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An analysis of physical conflict in lesbian relationships

Groves, Patricia Ann, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1991

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Hillary Ann Dean.

It is my hope that she will grow up in a world where nurturance,
caring, and tolerance of human diversity
will prevail over intolerance and violence.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express sincere appreciation to Dr. Roberta Sands for her guidance and insight throughout the research. Appreciation also goes to Dr. Virginia Richardson for her guidance through the final stages of this project. Thanks go to the other members of my committee, Drs. Beverly Toomey and Kathleen Nuccio, for their suggestions and comments. Gratitude is expressed to Denise Mitten, Marilyn Stavenger, Beth Zemsky, and Rosemary Jozwiak who provided assistance in locating respondents and helped in clarifying the issues which arose throughout the course of the project. The technical assistance of Donna Diekoff, Patricia Bell, and Michelle Hudson is gratefully acknowledged. To Cynthia Dean, my partner, I offer sincere thanks for your constant support and belief in my ability to complete this project.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | iii |
| VITA | iv |
| LIST OF TABLES | ix |

## CHAPTER

### I INTRODUCTION

- Statement of the Problem ........................................... 12
- Rationale for a Qualitative Approach .......................... 15
- Biases of Researcher ............................................. 17
- Objectives of Project ........................................... 18

### II LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................ 19

### III METHODOLOGY ............................................ 39

- Method .................................................. 39
- Sample .................................................. 43
- Key Informants ........................................... 45
- Conflict Tactics Scale ....................................... 47
- Pilot Interview .......................................... 47
- Resources Available to the Respondent and the Perception of the Process by the Respondents ........................................... 48
- Data Analysis .......................................... 50
- Research Questions ...................................... 52

### IV DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE ............................. 54

- Demographic Information ..................................... 54
- Respondent as Victim or Batterer ......................... 54
- Education ............................................. 57
Feelings of Responsibility for Abuse ........................................................ 109
Economics ................................................................................................... 110
The Importance of Fear and Emotional Attachment
in Maintaining the Relationship ........................................................... 111

VII REASONS FOR LEAVING ................................................................. 116
Batterer Terminating the Relationship ..................................................... 116
Respondents in the Process of Separation ............................................. 121
Realization that the Victim Had No Control Over the
Abuse and that Serious Physical Harm or Death
Was the Likely Outcome of Continuing the
Relationship .......................................................................................... 122
Validation of Reality of Being Battered ................................................. 124
Recognition of Potential Harm to Children .......................................... 126
Relationship Addiction ........................................................................ 129
Recognition of Caretaking Role and Decision to
Meet Own Needs ................................................................................... 130

VIII STAGES OF SEPARATION FROM BATTERING RELATIONSHIP ............... 131
Initial Attraction ....................................................................................... 133
Beginnings of Violence ......................................................................... 135
Stage One of Separation: Identification of Self
as a Battered Woman .......................................................................... 140
Stage Two of Separation: Seeking Safe Space ....................................... 141
Stage Three of Separation: Isolation and Depression .......................... 143
Stage Four: Healing .............................................................................. 148

IX A PROFILE OF THE BATTERER ...................................................... 151
Societal Factors ................................................................................... 151
Childhood Victimization ....................................................................... 152
Mutual Abuse ......................................................................................... 157
Charm and Manipulation ..................................................................... 158
Dependence .......................................................................................... 159
Control .................................................................................................. 160
X COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY ....................................................... 164

Accepting Responsibility as a Community ...................................... 170

XI TREATMENT ISSUES ........................................................................ 176

Therapy .............................................................................................. 176
Battered Women's Shelters ............................................................... 184
The Legal System ................................................................................ 186
Alcoholics Anonymous and Alanon .................................................... 189
Survivor Support Groups .................................................................... 189

XII DISCUSSION .................................................................................. 192

Theoretical Issues .............................................................................. 192
Issues for Social Workers and the Feminist Community ...................... 201
Problems Encountered in Collecting Sample ...................................... 213
Issues for Further Research ............................................................... 219
Conclusion ............................................................................................ 221

APPENDICES

A. LETTERS ............................................................................................ 223

B. ADVERTISEMENTS ........................................................................... 236

LIST OF REFERENCES ............................................................................. 247
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLES</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. History of Abuse/Perpetrator</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. History of Abuse/Survivors.</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family violence has been studied primarily in terms of child and spouse abuse. In 1962, Kemp published an article on child abuse which generated much research around the issue of abuse. Once child abuse was recognized as a national problem, wife abuse was identified as an issue for public concern. Straus (1980) has estimated that 50 per cent of all married couples have experienced violence at some time during their relationship. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) have reported that spouse abuse is often viewed as normative behavior in our society.

While much attention has been directed toward identification of the causes and theoretical conceptualizations of husband-wife abuse, little research has been directed toward the study of the phenomenon of violence in lesbian relationships. Lobel (1986) has written a book about the problem of violence in lesbian relationships which documents the existence of the problem and identifies some of the relationship issues and social issues which lead to violence between women.

If the issue of violence between women in lesbian relationships is to be included in the literature on violence in families, it is necessary to broadly
define "family" so that same sex couples are given family status. Over all, our legal system defines family in a manner which precludes the inclusion of same sex couples. Same sex couples are denied tax benefits, social insurance benefits, rights to the estate after death of partner, etc. The State of Ohio has made an exception to this rule of exclusion of same sex couples from family status in the Domestic Violence Act passed in 1979. This law has defined victims of domestic violence as "Any person, whether or not as a spouse, parent, or other adult person related by consanguinity or affinity, who is residing or has resided with the person committing the domestic violence and dependents of such persons." (Ohio Am. Sub. Senate Bill 46). According to this state statute, persons in same sex relationships are entitled to protection from police and to shelter and protection if battered by the same sex partner.

The profession of social work, through N.A.S.W.'s Code of Ethics and policy statements, has taken the position that same sex couple should not be discriminated against in the provision of services by social institutions. Therefore, as a result of the position taken by the social work profession, it is important that the social work literature include same sex couples in definitions of family. It is also important that our profession take the lead in examining violence and other problems which confront same sex couples. The study of violence in lesbian relationships will
prove valuable to practitioners working with couples who use physical aggression as a way to maintain power over the partner or as a means of conflict resolution. The knowledge of violence in same sex couples can also be applied to the development of social policies which promote the health and well being of lesbian women and gay men.

In a theoretical perspective, violence between lesbian partners can be useful in developing further understanding of the dynamics of family violence and general violence in our culture. Violent behavior is often viewed as a problem of males in our society. Women are often viewed as victims. Steinmetz (1977) has identified females as most often the abusers of children. Developing an understanding of violent behavior in lesbian couples can help to unravel the nature of violent behavior and lead us toward an awareness of the process of socialization which socializes both males and females into the patriarchal structure of society. Through the socialization process, women learn to accept the "rightness" of male dominance and respond by allowing themselves to become passive victims or to attempt to gain or maintain power by taking on the role of perpetrator of violence.

Often we pretend that women are not capable of real violence or blame the victim of violence by discussing the issue in terms of mutual abuse or as harmless fighting between equals. The women interviewed for this study shared stories every bit as painful as those given by
heterosexual battered women. All feared for their emotional and physical safety, and most shared fears of losing their lives. Violence is dangerous and as a society we must work to eliminate it from our lives.

The issue of violence between lesbian partners strengthens the argument that it is the patriarchal structure of our society which has created second class status for women and breeds violence. The patriarchal society automatically ascribes power and dominance to men, particularly white men. Subordinate people, including women, men of minority status, and men who do not live up to their role expectations are very important to maintain the system of male dominance. At the same time these groups are despised by those with power because they are seen as weak. This hatred of subordinates grows out of the controller's recognition of his own vulnerability to those who have greater power than he. In this system, violent behavior is an acceptable means to keep subordinates under control. In the patriarchal system, women are ascribed the victim role. Some women who have been severely victimized, usually as children, will take on the role of the abuser as a means to gain a sense of personal power, as power has been defined by the patriarchy. These women will be punished for stepping out of role, as well as for their violent acts.

Too often, the argument about the nature of violence has been simplified to the level of viewing it as an issue of gender, i.e., men are violent; women are victims. The lesbian community and the battered
women's movement have both locked themselves into this perspective. As long as we can identify men as batterers, we can create an illusion of protecting ourselves. The world becomes a dangerous place when we admit that women may also take on the violent role.

Steinmetz (1977), Gelles (1972), and Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) have found women who are batterers in their studies of battering. A serious danger in acknowledging women as batterers is demonstrated by McNeely and Robinson (1987) in the article which appeared in Social Work. They used the findings of those who have studied the issue of family violence to support the patriarchal system. Defenders of the patriarchy call attention to men who are battered and deny the major reality that women are categorically subjected to victimization in our society. This victimization includes rape, murder, and physical battering.

It is important to define the terms "battering" and "battering relationships." In heterosexual relationships, a woman may go to a battered womens' shelter and identify herself as battered. A simple question about the behavior of her spouse may reveal that he punched, choked her, or used other physically aggressive behaviors. Clearly, there is no question about her being a battered woman. If she says she scratched, punched, or pushed him, these behaviors are defined in the context of self defense. Men are viewed as physically superior to women
and as the aggressors and controllers in our society. When a relationship involves two women, it becomes more difficult to identify the aggressor. Often, the batterer will justify her behavior by blaming her partner for provoking the abuse. The victim, feeling guilt over any defensive behavior and believing the batterer’s projections of blame, may define herself as the abuser.

Even in heterosexual relationships, battering goes beyond acts of physical aggression. The dynamics of power and control have been described as critical elements in abusive relationships. Threats of abuse, harm to personal objects of importance to the victim, derisive comments about the victim, etc. are as damaging to the self esteem of the victim as actual acts of violence. Control of money and limiting contacts with people outside the relationships are powerful ways of isolating the victim and preventing her from gaining access to resources, both physical and emotional, which would assist her in leaving the relationship.

Psychological abuse, while damaging to a person’s self esteem and feeling of personal power is hard to define. Lenore Walker (1984) has listed the psychological tactics defined by Amnesty International and related these to intimate, violent relationships. Because of the complicated nature of defining psychological abuse and the difficulty in clearly establishing it as dangerous to the health and well being of individuals, there had to be at least one incident of physical aggression in the relationship defined as violent by the respondent for inclusion in
this study.

Violent actions may range from slaps and shoves to the use of weapons such as knives and guns. Automobiles may also be used as weapons. A perpetrator could attempt to run over the victim or could grab the steering wheel in an attempt to cause an accident. Threats of violence can be as powerful as means of control as actual violent actions. For example if the victim is aware that the perpetrator has a gun and the perpetrator says, "If you leave me, I will track you down and blow your brains out," such a statement can evoke an enormous amount of fear.

Psychological abuse, such as verbal degradation can be powerful as a means of control. Respondents reported that abusers would ridicule them, make degrading remarks about their appearance or sexual practices, and convince them they were stupid and incorrect about their perceptions of their own feelings. Because of the confusing issues around a clear definition of psychological abuse and the difficulty in determining when demeaning remarks actually create an abusive relationship, it was necessary for respondents to have experienced at least one incident of actual physical abuse in order to be included in this project.

There is a tendency to view violence between two women as less significant than violence by a male toward a female. People seem to
believe that violence between women is less dangerous because the perpetrator and the victim are viewed as social equals and as being physically weaker than males. One of the most personally distressing parts of this study was listening to accounts of severe physical assault experienced by the respondents. Slapping and shoving were reported, but in addition, women reported incidents of abuse every bit as severe and life threatening as in heterosexual violent relationships.

Incidents of abuse are not the primary focus of this study in order to avoid the sensationalistic perspective which would result from a detailed account of violent episodes. Physical aggression was explored because the respondents must have experienced at least one incident of physical aggression in order to qualify for this project. Most of the respondents felt it necessary to talk about the experiences of violence in order to have their experiences validated and understood. One potential interviewee was rejected because she described her relationship as completely emotionally and psychologically abusive.

The following examples of violent actions are included to illustrate the seriousness of violence in lesbian relationships, and to make the reader aware that it is important to treat this issue with the same degree of seriousness accorded to heterosexual women who are assaulted by their partners.
Physical battering began when M.J. attempted to leave the relationship after discovering her partner was having an affair with another woman. She described the first assault as follows:

And then I went to her apartment and I was, I was really furious. I said, you know, I've been real honest with you and I've been real open and this is what you're doing to me. And she had a Pepsi in her hand and she just, that Pepsi bottle went flying, aimed at me, and hit the wall behind me. And then, you know, I was like I can't believe you did that, I just can't believe you, I've never had anybody do anything like that. And, I said why don't you just give me my keys, she had my house key and a copy of my car keys, and I'll just go and we'll just call it quits right here and right now. And she walked out of the apartment, and I thought she was splitting, because her big thing to handle situations was to just walk out. And, she walked out and I yelled out the window, well, that's a real mature way to deal with this situation, and she went to her car and she got my keys. And she came back up and she had them in her hand, and she like whacked me, right up side the head with them? And like split my head open, so there was like, there was like, and I was in shock.

One respondent reported being chased around the living room by the batterer who had a gun loaded, cocked, and pointed at her. She experienced this on more than one occasion and of course feared for her life. On one occasion, the children were in the room during the fight and she realized that they could be killed. This realization motivated her to take steps to get out of the relationship with the batterer.

Another respondent was chased down by the batterer who was driving a van. A permanent disability resulted from this incident. There
were repeated incidents of severe physical abuse over an approximately eight year period in this relationship.

Another respondent reported being beaten severely by the batterer's fists on the head and face. She was hit so hard that her retina was detached and permanent visual damage resulted from the injury.

One respondent reported being choked with the telephone cord when she attempted to call 911 during a violent episode. She was recovering from surgery when the incident occurred.

One respondent reported only one incident of physical violence in the duration of her relationship with the abusive partner. This incident involved being threatened with a pair of scissors. The respondent was terrified by this incident and lived in fear of the abuser after its occurrence. From this point forward, she did everything possible to avoid another incident which would be life threatening.

Several respondents described incidents of sexual assault by the batterer. Batterers would forcibly have sex with the partner after an incident of physical abuse occurred. These respondents believed that the batterers felt totally in control after an incident of abuse and this feeling of power was further intensified by forced sexual acts. In another case, the batterer was reported to need a sexual experience after an abusive incident to prove that her partner still cared about her.
One respondent described her abuser as needing to have sex with her in order to prove that the abuser was "as good" as a man. The respondent felt forced into sexual activity, often when she did not want it: "And as far as the lovemaking or whatever, that part was all right, except sometimes it felt more like rape to me than lovemaking."

Abuse of pets, destruction of the partner's personal property, threats of suicide and threats of violence, and other kinds of harm were also frequently reported. In lesbian relationships, the threat of exposing the partner as a lesbian at work or to family was a particularly powerful means of control. In one case the batterer actually told the partner's family about the lesbian nature of the relationship. This resulted in stress and difficulty for the partner. Two batterers caused the lesbianism of the partner to be revealed in the workplace. In one instance, the batterer attempted to have the former partner sanctioned by a professional licensing board.

