need for support.

In the first part of her interview, one participant said that she would be very indirect and cautious about talking to her friend because, “You never know what goes on between two
people.” Through these statements her face maintenance goals became apparent. Her later responses showed her awareness of the friend needing support from her. However, the participant’s initial non-committal approach could create a rift between her face maintenance goal and her friend’s need for support. This conflict was recognized by a few other participants.

All participants reported having concerns about negotiating persuasive goals and the obstacle faced from the friend’s negative face want of not being constrained. Several participants underscored the urgency in the situation, and expressed concern that their friend may not realize the urgency, and while she is taking time to work out her options, her life and safety are under threat. One participant who has a friend in an abusive relationship said, “I think she needs to leave the situation immediately, but she totally minimizes her situation … she doesn't feel that it's serious enough yet to leave.” Another participant said that her friend has recognized the abuse and is making progress toward leaving the situation, but “she still needs to find the strength, and I think it's going to take something really awful happening for that to happen…I'm just concerned that she will not do it in time.”

**Summary**

Participants formed several situational objectives, of which the identity, relationship, persuasive, informative goals were the most common. The complexity of the situation also caused them to compete against each other. For instance, for most participants, persuasive goals competed with relational goals, and relationship goals competed with face maintenance goals. Participants’ goals were also seen to be in conflict with obstacles they expected to face from the friend’s wants. The most common conflicts were between participants’ persuasive goal of getting the friend out of the situation and the friend’s want of relational support. Conflict could arise when the participants’ face maintenance goal encountered an obstacle in the friend’s relational want. Participants’ also envisioned facing obstacles from the friend’s negative face wants of not
being impeded that would create a conflict with their persuasive goal of convincing the friend of the urgency of the situation.

III. Communicative Practices for Addressing Aims

In this section I present participants’ communicative practices. This section is divided into two sections. The first section reports findings related to the communicative practices adopted to address univalent aims. The second section reports findings on communicative practices that addressed competing and conflicting aims.

In the first section, RQ4 in the study asked what communicative practices female friends would use in their conversation with a victim of domestic abuse. This section reports findings on specific communicative practices that participants would adopt and refrain from adopting to address univalent aims. RQ5a, RQ5b, and RQ5c asked how female friends would communicate trust, empathy and self-efficacy. Findings pertaining to trust, empathy and self-efficacy as core components of messages are presented.

In the second section, RQ6 asked how female friends would use message strategies to address competing and conflicting aims. In this section I present findings on message strategies that participants would adopt to address competing aims and the conflict between participants’ own aims and possible obstacles from their friend. RQ7 asked what will be instances of a highly person-centered and rhetorical message. Instances of person-centered messages and rhetorical messages are presented.
**Communicating Univalent Aims**

Table 4.7 presents participants’ responses in terms of what they would and would not say. The specific question asked at the interview regarding participants’ use of communicative practices was about what they would say to their friend. A question later in the interview asked participants what they would not say to a friend who is being abused. The responses to both these questions corresponded and have been presented together. This is followed by a summary of participants’ responses regarding their communication of trust, empathy and self efficacy as core components of their situational aims. Responses from all fifteen participants were accounted for in the data presented in Table 4.7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Aim</th>
<th>Communication Practice</th>
<th>Function of Communication Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Identity-related</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would</td>
<td>- You are (a positive</td>
<td>- Assertion of positive qualities</td>
<td>- You’re a beautiful woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say</td>
<td>quality).</td>
<td></td>
<td>- You should be proud of yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- You’re cute, you’re successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would</td>
<td>- You are (a negative</td>
<td>- (Non)-assertion of negative</td>
<td>- What is wrong with you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not say</td>
<td>quality).</td>
<td>qualities</td>
<td>- You’re insecure and stupid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- I don’t believe you’re still with him!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would</td>
<td>- You are not to</td>
<td>- (Non)- attribution of blame</td>
<td>- There is nothing that you could have done that’d warrant someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say</td>
<td>blame for this.</td>
<td></td>
<td>putting hands on you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- It is not your fault.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued

Table 4.7. Communication practices to be used and refrained from in response to friend’s needs
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Aim</th>
<th>Communication Practice</th>
<th>Function of Communication Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- What I would</td>
<td>- You are to blame for this</td>
<td>- Attribution of blame</td>
<td>- You deserve it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- How could you let this happen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- You’re just as liable to let this happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would</td>
<td>- You can make your own choice</td>
<td>- Catering to negative face want</td>
<td>- I am not going to tell you what to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- (I am not judging you) for being undecided or taking time to decide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would</td>
<td>- You have no choice in this</td>
<td>- (Not) Threatening negative face</td>
<td>- You have no choice but to stay in the relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not say</td>
<td></td>
<td>want</td>
<td>- Why are you not leaving the relationship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- You have to leave right now.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relationship-related**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Aim</th>
<th>Communication Practice</th>
<th>Function of Communication Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- What I would</td>
<td>- I care for you</td>
<td>- Expression of concern</td>
<td>- You’re my friend, so it is my business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would</td>
<td>- I do not care for you</td>
<td>- Expression to hurt other</td>
<td>- I care for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not say</td>
<td>- I do not care for what happens to you</td>
<td>- Expression of aloofness</td>
<td>- I’m leaving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would</td>
<td>- I will not judge you</td>
<td>- Expression of non-judgment</td>
<td>- I am not going to judge you …if you want me to not react at all, I won’t say anything at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would</td>
<td>- I will judge you.</td>
<td>- Expression of judgment</td>
<td>- I told you so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal Type</th>
<th>Communication Practice</th>
<th>Function of Communication Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support-related</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would say</td>
<td>- I understand you.</td>
<td>- Expression of understanding</td>
<td>- You know how I understand how you feel trapped. - I know maybe you feel uncomfortable about this and I know you probably don’t want to get him in trouble. - I know it’s hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would not say</td>
<td>- I do not understand you.</td>
<td>- Expression of lack of understanding</td>
<td>- You have to leave him right now. - I am calling the police if you don’t solve this right now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would say</td>
<td>- I support you.</td>
<td>- Expression of support</td>
<td>- I will support you in any decision you take.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would not say</td>
<td>- I do not support you.</td>
<td>- Expression of lack of support</td>
<td>- I’m leaving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persuasion-related</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would say</td>
<td>- You need to get out.</td>
<td>- Expression of persuasion</td>
<td>- You need/have to get out of this situation. - You need to take better care of yourself. - You’ve got to leave before it gets worse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What I would not say</td>
<td>- You need not get out.</td>
<td>- Expression of nonchalance</td>
<td>- It’s okay, it happens sometimes. - (You have to) stay with him and make it better.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identity and Face Messages. This category constitutes of identity and face messages that participants thought were appropriate and inappropriate. Participants reported that they would convey messages that assert a positive quality to the friend, and refrain from attributing blame to the victim. Most participants felt that if a message attributes the need to end the abuse to the positive qualities of the friend, it makes her feel valued and empowers her to look beyond the abuse. Thus many participants said that their messages would boost the friend’s self esteem and communicate to her that she does not deserve to be humiliated and abused. Participants said that the focus of the discussion should be the friend and not the abusive partner. One participant who has been a victim of domestic abuse and has known several other abused women said of her experience:

“… I think you know you need to … make it about them because I think a lot of the times in these relationships women feel that they’re not important and they’re not valued and they need to know that somebody cares about them … they’re probably in a situation that they’re not being heard, especially by their husbands or boyfriend, so they might feel that their voice doesn’t matter.”

This participant highlighted the need to communicate in a person-centered manner and not enforce one’s own perception on the victim. She highlighted throughout the conversation that victims’ inner resources are depleted by the abuser and friends who want to help should be very sensitive in restoring their sense of self. A few other participants also stated that their messages would not thwart the friend’s autonomy by telling her what to do. They would instead say that the friend was free to make a decision for herself.

Relationship and Support Messages. Messages that referred to the friendship the participants and their friend shared and those that conveyed the participants’ understanding of and support to the friend constitutes this category. Participants said that they would deliver messages that would recognize the dilemmas they imagined their friends to be facing, and one of them elaborated that she would mention that her friend had taken a positive step by communicating
about it. “I think I would tell them that it's really difficult to do by yourself, I would realize that it would be incredibly difficult to confide in someone, but that's such an amazing and positive step toward getting yourself in a better place. “ Participants also said that their messages would be non-judgmental and show concern. They would not be aloof or hurtful toward the friend.

**Persuasive Messages.** All participants responded at different times during the interview that they would want to convince the person to leave the situation as soon as possible. Participants said that a person who is in an abusive relationship often lacks necessary perspective, and therefore they would be more persuasive. Most participants said that they would emphasize the threat to the friend’s physical safety and emotional well-being as the basis for arguing the urgency of the situation. While a few would want to raise this issue toward the beginning of their interaction with the friend, a few participants also noted that they would not want to mention leaving immediately. A few participants said that their degree of forcefulness would depend on how the friend viewed her situation. One participant said, “… depends on how serious they thought the situation was, say if it was a really violent situation, I'd say, look you really have to do something about this”.

**Communicating Trust, Empathy and Self-Efficacy**

RQ5a, RQ5b and RQ5c pertained to the communication of trust, empathy and self-efficacy. These are presented in the following sub-section.

**Communicating trust.** RQ5a asked how participants would communicate trust to their friend. Several participants said that they thought that trust played a significant role in interpersonal relationships. The question asked at the interview was: What would you say to build trust with your friend? Table 4.8 shows that all fifteen participants used five practices in
communicating trust to their friends. They said that they would communicate their availability and support to the friend, communicate in a non-judgmental manner with the friend, assure continued support to the friend, promise confidentiality to the friend, and disclose details about themselves to the friend.

Participants also responded to four items on trustworthiness in the questionnaire. Results showed that all participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they were trustworthy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative Practice</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Relationship/Identity Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will be available and supportive to friend</td>
<td>If there's anything that you need to talk about, I'm here for you</td>
<td>Look dependable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will communicate in a non-judgmental manner</td>
<td>I will not judge you.</td>
<td>Look respectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will assure confidentiality</td>
<td>This does not leave this room.</td>
<td>Look honest and trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will assure continued support</td>
<td>I will be there for you always.</td>
<td>Look consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will disclose personal details</td>
<td>You know what, I've been through this, I know what’s ahead, I've done a lot of reading about this</td>
<td>Look similar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8 Communicating trust

*I will tell my friend that I am available to and supportive of her.* Most participants wanted to communicate trust through assuring the friend of their availability and support. This
reflected a relational goal for them, as supportive communication strengthens a relationship. Some responses in this category were: “I'm here for you,” “You can tell me anything”, “I want to be your friend”. Certain messages intended to convey that the participant had the friend’s interests in mind also expressed their identity goal of wanting to appear benevolent and dependable. Some exemplary responses expressed by participants were, “I just care about your health and well-being, I just want you to be okay” and “It is your choice”. Participants also responded that they would build trust by reminding the friend of their strong relationship. One participant said:

“… We've been friends for a while, you know, I've known you for a long time, you've known me, we've been through a lot together…you know I want to stay friends with you, I want you to be happy, and I want to be able to be there for you if you need me.”