When children were involved in the relationship, threats to report the fact that the partner was a lesbian to an ex-husband could be extremely threatening in nature. Lesbian women often fear court cases and the potential of losing custody of children.

After hearing the experiences of lesbians in violent relationships, it is clear that these women live in fear and that their lives and the lives of the children involved are often in danger. The violence is often severe
and life threatening and cannot be dismissed as "a fight between equals."

One respondent reported developing a pattern of self abuse to reduce tension during the batterer's phase of escalating toward a violent outburst. She became accustomed to severe violence in this relationship. Hitting herself in the head became a means for her to control her own feelings of tension in response to the abuser. She reported no abuse in her childhood, and no self abusive behavior prior to the battering relationship. She stopped this pattern of self abuse long after separation from the batterer. This is an unusual coping mechanism, but it demonstrates the powerful impact of battering relationships on the victim.

Statement of the Problem

Lobel (1986) has documented the existence of violence in lesbian relationships. Further research is needed if we are to understand the dynamics of violence between women and to develop policies to protect all persons from family violence and treatment strategies to effectively intervene in lesbian families who experience violence in their relationships.

Feminist literature (Lewis, 1979; Tanner, 1978; Wolf, 1979; & Wolff, 1977) has focused on the positive aspects of lesbianism and lesbian relationships. While this perspective is important in breaking down myths
about lesbians as sick or socially deviant, it does not provide assistance
to therapists who are faced with persons and couples who are
experiencing pain and suffering in their lives. An effect of this literature
on lesbian women may be to reinforce the belief in the ideal image of the
lesbian and her relationships, thus creating stress for women who feel
that they do not measure up to social expectations.

It has not been easy for the lesbian or feminist community to
recognize, validate, and discuss the issue of violent conflict between
women in a lesbian relationship. The battered women's movement has
taught us to view violent behavior on the part of a heterosexual male as
unacceptable under any circumstances. Cecere (1986) has described
her experience in a battering relationship as a second closet. If she
attempted to share her experience with other women, she often felt that
the listener would attempt to find a cause for the battering. This response
is in line with the perspective of blaming the victim. If she was struck by
her partner, she must have done something to provoke the action;
 furthermore, the provocation justified the battering.

McCandlish (1982) has described the feminist heterosexual
therapist as likely to idealize the lesbian relationship. She is likely to
expect lesbian relationships to be nurturing and open in terms of
communication. As a result of this perspective, she may have difficulty in
identifying problems accurately and may be unable to develop a
cohesive therapeutic approach. Lesbian therapists may face
countertransference issues, such as idealization of the relationship or overidentifying with the couple.

Given the pitfalls identified by McCandlish, it can be argued that therapists, both heterosexual and lesbian may deny the existence of battering in lesbian couples and discourage discussion of battering in the therapy process. The literature suggests that an awareness of family violence has developed partially as a result of raised consciousness on the part of therapists and direct questioning of clients in response to subtle or obvious cues given by the client. If the therapist idealizes lesbian relationships or overidentifies with the couple in therapy, it is unlikely that she would respond to cues given by the client about experiences with violence in the relationship. A study of gay/lesbian clients of mental health agencies in San Francisco (Rabin, Keef, & Berton, 1986) revealed that many persons do not reveal themselves as gay/lesbian during the course of treatment for mental health problems. Those who do take the risk of revealing gay/lesbian identity may withhold other negative aspects of the relationship out of fear of negative sanctions by the therapist.

Lesbian battering is beginning to surface at conferences on family violence and some attention as being directed toward lesbian battering in the literature. Since the profession of social work has identified itself with the provision of services to enhance the quality of life for gay/lesbian
persons, it is important that social workers take a leadership role in the development of literature which can help to improve the quality of life for lesbian women.

**Rationale for a Qualitative Approach**

Rather than selecting a theoretical framework and fitting the data into that perspective, qualitative researchers suggest that theory may grow out of data as they are collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Once gathered and compiled, the data are sorted and categorized. Theories already developed may be matched to the data if there is a good fit. Otherwise, the theory may be altered to incorporate the concepts brought forth by the new data or a new theory may be proposed to account for the findings.

From the perspective of the qualitative researcher, it is problematic to operate from a pre-selected framework and attempt to automatically fit one's data into that perspective. This concept can be related to an overall existential philosophical position in relation to research. Existentialists have put forth the idea that reality is created by the observer. It is therefore possible to seek information in such a manner as to support the predetermined theoretical position.

It is inevitable that the perspective of the researcher influenced the collection of data and the development of theory. Krieger (1983) has discussed the process of fictionalization as it relates to social research. It is impossible to remain objective in data collection and once data are
gathered, they are assembled into a framework which is consistent with the views of the researcher, the belief systems of the professional discipline to which the researcher belongs, and by the views of the society as a whole.

Given the nature of the population being studied and the orientation of the researcher, it was important to operate out of a theoretical perspective which is consistent with feminist ideology and values. Qualitative research methodology is consistent with a feminist perspective. In this project, the data were collected through the use of the life interview method. The data were interpreted within the perspective of feminist and conflict theory.

Theory was refined through the development of categories of data. It was possible to relate theory specifically to the data and population under study. Some members of the group being studied were asked to review the material to insure that their reality was accurately depicted by the researcher. Discrepancies in view were subject to negotiation, providing an opportunity for consensus to be reached between the researcher and the members of the population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher operated out of the premise that the members of the population being studied are experts regarding themselves and their experience. The primary task of the researcher was to help interpret their experience in a way which was meaningful to the group itself and to
those who seek greater knowledge and understanding of the group being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Biases of the Researcher**

Since all researchers bring their personal perspectives and biases into their projects, it is important to identify as much as possible, the beliefs which impact upon the proposed study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following issues seem relevant to this project:

1. Consistent with the position put forth in the N.A.S.W. Code of Ethics (1976), lesbianism is considered a viable lifestyle, lesbians are among those groups who experience oppression by our society, and the primary goal of social work intervention with members of this group should be to enhance their coping capacities and to facilitate the elimination of their oppression.

2. Nurturance and intimacy are hallmarks of lesbian relationships and as healthy elements of a relationship, these issues should be supported and can provide examples for members of other groups who are struggling to develop egalitarian relationships.

3. Like all members of our society, lesbians have been reared in a patriarchal and oppressive social structure and have incorporated elements of this oppressive structure into their
personal beings. Therefore, social workers need to take care not to idealize lesbian relationships. Problems in communication, struggles around independence and intimacy, power issues, and in some cases, physical violence are issues which must be addressed seriously by the social work profession. Social workers must respond to these issues both at the personal and the policy level if we are to achieve the goal of enhancing the coping capacities of lesbian women.

Objectives of Project

The objectives of this project are as follows:

1. To study physical aggression as it arises from conflict situations in lesbian couples.

2. To sensitize the profession of social work to the issue of violence in lesbian relationships in order to produce effective intervention with lesbian couples, and to develop social policies which protect lesbian women from violence in the home.

3. To document and describe a problem which has received little prior attention in order to generate questions for further research and study.
Kerry Lobel (1986) has written a book entitled *Naming the Violence: Speaking out about Lesbian Battering* which includes articles and essays by lesbians who are or have been victims of abuse and by women who have worked in the battered women's movement. This work will provide a background for my dissertation. The articles reveal the fact that battering in lesbian relationships follows patterns similar to those found in heterosexual relationships. The problems experienced by the victims are intensified by the tendency for the feminist community to deny the existence of the problem or to recognize it as serious. Since the victim and the batterer are part of the same social network of women, the victim often feels that she is not being supported by her friends.

While isolation from the lesbian community is often a characteristic of battering relationships, some couples who experience violence are seen as respected members of the community. The batterer may be viewed by other women as a strong and attractive woman. This view may intensify the victims feelings of being cut off and unable to find support from her peers.
do not result in enhanced control of the batterer over the recipient. Reactions of the victim include fear of the perpetrator and modification of behavior to avoid future instances of battering. Threats of abuse and economic exploitation are included as battering in her definition.

Lobel's definition differs from the definition generally used by researchers who have studied violence in heterosexual relationships. For example, O'Brien (1971) defined violence as any behavior which threatens to cause or causes physical damage to objects or persons. Since the subject of sado-masochism has received a good deal of attention among lesbians in recent years, Lobel's definition of battering may be an attempt to clearly separate battering relationships from those where mutually agreed upon acts of physical aggression are a part of a couple's repertoire of sexual activities.

While Lobel's definition makes a valid distinction between battering and sado-masochism, at times it appears as though she has defined battering in terms of the partner's response to the attempt for control. Lobel states, "Lesbian battering is the pattern of intimidation, coercion, terrorism, or violence, the sum of all past acts of violence and the promises of future violence, that achieves enhanced power and control for the perpetrator over her partner." I believe it is important to define battering clearly in terms of the batterer's actions or intent of those
actions rather than to imply that the victim has any degree of responsibility for the batterer's actions. A strong willed woman who refuses to be intimidated is still a victim if the partner uses physical force or threats of force with the intent of gaining power or control in the relationship.

A controversial issue has arisen within the feminist community around the distinction between the batterer and the victim when dealing with violence between two women in a lesbian relationship. Some workers in the movement insist that mutual battering does not exist and that one person must be identified as the batterer. McCarthy (1986) has indicated that in her work with lesbians, she has come to believe that "mutual battering" is possible. She cites the example of two women who may be equally matched physically and that both may initiate violence with regularity. Another possibility is a women who is battered in a relationship and may become the batterer in another relationship. It is important to recognize that the woman who fights back in self defense is not a batterer and should not be labeled as such. At the same time, we must remain open to all possibilities in how two women may relate to each other.

Claire Renzetti (1989,1988) completed a study of violence in lesbian relationships. She sent a questionnaire to 100 lesbian victims of violence. She sought respondents through the gay/lesbian press. She
examined issues of dependency and power in the relationships and also looked at the way responses of the lesbian community impacted the violent relationship. She found batterers to be more dependent on their partners than vice versa. The respondents felt responsible for their batterer's well being and dependency issues were a major source of relationship conflict. Batterers were more likely to be the decision makers in the relationship and respondents had slightly greater resources than the batterers. The respondents and batterers did not differ significantly in age, employment status, and level of occupational prestige; however, slightly more than half the respondents had a higher income and had more years of education than their batterers.

The responses of the lesbian community were very important in determining the length of time the victim remained in the abusive relationship. Practical assistance by friends, such as offering shelter or help in finding an alternative place to stay was considered important by respondents. Emotional support was also important. Respondents indicated that feeling that others in the community believed their stories was important to their self esteem. The majority of respondents reported negative experiences with friends and professionals. Many felt that people did not believe their stories and frequently others were not willing to label the violence as battering. Some respondents felt friends shunned them. Overall, the respondents indicated that they felt few
opportunities for support and assistance were available to them. The perceived lack of assistance tended to reinforce respondents' staying with the abuser.

The literature on heterosexual spouse abuse will be examined in this paper since there has been relatively little work related directly to violence in lesbian relationships. Some studies of spouse abuse have examined conflict resolution and resources as well as power between partners. These concepts can be examined as part of the pattern of lesbian violence.

O'Brien (1971) studied violence in divorce prone families using the conflict theory as a theoretical perspective. The results supported the Lobel has carefully defined violence as "That pattern of violence and coercive behaviors whereby a lesbian seeks to control the thoughts, beliefs or conduct of her intimate partner or to punish the intimate for resisting the perpetrators control over her." She does not include acts of violence which hypothesis that violence is associated with a family condition where the achievement ability of the husband is less than his ascribed, superior status. The sample was not random and was obtained by interviewing the partner who initiated a divorce action. Data were analyzed from a study done on general family instability. Since only couples in the process of divorce were interviewed, the results cannot be applied to couples who experience violence violence but remain
together. Another major flaw in the study was that no direct inquiry was made about violent behavior. People were included in the sample if they happened to mention violence as a reason for divorce. Other couples may have experienced violence but did not recognize violent behavior as a reason for the divorce action.

Gelles (1976) devised a sampling method which included families who were not identified as violent by police or social agency contact. The research was conducted in 1973. Although not a random sample, this method was an improvement over studies using only families identified as violent by police blotters or agency records. Violence was found in neighboring families and enabled the author to look at violence in couples who did not seek intervention or dissolution of marriage. The results demonstrated that women with fewer resources are more likely to stay in the relationship than women with more resources.

Straus (1974) found that verbal aggression in families can lead to physical aggression. He related factors of intimacy and intensity of relationship to that phenomenon. The study was conducted by giving questionnaires to college students and having them respond to questions about their parents' relationship. The questionnaire included conflict resolution techniques ranging from discussion to violence. The sample only included families with a student in college and therefore is not representative of the population at large. It is, however, a sample of
families who have not sought intervention around violent actions. Student memory of potential violence may be questioned. In order to compensate for this problem, Straus used the Conflict Tactics Scale (1979) with a sub-sample of parents of the students investigated. He found a high degree of agreement between student and parent reports of violent incidents. In the 1974 study, Straus recommended that family violence can best be understood by studying different populations, different situational conditions, and families at different points in the life cycle. Since lesbians tend to form long term, stable relationships (Tanner, 1978, Bell & Weinberg, 1978), this population could add to the general understanding of violent behavior in families.

Owens and Straus (1975) found a correlation between committing, receiving, and observing violence as a child and approval of violence in adulthood. The data were collected from a national survey on causes and prevention of violence. The highest correlations were .33 for males who received violence as a child and .33 for males who observed violence. For females, the highest correlations were .12 for those who received violence and .16 for observers of violence. The correlations while positive, are low. Owens and Straus suggested that the time lag from the time of observation or receiving violence to the time of adulthood may account for the low correlations. It is interesting that the correlations
for males are higher than those for females. This result seems consistent with other studies which indicate that males are more likely to approve of or engage in violent actions.

Carrol (1977) studied a group who reported at least one incident of violence in their marriages. The sample was drawn for another study and the results were analyzed in relation to those families who experienced violence. This study controlled for the variables of isolation and psychological well being. Thirty six and six tenths of a per cent (36.6%) of those who experienced physical punishment as a child compared with 14.5 percent of those who did not, reported violence in their families as adults. Those who reported a high degree of marital happiness reported a low rate of violence even though they had experienced violence as children. Whether happiness is a cause or effect of a low violence rate is not clarified in this study.

Steinmetz (1977) gave a questionnaire to 78 persons to examine the resolution of conflict in families. She looked at conflict between parents, between mother and respondent, between father and respondent, and between each sibling and respondent. Nearly all families used verbal aggression and 70 percent used physical aggression to resolve conflict between parent and child and sibling to sibling. Physical aggression was used by 30 percent of the families to resolve conflict between marital partners. Steinmetz describe four types
of families: "screaming sluggers," having high verbal and high physical aggression; "silent attackers," having low verbal and high physical aggression; "threateners," having high verbal and low physical aggression; and "pacifists," who were low in both verbal and physical aggression. Her findings identified categories of high verbal and low verbal aggression and low verbal but high physical aggression which indicate that Straus' position that verbal aggression escalates to physical aggression holds true in some but not all instances.

Steinmetz (1977) found women to use physical aggression as often as men in the marital relationship. The sample was randomly selected and included white, intact families with two or more children at home. This study refutes the myth that women are socialized to have better impulse control and therefore use less physical aggression and that women use more verbal than physical aggression.

Gelles (1979) reported that wives often use violence in self defense. Men and women kill each other with equal frequency but wives are seven times more likely than husbands to murder in self defense. He defined "protective reactive violence" as the phenomenon of the wife striking first if she thinks her husband is about to hit her or verbally abuse her. Gelles (1973) also reported that women are more likely than men to abuse children. Women spend significantly more time with children which may explain this phenomenon.
Frodi (1977) reviewed the literature on aggression and found that the research does not support the belief that women are less violent than men. The literature indicates that women are most likely to be aggressive if their aggression can be viewed as pro-social or justifiable in terms of the situation.

Steinmetz (1977) reported that husband battering may be more underreported than wife battering. The husband may not get medical attention or report the incident. Women may be more comfortable complaining about battering by men. Gelles (1979) has argued from the opposite perspective. He claims that men are less humiliated by violence because they have more power and are less likely to accept violence against them as normal. Reports to police and agencies indicate that men report less violence. While men may not be as likely to report violence to public authorities, they may be more likely to divorce a violent spouse because of greater power and resources. They may also be less likely to feel that they are to blame for the abuse.

In an empirical study, Hauser (1982) examined the impact of relative resources and family power on violence. Several of his hypotheses were not borne out and those that were in the expected direction were not significant. He studied conflict in married college students and found the highest level of abuse in families with equal power between spouses. It is possible that the stress of the student
status had a greater impact on the couples than the variables under study. He also used a small sample.

Allen and Straus (1980) found that violence is most likely to occur when the resources of the spouse are low and the spouse's power is greater. There was no relationship between power and violence when resources were high. The correlations were low.

LaRosa (1980) found an influence on the marital exchange structure and symbol structure by the marital power structure. He defined this result as a synthesis of power distribution and resources.

Bern (1982) examined stress in relation to violence. He grouped the causes of violence into two categories: stress which produces frustration and violence, and socialization of the use of violence. His study examined the process of labeling and self identification which moved an individual (male) from the violent incident to the self identity of a violent person. If abuse was integrated into the self, violence was likely to occur again. This study has provided an interesting perspective although numerous intervening variables could account for the result.

Straus (1980) and Gelles and Straus (1978) have raised some important theoretical implications in the study of family violence. Straus has pointed to cultural norms, societal violence, and media violence as contributing to the acceptance of violence as a means for individuals to resolve conflict.
Gelles and Straus (1978) have listed eleven factors which differentiate families from other social groups. These factors can be considered to have a relationship to the eruption of violence within the family structure.

1. Time at risk.
2. Range of activities and interests.
3. Intensity of involvement.
4. Infringing activities.
5. Right to influence.
6. Age and sex discrepancies.
7. Ascribed roles.
8. Family privacy.
9. Involuntary membership.
11. Extensive knowledge of social biographies.

With the exception of sex difference, all of the factors identified by Gelles and Straus can be considered as important in lesbian relationships. The issue of relationship intensity may be of greatest significance to the lesbian population. Since females in our society are trained to put a high value on interpersonal relationships, lesbian couples can be expected to have a high degree of intensity in their
relationship.

Overall, the study of family violence has been difficult to undertake because of the private nature of the family in our society. While the use of questionnaires has resulted in studies with less depth, this technique has enable investigators to utilize larger, random sample. It is important to continue the study of violence in families and to identify population differences. The study of lesbian couples is a special population which can be considered important to social work practitioners.

There is little research specifically dealing with conflict in lesbian relationships. There have been some general studies of lesbian couples and the nature of their relationships and some studies examining the nature of stressors in these couples. These works can provide a general picture of lesbian relationships and can form a backdrop for a study of violence and conflict among lesbian couples.

Coser (Turner, 1982) has put forth the theoretical position that in smaller groups based on primary affiliations where social structure is rigid, conflicts will be less frequent but more intense and potentially violent when they do occur. Sang and Lowenberg (1975) observed that two women in an intimate relationship have more in common than a man and woman in such a relationship. It is possible for a high level of commonality to produce a relationship with greater levels of liking and attraction for each other. As Coser has suggested and as Straus has
observed in heterosexual families, it may also be possible that commonality and intensity can lead to higher levels of conflict between family members.

A study of friendship in the development of lesbian love relationships Vetere (1982), indicated that friendship was a primary component to a love relationship. Respondents reported a high level of liking for their partner and defined their relationships as having no roles and no oppression. Respondents did not clearly distinguish between friendship and love relationships. The study was based on a snowball sample which began with a women's studies class at the University of Pittsburgh. It is likely that the respondents were young, idealistic, and highly feminist in their beliefs.

Peplau, Padesky, and Hamilton (1982) studied the level of satisfaction in lesbian relationships. Through a survey method, they found that greater satisfaction was related to equality of power and involvement in the relationship. Higher levels of similarity between the members also correlated with greater levels of satisfaction with the relationship. Reasons cited for break up of relationships were most often related to a desire for more independence and feeling that there was too much dependency within the relationship. The sample was drawn from a university campus with advertising in the feminist and gay press. The respondents were white, ranged in age from 18 to 59 years, with a
Median age of 26 years. Ninety seven per cent (97%) of the respondents endorsed the idea of equality in relationships.

A comparison of heterosexual and homosexual relationships in relation to satisfaction and commitment (Duffy & Rusbult, 1986) revealed that gender is more predictive of behavior than sexual preference. Women, both heterosexual and lesbian reported higher levels of commitment and investment in relationships. Relationship satisfaction was correlated with higher levels of reward and lower levels of costs. This study is of particular interest because the sample was drawn from the Lexington Kentucky area and was not primarily drawn from a university setting.

McCandlish (1982) observed that the strength of lesbian relationships lies in the value placed upon relating by both partners. Paradoxically, she also observed that this strength can become a weakness if the partners in a relationship become so close that separateness and individuation is lost. Kaufman, Harrison, and Hyde (1983) made similar observations in a paper examining the need for distancing and space in lesbian relationships. While high levels of similarity and emotional closeness can lead to greater levels of relationship satisfaction, they may also be related to feelings of enmeshment and loss of personal identity.
Susan Krieger (1983) has examined the struggle for individual identity while remaining a part of the lesbian community at large. While her study does not deal explicitly with intimate relationships, it is supportive of the concept that women are socialized to value the importance of relationships and that the conflict between seeing oneself as an individual or as a member of a group or as part of a relationship is an ongoing issue for lesbian women.

Peplau, Cochran, Rook, and Padesky (1978) studied the issues of dyadic attachment and personal autonomy in lesbian relationships. In the literature, these two perspectives have been viewed as opposing value orientations. The study by Peplau concluded that while autonomy and attachment are distinct, they are not mutually exclusive orientations. There were significant differences between women who endorsed one set of values and those who de-emphasized that set.

While McCandlish, Kaufman, et.al., Peplau, et.al., and Krieger have not discussed the issue of violent conflict, their conceptualizations of merging of self into an intimate relationship or into a community of women raises the possibility of conflict erupting if one feels a loss of self through the merging process. It is important to directly study the implications of individuation versus merging in relation to violence between lesbian women in intimate relationships.
Chodorow (1978) has examined the issue of merging, separation, and individuation as a part of female adolescent development. While the oedipal conflict forces boys to make an early separation from mother, girls remain closer to their mothers throughout childhood and the issue of separation from family is an intense part of the female adolescent struggle. Since girls remain closer to family during childhood and adolescence, the primary developmental adolescent task for females is to separate from mother. The conflict between mother and daughter is often fraught with ambivalence. The mother may struggle with the desire to keep daughter close, yet at the same time attempt to push the daughter into adulthood.

The adolescent girl is in conflict because mother has been her primary source of identification, while she needs to reject this identification in order to begin the process of separation and individuation. In childhood, the female establishes her own boundaries, but intensity of emotional attachment creates boundary stress for the adolescent.

Often, the female splits the world into the good and bad segments, with mother and family representing the bad, which must be rejected, and the outside world representing the good. An outside role model may be sought; i.e., a teacher or best friend with whom everything is shared.
Chodorow has stressed the fact that the resolution of this conflict is not related to adoption of heterosexuality, but rather the constitution of differential relational potentials in people of different genders. Whether heterosexual or lesbian, the girl remains engaged to mother and the issues of merging and separation are carried into adulthood. Whether lesbian or straight, women develop close emotional bonds with other women. Chodorow states that the homosexual taboo of our culture prevents sexual expression in many female relationships.

Throughout the life-cycle, the female defines herself as more continuous with others and emotionally bonded to them. Males define themselves as separate and distinct from others and their world is more simple and fixed. Empathy may be seen as the positive outcome of the female perspective.

Carol Gilligan (1982) has examined these issues in relation to moral development. For females, the capacity to understand someone else is the prerequisite for moral response. The adolescent girl is often confused over the conflicts between self perceptions and the perceptions of others. She has described successful resolution of the adolescent conflict as the recognition that one can be separate from others and individuated, while maintaining a sense of connectedness to others. For the female, life is dependent upon connection and the bond of
attachment. For the male, life is a contract of agreement.

All women carry these conflicts and struggles with individuation and merging into adult relationships. Our relationships with our mothers, daughters, lovers, and friends recreate the struggle at different levels of resolution. For lesbian women, the struggle is likely to be intensified because emotional and physical bonding takes place between two females, both of whom are working on the same issues. For lesbian women who have not become individuated enough to clearly establish their personal boundaries, intimate relationships are likely to become enmeshed and the partners will merge and then struggle for separateness and individual identity. Physical conflict may be one way to cope with the perceived loss of personal boundaries.

DeCecco and Shively (1978) studied the issue of rights and needs in interpersonal conflicts of gay male and lesbian couples. Since only 34 women were included in a total sample of 125, the results may be more applicable to gay men than to lesbians. Psychological needs rather than democratic rights were more often perceived as critical issues to the conflict. Power was the need most frequently perceived as the issue by respondents. Coders were more likely than respondents to rate dependency as the critical need. It is important to note that negotiation was seldom attempted as a means to reduce conflict.
Brooks (1981) studied the concept of minority stress in lesbian women. The study did not directly address the impact of stress on lesbian couples. However, the concept of minority stress may be an important variable to consider in the study of conflict in lesbian relationships. Brooks found stress to be correlated inversely with socio-economic status. Respondents reported that they experienced more stress related to being female than to their lesbianism. Those exposed to feminist ideology experienced lower levels of stress than those not exposed. In the perspective of exchange theory, women with lower achieved status and fewer resources experienced the greatest amount of stress.
CHAPTER III
Methodology

Method

The interview method was used to gather data. Consistent with an emergent design, respondents were asked to tell their stories and share their perspectives relative to experiences with violence. Spradley (1979) has described the process of ethnographic interviewing and data analysis. While this project was not specifically ethnographic in nature, Spradley's work can be applied to qualitative designs.

Spradley (1979) has suggested that the following issues be kept in mind when gathering information from informants: What do informants know about their experience which I can discover? What concepts do my informants use to classify their experience? How do my informants define these concepts? What folk theory do my informants use to explain their experience? How can I translate the cultural knowledge of my informants into a cultural description with meaning for my colleagues?

Spradley (1979) has emphasized the fact that ethnographic research depends on the language of informants. In Spradley's view, it is important to avoid culture bound questions and interpretations. It is
possible to accurately observe or record, but to inaccurately interpret information provided by informants. A second interview was conducted with eight informants to allow informants to check the accuracy of the data collected. It was also possible for the researcher to discuss emergent categories and theoretical assumptions with informants in order to determine whether the interpretations are consistent with informants perceptions of their own reality. Distance prevented a second interview to be conducted with all informants. Some informants were unable to be contacted again because the instability of their situation at the time of the interview was such that they had relocated by the time efforts were made to contact them a second time.

The format was flexible to allow the women the opportunity to tell their stories from their perspective. Some structure was developed in order to insure that the informants addressed the research questions. Spradley (1979) has suggested that as categories emerge from data, it is possible to develop hypothesized domains.

The data were analyzed as the project progressed and structural questions were asked of informants in order to test emergent hypotheses. For example, hypotheses were developed around the issue of batterers initiating the termination of the relationship. This finding was unexpected and tentative hypotheses were discussed with respondents and key
informants.

As domains were discovered, it was possible to test the boundaries (Spradley, 1979) by asking questions which encouraged an expansion of the existing data. For example, a question may be developed from terms included in a category or domain: "You mentioned that alcohol, jealousy, and trouble at work triggered violent episodes. Can you think of other things which contributed to the violent episodes?" Most respondents indicated that the trigger episodes were not predictable and were most likely an excuse for violence. The questioning approach can help the informant make connections and recall experiences. This approach was also useful in attempting to exhaust all possible categories of a domain. Repetition is an indication that the area has been adequately covered and that relevant information to the domain has been uncovered.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. A copy of the transcription was given to informants when possible so that they could check for accuracy or to provide the opportunity for further clarification of statements.

Kirk and Miller (1986) have identified three types of validity which are relevant to qualitative research. These types are apparent validity (face validity), instrumental validity (concurrent and predictive validity), and theoretical validity (construct validity). An advantage of interviewing
as a method is that it is possible to question respondents about cultural or personal meanings and repeated exposures reduce the potential of erroneous conclusions. If accurate interpretations are to come out of this project, it is important to use confirmatory methods and to use the members meanings rather than the assumptions held by the researcher.

Accurate collection of data does not insure theoretical validity (Kirk & Miller (1986). Malinowski reportedly applied psychoanalytic theory in generalizing about ethnographic situations. One must be cautious about applying theories to groups which are different from the groups for which the theory was developed. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) have suggested, it is possible to apply such theory, but care must be taken not to impose cultural bias in the process.

Kirk and Miller (1986) have described three types of reliability. These types are: Quixotic reliability, defined as the circumstances in which a single method of observation yields an unvarying measure. Diachronic reliability refers to the stability of a measure over time. Synchronic reliability refers to the stability of measures during the same time period.

Reliability has received little attention from ethnographic researchers because validity is a more critical issue. It is possible to gather data which are very reliable but invalid. The example of invalid but reliable information being a situation where respondents have
colluded to give certain messages to the researcher. With that possibility in mind, complete reliability should perhaps signal that data are inaccurate or that only superficial information is being solicited by the researcher or given by respondents.