This participant seemed to conceptualize trust as a function of the relational goal of her communication with her friend. She referred to their history together in establishing her credibility, and also reinforced the credibility by stating her vision for their relationship. In openly stating her intentions, she seemed to build an argument for herself and for her this argument would build trust with her friend.

**I will communicate in a non-judgmental manner with friend.** Participants also said they would convey trust to their friend by communicating in a non-judgmental and non-patronizing manner. For some participants, trust would be built when the friend feels secure that her face would not be threatened. Thus participants viewed face maintenance as a cooperative activity between the two interactional partners that would create trust between them.

For most participants, a face-threatening act in this context is one that criticizes or blames the subject, implicitly or explicitly passes judgment on the subject, and/or patronizes the subject. Criticism of the subject’s actions or blaming the subject for her action was seen by these participants as a message delivered as an open insult to the friend, or a bald on record face-
threatening act. For instance, one participant said, “If I said things like, if you left, probably you wouldn't have had this problem, she could not trust me if I said things like that, you know.” Implicit patronization or criticism guised as concern was also seen by one participant as certain to impede communication: “I mean if you say something like, how could this happen or I should worry about your kids, or something like that, then that would just shut things down.”

*I will assure confidentiality to friend.* Confidentiality was perceived as crucial in this situation by several participants. The purpose of promising confidentiality was seen as a function of the desire to appear honest and dependable, and the situation of domestic violence made confidentiality even more significant. One participant said: “I’ll tell her that I won't say anything to anyone if you don’t want me to … I’ll just basically try to build trust by you know keeping some kind of secrecy about it.” A few participants also expressed their internal conflict between the need to build trust by ensuring confidentiality, and the situational need of communicating with others in order to garner more support for the victim. Through their interactions with their friends, all participants seemed to want to achieve the identity goals of establishing their personal integrity and appearing honest.

*I will assure friend of continued and consistent support.* Trust was seen to be manifested not only in the immediate situation for some participants, but seemed to operate on a continuum. A few participants who have friends in abusive relationships and have been communicating with them, said that trust had always been there in their relationship, and talking in a non-judgmental way left the line of communication open for them. To one participant, trust meant being available to a friend continually. One other participant said, “… just continuously be around … and do the thing that I said that I'm going to do.” Thus, honoring one’s promise to the victim is a crucial way she saw trust being enacted. From the participants’ responses, it was
apparent that through their awareness of trust-building as a continuous process, they wanted to come across as consistent and credible to the victim. One participant said for instance:

“… if she came to talk to you once, so make sure that you are always available for her to keep coming to you. Otherwise if she comes to you once, and the next time you ignore her she'll obviously feel betrayed, you know.”

This participant said that reinforcing one’s words with action conveys emotional security, which is crucial in interpersonal relationships, and this in turn would build trust between the two friends.

I will disclose details about myself to friend. Finally, disclosing intimate personal details to the friend was seen by some participants to be a means of building trust. The purpose of disclosure was to create common ground, and perceived similarity would help the recipient of the message to identify with the speaker. These participants referred to homophily, or similarity with the victim, as a way to influence the level of trust between them.

Communicating empathy. RQ5b asked how participants would communicate empathy to their friend. The question in the interview asked about communicating empathy was: What would you say to your friend to communicate empathy for her? The communicative practices that all fifteen participants reported that they would use in order to convey empathy fell into seven categories, presented in Table 4.9.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative Practice</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I state that I understand how she’s feeling</td>
<td>I can understand what you’re feeling like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I can understand where you’re coming from.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I explicate and/or validate her feelings</td>
<td>You're scared, I know that he's telling you this, and he's trying to make you afraid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How you’re feeling that things are not going well right now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I draw an analogy to my own experience</td>
<td>I would tell her about the situations that I've been through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I would probably try to think of some instances or situations where I may have felt powerless or that I was in a situation that I could not get out of.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I self-disclose my own feeling about the situation</td>
<td>I’m scared for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It makes me angry that anyone would do that to you because you don't deserve it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'm very sorry about the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I express confidence in friend’s positive attributes and instill hope</td>
<td>I also know that you are strong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>But you know that there's a way out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I express my desire for my friend</td>
<td>I would want to see you out of this dangerous situation as soon as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You just have to be … trust yourself and have the confidence to get up and find your way out of the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I offer to help</td>
<td>I will tell her that when she needs someone that I would be right there for her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want to do whatever I can to help you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9 Communicating empathy

*I will state that I understand how she’s feeling.* Several participants responded that they would communicate empathy to their friend by stating that they understand their friend’s emotional state. One participant said, “(I will tell her that) I completely understand what she’s going through.” These messages communicated participants’ awareness of the friend’s emotional state, and in doing so they acknowledged the friend’s feelings. Another participant stated, “When
she starts to say how she feels, I state that I completely understand.” This participant’s response highlighted reciprocity to the friend’s need for acknowledgment.

**I will explicate and/or validate her feelings.** Several participants said that they would explicate the friend’s feelings by giving her a reason for feeling this way. These responses illustrated perspective-taking as the participants showed their understanding of the friend’s perspective on the situation and her feelings. For instance, one participant said, “(I understand that) you're scared, I know that he's telling you this, and he's trying to make you afraid.” Her message reflected her ability to estimate the friend’s specific emotions. Moreover, she communicated her awareness also of the entire interactive process in which elements in the abusive partner’s communication caused the friend to feel that way. The message also demonstrates her empathy by showing her awareness of her friend succumbing to the partner’s attempts to scare her. One other participant said, “(I understand) you want things to work out with him.” This participant showed empathy by sensitively communicating the friend’s relationship goal with her abusive partner.

**I will draw an analogy to my own experience.** Some participants said that they would draw an analogy to their own experience to demonstrate their empathy. Some said that they would draw on their own experiences in abusive relationships to express their empathy. For instance, one participant said, “I would tell her about the situations that I've been through.” Another participant who has not been in an abusive situation said that she would acknowledge the limitation in her perspective for not having been a victim. All of these participants seemed to situate the content of their message in the context of their experiences or lack of experiences with domestic violence as a situation.
**I will self-disclose my own emotions about the situation.** Several participants reported that they would communicate empathy to their friends by disclosing their own emotions to their friends. These participants would express that they were sad and sorry about the situation their friend was in. Their communication contained instances of empathic concern for the friend. However, one participant’s response reflected how communicating feelings creates an emotional connection between the two interacting partners. She responded that she would say, “It makes me angry that anyone would do that to you because you don't deserve it.” In saying so, she disclosed her emotion (anger) in response to the situation, but also conveyed a strong emotional connection with her friend through her conviction that her friend did not deserve that treatment.

**I will express confidence in my friend’s positive attributes and instill hope.** One participant said that she would explicitly state her belief that the friend was strong. This participant would convey empathy by implying that she could imagine the emotional attribute that was required of the friend in the situation, and stating that she knew that the friend possessed that attribute. Another participant said that she was going to instill hope by stating, “But you know that there's a way out”. The participant hoped that her emphatic statement about hope would achieve empathy with the friend.

**I will express my desires for my friend.** Several participants said that clearly expressing their desires for their friend would communicate empathy. One participant said, “I would want to see you out of this dangerous situation as soon as possible.” Another said, “But you need to do what's better for you.” While the former response conveyed a direct desire on the part of the participant, the latter message communicated empathy through the participant’s acknowledgment that the friend had the freedom to decide what was best for her and the ability to do it. All responses in this category contained implicit references to the situation, as well as to the friend’s
possible feelings in the situation. This category was characterized by participants communicating
their empathy by explicitly stating that they wanted their friend to do something about the
situation

**I will offer to help.** Finally, several participants responded that they would state actions
that they would undertake for the friend in the situation, and also that they would offer to help
their friend out. One participant said, “I’m going to just listen to you,” while another said that she
would tell her that when she needs someone, “that I would be right there for her.” Their responses
carried the duality of their understanding of their friend’s need, first for support in order to
emerge out of the situation, and next that of a vocalized assurance of the support to feel secure in
their relationship with the participant.

Insights into the communication of empathy were also offered by responses to eight items
on empathy and four items on communicative responsiveness on the questionnaire that
participants filled out. Participants’ responses to items regarding their ability to take others’
perspective, concern for others and protective feeling toward others were uniform. Participants’
responses to the following items were more varied, with some responding that they agreed to the
statement, while others responding that they did not: “Other people’s misfortunes do not disturb
me”, “It occasionally embarrasses me when someone tells me their problems”, “I sometimes feel
helpless in the middle of a helpless situation”. When asked if they had the knack for saying the
right thing to make people feel better when they were upset, about half participants said that they
somewhat agreed. The other half either was not sure or agreed. Responses to the item “I usually
respond appropriately to the feelings and emotions of others” were also distributed, with some
participants agreeing, some responding that they somewhat agreed, while others were not sure.
Participants’ responses were also evenly distributed with regards to their perception of the effect
their behavior has on others (“Others view me as an empathic person”). While most people
agreed, three participants were not sure, and one somewhat agreed. Participants’ responses to the item “I’m the type of person who can say the right thing at the right time” was especially significant, as eight participants responded that they somewhat agreed. Two participants were not sure, while three participants either agreed or strongly agreed.

Results from the questionnaire highlighted the specificity of the context for the participants. Although participants responded unequivocally regarding the perspective-taking items, responses to the more context-relevant items were more varied. Responses to items regarding empathic concern in an unfortunate situation were varied. Responses in the interview regarding communicative practices and communication of empathy were less ambiguous than responses to questionnaire items. There was wider distribution of responses in the questionnaire regarding responsiveness to a situation.

Communicating self-efficacy. RQ4c asked how female friends would communicate self efficacy to the friend. At the interview the participants were asked whether they thought the friend had any control over her situation, and how they would communicate to her about that. Almost all participants mentioned at different times during the entire interview that the friend would have to figure out the situation herself and make a decision, thereby recognizing the need for self efficacy.

The most common reaction from participants was that one always has the option to leave. A few participants said that they were not sure, and a few other participants said that the friend might not be in a position to realize that she has control. Among participants who have friends in abusive relationships, one implied that she did not think her friend would be able to leave, while the other said that her friend was “making baby steps”. With regards to how they would communicate to the friend, all responses fell under two broad categories as shown in Table 4.10. Responses from all fifteen participants are accounted for in the table.
I will reaffirm my faith in her ability to take control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicative Practice</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will reaffirm my faith in her ability to take control</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>If you want to get out, you can. You have to make that choice. It may be scary and complicated, but you can turn things around.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will refer to contextual factors that will affect her motivation and/or ability to take control</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>There are lots of people who care about you. Come stay with me. Let’s work on finding what resources we can find for you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10. Communicating self-efficacy

I will reaffirm my faith in her ability to take control. Almost all participants used the words “have” to indicate control and “can” regarding the action of leaving. Participants said that they would emphasize the friend’s inner resources as the determining factor in her ability to leave. Participants said that they would tell their friends that she can leave if she wants to but that she has to make that choice. Most common responses were: “If you want to get help, you can”, “If you want to get out, you can”, “There are ways”, “You have to make that choice”, “Nothing is impossible, you’ll be fine”, “If you say that you want out, then you want out”, “You have the ability to get out”, “You’re a strong person, you just have to realize it in yourself”, “You deserve to be happy”, “There are lots of people who care about you” and ”Oh, you’re a smart and beautiful woman, you need to, you can take control”.

While most participants seemed to think that emphasizing on the friend’s inner resources would be useful, two participants elaborated on the reason they thought that was necessary. One participant’s response indicated her awareness of the effort required in the process of regaining control. She expressed her desire to craft her message in a way that would encourage the victim to make that effort. When asked how she would communicate this to her friend, she said, “Well, I
think it just goes back to the positive reinforcement, that they are better than what they are receiving, that tends to work with a lot of people when you tell them that they’re better than what they’re receiving. It makes them look at themselves and strive harder I think.”

One other way participants said they would communicate to their friend about her control was by comparing her control over herself against her control over the abuser. Four participants said that they would prefer to focus on the fact that the friend had control over her own action and no control over the abuser’s actions, and that he “was responsible for his actions.” One participant said, “…you just have to realize it in yourself that this is not acceptable, and that you have the power to change the situation. She can't change him, but she can change herself and her situation by getting out of it.” Through their communication these participants seem to want their friend to reclaim her own self by detaching it from her partner. This line of communication aims to persuade the friend to shift her concept of effective action from wanting to care for the need of the relational unit to wanting to take care of her autonomous needs.

I will refer to contextual factors that will affect her motivation and/or ability to take control. Some participants also mentioned that contextual factors like money, the presence of children, etc. would be pivotal in the victim’s sense of control in the situation and her willingness and ability to assume that control. Participants also felt that the support one felt around oneself would determine the decision to leave. One participant, for instance, felt that if the person is being entirely controlled by the abuser, then she has no control, but if she has “enough support to pull away” from him, then she can. Another participant said that one always has control in a situation, and “it will just take some support to tell her she can, that she will be able to leave.” When asked what she would tell her friend, she replied, “… you have resources and you have support, you have the legal system, like we can get you out of here.”
Summary

All participants recognized that trust as a condition in their relationship with a friend who may be a victim of domestic abuse can have direct effects on the success and failure of their relationship. Responses about communicating trust revealed that participants would engage in five practices of communicating trust, through which they seemed to want to achieve multiple types of relationship goals. They said that they would convey their availability and support to the friend, communicate in a non-judgmental manner with her, assure confidentiality, disclose details about themselves, and assure the friend of their continued support. Participants responded that they would convey empathy in several ways: by referring to their own experiences or lack of it to explain the extent or the limitation of their understanding of the friend’s situation, by validating their friend’s feelings, by disclosing their own emotions about the situation to the friend, by expressing their confidence in their friends’ positive attributes, and by assuring their friend of their availability. Participants said that they would communicate self-efficacy to the friend by reaffirming faith in her ability to take control, and also by reminding her of contextual factors that will empower her.

Messages Addressing Competing and Conflicting Aims

The former section reported on participants’ use of expressive and conventional message designs that they thought would be effective in addressing univalent aims, and also their responses regarding the communication of specific topoi of messages like trust, empathy and self efficacy. This section reports on complex communicative practices that would be used to manage multiple goals.

The complexity of the situation also generated competing goals for the participants as well as conflicts between their aims and obstacles they expected to face based on their context-
relevant beliefs about the friend’s wants and dilemmas. This made the conversational task complex for them. To this effect, RQ6 asked how participants would address these conflicts through the design of their messages. The question asked at the interview was: How would you communicate if there was a misunderstanding between you and your friend? However, I also analyzed responses throughout the interview that reflected participants’ efforts to address competing goals and conflicting goals and obstacles.

RQ7 asked what would be instances of highly person-centered messages that would help the abused friend in reappraising her reality. RQ7 also asked what instances of rhetorical messages that initiate movement toward a desired reality for both the conversational partners would be like.

Conversing with a battered friend seemed to be a constant negotiation of objectives and messages designed by participants carried this negotiation. Therefore, all fifteen participants were seen to adopt the following strategies as they deemed appropriate in the situation. When faced with competing goals and conflicts between aims and obstacles from the friend, participants reported using communicative practices that implemented the three techniques mentioned by O’Keefe and Delia (1982). Faced with the inherent face maintenance goal in the context of communicating with the friend, participants used politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

Selection. Some participants said that in dire circumstances they could see themselves prioritizing one aim over the other when the two competed with each other. One participant said that if there was proof that her friend was being abused, but she denied it over and over again, the participant would prioritize her relational goal over her valued identity goal of appearing supportive and tell the friend what needed to be said:

“… something is not right and I am really only wanting to do what is right for you, and if that means that you are going to be upset with me, then I’d have to say what I have to say, which is that something isn't right in the relationship, and that you shouldn't be treated that way …”
The participant was clear that at that point her preferred intent would be to convince the friend to acknowledge the abuse. The participant first strengthened her relational goal by mentioning that she was doing what she thought was necessary because of her care for her friend. She then showed her awareness of the threat her communication posed to her face as well as to their relationship by mentioning that the friend might be “upset” with her. She then explicitly selected one goal over another in reinforcing that she was willing to accept that. Her reference to the state of her friend’s relationship is an act of self-disclosure, but the fact that she mentions it in the context of the friend denying it, makes the act a bald-on-record face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

Some participants also said that it would sometimes be necessary to prioritize one’s instrumental goal of being able to help the friend over the more immediate goal of persuading her. As one participant mentioned:

“… you can't just badger people, sometimes if she just ignored what I was saying, sometimes you know you have to respect that at some point, maybe they’ll come back to you at some other time, or maybe they won't, but if you badger, if you react so strongly, you'd really scare people off and then you'll never have a chance to help them.”

By respecting her friend’s immediate need for silence, and choosing not to persuade her any further, this participant reports that she would prioritize her instrumental goal of eventually being able to help her friend. Similarly one other participant responded how she would prioritize her relational goal over her persuasive goal, “if she denies it, you know, then I might become even more aggressive, but if she starts to get angry, I might pull back and try to re-establish that, you know, I'm her friend, and that I'm worried for her and I want to help her.” The participant would therefore address the conflict between her own persuasive goal and the obstacle from her friend’s want of face maintenance by prioritizing a relational message strategy over the persuasive message strategy.
**Temporal or Behavioral Separation.** Some participants said that they would resolve the conflict between an aim they have and an obstacle that they anticipated facing by separating both the elements and placing them sequentially in their speech. For instance, one participant responded that she would tell her friend, “you know, I could be wrong, maybe I'm misinterpreting things, but I've noticed this, this and this, and I'm just concerned, you know that maybe you're in trouble … and you know I care about you, and I want to know if I can help.” In the sequence of her statement, the participant first redressed her face-threatening act with an apology. She then stated the signs she had seen as justifications for her talking on the subject. The first elements of her speech therefore addressed her identity needs of coming across as observant but unpresumptuous. She then stated her concern and her desire to help, expressing her relationship goal.

A few participants also mentioned the importance of a comfortable setting when broaching this rather uncomfortable subject. One participant said that she would take her friend out to dinner, while another mentioned that she would want to mention the topic while they would be “spending time alone in her house or my house watching a movie.” A few participants mentioned being friendly and supportive non-verbally when asking questions or making persuasive statements. Their messages were thus separated “into different components of a message display,” (O'Keefe & Delia, 1982, p. 58), and each component (verbal and non-verbal) expressed a different objective.

**Integration.** Several participants spoke of situations where they could see themselves integrating two conflicting goals like maintaining face and seeking information, for instance, by making a request “off record” (Brown & Levinson, 1978). One participant said for instance, “if I thought that something was going on, I might ask a couple of questions about their relationship, so how would your partner respond if you did xyz, how angry do they get if this were to happen
…” She said that this indirect question would be her strategy of maintaining face and at the same
time asking a question that she hoped would elicit relevant information. She thus compromised
her aim of clear communication and attempted to ask a question “off record”.

One other strategy that participants were seen to use to integrate conflicting aims and
obstacles was synthesizing, or creating a message that addressed both the aim and the obstacle
(O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). For instance, a few participants designed persuasive messages that
emphasized advantages to the friend. One participant said that in trying to persuade her friend
who is in an abusive relationship, she tells her friend, “you need to get out of this situation, you
have to do this for you, you have to do this for the kids.” In her effort to persuade her friend,
she anticipates an obstacle from her friends’ want of not being thwarted. She therefore creates a
message that mentions the friend’s children, who are important to her. Thus, within the same
message, she advances her persuasive aim and also removes a possible obstacle to consent.

**Participants’ use of politeness strategies.** In addition to the techniques mentioned
above, most participants were seen to be concerned about maintaining their own face with the
friend, and also aware of the bald-on-record face-threatening act that they were conducting by
asking questions about the situation or making request to the friend or persuading her to leave the
situation. This was explicitly stated by a participant, “I guess with a friend you just want to make
sure that there is a sign before overstepping your bounds. “ This statement reflected the
participant’s conflict between the support and the face maintenance goals. Several participants
redressed the face-threatening acts by adopting several positive and negative politeness strategies
(Brown& Levinson, 1978). These are presented in Table 4.11.
## Politeness Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Politeness Strategy</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Assert or presuppose knowledge of and concern for friend’s wants</td>
<td>1) You know, you don't deserve to be in this, you deserve to be happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Include both self and friend in the activity</td>
<td>2) Let’s get you out of here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Give gifts to friend (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)</td>
<td>3) I am concerned about things that I am seeing that are making you less like my friend than before.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Politeness Strategy</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Be pessimistic</td>
<td>1) You maybe don't want to hear this, (but) this is the helpline phone number.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Minimize the imposition</td>
<td>2) I just want to make sure that you’re okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) State the FTA as a general rule</td>
<td>3) No one has to take this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11. Politeness strategies adopted by participants to redress on-record FTA

### Summary

All fifteen participants were seen to use message strategies that used selection, temporal separation and integration to address competing aims or conflicts between aims and obstacles. In order to redress the bald-on-record face-threatening acts of asking questions, making requests or advising, they also used negative and positive politeness strategies.