Sample

Because this project was designed with the intent of developing an understanding of lesbian couple violence in a manner consistent with the development of social work policy and direct interventive strategies, an ethnographic approach seems to be appropriate. This type of approach is also consistent with a feminist value orientation. Since the topic of this project was expected to elicit painful and unresolved feelings, it was likely that many women who are currently experiencing violent relationships had difficulty in coming forth to discuss their situations. For this reason, the sample included lesbian women who had experienced violent relationships in the past. Women who sporadically or under extreme conditions experienced violence were also solicited.

In addition to interviewing lesbian women who identified themselves as having been in or as currently in a violent lesbian relationship, the researcher interviewed people who are currently providing treatment services to lesbian survivors of violent relationships and to lesbian perpetrators. These people were identified through personal contacts developed in Minneapolis, St. Louis, and the Michigan
Coalition for Battered Women. Contacts were made with social workers, psychologists, and other counselors, shelter staff and directors, as well as an attorney who is currently employed as an advocate for battered lesbians and who has organized a support group for survivors of lesbian battering. These interviews proved helpful in defining the issue involved as well as being a source of interviewees for the study.

Initially, attempts were made to find interviewees for this study by sending letters to gay/lesbian organizations in Detroit, Columbus, and Ann Arbor and by placing advertisements in gay/lesbian newsletters in these three cities and in the major newspapers in Detroit and Columbus. These methods were effective in opening a few doors, but on the whole were expensive and produced limited results. Eight respondents came from this identified area, but it became difficult to expand upon this number.

By including Minneapolis (Twin Cities area) and St. Louis, it was possible to expand the total number of respondents to twenty. Minneapolis has an extensive social service network reaching out to battered lesbians. The community has organized a Survivor's Network, the United Way funds a program for batterers, there are groups for helping women to deal with personal struggles around the experience of battering, etc. The lesbian community is also attempting to confront the issue of battering as a problem for community intervention. St. Louis has
not developed services to the extent that Minneapolis has, but similar efforts are being made to organize responsible and helpful resources.

**Key Informants**

Key informants were contacted in Michigan, Minneapolis, and St. Louis. These were people who were counselors and others who were connected with the battered lesbian movement. The researcher attended several seminars on lesbian battering in Michigan which enabled her to connect with key informants for that state. In Minneapolis, a respondent to a lesbian newsletter ad was able to give the researcher much information which led to finding informants in the respondent's area. A personal friend in St. Louis put the researcher in contact with service providers working with lesbian women in that community.

The key informants served two purposes for this study. They were able to locate respondents and also served as consultants in identifying themes and in making sense out of the data. In addition to social workers and other professionals, two respondents were able to provide insights into the data as well.

The contacts in Minneapolis proved most useful, in that once the researcher had met some of the key people in the field, people in other communities were more able to see the researcher as a supportive and trustworthy person. The professionals in the field frequently
communicate with one another and word of this project traveled through the helping network. A personal introduction was valuable in being considered trustworthy by potential respondents and the professional community.

Minneapolis has an extensive service network for lesbian women dealing with issues related to domestic violence. There are services being developed in the St. Louis area as well. Professionals in these communities were willing to talk with this researcher and to connect her with potential respondents. In communities where violence in lesbian relationships is a less open topic, there was little support from professionals working with lesbian women. In some instances, the professionals clearly had little or no awareness of the issue. Most likely, these professionals had worked with women who were experiencing violence but did not confront the issue and the client did not feel comfortable talking about her experience. In other instances, there was a reluctance on the part of the professional to allow the researcher to access clients. For example, one psychologist stated that her clients who were dealing with this issue were not at a point in their treatment where they could speak about the issue to anyone but the therapist. This researcher suggested that she consider allowing the clients to make such a decision for themselves, but did not get any respondents through this source.
Conflict Tactics Scale

In the original design of this project, the respondents were to include a written response to an adapted version of Straus' Conflict Tactics Scales. The first six respondents shared negative reactions to the scales. The respondents felt it was confusing and constraining to answer the Conflict Tactics questionnaire. In reviewing the responses from these six respondents, it appeared that their C.T.S. responses did not contribute much to the understanding of violence in their relationships. Therefore the Conflict Tactics Scales were not included in the final project.

Pilot Interview

A difficult issue for a practicing social worker in undertaking a research project requiring the use of unstructured interviews is the tendency to act as a therapist, thus altering the responses of the respondents and changing their perspective on their experience. An interview was conducted with a woman who identified herself as a battered lesbian prior to the formal beginning of this project in order to provide an opportunity to practice the skills required to interview a person from a research perspective rather than from a therapy perspective. In reviewing this interview, the interviewer intervened as a therapist several times during the interview. Attempts were then made to limit, if not eliminate these responses in the interviews which are included in this
project. An example of a therapist response is a woman who had trouble in recognizing herself as battered and several times during the interview would identify herself as the batterer. Rather than simply allowing her to define herself and describe her situation, the interviewer might have pointed out her discrepancies and helped her to redefine herself as the victim, since fighting back does not make one a batterer. The perceptions of the interviewer were accurate based on the respondent's description of the relationship dynamics, but it was not appropriate to work toward a redefinition of her experience. To provide effective treatment, it is important to help the individual accurately define her experience as a batterer or as a victim.

Resources Available to the Respondent and the Perception of the Process by the Respondents

Being a social worker, however, ethics dictate that it is appropriate to intervene in a helpful way when one has information which could alleviate someone's emotional suffering. Also, from a feminist perspective, the research process should be interactive and the opportunity should exist for the respondent to gain something from the process. The researcher did use the information gathered in prior interviews to give the respondent the opportunity to think about her experience in the context of responses by others in her situation. For example, the respondents who were battered often indicated that they felt
responsible for the abuse and frequently identified themselves as the perpetrator over the course of the relationship. The interviewer might have said that respondents had identified themselves in this manner and asked this respondent if she thought this perspective might fit with her experience. It was made clear to each respondent that she could stop the interview if our discussion raised issues which she found too uncomfortable to handle. Each respondent was also informed that she could contact the researcher if she did not wish information about her to be included in the final project. One respondent asked me to stop the recorder for a brief period, allowing her to recompose herself and then indicated that she did wish to continue the session. No respondent requested that the interview be terminated, nor did any respondent indicate that she did not wish information about herself to be included in this project.

Upon contacting respondents for a second interview, three said they found the interview helpful in their own healing process. Hearing themselves talk about their experience allowed them to rethink it and to view pieces of it in a different perspective. One respondent sent the researcher a letter raising some ideas which she had forgotten at the time of the interview and another shared that she realized more clearly the next step in her own healing process after the first interview.
Names of therapists were available to use as referral sources if someone seemed to be having a difficult time dealing with her situation and was not seeing a therapist or did not know where to go for help. A list of supportive resources was also available. This list included the Survivors’ Network for Battered lesbians in Minneapolis and general lesbian organizations for women who were isolated from resources. No therapy referrals were made during the course of collecting data, but information about the survivors' network was given to two respondents and information about lesbian organizations to several others. The respondents seemed eager to receive information about help and support.

Data Analysis

This study was interpretive as well as descriptive. Data was be categorized and coded for interpretation. The constant comparison method of data analysis developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was incorporated.

Once data were collected, they were analyzed and categorized. Categories were identified along with the properties associated with each category. Integrating conceptualizations were formed from the identified categories and theory was developed. Glaser and Strauss (1967) have suggested that it is possible to fit new data into categories
developed from existing theory, but this approach does not emphasize emergent conceptualizations. It is important to generate new categories, as well as to document the relevance of existing categories and theoretical formulations. The major problem encountered when fitting data into existing categories is that ultimately data are collected which do not fit the existing set of categories. While the perspectives of Straus, Walker, Lobel, and others were considered and incorporated into the theoretical perspective of the data collected in this research project, new categories and theoretical explanations were also generated.

Spradley (1979) has described the process of data analysis as the research progresses. Informant meaning systems are the key components of the data collected. It is important to identify symbols and their relationship to other symbols. Symbols function as categories. As the research progressed, hypothesized domains were recorded. The domains were continually revised as new information was received. It was important to discover information about the domain, as well as the boundaries of the domain. The critical question was: Are there different ways for this particular thing to happen?

The final analysis was written primarily for social work practitioners. The material can also be useful to the lesbian/feminist community. Efforts have been made to explain the experience of informants in language familiar to social work practitioners, along with
recommendations for practice.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to describe and understand the phenomenon of family violence in the context of lesbian relationships. Lobel has written one of the few works in this area and has documented the existence of the phenomenon. She has defined the problem of lesbian violence in terms of its relationship to needs for power and dominance.

Lobel's cases describe women who have been extensively victimized or have extreme fear of victimization by a lover. This study has taken the next step in developing a perspective on the problem of lesbian violence by examining couples or individuals who have experienced violence in relationships ranging from extreme and extensive victimization to sporadic or occasional outbursts of violence aimed at control of the victim or resolving conflict between the partners.

The following questions have been specifically examined:

1. What factors in the individual, relationship, or environment contribute to acts of physical aggression toward the partner?

2. What factors in the individual, relationship, or environment are related to the maintenance or reduction of violent actions in the future?
3. What are the norms within the lesbian community regarding violence toward a partner?

4. What are the costs of violence to the stability of the relationship?

5. What are the costs of violence to the self perceptions of the victim and the perpetrator of the violence?

6. Does feminist ideology influence the incidence of violence as a means of conflict resolution or the nature of physical aggression?

7. Do lesbian women remain in relationships where they are victimized? If so, what factors influence this decision?

8. Does exposure to violence in childhood relate to being a victim or perpetrator of violence in an adult lesbian relationship?

9. Does the degree of comfort expressed in relation to acceptance of a lesbian identity affect the likelihood of violence erupting in a lesbian relationship?
CHAPTER IV
Description of Sample

This chapter will address the characteristics of the respondents in the sample and their batterers. Demographics of the sample will be discussed. The identification of the respondent as the victim or batterer in the relationship will be addressed. Years of education of respondents, race, drug and alcohol abuse, and previous exposure to violence and abuse will be discussed. The impact of children on the relationship and the personality characteristics of respondents will also be included in this chapter.

Demographic Information

Twenty interviews were conducted over a period of two years. Respondents came from Northwest and Central Ohio, Southeastern and Northern Michigan, Minnesota, and Eastern Missouri. Four respondents currently identified themselves as living in a rural area and 16 were from urban communities.

Respondent As Victim or Batterer

Only one respondent identified herself solely as a batterer. One identified herself as being battered but said she became the batterer
near the end of the relationship. From her description of herself and her partner, it appeared as though both had the potential to be violent. It is possible that the power dynamic shifted over the course of the relationship and the two women switched roles. This particular couple was very isolated from other lesbians and both seemed to feel trapped in this relationship. It is possible to argue the validity of this point, but the respondent's description of the relationship will be accepted in the context of this study.

The other 18 respondents identified themselves as being battered by their partners. It is difficult for lesbian women to recognize that battering exists in lesbian relationships and to identify themselves as battered women. It is even more difficult for lesbian women to admit to battering a partner. The professionals who have developed services for battered lesbians and batterers in Minneapolis have indicated that the batterer may deny battering and present herself as a victim and the battered lesbian may present herself as a batterer. The kind of information given by the respondents in this study is consistent with the perspective of battered lesbians as described by professionals who provide services to survivors and perpetrators of violence. It is possible that someone was an expert liar and severely distorted reality, no respondent who identified herself as battered gave messages which
would fit with battering, i.e., "she was responsible for my behavior."

One respondent is currently involved with her batterer. Both are in treatment groups specifically dealing with issues related to battering in the relationship. They have negotiated a contract in which the batterer cannot have contact with her partner if the batterer drinks alcohol and the relationship will terminate if any incident of physical violence occurs. The respondent feels in control of her life and wants to work toward a successful, violence free relationship with the identified batterer. The batterer is reported to be accepting responsibility for her actions. Two respondents were in the process of separating from the batterer, and had not completely separated from the relationship. The remaining 17 respondents were completely separated from the relationship with the batterer (or partner in the case of the batterer interviewed). Some of these respondents lived in the same community as the batterer and had periodic contact with her, and some currently have no contact with the former batterer. The length of separation from the relationship ranged from a few months to ten years.

Given the difficulty for lesbian women to identify themselves as battered, it is reasonable to assume that women who are presently enduring a battering relationship are unable to recognize the relationship as such. Because of the lack of attention paid to the issue of lesbian battering, some respondents did not recognize themselves as battered
until after the relationship had ended. One respondent reported that she had separated from the relationship and she and her former partner met in a restaurant to divide the remainder of their property. They began arguing and the batterer pointed her finger into the respondent's face and called her names. She suddenly realized that the abuse she had endured over the course of the relationship was not her fault and that she had been physically and emotionally battered for several years.

**Education**

The educational backgrounds of respondents ranged from completion of 11th grade to PhD. Three respondents completed MSW degrees and one a law degree. Three respondents worked specifically in the field of domestic violence while they were in the battering relationship.

**Race**

All respondents were white women. Four respondents reported their batterers as women of color. One was black, one hispanic, and two were Native American. The remainder of respondents were in relationships with another white woman. The respondent whose batterer was black talked at length about her experiences in the black community and about the way both lesbianism and battering are dealt with by the black community. As a white researcher, getting information from a white respondent, it is not appropriate to accept her view as an accurate
portrayal of the black community without validation from a black lesbian, who strongly identified with the black community. Issues raised by the respondent were discussed with a key informant who met the stated criteria. She supported the respondents views as accurate in relation to her experience with the black lesbian community over the years. It is still impossible to conclude that the data collected from one person's experience can be generalized to the entire African American population. It is important that further research be done within minority communities to clarify the similarities and differences in battering experiences between various groups of lesbians.

**Drug and Alcohol Abuse**

Drug and alcohol abuse have been correlated with family violence in heterosexual relationships. Since one in three lesbians is estimated to have a problem with substance abuse (Anderson & Henderson, 1985), it is likely that drugs and alcohol were used by batterers and victims in this study. Three of the batterers were reported to be in recovery programs for drug and/or alcohol dependence during the period of the relationship and there was no active chemical abuse during the relationship. Nine batterers were reported to be addicted to or to abuse drugs or alcohol during the relationship. Only two respondents reported that use of drugs or alcohol always or nearly always preceded the incidences of battering. It is important to note that even in cases where chemical abuse always is
involved in battering, the use of chemicals cannot be considered the cause of battering behavior.