### Person-centered Message and Rhetorical Message

RQ7 asked about instances of a highly person-centered message and rhetorical messages in the communication. This section presents findings on such instances.

Existing research on domestic violence has highlighted that victims often feel powerless and isolated in their relationships. They often think that they are alone in their ordeal. To this
effect, I interpreted a highly person-centered message as one that helps them reappraise the situation by placing it in a broader perspective (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998), and imparting a sense of belonging to the victim.

Research on victims of domestic violence has also found that they lose control and power in their romantic relationship. This can influence their friendships as well, making them embarrassed to express their concerns or their needs to friends, and hindering the equality in it. The concept of a rhetorical message would thus be one that reconstructs the context for both the victim as well as the friend (O'Keefe, 1988) by reestablishing equality. Such a message would accomplish reciprocating to the victim’s blatant need as well as intuitively fulfilling her subdued needs.

**Person-centered message.** In responding to how she would communicate empathy to her friend, one participant, who mentioned nothing in the interview regarding her experience (or lack thereof) with abuse, said:

“I would probably try to think of some instances or situations where I may have felt powerless or that I was in a situation that I could not get out of … that I would try to relate in that sense, even if it wasn't physical violence situation, I might talk about maybe a bad relationship or something like that, to try and convey the message that most people, if not all of us, have been in situations where we didn’t feel like we could get out of the situation, that we were pretty much stuck, in that I was trying to provide some kind of testimony or speech to my own past experiences of being able to get out of a difficult situation I thought I could not get out of.”

The participant expressed her intuitive sense that her friend may feel isolated and believe that no one would understand her unique situation. The participant emphasized that domestic violence is similar to any human condition that thwarts one’s self efficacy and sense of hope, thereby achieving true common ground with the friend. Her message is highly person-centered, since it transcends situation-specific constraints to refer to universal human experience, and in doing so, helps the friend reappraise her reality. The message also captures the personal nuances
of the situation for the friend. It is interesting to note how the participant crafts her message around her own experience, but it reflects her absolute awareness of the friend’s feelings. Her person-centered act also projects her vision and hope for the friend in that she implies to her friend that she was able to emerge from the constricting situation, and so will she.

In response to her thoughts on self-efficacy, one participant said:

I don't know if I'd use the word control, but I think I would say you know that you deserve to be happy and you don't deserve to be mistreated and that you can turn things around … instead of saying that you have control over this, I might say you don't have to take this, you deserve better treatment … it may be scary, it may be complicated to figure out how to get out of this, but you don't have to let things continue the way they are. I think I would put it that way rather than saying that you've got to realize that you have control over the situation, because probably somebody who is in a relationship like that, I'd be very surprised if they felt like they had any control whatsoever, so I'm not sure that they could even hear that.

This participant showed a deep awareness of the powerlessness inherent in the predicament of a victim of intimate partner abuse. Her decision not to use the word “control” because “I'm not sure that they could even hear that” is an instance of a highly person-centered message. Her reasoning for using positive messages that would gently but surely uplift the friend’s self-confidence shows her sensitive awareness of the need to not be forceful with victims of violence.

Person-centeredness was also measured by three items on the questionnaire. These measured participants’ views on telling their friend to leave the situation as a solution to the problem. Participants unanimously agreed that they would look for a solution readily if a friend told them about a problem, if a friend mentioned being abused they would give her their opinion and want her to take their advice, and if a friend told them about being abused, they would respond by telling her to leave. These findings were in contrast with findings from the interview
in which participants revealed concerns regarding the effect of such clarity on the friendship. Responses on the questionnaire were less varied.

**Rhetorical messages.** In answering the question about the communication of trust, friends showed an awareness of the victim’s inability to trust others. Most responses regarding the communication of trust followed the expressive message design logic through the expression of participants’ feelings, as well as conventional message design logic in assuring context-relevant support and confidentiality. In communicating how she would build trust with her friend, one participant was notably seen to be more rhetorical in her ability to anticipate her friend’s face need for autonomy regarding the sharing of her story:

“… I guess that I wouldn't share her secret with just anyone and there it just might lead to a discussion about who I think would be the … who should hear that. And then we go down the entire … trying to wheeze a way out of the mistrust that's initially there from being in something so vile…Initially that’s going to throw up a red flag like who are you going to tell my big secret to? … (I would tell her that) it depends on who she felt she could trust the secret with…”

Through her message the participant showed her awareness of the friend’s face concerns, resulting from the dichotomy inherent in domestic violence as a situation. While it is attractive as a subject for gossip, there is also a social stigma attached to victims of domestic violence. Consequently, the predicament of the victim becomes accessible to the outside world, and yet she cannot make a connection with anyone (Rose et al., 2000). This participant is aware of the friend’s concern that she would now be talked about (“Who are you going to tell my big secret to?”), and the helplessness that results from that. The participant is also aware of the mistrust that her friend would enter the conversational context with that would make it difficult for her to trust the participant. Her conventional response would have been to say she would not tell anyone (confidentiality is a conventional dimension of trust), which would have restored the friend’s trust. Instead, she endorses the friend’s autonomy by asking her friend who she wanted her story
to be shared with. This created a desired reality for the two friends where the abused friend is not a subject of gossip, but can actively determine who the helper friend’s converses with about her.

One other participant stated that she envisioned building trust and making connections with her friend by disclosing intimate details about herself.

I think what I normally do in those situations is tear a piece of myself and tell them something, you know, give something, a piece of information that I’m entrusting them with, to show them that I trust them.

However, self-disclosure for this participant established the mutuality of the relationship in that trust was not only seen as a condition that is constant in a relationship, or a commodity that is given by one to another. It is seen to be enacted through the communication between the two parties. This participant said that she would build trust not by claiming that she was trustworthy, but by making the friend feel trustworthy. In the way she mentioned “entrusting” her friend with a piece of information from her personal life, she thus seemed to be achieving the aligning action of communication. She perceived the need of her friend to feel secured and equally active and powerful in the relationship, and thereafter fit her disclosure with this need. Moreover, her message conveys how both their lines of action (trusting) are fitted together and moves forward in a successful way, reflecting the mutuality of relational communication. Her reference to her own vulnerability in entrusting the friend with her secret initiates movement toward a desired reality for them, in which the abusive condition is transcended and they are on equal ground.

In the context of the initial communication, one participant said, “I think that women who are being abused are, even though we know that it goes on a lot, are still very ashamed of it. That’s why a lot of times you have to draw it out a little bit, you can’t just expect them to tell you.” When asked how she would “draw out” communication from the friend, the participant mentioned that she would use silence strategically, “one thing that really works with people is if you give them a little time, and you know you say something and they say something back and you just let there be a little silence and give them a little time to talk. Sometimes you just need
even just a few seconds, sometimes if you’re silent then you can convey maybe that you know that there's more to be said.” The participant’s use of silence establishes the collaborative act of communication, as it highlights the congruity between her friend’s need and her reciprocation. However, the communicative act through which she crafts a preemptive response to a need, which by its nature is unuttered, conveys a deep respect for the friend, and is an instance of a rhetorical message. The message accentuates relational communication as not merely a process of expression and reciprocation, but as the creation of joint realities. In the delicate and fragile environment for a victim of intimate partner abuse, this aligning enactment of communication is especially meaningful.

**Summary**

In sum, participants adopted several message strategies to address competing goals and conflict between their goal and obstacles from the friend. They selected one message over another, separated different message components sequentially into the structure of the message, and integrated two goals into one message. There were some instances of highly person-centered messages that would help the friend reappraise her situation. Some participants also designed rhetorical messages that reconstructed reality and initiated a movement toward a desired context through the joint action of communication.

**IV. Communication Skills and Training**

The final sub-section reports on specific communication skills for training that participants thought they would benefit from. The final research questions on skills and training asked what skills participants would report using the most in this context and what skills they would want training in. In the interview participants were first asked about their thoughts on listening and advising skills, and also their overall thoughts on what skills they thought people needed the most in order to communicate effectively with a friend in an abusive relationship.
Participants were then given a description of competent communicators (Burleson, 2007) and asked about their thoughts on the description. They were also asked which skills from the conception were relevant to them and they wanted to be trained in to better communicate with a friend in an abusive relationship.

This section is divided into two parts. The first part reports on participants’ thoughts on listening and advising skills. The following section includes participants’ thoughts on skills that they would want training in. This section also reports on specific training practices that participants recommended that would empower them to communicate with a friend who is in an abusive relationship.

In this section, I present participants’ thoughts on listening and advising in this context.

Table 4.12 lists participants’ responses on listening skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Responses on listening</th>
<th>Example of messages conveying intent of listen</th>
<th>Action during listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>- Listening is very important, sharing with someone helps.</td>
<td>- I want you to talk and I will only listen.</td>
<td>- I will let them talk uninterrupted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- I'm just here to listen, so whatever you want to say, I'm here.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationship</td>
<td>- Listening builds trust.</td>
<td>- I won’t judge you, you can tell me anything.</td>
<td>- I will be a sounding board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimizing</td>
<td>- Listening makes a person feel like their voice matters, they are being heard.</td>
<td>- I want you to know that your feelings are very important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information-gathering</td>
<td>- Listening will help me understand the full situation.</td>
<td>- I want you to tell me what is going on.</td>
<td>I’d wait for a pause and then pose a question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- I want to understand what’s going on.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.12. The use of listening skills and the messages to communicate intent to listen
Listening

Most participants thought that listening is very important in the situation. Participants responded that they would communicate to their friend their intent to listen to her without judging her. Several participants said that being available for the friend and listening to her without judging builds trust and consolidates the relationship. One participant said for instance, “I would let her know that I was genuinely open to hear anything she had to say and not there to judge her.” A few participants said that listening also legitimizes the friend’s concerns and makes her feel that she is being heard, which is key in this situation. One participant who has a friend in an abusive relationship said, “They’re probably in a situation that they’re not being heard, especially by their husbands or boyfriend, so they might feel that their voice doesn’t matter. And so I think that it's even more important to listen.”

Several participants said that they would want to listen to their friend uninterrupted. They would pay attention and look out for cues in order to ask questions. A few of them said that they would only ask questions when the friend paused. One participant said,

“A lot of times people would get in conversations too quickly because they don't want silence to happen and they won’t give the other person a chance to talk… Sometimes you can make kind of a guess, if they seem like they’re really embarrassed, “I know that it must be hard for you but I think that this is really a good thing for you to talk about it now, I'm not going to repeat it to anybody,” and that can kind of encourage the other person.”

For this participant, listening silently to the friend was important, as it urges the person to continue to talk. She elaborated that it was important to look out for cues about the friend’s discomfort in talking, and offer assurance and encouragement.

Participants seemed to believe that non-judgmental listening would serve the support and relationship goal of assuring the friend of one’s availability and support. A few participants also felt that listening builds trust and this is key in the context. For several participants, listening well to the friend would also give them a better perspective into a friend’s situation and this would
help them in communicating with her well. For these participants listening well prepared them to design person-centered messages for the friend.

Listening was also measured by ten items on the questionnaire. Participants agreed that they are non-judgmental, active listeners. However, most participants responded that they were not sure about the following two items: “I focus on the logic of the ideas rather than on the emotional meaning of the message” and “I generally remain silent and take in what the other person is saying.” The response to the first item was consistent with responses in the interview that participants would also look for emotional messages expressed by the friends. The latter response however was interesting, since it showed that participants were not sure that they would not speak to the victim while also listening to her. This was contradictory to participants’ responses that they would just listen and not talk while the friend spoke.

**Advising**

Participants were next asked if they would advise their friend in this situation. Most participants said that they thought they were not trained to advise, and therefore would not do so. A few participants said that they would offer suggestions, but some of these participants said that they would also tell the friend that this was their opinion. A few participants said that advice does not help as it is one more person telling them what to do. One participant said for instance, “Advice says I know what’s going on and you don’t.” This participant and a few others were concerned about the friend’s negative face want (Brown & Levinson, 1967), and wanted to make their friend feel that it was her decision. One participant said in this regard that she would first ask her friend if she wanted advice and respond accordingly. This concern was confirmed by a participant who has a friend in an abusive relationship. While discussing advice she said that advising her friend shut her down, so she stopped giving advice. One participant said that since she herself has been in an abusive relationship, her advice helps her battered friend. One other
participant said that mere advising would not help, “something more than advice is needed.” Several participants said that they would advise their friend to get professional help like counseling.

**Recommendations for Training**

In this section I present findings from participants’ responses when asked what skills they would need training in. Responses from all fifteen participants to the question about skills that they thought they would benefit from obtaining training in were categorized into two broad categories: training in addressing a single goal, and training in achieving multiple goals through a message. The findings for the first category are summarized in Table 4.13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Communicative Practice</th>
<th>Skill necessary to be trained in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental Task</td>
<td>Getting her out of the situation.</td>
<td>How to help them find a way to leave. How to get results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information-gathering</td>
<td>Understanding the situation.</td>
<td>How to recognize signs. How to understand the context of the situation. How to read between the lines. What might be her reasons for staying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face</td>
<td>Not threatening her face.</td>
<td>What you should not say.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Offering esteem support</td>
<td>How to encourage and support her. How to be sensitive. How to make her feel she’s not alone, she has support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>How to build her self esteem. How to listen empathically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
<td>Informing her about resources</td>
<td>What/where the resources are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive</td>
<td>Persuading her</td>
<td>How to make her realize the danger. How to advise her to seek professional help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.13. Participants’ recommendations for training in skills that address univalent aim
Training in skill to achieve univalent aim. While some participants recommended training on the content and timing of an effective message, others thought that people need training in skills that would help them connect to the friend better. Participants focused on emotional support skills, persuasive skills, informative skills and information-gathering skills. These skills were related to specific goals that participants wished to achieve through their communication with the friend. Several participants wanted training that would help them understand the friend’s situation better, for instance, what the stages of an abusive relationship are and what the process of leaving is like for a victim. One participant for instance said:

I would imagine that you would start off adding to your knowledge base about this problem, you’d want to learn about what the experience of victims of abuse is like... what are they up against. And I would want to learn, something about the process that a victim of domestic violence of abuse needs to go through in order to let go of that relationship and be willing to make changes and to take the risks that would be involved in doing that.

This participant felt that being trained in the details of the situation and what it is like for the friend would enable her to help her friend better. She thought that this would help her design a person-centered message that would achieve her instrumental goal of talking to the friend about the need for a change in her situation. Several others mentioned that they would prefer to have training in how to design person-centered messages that were appropriate to the friend.

While some participants wanted training in instrumental task skills like getting the friend out of the situation, several participants responded that training in how to be supportive and sensitive would be most beneficial. A few participants also stated that they would want training in what they should not say to their friend. The implicit goal was to avoid conducting a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1978).
Training in skill to achieve competing goals. For most participants, training in a single skill would be helpful in enabling them to communicate effectively with a friend in an abusive relationship. Some participants, however, wanted training in addressing multiple, competing goals. These participants explicitly stated the conflict in the communicative act and wanted training to address this. These responses are presented in Table 4.14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflicting goals</th>
<th>Recommendations for training in skills to address conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiate conversation vs. Face maintenance</td>
<td>How to say something without making her feel like she’s doing something wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate conversation vs. Relationship</td>
<td>How to broach the topic without alienating her or putting friendship in jeopardy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support vs. Face</td>
<td>Try and let them know what you’re trying to say, say that you want to help them, but you also want them to go along with their help as well</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.14. Participants’ recommendations for training in skills to manage multiple goals

A few participants said that communicating with a friend about this topic would pose threat to several other goals that were present in the situation. The conflict between their perceived objectives was apparent in their responses and they recommended training in skills to address this conflict effectively.

Specific training activities. Some participants gave details of training practices that they thought would help women to understand domestic violence as a situation better and subsequently enable them to help a friend. One participant said that it would help to engage people in role-playing activities, “very much like this interview, putting us on the spot and saying
how would you approach this situation … with someone who's trained in this kind of thing and then you could review the conversation and see here is maybe what you could improve on.”

Another participant said that trainings should include survivors discussing “what helped them, and what they would’ve wanted somebody to do…what they would have done differently” and it would also help “if this could also be done with friends, like a support group kind of thing”. A few participants said that trainings should “just have a lot of different contexts presented, because there are so many different circumstances and stages of abuse.” One participant said that training should go beyond friendship to include identification and intervention strategies for anyone so that they are able to help a victim.

**Summary**

Participants responded that listening was very important in this situation as it helps to understand the situation better and also communicates emotional support to the friend. Participants felt that advising, on the other hand, rarely helps, as it can threaten the friend’s autonomy and can alienate the friend. Most participants said that they were untrained to advise the friend and some said that they would advise the friend to seek professional help.

Participants responded that they needed training in specific skills like communicating support, identifying and sharing information and persuading the friend out of the situation. Some participants shared their apprehension about conflicting goals like persuasive and relationship and communication and face maintenance that they thought might arise in the context. They expressed the need for training in being able to manage these goals
Chapter 5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand a friend’s conception of communication with a victim of intimate partner abuse, and the context-relevant beliefs and situated objectives that are reflected in communication. In this chapter, I present my findings from the fifteen interviews I conducted. I first summarize the findings from the research questions. I then discuss their significance in relation to theory and research. I then identify limitations of the study. In the third section I discuss implications and contributions of the study and suggest possible directions for future research.

I. Summary of Findings

In this section I summarize findings from the study. Findings are presented in four parts. In the first part I discuss participants’ conception of the initial conversation with the friend as a microcosm that captured the conflicts and dilemmas faced by them. In the next part I discuss participants’ context-relevant beliefs. The third part discusses the conflicting objectives that participants would have in this situation. The final part summarizes communicative practices adopted by the participants that reflected and advanced their beliefs and aims. Throughout the presentation of findings, I link them to existing research.

RQ1 asked about the initial conversation between a victim of abuse and a friend. Participants’ dilemmas regarding the initiation of the communication with the friend seemed to capture the dichotomies inherent in the context. Participants expressed that they would be concerned for the friend and wonder about her safety and well-being. However, they would be hesitant to initiate talk with her or speak directly, because self-disclosing feelings and suggestions
regarding the friend’s relationship could pose a threat to their friendship. Participants also said that they were concerned about losing face by making an assumption about the abuse and being wrong about it. Therefore, they would want to wait until there were definite signs of abuse. Most participants said that they would broach the topic very carefully by designing off-record face-threatening acts like general and indirect questions about the friend’s well-being and her romantic relationship. They would cite the signs of abuse as the reason for these questions. Participants would also wait for the friend to initiate conversation or to continue it once they initiated it.

Participants were concerned about their own positive face want of being seen as supportive, and yet could not decide upon a suitable way of communicating support to the friend without conducting a face-threatening act. Participants also reported that they would be concerned for her friend and would want her out of the situation, and yet they would not want to come across as domineering. From the responses it was clear that in most cases there would be a significant delay in the initial communication as participants waited for evidence to explain their conversational initiative.

RQ2 asked about participants’ context-relevant beliefs. Participants had six context-relevant beliefs. They had beliefs regarding domestic violence as a situation, like its danger, unpredictability, and volatility. They had situated beliefs about the effect of domestic violence on the friend, like isolation, compromise and control. They had beliefs about reasons why the friend was staying in the abusive relationship, and these included contextual factor beliefs like monetary dependence, marital status, presence of children, and lack of a social network. Finally, participants had beliefs about the friend’s dilemmas and face issues that might influence the friend’s ability and willingness to talk about the relationship. Participants believed, among other things, that the friend might be in denial, might defend the abuser, might feel guilty for wanting to stay with him, and might want her friends to have a good impression of her.
RQ3 asked about friends’ multiple aims and how they competed with each other and conflicted with victims’ wants. Multiple situated aims were evident from participants’ responses regarding their approach to the situation. Identity, relationship and persuasive goals became the instrumental task objective at some point for participants. For instance, the instrumental goal for some participants was to get the friend out of the situation. For others, maintaining the relationship with the friend and keeping the line of communication open was the instrumental goal. Participants reported wanting to be supportive of the friend, wanting to appear non-judgmental, and wanting to persuade the friend out of the situation.

Conflicts within participants’ own goals and that between participants’ goals and obstacles from the friends were apparent from participants’ responses. Participants wanted to support the friend without appearing interfering and imposing. Participants also said that although they understood constraints that the friend had, they would still want to persuade her to get out of the situation. However, they would not want to alienate her in the process, as that would not only hurt their friendship, but it would also signal the loss of all future opportunities of helping the friend. Several participants said that their instrumental goal of getting the friend out of the situation would be in conflict with their relationship goal of showing concern for her.