**Previous Exposure to Violence and Abuse**

Previous exposure to violence has been correlated with family violence in heterosexual relationships. The respondent who self-identified as a batterer described herself as being severely abused as a child. She was literally abandoned by her mother in infancy. Her mother was single and left her in the care of sisters in a convent while she sought work and intended to establish herself. She did not return for her daughter and since she did not sign papers for adoption, the respondent was too old and too hardened by the child welfare system to be adoptable by the time the state was able to legally make her available for adoption. She spent her entire childhood in institutions and foster homes. It is interesting to note that the respondent who reported herself turning from victim to abuser, had a similar history of severe abuse. She was removed from her family at a young age as a result of sexual abuse by a step-parent. She spent her childhood years in foster homes, with relatives, and ultimately in juvenile institutions. She experienced repeated physical and sexual abuse in these settings. Her first ongoing lesbian relationship was with a staff member of a juvenile institution in which she was incarcerated. She did not define this relationship as sexually abusive and said, "If you were in my situation and your choice
was to be beat up by the staff or have sex with them, which would you pick?" While I would not identify this woman as an abuser in the context of the reported relationship, she had been physically abusive to others as an adolescent and her rage and need to control others to prevent being controlled by them seemed similar to the self description given by the identified batterer.

The other respondents reported physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, parental alcoholism, and other forms of family dysfunction in their batterers' backgrounds. Only two respondents reported knowledge that their batterers had observed their mothers battered by fathers. In both instances there was also physical abuse of the batterer by parental figures.

There were thirteen reports of physical abuse of batterers, ten reports of sexual abuse and one suspected but not reported, six reports of psychological or emotional abuse, three reports of parental alcoholism, and one report of other family dysfunction (mother was hospitalized for long periods in a psychiatric facility and older brothers acted in parental role).

The abuse reported to have been inflicted on the batterers was described as severe in most instances. For example, one respondent reported the following in regard to her abuser:
Her father abused her all through her childhood. He finally tried to burn the house down with her and her sister in it. After that, they finally took him away in a strait jacket. I don't think she has ever really dealt with this stuff. She would always use it as an excuse for her behavior.

It was reported that ten batterers had previously been in a violent relationship. Two were described as previously violent to a husband, one was described as battered by her former husband, four battered a former lesbian partner, two battered acquaintances or housemates, and one battered her children. Another was described as sadistic in a consenting sado-masochistic relationship.

While the reports of abuse history among batterers is consistent with the literature on family violence, the information given by the respondents was often given with questions about its validity. Four respondents described the batterer as frequently lying and that there were many inconsistencies in their stories of their past histories of abuse. For example, one respondent reported that her batterer described herself as severely abused by parents who were alcoholic. The respondent discovered that the batterer often abused herself and said bruises were inflicted by others, including parents, and that she observed no evidence of excessive family dysfunction when she visited the batterer's parents. She described her experience with conflicting stories from her abuser as follows:
But all along this whole time of getting to know each other, there were things that were going on that were real different for me. For one thing, Cheryl had told me that she was abused by her father, sexually and physically, and she'd go home to her hometown and she'd come back and she would have like marks around her eye or whatever and she would give me a story about something. One of them was, well I was pulling out of the parking lot, the parking lot of their house, and I wasn't doing it quite straight and they started laughing and my Dad turned around and he, and he slugged me in the eye. And, I would always be really like, wow, you know, what can I do for you, and, so what I did, I started calling up counseling services and finding out what are some of the underlying issues around family abuse and child abuse and what are some things, how can I be supportive cause I'd never had that as part of my life, either personally or professionally. Except I was just starting to work in a group home for girls who had been, abused or neglected. But anyway, so I started really looking into this and, really laid off when she'd go home, I tried, I got to some points when I got so frustrated, it's like, why do you go home when you're getting beat up. Because I love my mother and I want to see my mother. She'd come back and I'd touch her on the back and she'd like jerk her body, like I had just touched a bruised area or something. And there were, she worked, then she started working for Community Mental Health, and one day she came home and she had teeth marks around her wrist and she told me that one of the clients had bit her. And, and I had reason to wonder because it was in one of those spots where it was real convenient for someone to bite herself. Later, I found out from a former lover of hers, that she made up stories of abuse by others and actually did abuse herself.

Another respondent who questioned the validity of her abuser's story about being abused as a child explained the batterer's family situation as follows: Darlene told Attie she had been sexually abused by her father. Attie was not sure whether this was true or not, since
Darlene's stories frequently changed. She described her father as an alcoholic, although Attie never saw him take a drink, nor was she aware of his attending AA meetings or any other recovery program. After the relationship ended, Darlene became involved in AA and described herself as having been drinking heavily for several years. Attie said that Darlene did not drink during their eight year relationship. From observations of Darlene's family, Attie believed that they were dysfunctional. However, given Darlene's history of lies, she felt that the facts of their behavior remained unknown.

It is also possible that the history of abuse was exaggerated by the respondent as a means to explain the behavior of the batterer. All respondents attempted to find explanations for the batterer's irrational behavior. During the course of the relationship these explanations were reinforced by the batterer. The link with prior history of abuse was the most common explanation for abusive behavior. For example, one respondent indicated that her batterer denied sexual abuse while the respondent felt strongly that the batterer had actually been sexually abused.

Another respondent described her knowledge about her batterer's experience with incest as follows: She believed that Marty had been an incest victim, but was not sure what her actual experience had been. Marty had told her that her father once fondled her breasts, and that
another time, he had talked sexually to her. She did not feel that Marty was able to share the entire story of her experience and thought she had blocked it out of her mind or that it was too painful to talk about. It is possible that batterers had blocked out or did not disclose abusive experiences.

Respondents used other means to explain battering episodes. These included references to mental illness, multiple personality, demon possession, and a "Jeckel and Hyde" personality. It is probable that two abusers could be diagnosed as having a serious mental disorder, based on suggestions from mental health professionals consulted by the respondents. Mental disorders, including multiple personality cannot be ruled out in the others. However, the behavior patterns described by respondents seemed more consistent with behaviors associated with the cycle of abuse (Walker, 1979) than with serious mental disorders.

Multiple Categories of Abuse History

Eight batterers were reported to have been violent in a previous relationship. Of this group, four were reported to have been physically and sexually abused as children, one to have been physically abused as a child and from a dysfunctional family, one physically abused, and one to have been sexually abused as a child and to be an adult child of an alcoholic. The previous exposure to abuse was not known for one abuser who was reported to have been abusive in other adult
relationships.

For batterers not violent in other relationships, three were reported to have experienced only physical abuse and three only sexual abuse. Multiple categories were as follows: one physical, sexual and emotional abuse, one physical, sexual abuse, and dysfunctional family, one physical and sexual abuse, one physical and emotional abuse. The dysfunctional family was defined as the mother being hospitalized in a psychiatric facility for long periods of time. The abuse history of one batterer was unknown.

Only one batterer was identified as experiencing only psychological abuse. While emotional or psychological abuse was explicitly mentioned by six respondents, it can be assumed to have been a part of the violence inflicted on most of the batterers. It is unlikely that physical abuse occurred without a component of emotional abuse as well.

For the reasons stated, the data on the batterer's history of abuse should be viewed with caution. It is probable that there is a strong correlation between being abused as a child and becoming an abuser as an adult. This correlation has been established with male batterers and with female child abusers. Further research needs to be done in this area to determine more clearly what historical factors differentiate female
batterers from nonbattering women.

**Drug and Alcohol History of Respondents**

Three respondents reported being in recovery for drug or alcohol abuse at the time of entering the battering relationship. All maintained their sobriety for the duration of the relationships. One respondent indicated that she became involved with the batterer early in her recovery process and felt that her sobriety was so overwhelmingly important to her that she did not deal with the abusive aspects of the relationship. Another indicated that she could not get support from other AA members around abuse because many of them were spouse abusers or abused their children. Issues of abuse were denied in the groups she attended. None of these respondents felt that AA was helpful to them in dealing with the abuse in their relationships.

Three respondents were actively abusing drugs or alcohol during the abusive relationship. The batterers were also abusing drugs or alcohol in these relationships.

**Abuse History of Respondents**

Two respondents reported no history of family dysfunction. Two others reported coming from families where there were no experiences with abuse, but described their families of origin as dysfunctional because their religion taught them to deny feelings of anger and other negative emotions. In one of these families, the mother committed
suicide as well. These cases are important because they demonstrate that a history of family abuse is not a prerequisite for being in an abusive relationship as an adult.

Since the respondents are reporting their personal experiences with abuse, these reports can be considered to be more accurate than the reports the respondents gave regarding the history of their batterers. Because of pressures around issues of social oppression, lesbian women may be more likely than heterosexual women to seek therapy and to undergo the process of self-examination. Also, many of the respondents were contacted as a result of participation in therapy or support groups resulting from their battering experiences. For these reasons, the respondents may be more likely than the general population to recognize the dysfunctional elements of their family experience and to more clearly remember abusive experiences.

**Involvement in Prior Adult Abusive Relationship**

Four respondents reported being in a prior relationship which was physically abusive. Three of these relationships were with a male partner and one respondent reported sexual abuse in the relationship in addition to physical abuse. A respondent stated that it was easier to recognize the relationship with a man as abusive. She had more knowledge about men as abusers and also felt less emotional connection with him.
The respondent who had another abusive lesbian relationship reported the first batterer as extremely violent, and she was able to leave the relationship after a period of about one year. The data about this batterer are not included in this study. In her second relationship, the batterer was more manipulative and the respondent remained in the relationship for about five years before she was able to identify her partner as a batterer, even though there were a number of instances of being physically beaten by her. The data in this study are from the second reported relationship.

Exposure to Abuse in Family of Origin

Nine respondents reported being physically abused as children, seven respondents reported being sexually abused as children, and ten respondents reported emotional abuse as children. Two respondents reported being adult children of alcoholics.

Six respondents reported other forms of family dysfunction. There were two instances of parents committing suicide, two (previously mentioned) reports of religious training which made expression of anger unacceptable, an additional report of lack of expression of feelings, and one report of a respondent viewing her mother as powerless against her father.
Children in the Abusive Relationship

There were children involved in seven of the abusive relationships. Four of the respondents had children, three of these children were born prior to their mothers coming out as lesbians. One respondent had a child during the relationship to please the batterer. She believed that the presence of the child would improve the relationship. Three of the batterers had children who lived in the household during the relationship.

Personality Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents could all be described as strong women. As previously mentioned, several had achieved high levels of education and nearly all were working in meaningful jobs and were active in the lesbian community. None appeared to be suffering from serious emotional disorders and all indicated that the abusive relationship was a serious source of pain and stress in their lives. Several described a period of depression which began as a result of the battering and continued after the relationship had ended. Several women described a grieving process relating to the end of a significant, although painful, relationship. While most of the women still have difficulty dealing with the abusiveness of the relationship within the lesbian community, all seem to be functioning well at the present time.
TABLE 1
History of Abuse/Perpetrator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Abuse as Child</th>
<th>Family Dysfunction</th>
<th>Abusive Adult Relationships</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical (P)</td>
<td>Sexual (S)</td>
<td>Emotional (E)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parental Alcoholism</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Perpetrator</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td></td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>no known history of abuse</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>TOTALS</td>
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TABLE 2
History of Abuse/Survivors

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<th>Sexual Abuse</th>
<th>Emotional Abuse</th>
<th>Family Dysfunction</th>
<th>Abusive Adult Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Parental Alcoholism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Perpetrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. x                      
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3. x x x                   
4. x x x x                 
5. x                       
6. x x x                   
7. x x                     
8. x x                     
9. no known history of abuse
10. x x                    
11. x                      
12. x x x                  
13. x x x                  
14. x                      
15. x x x x                
16. x x                    
17. x x x x                
18. x x                    
19. no known history of abuse
20. x                      

| 9 7 11 2 6 0 4 TOTALS |
CHAPTER V
The Nature of Battering

This chapter will focus on the issues which characterize the battering relationship. Violence will be defined and examples will be presented. Power and control, the hallmark of a battering relationship will be discussed, along with the characteristics which distinguish batterers from non-batterers. Maintenance of power and patterns of violence will be described as well as the factors which contribute to the maintenance of power. These factors include internalized homophobia and self hate, emotional intensity, nurturing and caring, fear, loss of control, and caretaking.

Power and Control

The issue of power and control must be addressed as primary in battering relationships. Issues of dependency, inability to handle intimacy and emotional intensity, and previous victimization of the batterer play a role in the need to maintain control, but the need for control on the part of the batterer surfaced in every interview.

This intense need for dominance on the part of the batterer, means that there will be a primary batterer and a primary victim in the
relationship. When the question of mutual battering is raised, it is usually related to the possibility that battering in lesbian relationships can be explained as two power equals having a fair fight. Since there are two women in the relationship, the dynamic of male dominance is removed. The battered male dominance as the central feature of violence in heterosexual relationships. While the male dominance issue has been important to the success of the movement, it has overshadowed the other issues involved in heterosexual battering. What factors distinguish the battering person from the nonbatterer?

Factors Distinguishing Batterers From Non-Batterers

The potential batterer, in seeking a partner in the lesbian community, is most likely to select someone who is perceived to be less powerful than the potential batterer. In no way does this imply that there is something wrong with the potential victim. Too often, battered women are described as if they have some defect in their personality which predisposes them to battering relationships.

There are many reasons why a woman may be perceived as potentially less powerful in a relationship. For example, the majority of women interviewed were entering their first lesbian relationship or their first committed relationship. In the initial phase of the coming out process, women are unsure of themselves. They are in the process of
developing a new self identity and are experiencing role change (Groves and Ventura, 1983). For these women, the batterer was viewed as someone who was more knowledgeable about lesbian issues or about lesbian relationships. One respondent indicated that when she met the batterer, she had had virtually no prior contact with lesbian women. She was uncertain about her lesbian identity and looked to her partner to show her the way.

Age was another factor identified as related to power. One respondent who had been in a prior lesbian relationship with a woman her own age, felt she was attracted to the batterer because she was older and therefore was perceived as having a great deal of knowledge about relationships and lesbian lifestyle issues.

For women who were already clearly self-identified as lesbians, the batterer was often perceived as being a superior person in some way. Community activism, being a lesbian therapist, or being a spiritual leader were examples of this kind of superiority. Since other members of the lesbian community believed that the batterer possessed these qualities, the individual gained a good deal of support for her beliefs. She also was likely to gain community status by her involvement with the batterer. One respondent had been actively involved in the lesbian community for many years and had several committed relationships. She described herself as having overdeveloped the logical, linear
thinking part of herself. She was in the process of finding the feminine, intuitive, and spiritual parts of herself. She met a woman who was the leader of a group dedicated to spiritual and psychic development, and sincerely believed this woman to hold the key to her own development in this area. Since the potential batterer was the leader of a group, there was a great deal of support for the view of the batterer as a spiritually and psychically superior person.

Another respondent described her abuser as having more professional expertise which gave her power over the respondent:

She was a psychologist. I was fresh out of grad. school and had started my first professional job in chemical dependency. She worked on the unit and had a couple of years experience. She was also recovering, supposedly, which threw that element in too. I was still uncertain of my own sexuality as well as my professional skills, so I looked up to her in a lot of ways.

Previous involvement in an abusive relationship could also create vulnerability to another battering relationship. This factor does not mean that these women sought a violent relationship or had a personality that predisposed them to violence. They had not recovered from the devastating psychological impact of the abusive situation, and their vulnerability was likely to be apparent to the batterer who presented herself as caring and understanding. Twenty five per cent (25%) of the respondents had been in violent relationships prior to the relationship
referred to in the interview. Three respondents had been in violent relationships with men prior to becoming involved in a lesbian relationship. One respondent had been in a violent lesbian relationship prior to the primary relationship discussed in the interview. One woman reported in a subsequent contact that she had become involved with an abusive partner for a relationship of several months' duration after leaving the relationship she had discussed in our earlier interview.

Early recovery from drug and alcohol abuse created another type of vulnerability. Three respondents reported themselves to be coming out of treatment programs for drug and alcohol abuse at the time of entering the relationship with a batterer. One respondent described herself as needing to devote so much energy to her own sobriety that she could not focus on the abusive elements of the relationship. Her batterer was involved in AA and on the surface provided her with sober support. Another respondent described herself as gaining self-esteem, lost through alcohol abuse, by her involvement with the batterer, who was a person respected in the lesbian community. As the abuse progressed over time, her self-esteem began to erode. Thus this relationship could not be defined as truly contributing to the development of a positive self image.
Maintaining Power in the Relationship

Once the relationship is established, the batterer must do whatever is necessary to maintain the position of power and superiority in the relationship. Typically, the physical abuse did not begin until the relationship was firmly established. The length of time for this process to occur varied from a few months to over a year into the relationship. In retrospect, respondents reported emotional abuse beginning earlier in the relationship. This type of abuse was ignored, as well as incidents of minor physical abuse such as slapping or aggressive "play." One respondent described her experience as follows:

We became involved initially because we cared about each other. It is easy for those who have never been battered to say you should just leave the relationship the first time you are abused. When she hit me the first time, I was shocked. This was the person I loved, and who cared about me. When she promised never to do it again I believed her. I wanted this relationship to work. I think most people would have reacted in the same way.

Patterns of Violence

Generally, once physical violence occurred in a relationship, it increased in frequency over time. The batterers needed increasing violence to feel in control of the relationship. Some respondents reported being battered on a weekly basis. One respondent reported that she was likely to be physically abused two or three times per week.
For some respondents, the physical violence was sporadic and the batterer's emotional abuse and the respondent's fear were sufficient for the batterer to maintain control between the infrequent violent episodes. One respondent reported that the physical abuse decreased over the course of the relationship. The early episodes of violence were severe and the overwhelming fear on the part of the respondent created a relationship where the batterer was able to maintain total control without physical violence. Threats of violence evoked memories of actual abuse in the mind of the victim and served as a powerful means of control.

Four respondents specifically discussed the batterer as using physical force when verbal means of control failed. One respondent described her abuser as feeling less educated and as having less verbal skill than the partner. Therefore, she resorted to physical abuse to gain dominance. Two respondents indicated that the batterer realized that the partner was at least an intellectual equal and could not handle this element of equality in the relationship. One respondent whose abuser was actively alcoholic said that the batterer's prior relationships were with other alcoholic women. She did not need to physically abuse them because, although she abused alcohol herself, she could control her previous partners when they were drunk. Since the respondent did not abuse alcohol, she was perceived as less controllable by the batterer.
It is important in understanding the dynamics of violence to look at what factors in a relationship trigger a feeling of loss of control in the batterer. The respondent who was a self-identified batterer and the respondent who described herself as moving from the role of victim to abuser, both described themselves as having experienced severe abuse as children. Both spent much of their childhood years in foster home and institutional settings. Both were severely physically abused and one described instances of repeated sexual abuse by those who were in caretaking roles. The respondents who were survivors of violent relationships described their abusers as having experienced severe abuse as children. Those who were not aware of specific abuse to the batterer suspected it had occurred and was too painful for the abuser to talk about.

While it is consistent with the literature on battering that most batterers have been abused as children, it is not possible to conclude from these data that child abuse always precedes violent behavior in adulthood. The respondents needed to explain the battering behavior in order to make sense out of their experience. Since women are not expected to be abusers in our society, it was important to have a rationale to explain the battering behavior.
Three respondents described the batterer as explicitly using childhood abuse as an excuse for violent actions in the relationship. These excuses were effective as a means to manipulating others into accepting the abusive behavior. After recognizing the relationship as a battering one and then separating from the batterer, the respondents were angry at having been manipulated and were no longer sympathetic to these excuses.

Two respondents reported that their abusers lied about everything, including their history of being abused as children. Both respondents had evidence that some of the stories of abuse to the perpetrator by her family members were lies. While they believed that a person who is an abuser has probably been victimized, they were confused about the reality of this issue in relation to their abusers. Two respondents who reported their abusers to have no known history of abuse suspected that it had occurred but was too painful for the batterer to disclose.

The two respondents who reported themselves to have been the batterers both described severely abusive childhood experiences. These women seemed to have little or no supportive relationships as children. It is possible that severity of abuse, along with few positive relationships, plays a role in the development of the female abuser.
One abuser described herself as unable to trust others and that she had no positive relationships until she found a true friend who took her in when she escaped from an institution and took to the streets as an adolescent. This friend was a slightly older woman who had similar negative experiences in life. The fact that this woman was surviving made her a role model for the respondent. When this friend committed suicide, the respondent reported that she lost faith in the possibility for positive outcomes.

One respondent described her abuser as severely abused in childhood and also having witnessed other family members abuse each other. She described her partners violent outbursts as follows:

Part of what was acted out by her being violent was that she felt that was the only way to make herself safe, because that's what she saw in her family, was to see who could fight the hardest. You know, whoever had the biggest muscles, who could hit the hardest, who could swear and just you know, come up with the biggest insult to each other was sort of top dog.

The respondent who reported herself changing from victim to batterer was removed from her parents because of severe physical and sexual abuse. She was sent to live with an aunt and uncle. For a short time, she experienced a positive family experience. The trauma of her life with her birth family had filled her with such rage that the relatives felt
they could not control her behavior. They sent her to an institution for evaluation and she felt the system kept her institutionalized for most of her youth. She felt that her only hope for a positive family life was stripped away from her.

Such abusive experiences could be postulated to create feelings of dependence, difficulty with intimate relationships, and the feeling that one must be in control at all times or be subject to abuse or abandonment by others. Regardless of the source of such feelings, they were frequently reported by respondents as characteristic of the abusers.

From these data, it is clear that abuse in childhood plays a role in becoming an abuser as an adult. Further studies of batterers need to be done in order to more fully understand this phenomenon. It is important to note that the survivors of battering reported abuse, sexual, physical, and emotional, in their own childhood. The question of what distinguishes the batterer from other women who have been victims of abuse in childhood has not been clearly proven and further research into this area is warranted. There appears to be a clear connection between serious victimization in childhood and the assumption of the role of perpetrator as an adult. Perhaps these individuals have learned to perceive the world totally in terms of dominance and submission. In this perspective, if one does not maintain total control, she will open herself up to be victimized again. One respondent who self identified as a
batterer reported frequent violent outbursts in adolescence against adult caretakers. She was able to directly connect this adolescent experience to the need to control and act aggressively before the adults attacked her.

**Internalized Homophobia and Self Hate**

We live in a homophobic society. Gay men and lesbian women grow up with negative internalized messages and shame about who they are. An effective way to overcome this internalized oppression, is to build supportive relationships with other gay persons and to be involved with a gay/lesbian community which can provide role models and a safe haven from the oppression of society at large. Since the hallmark of abusive lesbian relationships is isolation, these women often have little or no support to overcome the feelings of shame and guilt which have been built up over the years of oppression.

In addition to homophobia, our society promotes negative messages about being female. Violence against women is on the rise and is often glorified in the media. In addition, women are still too often portrayed in the victim role by Hollywood. These messages have a negative effect on the self-image of women in our society. For women whose love object is a person of the same gender, these feelings of self-hate can be intensified when faced with an intimate relationship. For the batterer, the self-hate is further intensified by the feelings of shame engendered by violent behavior which does not fit the acceptable female
role in our society.

Burch (1987) has discussed the issue of self-hatred resulting from feelings of dependency in lesbian relationships. Dependency is viewed by some lesbians as identification with the traditional model of heterosexual femininity. A woman who cannot accept her own feelings of dependency may project her gynophobia onto her partner. Her dependency on her lover will then intensify her own feelings of self hatred and lack of worth as a female in our society.

Respondents reported evidence of homophobia and negative feelings toward being female by the batterers. Three respondents reported that the batterer clearly gave the message at times that she wanted to be a man. Two of the batterers clearly came from families where physical violence occurred on a regular basis between parents and children and between siblings. To be female meant to be vulnerable to abuse and the women seemed to take on a violent masculine role as a means of self protection. In all three cases, family members, fathers in particular, commonly made negative remarks about gay people. One father was reported to have said "faggots should be killed," in response to a news report on gay rights. An additional respondent reported that her batterer had come out to her mother as a teenager, and the mother continually told her daughter she was sick.
Two additional respondents indicated that their batterers were not comfortable with their femininity and attempted to cover up feminine aspects of appearance and were not comfortable with expression of emotion which was a characteristic attributed to the female gender. They were described as making their appearance extremely masculine, avoiding any attire which would identify them as female. Their lack of emotional expression was also described as extreme.

While several respondents discussed issues related to clothing worn by their abusers, these data must be viewed with caution. These respondents were referring to the batterer's total presentation of self and not just addressing the issue of attire. It is important to note that many feminists, lesbian or heterosexual, have rejected the societal standards of feminine appearance. "Feminine" attire may be viewed by feminists as promoting the objectification of women. Some women may simply find this clothing uncomfortable and restrictive of movement. One should never make judgments about self image on the basis of clothing alone.

These and other respondents reported that their batterers would accuse them of wanting to be in relationships with men. These accusations were confusing to the respondents because they had no interest in pursuing relationships with men and felt the accusations were unfounded and that they could not convince the batterer of their true
feelings in this area. What often triggered such accusations was anything perceived as feminine by the batterer. Two respondents reported cutting off their hair to please the partner. Long hair meant to the batterer that they were not "dykey" enough and that they might be attempting to get male attention. For one of these women, cutting her hair was a traumatic event and she felt she was being forced to alter her entire identity to please her partner who still told her she did not look like a lesbian.

Another batterer cut off her partner's hair. The respondent reported that she agreed to let the batterer give her a hair cut. The batterer proceeded to give her a mohawk to make her unattractive to other women as well as to men. The respondent reported that she was extremely upset by this action because she was a teacher and wanted to maintain a professional appearance. The issue of ownership and control is a theme which is also related to these actions by abusers. The partners' wishes were completely disregarded by the batterers who did what they pleased with their partners.

These women also reported that the batterers controlled the clothing they wore as well as their hair styles. The respondent who felt her identity was taken away by being coerced into cutting her hair also reported that the batterer wanted her to dress in clothing which she perceived as unattractive. Since a number of these women had not had
much prior experience with the lesbian community, they were confused about expectations of appearance. Wearing one's hair in an unattractive style and dressing in clothing which did not fit their self-images, led these respondents to have a sense of lowered self-esteem and contributed to their feelings of being unattractive to persons other than their abusers.

One respondent reported that the abuse in her relationship seemed clearly related to the abuser's inability to deal with her lesbian feelings. Just prior to becoming involved in the relationship with the respondent, the abuser had marched in an anti-gay march promoted by Anita Bryant. This was the first lesbian relationship for the abuser and the respondent reported feeling guilty and responsible for the batterer's lesbianism. The abuser would frequently become emotionally abusive during lovemaking and on one occasion, chased her partner with a scissors. The respondent reported fearing for her life in this situation.

Another respondent reported that her abuser was physically strong and powerful and prided herself on this quality. She also received support from other lesbians for her physical strength and ability to "take care of others" in wilderness situations. The respondent went on a wilderness trip with the abuser and a group of friends. The group was inadequately prepared for the trip and endured serious hardships along the way. The abuser had extreme difficulty in accepting any kind of emotional reaction from the respondent who had not even been on
camping trips prior to this time. Any emotion expressed by the respondent was responded to negatively by the abuser. The abuser berated the respondent and continually called her weak, at the same time pointing out her own physical abilities and applauding her own lack of emotional response.

One respondent reported that she gave birth to a child to please her abuser. The abuser wanted to parent a child and could not accept being pregnant, which would put her in touch with her womanhood. She convinced her partner, who indicated that she did not really want a child, to have a sexual relationship with a man as a means to get pregnant.

The above examples cite the ways in which abusers exert power and control over the victims in their relationships. Vulnerabilities of victims or lack of awareness of expectations for behavior in the lesbian community were fully exploited by the batterers as means of maintaining power and control.

**Emotional Intensity**

Difficulty in handling intimacy and emotional intensity in the relationship was viewed as characteristic of batterers by respondents. The relationships were described as emotionally intense as abuse was used to create emotional distance. Two respondents specifically discussed the fact that abuse often occurred at times of sexual intimacy because the batterer could not tolerate the level of closeness which
evolved at that time. These batterers also were described as having difficulty in accepting their lesbian identity.

Batterers were described as having fairly consistent personality patterns and were often described as abusive to others in previous or future intimate relationships or to others in general. The survivors, on the other hand, were seemingly more diverse in their personalities. The characteristics shared were likely to be developed as coping mechanisms to survive the battering situation or as a direct result of living in fear of abuse.

Those women who had suffered abuse as children had often learned survival tactics which came into play again in the relationship with the abuser. For some of these women, there was a higher tolerance for abuse because they had experienced violence as children and were not as shocked by it as some persons might be, or the childhood experience had taught them techniques to block out the pain. One respondent reported that her father was alcoholic and would often take her in the car when he was drunk. She was terrorized by his erratic driving, but realized she had no control over the situation. She would curl up in the seat with her eyes closed, uncertain whether she would be dead or alive when the ride ended. She responded to being battered by her lesbian lover in the same manner. She reported similar feelings of fear and of having no control over her life at that moment in time.
Nurturing and Caring

When confronted with domestic violence, the first question often asked is, why did she stay? One respondent discussed her feelings of love for her abuser. When the first episode of violence occurred, the relationship had already been formed and the bonds cemented:

If you went on a date with someone and that person was abusive and hit you, you would not be likely to become further involved with that individual. But if you go out with someone who is tender and affectionate and caring, you are likely to continue the relationship. When the verbal abuse begins, you pass it off as stress or feel some responsibility for the fight. The first time she hits you, you are not going to leave. You love her and do not view her as a violent person. She promises never to do it again and you want so much to believe that to be true. As the abuse increases, the fear grows, and it becomes harder and harder to get out.

Fear

Sixteen respondents cited fear as a major factor which kept them in the relationship with the batterer. One respondent reported that she tried to leave and the batterer cut up her clothes. When she came back to the apartment to get her things, she knew the batterer would come after her and the abuse would be worse if she did not return to the relationship.