Participants’ context-relevant beliefs regarding the friend’s conflicts also made them anticipate several obstacles from the friend that would be in conflict with their objectives. For instance, many participants said that the persuasive goal of getting the friend out of the situation was crucial; however, the friend may not yet be ready for the change and may have the negative face want of not being impeded. This negative face want was also in conflict with participants’ support goal. Participants were especially apprehensive regarding this possibility, as they could be the only person the abused friend talked to, and they wanted to adopt any means to continue being available for the friend.
Friends’ responses to RQ4, which was regarding communicative practices used, showed that they viewed communicating in the context as a constant act of negotiation. Friends used communicative practices that expressed their relationship, support, persuasive and face goals. Friends gave consistent responses across what they would and would not say to address these singular goals. In response to RQ5a, friends reported that they would communicate trust by assuring confidentiality, consistent and continuing availability, building common ground, and disclosing personal information to the friend. Communication of empathy, which was asked in RQ5b, would be through validation of the friend’s feelings, self-disclosure of participant’s own feelings about the situation and desires for the friend, reference to own situation, and offer of help. Friends would communicate self efficacy (RQ5c) by referring to the friend’s positive attributes, and also the contextual factors that would ensure that she exercised control over her situation.

In response to RQ6, friends’ responses showed that they designed messages that served multiple goals based on their interpretation of the complex situation. While friends used off-record face-threatening acts to initiate the conversation, they redressed their face-threatening act (for many participants the act of communication in this context itself was a face-threatening act) with positive and negative politeness strategies. In order to negotiate multiple competing aims and conflicts between their aims and the victim’s wants used multiple strategies like selection, temporal separation and integration (O’Keefe, 1982) and positive and negative politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1978).

RQ7 asked about instances of highly person-centered as well as rhetorical messages. While most friends used conventional design logics to communicate with the friend (O’Keefe, 1988), some participants designed highly person-centered messages (Burleson, 1987) that would help the friend reappraise her situation (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998). Some participants also designed rhetorical messages (O’Keefe, 1988) that demonstrated their deep understanding of the
friend’s unexpressed needs. These messages would recreate the context for the friend and initiate movement toward a desired reality for the participant and her friend (O’Keefe, 1988).

With regards to RQ8 and RQ9, participants mentioned that listening was a necessary communication skill in the context, while advising from an untrained friend, would be unhelpful. With regards to training in skills that would empower women to better communicate with victims of domestic abuse, participants said that they needed training in identification of warning signs of abuse, in complexities of the situation for the victim, as well as in multiple goal management through message design. These desire of and recommendations for training confirmed participants’ discomfort with belief and goal complexities and how messages could be used to negotiate these complexities.

From the results it was apparent that communication between a victim of abuse and her friend is a constant and often extemporaneous negotiation of beliefs and objectives. Participants’ complex beliefs about the situation as well as about the inner state of their interaction partner created conflicts in their phenomenal field. On the one hand they saw the situation as extremely dangerous, warranting immediate intervention, while on the other hand, they anticipated facing multiple obstacles from the friend due to her dilemma and face wants. Moreover, participants often expected to improvise on their message strategies in keeping with the recognition that the situation is extremely volatile and unpredictable, and wants and needs of the friend may change suddenly. This was also apparent in participants’ recommendation for training in communication skills that they saw as being helpful in addressing multiple conflicting objectives.

II. Significance of Findings

The findings from this study corroborate and contradict existing research on domestic violence, and also cater to gaps in existing literature. In doing so, this study also provides possible explanations for discrepancies among findings from lines of research.
Findings Corroborating and Extending Current Research

Participants’ beliefs about domestic violence as a situation, as well as about its effects on the inner state of the victim were aligned with existing research. Research on the effects of domestic abuse on a victim’s mental well being has examined how abuse makes her fearful (Smith et al., 1995), isolated (Rose et al., 2000), confused (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983) and emotionally dependent on the abuser (Smith et al., 1995; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983). Participants also responded that the abuse will hurt a friend’s self esteem, and this was supported by research (Coker et al., 2003). Participants also said that situations where one intimate partner is being abused by the other rarely improve as the abusive partner always finds a reason and a context for abuse, and the isolated and confused victim needs time to make sense of the abuse, while being subjected to it (Liang et al., 2005; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995).

Participants mentioned that several contextual and emotional state factors could account for a victimized friend’s decision to remain in her abusive relationship. She may be married to the abuser, financially dependent on him, and may have children with him. Scholars examining why women stay in abusive relationships have found that contextual factors like marital status and having children with the abuser strengthens a woman’s sense of investment in the relationship, making it difficult for her to leave (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). Research has also found that being in a committed relationship and having a family contributes to the moral conflict women face regarding leaving (Belknap, 1999). Ironically, scholars have found that contextual factors like number of children and marital status influence responses from the members of one’s social network (Goodkind et al., 2003). Participants stated that emotional factors like a victim’s belief that she deserves the abuse and also does not have a better alternative for it also accounts for her decision to stay in the relationship. Research has found that apprehension about alternatives is a reason why women stay in their abusive relationships (Rusbult & Martz, 1995).
Participants also believed that the friend may be conflicted about her situation, and may be attached to the abuser and want the relationship to improve. Research has found that often victims of abuse are emotionally attached to the abuser (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995) and they yearn for the relationship to improve (Smith et al., 1995). Some participants said that a victim’s indecision regarding the relationship may be due to the time it takes for her to make sense of the abuse. Scholars examining the process of leaving for victims of intimate partner abuse have suggested that victims experience an abusive relationship in stages (Dinemann et al., 2002; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983), and their way of making sense of the abuse and coping with it is a continual conflicting process (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Ulrich, 1998). Several participants revealed that this confusion and indecision on the friend’s part may indicate that she may not want pressure from friends to leave the situation. Researchers have found that participants are dissatisfied with responses that dictate them to leave the situation (Goodkind et al., 2003; Ulrich, 1998). Some participants also expressed that the victim’s face concerns can cause her not to disclose the abuse to her friends, especially since they may be in happy relationships.

Participants’ responses that their lack of personal experience with domestic abuse could prevent them from having a complete understanding of the situation confirmed this apprehension on the victim’s part. Researchers have found that victims of domestic abuse feel more comfortable seeking support from women in their social network who have themselves been victims (Levendosky et al., 2004).

Existing research on domestic violence provides an extensive examination of the complexities inherent in the situation for the victim (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). The victim’s experience of abuse (Dinemann et al., 2002; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Liang et al., 2005; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995) and help-seeking behavior (Dunham & Senn, 2000; El-Bassel et al., 2001), as well as perceived social support (Goodkind et al., 2003; Rose et al., 2000; Tan et al., 1995; Ulrich, 1998) have been studied. However, existing research has disproportionately focused
Researchers examining social support for victims of domestic abuse have rarely studied members of the victims’ social networks. This study extends existing research since its findings have been from the perspective of the provider of support. Moreover, this research has studied female friends, providers of social support whom victims report being more comfortable with (Rose et al., 2000; Tan et al., 1995). This study thus extends two lines of research. First, it extends the line of research on victims’ experience of abuse and help-seeking behavior by providing evidence that friends have an understanding of the multifarious effects of domestic abuse on the victims, their subsequent dilemmas, and the resultant help-seeking behavior.

Second, the study offers a possible explanation of the line of research on the positive effects of social support by confirming the willingness of friends in providing it. Research examining the direct as well as buffering effects of social support has found that positive social support helps reduce the impact of intimate partner abuse on victims’ mental health and help victims develop coping skills (Carlson et al., 2002; Coker et al., 2002; Coker et al., 2003). Researchers have urged support providers to focus on women’s strengths, as that will help raise their self esteem and help them regain control of their lives (Goodkind et al., 2003; Ulrich, 1989, 1998). The participants in this study had an understanding of the needs and wants of the victim, and they explicitly stated their aims to offer support. Their aim was also to persuade the victim to leave the situation by highlighting their confidence in her strength and ability, and they did not want to advise or dictate her to leave or stay in the relationship. They also recognized the victim’s face want of not being constrained. These findings about the goals of friends provide strong supportive evidence to research findings on the dimensions of support from supportive networks (Bosch & Bergen, 2006).
Findings Discrepant with Current Research

Findings from this study were discrepant on the line of existing research that reports on the unsupportive behavior of members of victims’ social networks. Victims have reported being dictated to either leave the situation (Goodkind et al., 2003) or stay in the relationship and endure the abuse (Rose et al., 2003). Unsupportive members of their social networks have been seen to blame, question or dismiss the needs of victims (Bosch & Bergen, 2006). They have been found to reduce the complexities inherent in an abusive relationships by defining it by the violence, and prescribed solutions to the victims (Lempert, 1997). Victims also report members of their social network condoning the violence by helping them look presentable (Ulrich, 1998). The present study contradicted these findings. Although many participants stated that they would want to see the victim leave the relationship, they also said that they would be careful in persuading her. Moreover, participants demonstrated an awareness of messages they would design to express support, cater to the victim’s face want, and offer information and resources.

New Findings

This study had several new findings that are significant for domestic violence research as well as research on message design in complex situations. Researchers have studied the complexity in a victim’s situation (Belknap, 1999) and her experience of abuse (Dienemann et al., 2002; Liang et al., 2005; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). Several researchers have studied the reasons for which an abused woman stays in her relationship (Mills, 1985; Rusbult & Martz) as well as her experience with help-seeking (Lempert, 1997) and the process of leaving (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). However, the complexities of the providers’ situations have not been studied. Despite reports from victims that providers of support often do not want to get involved (Goodkind et al., 2003) or they are uncomfortable in hearing about the abuse (Bosch & Bergen, 2006), the reasons for this reluctance or discomfort has not been
investigated. The link between providers’ beliefs about the need, possibility and helpfulness of intervening with an abused woman has been seen to predict the behavioral intention of doing so; however, the belief did not predict actual behavior (Nabi et al., 2002). This study investigated the complexities inherent in the situation from the perspective of the friends, filling a significant gap in research. This study found that the friend has complex beliefs and objectives, and designs messages that address these complexities.

**Belief-complexity and goal complexity.** The complexity in the friends’ situation was apparent in the dichotomies in their beliefs, and the goals they formed based on these beliefs. Friends believed that domestic violence was a dangerous, unpredictable, volatile and irreparable situation with several implications for the victim’s mental health, well-being, and self esteem. These shaped their instrumental task objective of persuading the victim to leave the situation.