Destruction of personal property sent a powerful message to respondents about the batterers' willingness to violate boundaries, and
seemed symbolic of the physical abuse which was feared by respondents.

Other respondents reported that their batterers stalked them when they made efforts to leave the relationship. They felt it was impossible to escape. One respondent, an attorney, reported that long after leaving the relationship, her batterer still tried to disrupt her life. She believed that there was no way to totally escape from this violent and destructive individual. Because of her direct involvement in the legal practice, this respondent had a greater awareness of the limitations of the legal system in providing protection to victims of violence.

There were two respondents who specifically stated that they did not fear the batterer. One of these reported that the batterer was extremely violent and that she felt she would be killed if she left the relationship. She felt so hopeless and depressed, that she was incapable of feeling the emotion of fear. Other respondents reported blocking of feelings or intellectually minimizing the severity of abuse, thus reducing the actual amount of fear experienced.

My therapist was more afraid for me than I was. She really believed one of us would be killed, but I was so low, I did not feel anything... Once she was on top of me, beating me with her fists. She was screaming that I should cry. I finally made myself cry just to get her to stop. I didn't feel anything.
Another respondent was involved with a support group for battered lesbians and was able to identify her experience as battering as soon as it occurred. She was able to get support from the group to file a restraining order with the court. She said she did not fear the batterer because she felt she had control of her situation by being able to get the court system involved. She told the batterer that she would use the court again if there was any further abuse. She did stay in the relationship for approximately one year after the battering incident. After receiving treatment for a drug problem, she was able to leave the relationship.

One respondent was continuing the relationship with her batterer at the time I interviewed her. She was in a support group for battered lesbians and her partner was in a group for lesbian batterers. The respondent said that she no longer feared her abuser because she recognized herself as battered, was clear that she was not responsible for being abused or for the well being of her abuser, and was able to get consistent support from the group. She felt she had control over her life at the present time. She and her batterer were living separately, and she had a contract with the batterer which stated that the batterer would not see her for at least forty-eight hours after any drinking episode and that the relationship would terminate if any instance of physical abuse occurred.
Life Out of Control

All respondents except the one who reported the first incident of abuse to the prosecutor indicated that they felt they had no control over their lives. They had few resources for support and the fear of violence led them to feel that their lives were out of control. All but two of these women were self-supporting and successful in careers at the time they were in the relationship with the batterer.

Two respondents reported that they were not ready for a commitment at the time they became involved with the batterer. They felt pressured to enter the relationship and the batterer pressed for commitment. One respondent said that she did not feel she and her abuser had much in common. She liked movies and books and her batterer liked sports. She felt pressured into the relationship and felt the batterer came on very strong from the beginning of the relationship. These relationships differed from the others in that the batterer had intense feelings for the respondent as evidenced by their relentless pursuit of the relationship, but the respondents did not share in this feeling of intensity. These respondents described themselves as becoming involved with the batterer primarily because they felt they could not escape from the batterer and it was easier to give in to her demands for a relationship. These respondents had no expectations for the relationship to last forever.
The feeling of powerlessness often continued after the ending of the relationship. Many respondents indicated that the batterer continued to harass them and there was no way to get this person out of their lives. For some respondents, this harassment was short lived and for others, it continued indefinitely. One respondent reported that her batterer collected ex-lovers and continued to harass all of them. More commonly, the harassment would decrease or discontinue once the batterer became involved in another intimate relationship. It seemed that for many abusers, once there was another person to take care of their needs, they could let go of the former partner and no longer needed to focus on controlling her life.

Caretaking

Every respondent who was battered felt that she was responsible for the abuser and that she had to take care of her emotionally. The manipulativeness and emotional dependence of the batterers played into this feeling of responsibility. The respondents said that they believed that love could change the batterer who had been abused in childhood. One respondent whose abuser was alcoholic said she became involved initially because her batterer needed a sober person in her life. Another reported that the batterer needed a stable person in her life to take care of her and her child. This caretaking response seems consistent with the messages given to women in our culture. Women are responsible for
relationships and taking care of others needs is the primary female role. For lesbian women, this feeling of responsibility for the maintenance of relationships is carried into lesbian relationships.

Ten respondents, or one half of those interviewed, indicated that they felt specifically responsible for the abuse they received. For these women, the feeling of shame was very powerful. Five of these respondents specifically talked about fighting back and how that contributed to feeling responsible for the battering. The batterer often used any attempt to fight back or self-protection as proof that it was the victim who was responsible for the abuse. Bruises would be shown to others as evidence that the batterer was the one being abused. Feelings of shame and responsibility often prevented the respondents from talking to others or from identifying themselves as victims.

She would sit there and sob and say, "I feel like a battered woman." If I fought back, she would remind me that it takes two, meaning that I was as responsible for the abuse as she was...Once I told her she was so out of it during her tantrums that I just wanted to shake her out of it. She told me to do it, just slap her out of it. So I did that and she screamed she was a battered woman. She had hit me so hard, my ear was injured, but she was the battered woman. I believed that.

One respondent described herself as an adult child of an alcoholic and grew up believing that she was responsible for the behavior of others. She reported having a very difficult struggle in learning that she
did not control the actions of others and that she did not bring on the abuse from her batterer.

One respondent indicated that her batterer was abusive, verbally and at times physically, to other lesbian women in the community. Her friends feared the batterer and gave her the message that it was her responsibility to keep her abuser under control. She felt blamed by the community if her batterer was abusive to someone outside the relationship. This reaction reinforced her feelings of responsibility and shame for her partner's behavior.

Respondents who had themselves been victims of abuse as children felt a connection to the batterer around this issue. They reported feeling like they understood the batterers' pain and knew that she struck out at others because she was abused as a child. The victim knew the pain felt by the batterer because of her own experience with childhood abuse. This understanding triggered the belief that if there was enough love offered by the victim, the relationship would change and the batterer would not have to use violence as a means of keeping control. This level of empathy also contributed to the feelings of emotional bonding and the high level of intensity reported in the majority of abusive relationships.

Lesbians relationships have been reported to have a higher intensity level and a greater degree of enmeshment than heterosexual relationships (McCandlish, 1982, Peplau, Padesky, & Hamilton, 1978). It
is possible that the empathy level around childhood pain reported in battering relationships has contributed to an even greater amount of intensity in these relationships. One respondent explained her feelings as follows:

People are so close in lesbian relationships that I think I could almost see her point of view at times. I could really put myself in her place and I knew she was beating me because she needed to feel in control. I knew something was wrong, but I did not see it for what it was.
CHAPTER VI

What Kept the Women in the Relationships

When the issue of family violence is discussed, someone inevitably asks the question, "Why do they stay?" This chapter will explore the issues which created a climate in which the respondents felt trapped and saw no option other than remaining in the relationship with the batterer. Fear, destruction of property, exposure of lesbianism, threats of suicide, isolation, need to present the relationship as healthy, need to protect friends and family, and children are all issues which contributed to the woman staying with the batterer.

Fear

A primary reason for staying in the relationship with the batterer is fear. All but two of the respondents indicated that fear played a significant role in their remaining in the relationship with the batterer. As time went on, the fear became more powerful. When the abuse and the threats of abuse and harassment became greater, the respondents were more likely to remain in the relationship. They feared severe physical harm, or damage to family relationships, loss of job, or loss of child custody if they attempted to leave the batterer.
Mary had this thing, she would get red, her neck would get red and I would watch her hands a lot. You learn to read your abuser very, very, well. I could tell when the car came in the driveway the way the gravel crunched. I could tell. Just extreme sensitivity so you could protect yourself, you know? I've never in my life experienced anything like it.

One respondent who did not feel fear in the relationship reported blocking out all feelings of pain and fear. This was described as a survival technique developed as a child in response to parental abuse. The other respondent who did not feel fear said she minimized the danger in relation to the battering. When she entered therapy and began to talk about some of her experiences, she began to recognize the dangers to herself in remaining in the relationship.

Threats of physical harm were often made by batterers and many carried them out. Frequently the physical abuse increased in severity if the partner attempted to leave or discussed the possibility of separation from the relationship. One respondent reported that she was beaten up more severely than ever when she discussed the possibility of separation from the relationship with the batterer.

**Destruction of Property**

Destruction of property and harm or threats of harm to pets were also powerful as means to keep the victim in the relationship.

Destruction of clothing and other items of personal meaning and
importance sent the message to the victim that the batterer held power to cause her pain and harm. Harm to beloved animals carried tremendous power as symbols of the abuser's disregard for the boundaries and feelings of the partner. One respondent stated, "When I saw my dog huddled in the corner with a look of total fear in his eyes, I was terrified." She felt that abuse of the dog was an indication that the batterer would stop at nothing to inflict pain on her. She believed that the batterer could kill her dog or her.

**Exposure of Lesbianism**

The threat of exposure as a lesbian to family and employers was a powerful threat in abusive lesbian relationships. This issue is exclusive to gay/lesbian violent relationships, and society's negative attitudes toward gay/lesbian relationships reinforces the ability of an abusive partner to use this issue as a means of control over the victim in the relationship.

One respondent reported that her abuser threatened to expose her as a lesbian to her family and also used personal, confidential issues shared as a means of control:

I stopped telling her things after I had told her someone had sexually assaulted me when I was a child, a family member. During a fight one time, she said she was going to call my mother and tell her and my mother was the last person I wanted to know. It was a relative of hers who sexually assaulted me. And, you know, it would have served no purpose and I had been very clear with her that I didn't want
my mother to know.

This respondent also reported that her batterer had come out to the respondent's child without permission:

You know another thing was that when my child was younger, and I didn’t feel like I was ready to share that part of my life (lesbianism) with her. I didn't want to be really descriptive with her. I was afraid of what might happen if she went to school and said my Mom's a lesbian, or if she would say something to family members who were over, so I chose not to tell her. My abuser would always look for an opportunity to discuss stuff like that when my daughter was present. She would play Meg Christian's Leaping Lesbians on the tape deck all the time. And sing along with my daughter and they would make a game out of it. She knew what my feelings were at that time, she knew that I didn't want that to happen, and she did it anyway.

Societal homophobia creates an environment of fear of exposure for many lesbian women. Many women risk losing jobs or having relationships with family members damaged if their lesbianism is revealed. In situations where employers were aware of the fact that the individual was a lesbian, there was fear that harassment from the batterer at work would create a more negative attitude toward lesbian lifestyles, and that loss of job could result even when the woman was "out" to her employer.

Batterers often acted on these threats when there was an attempt made to escape the relationship. One respondent said that as a result of
harassment of her family members by the batterer, she was forced to come out to them. She was able to do this in a way that did not damage her relationship with family members and ultimately, she was able to receive support from them. She felt angry at being forced to come out to her family. She explained that coming out is a very personal issue and that the individual should be able to decide if and when to share her lesbianism with family members. Being forced to come out by her batterer took her right of choice and decision making away, and was an example of feeling that she did not control her own life and that the batterer did not respect her rights or boundaries.

**Threats of Suicide**

Self-destruction, suicide attempts, or threats of suicide were also used by batterers to keep the partner in the relationship. Often, self-destruction and suicide, or threats of these behaviors, resulted in the victim feeling like the batterer could not take care of herself and needed her partner to care for her. Respondents reported feeling trapped in the relationship because the batterer could not take care of herself.

In some instances, self-abuse was indicative of seemingly uncontrollable rage, and the respondent felt that if her partner would do such painful things to herself, what would she do to her? One respondent reported that the batterer became enraged as a result of a
discussion about ending the relationship. She tore up the apartment and beat her hands against the wall until they were bleeding profusely. The respondent was frozen with fear through this episode, and the batterer then came over and dripped blood all over the respondent. There was powerful symbolism conveyed in this action. The respondent felt terror at the possibility that the batterer would stop at nothing to keep her from leaving the relationship and feared for her life.

And at this point, I remember we were sitting next to each other on the couch and I had gotten up and moved further away from her on the chair. I had that feeling that I should be afraid of her. And at this point she stood up, ok, that's like I was sitting her and she's like as far away as that wall right there, and she stood up and hit the wall until her fists started bleeding ok, and then she came and stood over my chair with blood dripping off her fists.

Affirmation of Lesbian Identity

In addition to fear, there were other factors which played into the maintenance of the relationships with the batterers. For women early in the coming out process, there was a need to hold onto the relationship to affirm their lesbian identity. Four respondents indicated that they felt the batterer to be their only connection to the gay world and that she was important to the perception of self as being a lesbian. One respondent said she realized she did not really love her abuser. She felt bad about being in a relationship with her because the batterer put her down as well as being physically abusive (she did not actually identify herself as
being battered at this point). She felt she needed someone to prove to herself and the world that she really was a lesbian. The batterer had more experience in relation to going to bars and other lesbian activities. Without her, the respondent would have felt lost and disconnected from the lesbian community.

Two respondents reported that both they and their abusers were in early stages of the coming out process and dependent upon each other to affirm their lesbian identities.

Well this was my first long term relationship. So it was basically, well she was coming out. It was her first relationship with a woman at all and so it was kind of a, wanting to be in a relationship to prove you're a lesbian. We could go to the bar together and we were a couple. We didn't really have a lot of mutual friends because we were so isolated. I don't know. I'm still wondering what happened in the relationship because I didn't love her.

The other respondent reported not only feeling isolated, but total lack of awareness of the existence of a lesbian community and a lack of knowledge about lesbian lifestyles.

This was my first relationship and I wasn't particularly aware of lesbian/feminist issues at that point. Mainly because I was a, freshman in college and Marty was a freshman in high school when we started seeing each other. We were just friends for a while and then it developed into being a lover's relationship. And we didn't, we were so ignorant because of having grown up in the country and never having heard, I hadn't even heard the word homosexual I don't think before. And suddenly this happened. And we felt we ought to be together because there might not be any
other people like this in the world. Which made it, when the physical battering type stuff started it made it harder to get out of it 'cause we thought we better somehow stay in it or we might not be able to get along in the world, not knowing anybody else like that.

**Isolation**

The issue of isolation is a feature reported to be a part of all battering relationships. For those women early in the coming out process, the partner is often the only connection to the lesbian community and there is a fear that if the couple separates, there will be no more ability to participate in the lesbian community. For women further along in the coming out process, isolation increased as the battering became more intense. Batterers were reported to be jealous of outside friendships, and casual associations could lead to accusations of sexual involvement. Batterers often berated friends of the partner and if associations with others did take place, they were under the control of the batterer. Even family contacts were often curtailed in these relationships. Violation of rules regarding outside contacts could lead to a violent episode by the abuser.

**Need to Present Lesbian Relationship as a Healthy Relationship**

Three respondents reported that they felt it was important to give the impression to straight friends and family that they were in a good
relationship. They had been able to "come out" as lesbians to these important people in their lives, but felt lesbians were perceived negatively by many people in society and they needed to prove the stereotype wrong that says, "If you are gay, you will not be able to have a loving, long term relationship and will spend your life being lonely and looking for support in bars." It was not necessary for friends or family to actually tell the respondent that they believed this myth. For some respondents, the societal message about this stereotype was enough to create a need to counteract it. One might postulate that the need to prove the stereotype wrong results from internalized homophobia and the personal fear that the myth might be true.