Their aim was also to support the victim. The simultaneity of these two aims for the friends not only made the goals compete, but the nature of the context made them collide with each other, in that persuading the victim was not possible without alienating her. The friends were also concerned about losing face by broaching the topic with the victim and being proven wrong. At the same time, they wanted to provide support. Thus, their face maintenance goal competed with their support goal.

Moreover, the friends’ belief about the victim’s dilemma in the situation sensitized them to obstacles that they anticipated facing in the realization of their aims. Their belief about the victim’s face wants was in conflict with their persuasive goal. They considered conversing about the topic a face-threatening act, and in the given circumstances, maintaining the victim’s face was a situated objective that collided with other situated objectives of being supportive or persuasive (O’Keefe, 1988). Multiple goal management in persuasive situations (O’Keefe & Shepherd, 1987) and supportive situations (Goldsmith, 1992, 1994, 2004) have considered face wants as a
situated objective. The instrumental task objective of persuasion was also problematic, in that it could be seen as achievable only at the cost of a possible threat to the relationship. Scholars have argued that the relationship between interactants would influence the design of rejection messages (Saeki & O’Keefe, 1994). Relationship maintenance is a situated objective in any interaction between friends. However, friends in this study seemed to believe that disruption of the relationship was not only undesirable, but also functionally unhelpful, as it would interfere with future opportunities to help the friend. Thus relationship maintenance would also offer possible opportunities for persuasion; but the conflict between relationship and persuasion goals was dominant for the friends.

Face concerns for both the self and other caused the friends to wait for proof to initiate conversation, causing significant delay in intervention. Friends seemed to struggle with the conflicting and competing goals within themselves, and the conflict between their goals and anticipated obstacles from the victims in subsequent conversations as well. They often expressed desire to trade one goal off for another, but this caused significant discomfort as many of these goals were equally instrumental and situated for them.

**Message design.** Messages that participants designed addressed individual goals in being supportive, identity-related, relationship-related, and persuasive. Messages that addressed single goals were also consistent for what one would say and would refrain from saying. Messages that reflected friends’ recognition of the complexity of the situation addressed multiple goals.

In this study friends were seen to adopt three message strategies that addressed competing aims and conflicting aims and objectives. When they traded off one goal for another, they used selection, or the prioritization of one message strategy over another. Friends’ use of selection, however, was unusually strategic in this study. Selection as a message design strategy is
adopted to address the conflict between dominant and subsidiary goals (O’Keefe & Delia, 1982). In other words, it reflects a tradeoff between goals. In this study, however, the context rendered most competing or conflicting goals equally dominant for friends, and trading one goal off for another was not feasible. Thus friends selecting one message strategy over another mentioned at the interview that they would do so in order to allow themselves an opportunity to eventually address the strategy that was traded off temporarily.

Friends used the strategy of separation by temporally or behaviorally separating two strategies in the message display. This was seen the most in the use of positive and negative politeness strategies that redressed a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Friends also integrated competing and conflicting aims by stating the aim and removing any possible obstacle to consent within the same message.

Messages can be analyzed for “their communication-constituting belief system that the message producer relies on in reasoning from the goals sought to the message design used” (O’Keefe, 1988, p. 92). This analysis of substantive and thematic configurations (Saeki & O’Keefe, 1994) revealed friends’ use of three different message design processes. Many friends followed expressive message design logic, whereby they used language to express their beliefs and feelings. Their messages were clear, honest and open. Friends also seemed to be aware of conventional message design logics whereby they designed socially appropriate messages that were aimed to respond cooperatively to the needs of the victim. These responses, defined by the context, were performances of “conventionally defined actions” (O’Keefe, 1988, p. 89). Politeness strategies fell under these messages.

Most friends used a combination of expressive and conventional message design logics. They expressed their beliefs and thoughts, and designed messages that were socially appropriate and expected in the context. However, the study also revealed instances of rhetorical message design logics, that addressed the underlying needs of the victim, and in doing so, reconstructed
reality for the two friends. Friends expressed context-relevant beliefs about the victim’s embarrassment and hesitance in speaking with them. Researchers have found that victims of violence feel emotionally isolated and disconnected from their close ones (Rose et al., 2000). Thus it is crucial for friends to impart a sense of belonging to them so that they feel emotionally secured. Victims of domestic abuse are also embarrassed and they minimize the violence in order to obtain more social support (Dunham & Senn, 2000). The act of seeking help thus disrupts the equality in the friendship. There were instances of rhetorical messages that were coordinated with the inconspicuous need of the friend to feel equal in the friendship. These messages were not reactive but proactive (O’Keefe, 1988) in creating a reality for both the friends in which the violence was not negated or dismissed, but it was transcended in the friendship the friends shared.

**Implication for Training**

This study, while contributing to the extension of research, also has several practical implications for training and intervention programs for the community. Researchers have emphasized the need to mobilize community advocacy for victims of domestic abuse (Sullivan et al., 1992; Bybee & Sullivan, 2002), and members of an abused woman’s social network are often the first people to hear about or witness the violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Researchers have found that abused women feel more comfortable with social support when there are one or two close friends in their network (Tan et al., 1995), and they are more comfortable confiding in female friends than family members (Rose et al., 2000). However, researchers have found that friends and family do not feel comfortable intervening with an abused woman (Goodkind et al., 2003), and they often question, blame and/or dictate to the woman (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Lempert, 1997; Rose et al., 2000).

Multiple goal management in various situations has been studied by scholars of communication (Goldsmith, 1994, 2004; O’Keefe & Shepherd, 1987; Saeki & O’Keefe, 1994).
The need for training in social perception, message reception and message production skills has been emphasized (Burleson, 2007). Although there is research on programs to develop adults’ perspective-taking abilities (Pelias, 1984), there is a dearth of systematic research on the development of training programs and their effectiveness of enhancing communication skills (Burleson, 2007). It has been suggested that diversity of experience, the ability to reflect on the needs, wants, moods and motivations of others, cultivating complexity of thought about people and situations, and deliberating before speaking are ways to train ourselves in effective communication skills (Burleson, 2007).

Although there is a strong need to develop communication skills training programs that are grounded in research, the urgency of developing a training program for effective communication with a friend in an abusive relationship is imminent. This study has shown that belief and goal complexities for friends cause dilemmas for them, and this can interfere with the immediacy of their intervention. Training programs in communication should address the negotiation of these complexities by designing effective messages. Participants in the study emphasized the need for training in managing multiple communicative goals. The communicative practices used by them in addressing their belief and goal complexities were strategic and extensive, and could be used to exemplify effective and ineffective communication in this situation. A comprehensive training program for diverse populations should also make use of the instances of context-generated expressive and conventional message design logics that were used by participants in the study. Finally, the complexity of the situation requires training programs to incorporate workshops and similar individualized training in order to cultivate rhetorical message design logic among people. These workshops can draw from real and vivid cases, and train people through extensive role-playing that would enable them to create a desired context through communication.
II. Limitations of Study

This study makes key contributions in research on domestic violence as well as communication. The study also had some limitations.

First of all, only educated, working, urban women were interviewed for the study, which may limit its generalizability. This may also account for the discrepancy between the study findings and research since the latter has often studied rural populations (Bosch & Bergen, 2006) and victims staying in and/or exiting from shelters (Tan et al., 1995). However, researchers have emphasized the limitations of studying domestic abuse in relation to lower SES (Goodkind et al., 2003; Rose et al., 2000), as domestic violence is a pervasive problem in society. To my knowledge, this study is the first of its kind in studying friends who provide support to victims. The findings on the belief and goal complexities as well as the communicative practices can therefore be applied to study diverse populations.

Second, I interviewed only fifteen participants due to time constraints and the sensitivity of the topic. Qualitative studies that aim to understand a process have been seen to use small study samples (Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). The purpose of the study was to study the communication of support from the perspective of the provider, and the complexities inherent in this phenomenon. The findings make significant contributions both to research on domestic abuse as well as emphasize the need for contributions from the field of communication. It can be concluded that it will be worthwhile to study this phenomenon with larger samples.

Third, due to constraints of time, I could not follow the method of theoretical saturation. The number of interviewees was pre-determined and all interviews were conducted and transcribed before analysis began. I cannot thus claim that I have saturated all categories with all possible theoretical insights. Future research can extend this study to theoretically saturate categories.
Finally, I asked participants to imagine a situation where they would converse with a friend. As a result, the data obtained may be read as communicative intention. However, communicative intention has been seen to influence communicative practice (Delia et al., 1982). However, there were three participants in the study who had friends in abusive relationships and reported on actual conversations they have with their friends. There were great overlaps between the responses of these women and those who reported not having an abused friend. Moreover, responses that referred to the anticipations and apprehensions of participants who did not have a friend were echoed by those who had a friend as experiences they had had. Thus, participants who had friends in abusive relationships reported facing the same struggle that those who did not have friends in abusive relationships anticipated facing in their conversations with the friend. Almost all participants who reported not having a friend in an abusive relationship drew on uncomfortable conversations with other friends in tumultuous relationships to describe the struggles they had faced in such situations.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, it will be difficult to study actual communication between friends where one is a victim of domestic abuse. This is perhaps the closest that research can get in studying the communication of social support to victims of domestic abuse. Besides, the responses yielded rich data about the dilemmas and conflicts faced by friends. If intentions, which do not presuppose conversion to actual behavior reveals such negotiation and struggle for friends, actual encounter with a victim is only imaginable.

IV. Directions for Future Research

This study opens up many possibilities of studying domestic violence as a highly complex context for communication. For instance, future research should examine dyadic communication from both the victim and the friend’s perspective in order to get a more detailed understanding of effective communication. Victims of domestic abuse can be studied as distressed
others by having them rate supportive messages for person-centeredness. The use of relationship messages and their impact on the friendship could be studied in detail. The features of persuasive messages that are effective in this situation can also be studied.

Future research can examine domestic violence as a situation where multiple goal management is especially problematic. Communication between a victim of abuse and her friend is an ideal context to study the intricacies of the logic of message design, as well as the use of messages as strategies.

Finally, domestic violence is a pervasive problem in the society, and it should be addressed at the societal level. While societal apathy about it can partially be attributed to portrayals in the media (Carlyle, 2007), this study reveals that there are simultaneity of beliefs and goals for the friends as well, resulting in struggles of their own. This can at least partially explain why they take a simplistic approach toward the issue and have a negative impact on the victims, often worsening their experiences (Lempert, 1997). Researchers from diverse fields like psychology, social work, and women’s studies have emphasized that communication between victims and support providers should be examined (Goodkind et al., 2003; Levendosky et al., 2004). However, there has not been interdisciplinary collaboration on this issue. This study stresses that interpersonal communication between victims and friends is a dramatic context that should be examined with a collaborative approach. In order to address the complex needs of the victim in totality, support-providers need to be sensitized and trained in ways to help them.

**Conclusion**

“*It’s hard. Oh my gosh, I don’t know how I’m going to talk to her.*”

Those were words from a participant in this study, who was asked about what she would say to a friend she suspected of being abused. This study was undertaken to understand the conception of communication between a victim of domestic abuse and a friend from the friend’s perspective. It
was seen that the friend asked to offer support is not immune from dichotomies and goal conflicts. The friends’ sensitivity toward the victim made them struggle with finding the right word that would support her without alienating her. Women seemed to be adept at designing messages to address univalent and competing goals; however, they were uncomfortable about how little they know about the “right” way to help victims. As one participant said: “We make do with what we have.” Participants said that they would want training in multiple goal management. Systematic training programs will equip the community with message strategies that are required in complex situations such as this. Victims often seek help from members of their informal social network. Unless we understand the concerns of these members, we cannot empower them to help victims. This study is one step in that direction.
References


Appendix A: Interview Instrument

Hi, this is Mrittika Sen, I'm a graduate student in the School of Communication. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me. Before we begin, I would say again that your participation in this interview is totally voluntary, and you may withdraw any information or withdraw from the interview itself at any time without any penalty or obligation to you. My purpose in this interview is to learn how women understand communication in the context of an unhealthy relationship. Specifically, I would like your thoughts on how you would communicate with a friend who you suspect might be in an unhealthy relationship. Please note that I will take care to never ask you any confidential and identifiable information about your real-life friends, and you do not have to refer to anyone in particular if you would prefer that. Please be careful not to mention names and other identifiers that may compromise a person’s identity.

Also, please be assured that I am not judging you. I realize that this is a sensitive subject. The questions that I’ll be asking are to explore how women communicate about this sensitive subject – not to judge what kind of a friend you are. Please note that there’s no right or wrong answers here. We’re trying to find out what people would say and do in the context of domestic violence involving a friend. So it’ll be great if, for instance, for questions involving your conversations with a friend, you could speak in the language you would use with her.

Initial communication:

1. I’d like to you consider a situation where a friend has been showing some emotional and/or physical signs of abuse. You have seen these signs a few times, and yet you have
not spoken with her about any of this. What would be your first thoughts in such a situation?

2. Would you think about talking to her? If so, at what point would you say something?

3. What would you say? How would you phrase that?

4. In talking with her, how direct would you be with her? Do you think being direct is better in these circumstances?

5. Would you have a strategy in talking to your friend?

6. How much detail would you want to know that you think would help?

   *Context-relevant Belief (1): The friend*

7. How do you think she might feel about talking to you? Can you think of a situation where she might not want to talk to you?

   *Action (1): Communication to/with friend*

8. Would you say anything to address that? What might you say?

9. If she did not want to talk about it, how would you phrase that? What would you say?

   Anything else?

10. If you said “so and so” (taking from her statements), how do you think your friend might interpret this? What might she say to this?

   *Context-Relevant Beliefs (2): The situation and the friend in the situation*

11. As a friend in a situation like this, can you talk to me about what you may think of the situation your friend may be in? (Clarification Probe: What issues do you think victims of domestic abuse face the most? What, according to you, could be some complications that may arise in this situation?)
12. Is there anything that you can think where there could be a miscommunication between you and your friend? (Clarification Probe: What aspects of this situation do you think you might not get sufficiently? What might go wrong?)

Action (2): Communication about situation and friend in situation

13. What would you say to address these issues that you just mentioned?

14. Would you want to provide active and tangible assistance to the friend? If yes, what would you say to offer this?

15. Can you think of something that you would NOT say if you found out about a friend being abused in her relationship?

Context-relevant beliefs (3): Dilemmas within friend, within participant, conflict between friend’s aims and obstacles from participant

16. What would your thoughts be about how your friend was handling the situation?

17. Why would you think she’s handling it that way? (Probe if necessary: If she’s staying in the relationship, why do you think she’s staying?)

Action (3): Communicating disagreement

18. Would you communicate these thoughts to the friend, about how she was handling her situation? If you would, what would you say?

Goals Question

19. The fact that you’re talking to her: how do you think that would help? What would that do?

20. What would you want to come across as in your communication with your friend?

21. What would you want your communication to achieve for your relationship?

Context-relevant beliefs (5): Relational Questions – Trust, Empathy,

Control/Autonomy

22. A lot of people talk about trust and empathy being important in relationships and
communication within them. What do you think about trust and empathy?

23. Do you think your friend has control over her situation?

   Action (5): Communicating Relation – Trust, Empathy, Self-efficacy

24. What would you say to build trust with your friend in these circumstances?

25. What would you say to communicate empathy?

26. If you thought your friend did/did not have control over her situation, what would you say to her about that?

   Context-relevant beliefs (6) and Action (6): Beliefs about skills, enactment of skills

27. What are your thoughts about listening in such a situation? Can you describe how you would listen to your friend in this situation?

28. Do you think giving her advice would help? How would you communicate advice?

   Context-relevant beliefs (7): Skills and Training questions

29. What communication skills do you think people need the most in this kind of situation?

   What training in communication skills would you recommend to empower women to interact with friends who might be victimized by an intimate partner?
Appendix B: Questionnaire
Thank you for your time on the interview. I enjoyed our conversation, and your insight is greatly appreciated.

Just so we can get a better idea of the specific kinds of communication practices you think are important in interacting with a friend who you think might be in an unhealthy relationship with her intimate partner, please fill out the following questionnaire to the best of your knowledge.

Please Note:

- Participation in this questionnaire is voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from sharing the information asked for in the questionnaire at any time, without any penalty to you. You may choose not to provide your name or other identifying demographic information. If you do decide to provide your name and/or any identifiable demographic information, kindly note that when the findings of this study are analyzed and reported, along with those of the interview, the information you share through the questionnaire will NOT be matched with your name or other identifying information.

- Your responses will NOT be shared with anyone outside of the researchers involved in this study. All returned questionnaires will be analyzed by the two researchers involved in this research. All returned questionnaires will be kept locked in a cabinet in the locked office of Dr Susan Kline, the principal investigator in this research.

- At any point, if you have any doubt/question about the questionnaire, please feel free to call/email either of us at the phone number/email IDs at the bottom of this page.

This version of the questionnaire is recommended to be completed in one sitting.

We appreciate your cooperation and your honesty.

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Please state your full name. (You may choose not to disclose your name. If you choose to provide it, it will be kept confidential and will NOT be matched with the rest of the information in this questionnaire)

Please check all that applies to you:

Race:

☐ Caucasian  ☐ African  ☐ Asian  ☐ Hispanic  ☐ Other

American American American

Age:

☐ 20-29  ☐ 30-39  ☐ 40-49  ☐ 50-59  ☐ 60-69  ☐ 70 and older

Job Type:

☐ Full time  ☐ Part-time  ☐ Volunteer

Approximate number of women in your social network:

☐ 0-10  ☐ 11-20  ☐ 21-30  ☐ 31-40  ☐ 41 and above
For the remainder of the questionnaire, I would request you to consider each statement in the context of a possible interaction with a victim of domestic abuse who is your close friend.

Please answer the following to the best of your knowledge and ability by checking the option that best describes your opinion.

We appreciate your honesty.

1. I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.

   [ ] Strongly Disagree  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Somewhat  [ ] Not sure  [ ] Somewhat  [ ] Agree  [ ] Strongly Agree

2. Before criticizing somebody, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.

   [ ] Strongly Disagree  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Somewhat  [ ] Not sure  [ ] Somewhat  [ ] Agree  [ ] Strongly Agree

3. Usually I am not extremely concerned when I see someone else in trouble.

   [ ] Strongly Disagree  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Somewhat  [ ] Not sure  [ ] Somewhat  [ ] Agree  [ ] Strongly Agree

4. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.

   [ ] Strongly Disagree  [ ] Disagree  [ ] Somewhat  [ ] Not sure  [ ] Somewhat  [ ] Agree  [ ] Strongly Agree
5. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Somewhat Not sure ☐ Somewhat Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

6. It occasionally embarrasses me when someone tells me their problems.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Somewhat Not sure ☐ Somewhat Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

7. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Somewhat Not sure ☐ Somewhat Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

8. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Somewhat Not sure ☐ Somewhat Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

9. I usually have a knack for saying the right thing to make people feel better when they are upset.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Somewhat Not sure ☐ Somewhat Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
10. I usually respond appropriately to the feelings and emotions of others.

☐ Strongly  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Agree  ☐ Strongly

11. Others think of me as a very empathic person.

☐ Strongly  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Agree  ☐ Strongly

12. I am the type of person who can say the right thing at the right time.

☐ Strongly  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Agree  ☐ Strongly

13. I am likely to look for a solution readily if a friend reported a problem in her life.

☐ Strongly  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Agree  ☐ Strongly

14. If a friend reported being abused, I will give her my opinion of the situation and want her to listen to me.

☐ Strongly  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Agree  ☐ Strongly
15. If a friend reported being in an abusive relationship, I will respond by telling her to get out of it.

16. My friend would be able to confide in me and know that I would want to listen.

17. A friend could expect me to tell the truth.

18. A friend could tell me things she worries about knowing that I would not think her concerns were silly.

19. If I promised to help someone, I would follow through.
20. When someone is speaking to me, I listen actively.

☐ Strongly  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Agree  ☐ Strongly
Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Agree

21. I can communicate acceptance of the speaker, and prompt her to further explore her thoughts.

☐ Strongly  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Agree  ☐ Strongly
Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Agree

22. I listen without judging the speaker.

☐ Strongly  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Agree  ☐ Strongly
Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Agree

23. I listen to the literal meanings that a speaker communicates.

☐ Strongly  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Agree  ☐ Strongly
Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Agree

24. I listen without active involvement.

☐ Strongly  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Somewhat  ☐ Agree  ☐ Strongly
Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Agree
25. I generally remain silent and take in what the other person is saying.

☐ Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not sure ☐ Somewhat ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly
Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

26. I can listen objectively.

☐ Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not sure ☐ Somewhat ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly
Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

27. I focus on the logic of the ideas rather than on the emotional meaning of the message.

☐ Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not sure ☐ Somewhat ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly
Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

28. I can listen critically, evaluating the speaker and what the speaker is saying.

☐ Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not sure ☐ Somewhat ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly
Disagree Disagree Agree Agree

29. I look for the hidden meanings; the meanings that are revealed by subtle verbal or nonverbal cues.

☐ Strongly ☐ Disagree ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not sure ☐ Somewhat ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly
Disagree Disagree Agree Agree