**Protection of Others**

The need to protect friends, family, and children from the batterer's abusive behavior also played a role in keeping the victim in the relationship. If a batterer had a history of abusing others, the victim was strongly pulled into the role of protecting people from her abuse. In some instances, friends and family would not allow the victim to take shelter in their homes because they feared harm from the batterer. One respondent reported that her friends told her that she had to control the batterer and prevent her from harming others. Another respondent reported spending the night hiding in a shed behind a friend's house because she feared that the batterer would come to the friend's house
and create a scene, perhaps causing harm to the friend's child if the respondent was found there.

Children

As in heterosexual battering relationships, children played a powerful role in keeping the victim in the relationship. Many feared harm to children if they attempted to leave the relationship. If the victim had a child, she often feared loss of child custody when the batterer threatened to reveal her lesbianism to the child's father. If the batterer had a child, the victim often perceived herself as a stable force in the batterer's life. If she left, the child would be more likely to be the one to suffer abuse. The respondents reported having close relationships with their batterers' children, often being perceived as a parent by the child. Separation from the batterer in these cases would often result in a termination of the relationship with the batterer's child. Unlike a heterosexual divorce, a lesbian cannot petition the court for custody or visitation rights when the child biologically is parented by the batterer. Thus termination of the relationship with the batterer could mean involuntary separation from a child who was loved and perceived as a part of the victim's family.

One respondent reported that she has been able to maintain a close relationship with the batterer's daughter long after the separation. All parties remained in the same community and the girl was a teenager and able to visit the respondent on her own. In some instances, the
maintenance of such a relationship could put the child in danger of abuse.

Only two respondents reported that they did not have intense loving and caring feelings toward their batterer. These two respondents felt forced into the relationship by the batterers' relentless pursuit and did not feel intense emotional commitment to the relationship. All other respondents reported intense emotional feelings and caring as a primary reason for continuing the relationship. They wanted to believe the batterer's promises that she would not be abusive again and believed if they loved the batterer enough, she would change her behavior.

I figured I could love her into changing, and so I'd hang in there, you know? But when she graduated from high school we'd been involved for a while and she moved in with me the night she graduated high school because her parents had got mad at her and didn't go to the graduation ceremony. So we lived together for three years I guess. We were involved about five years in all. And during those three years I was probably hit at least, when I say once I don't mean one time per night, but during one incident of maybe being hit several times. At least once a week and frequently more like every three days or so. Its strange in that I was a large person then as well and she was much smaller in me and yet I didn't defend myself, it just wasn't part of my experience to think to do that. And I had this thing for a long time that I could somehow change this. In fact when I first sought counseling it was to "fix" her, not to take care of anything about me.
Feelings of Responsibility for Abuse

In addition to believing that the partner could change the batterer, most respondents reported feeling responsible for the abuse. This belief was often reinforced by batterers who told their partners they were responsible for the battering behavior. The following statement illustrates the tenacity of this belief. Even though the respondent has learned through AA not to accept responsibility for others' behavior, she holds to the position that if she cannot directly change the batterer, she can create conditions which will make it possible:

I did not feel like I could make her change but through what I had learned in Alanon and also what I had kind of reading, kind of philosophy with me, I believed that by my reactions or not reacting in certain ways, I could make it, I couldn't make her change, but I could make it more possible for her to change. I could make it easier or harder by my reactions. So, I wasn't ... at least outwardly, inwardly I was going crazy, outwardly I was maintaining as calm as a facade as I could.

Another respondent used "New Age" philosophy to support her belief that she could change the batterer or change the situation she was in:

There were lots of times when I was aware that this relationship was really out of control but I kept doing it anyway. And part of what it was about was I was hooked into this is alternative reality stuff with the new age community in town. And I was literally imbedded in that whole new age thinking process. And including create your
Identification with the pain experienced by the batterer contributed to the bond between the women and to the intensity of the relationship.

People are so close in lesbian relationships. I think I could actually see her point of view at times. You know, I could put myself in her place and think, Oh yeah, this woman is dealing with a lot of stress. She can't find work or she has work she doesn't like, or whatever. And I think for a long time I just saw this as she was upset, as something was wrong and not for what it was, not that she was beating me because she needed to feel like she was in control.

**Economics**

The literature on battered women often cites economic dependence and lack of resources as a primary reason for a woman to remain in a relationship with a battering male. Since it is often the case in our society, that women make less money than men, there is a high probability that in a heterosexual relationship, the male will have greater financial resources than the female. Based on this theory, programs for battered women often focus on building self esteem through job training or education which will result in greater financial independence. While this type of programming is helpful to a woman who will have difficulty supporting herself once separated from the batterer, this research brings out other reasons for remaining in a relationship with a batterer. Since the literature on lesbian women demonstrates that lesbians are
socialized into female sex roles and show little differences in relationship patterns from heterosexual, it is likely that the reasons given by the lesbians in this study for remaining with their female abusers could be applied to heterosexual women as well.

It has also been suggested that battering is more likely to occur if the batterer has less resources than the victim (money, education, or other indicators of social success may be cited as resources). One respondent reported that the violence in her relationship intensified during the time period that the abuser was unemployed. It is important to note that the unemployment led to an intensification of an already existing problem. The respondent pointed out that the joblessness of the abuser did not cause the abuse, it only gave her more opportunities to act out her aggressiveness.

The Importance of Fear and Emotional Attachment in Maintaining the Relationship

The two most frequently expressed reasons for staying in the relationship were fear and caring for the batterer or believing that by staying in the relationship, the victim could help the batterer. Fear is often cited as a reason for heterosexual women to remain in an abusive relationship and should be given serious attention by anyone working with people who are battered. Any attempt to leave the relationship can incite unprecedented rage in an abuser of either gender. Often threats
have already been made about the consequences of an attempt to escape, and these may be carried out if the victim actually attempts to leave the relationship.

Many heterosexual women feel that the court system does not go far enough in offering protection from a batterer. Most women in this study did not attempt to use the court system, expecting little help, or a negative response. Those who did found the court helpful. The respondents who used the court system gave much more positive responses than I expected, given the negative attitude toward homosexuality which prevails in our society. It may be that the respondents had lower expectation for the court system than heterosexual women. The basis for a positive response about the court or police intervention was that the respondent was treated as she expected a heterosexual woman would have been treated in a similar situation. Whether she was actually protected from further abuse or harassment seemed of lesser importance.

An example of the attitude of lesbian women toward the courts was expressed by a respondent who is an attorney. She has been harassed by her abuser for several years after separating from the relationship. In response to my questions about the legal systems ability to help her, she replied that the system is highly structured and is very limited in its ability to really help a woman free herself from a batterer. A
restraining order will not stop an abuser from calling an employer and making trouble at work or from talking to friends and thus isolating the victim from a support system. If a batterer wants to continue harassment, he/or she can devise ways to do it, and ongoing harassment from a batterer is a way of life for many battered women.

Fear of the consequences of leaving a battering relationship is real and should not be minimized by professionals or supportive lesbians in the lesbian community. Escape plans and ongoing plans for safety should be thoroughly explored with each woman. The specific behaviors of the individual batterer need to be identified, so that the woman can prepare herself for the likely consequences of leaving the relationship.

The least recognized reason for remaining in the relationship in the general battered women's literature is caretaking and emotional attachment. It may be that women in our society are trained to give unconditional love. It is difficult for many people to imagine continuing to hold intense emotional feelings for someone who physically and psychologically abuses you, but many respondents talked about this issue as a reason for remaining in the relationship with the abuser. The manipulativeness and the overwhelming positiveness of the honeymoon phase, contributed to the feelings of warmth toward the batterer, but the respondents indicated fear of the abuser and recognition of the potential for harm throughout the course of the relationship.
Heterosexual battered women have reported similar feelings, but these are often downplayed by those providing programming for these women. The issue of love, caring, and need to help the abuser overcome her/his problems may be the most important reason for battered women to stay with a batterer. Putting her own needs before those of her partner is something that women are not trained to do in our society. Women still put their own needs second to those of spouses and children.

It is important to confront the issue of caring and caretaking in treatment programs. It is likely to be counter productive to present the issue as negative to the woman who is confused about her desire to remove herself from a battering relationship. If these issues are addressed in treatment programs, the need for a woman to respond in a caring manner is often framed negatively as co-dependent behavior or as "women who love too much." The qualities which society has assigned to women are termed negative and can become victim blaming in their application. Nurturing behavior is a female attribute in our society. The social or biological underpinnings of such actions can be argued, but this can be viewed as a positive quality regardless of origin. A battered woman needs to learn to value herself as a caring and nurturing person, while recognizing that continued caretaking of the
batterer is not likely to change her/his behavior and will never contribute to the well being of the victim herself. Helping the woman to let go of the relationship, without having to give up a valued part of herself may make it easier for her to recognize the need to take care of her own needs in the situation at hand.

The issue of caring and unconditional love also supports Carol Gilligan's theory of women and relationships. The women in this study valued relationships and felt that intimate relationships were a priority in their lives. It is important to note that these were women who viewed themselves as self supporting and many had earned professional degrees and respect in their chosen careers. While relationships were a primary source of self identification and worth, they could gain self esteem and value through other channels as well.
CHAPTER VII
Reasons for Leaving

This chapter will address the issues which led to the termination of the relationship. In six relationships, the batterer initiated the separation. In those in which the survivor initiated the separation, the following factors played a role in the decision to leave: realization that the victim had no control over the abuse and that serious physical harm or death was the likely outcome, validation of the reality of battering, potential harm to children, relationship addiction, and recognition of caretaking and decision of the survivor to meet her own needs.

Batterer Terminating the Relationship

One of the most unexpected findings was that six respondents reported that the batterer actually was the one to end the relationship. This seemed different from the outcome of battering relationships reported by heterosexual women. The respondents who were left by their batterers did not have an explanation for their partners' leaving and all seemed confused by this unexpected outcome.

All six respondents who were left by batterers reported mixed feelings about the relationship ending. There were feelings of relief that
the relationship was over mixed with anger that the batterer had left after the respondent had put up with all the abuse over the years. Three of these respondents were beginning to recognize the dangerousness of the relationship and were making plans to leave, but the batterer left first. The other three still hung on to the belief that the relationship would improve and they were committed to a permanent relationship with the batterer. One respondent reported feeling as follows:

And I didn't come to a realization that I don't have to live this way and get out of it. I lucked out of it. There came a point when Smitty said, "I think a lot of what's wrong, why I can't hold a job and why all this stuff just keeps happening is that I just don't like living in a big city like this." "Let's move back to where we came from." I agreed to do it because I was real anxious to please, you know, "anything you say." But she was going to go down and like check it out first because I had a job that paid fairly well and I was being treated decently and I liked it a lot. And so she moved back home to look for opportunities for herself and quickly managed to get involved with another local dyke.

Three of the batterers became involved with someone else immediately, or prior to the end of the relationship with the respondent. The respondents felt anger and their feelings of guilt and responsibility for the battering were intensified when the batterer became involved with someone else. One respondent described herself as being totally devastated by the knowledge that her abuser was involved with another woman. She had put up with extreme physical and emotional abuse and
felt betrayed and used when the batterer became involved with someone else. She went into a period of severe depression for several months after the batterer left.

I got severely depressed. I went to work, but I did my work in sort of a fog. I mean that's all I did was maintain. And I would come home and I would sit on the couch and I would sit here all evening in the dark with the dog and cat. I had no energy. And then I would notice it was about 11:00 and I would try to go to bed.

Three batterers moved out of state, one joined the military and two others left to find better jobs. One of the respondents reported maintaining a long-distance relationship with the batterer for nearly a year after the move. When the batterer became involved with a man, the relationship ended and she, too, felt betrayed and rejected. It was difficult to accept the fact that the batterer had left her for a man and she felt responsible for the problems in the relationship until several years later when she saw a therapist who was able to identify the relationship as a battering one.

Another respondent whose batterer had moved out of town had felt unable to get out of the relationship. She was severely beaten several times per week and believed the batterer would kill her if she tried to leave. She prayed for the relationship to end and described herself as feeling "delivered" when the batterer moved to a different
community. At the same time, she reported feeling confused and angry that the batterer had left her.

Three of the respondents reported that they were becoming aware of the fact that this was a battering relationship and were beginning to think about the possibility of leaving when the batterers left. One respondent was saving money in order to move out on her own, and another who worked in the battered women's movement was confronted about the nature of her relationship by a co-worker and was beginning to realize that this was indeed a battering relationship. The third respondent had begun to develop an emotional connection with another woman which enabled her to recognize her relationship with the batterer as abusive. In these three cases it is possible that the batterers sensed that their partners would leave them and felt they had to end the relationship before they were left. Because of their dependency needs, they may have needed to leave before they were left and would have to face being alone. These three women did not harass their former partners after they became involved with someone else. They were able to get their needs met by a new partner.

The other three batterers may have felt guilt and shame about their behavior and believed that leaving the relationship and going to a new state would solve all their problems. Beth Zemsky, who has worked
extensively with lesbian abusers in the Minneapolis area has reported that women who batter are more in touch with their pain than men. When a woman abuses another woman, it is difficult to deny her own feelings of self-hatred and also, she is acting in a manner which is not acceptable for her gender. The male batterer can more easily deny his feelings of self-hate and distance himself from his own experiences of victimization. He can more easily transfer his anger and hatred to the object of his abuse. Men are also rewarded by society for aggressive behavior and can gain social acceptance for beating a wife who cannot be controlled by other means.

One respondent described her partner's ambivalence about remaining in the relationship as follows:

Well, there's a part of me that says she probably wishes I would have left after she hit me. She could have avoided all the guilt if I would have just said "damn you" and left. She wouldn't of had to go through what she knew was coming. She wasn't really asking me to leave. I think it was part of the game. I think that a part of her wanted me to stay and part of her just couldn't stand to remain with me and continue to do the things she was doing. She would tell me to leave and then she would get angry and hurt me if I tried to leave.

Homophobia and self-hatred undoubtedly played a role in the battering behavior and in the batterers' decisions to end the relationships. The batterer who eventually became involved with a male most clearly exemplifies the issue of homophobia. Her abusive episodes
most often revolved around times of intimacy and sexuality with her partner. She could not accept her homosexuality and blamed her partner for her lesbianism. By involving herself with a man, she could deny her lesbianism and continue to blame her partner for her abusive behaviors.

Another respondent described her partner's difficulty with intimacy and intensity in the relationship as follows:

And interestingly enough I think that when our relationship, when she got really abusive towards me when her attitude toward me changed is when we became lovers she was really shocked that I was so in love with the sexual, she got so turned on by me. And I think that she couldn't deal with it.

Once involved with new partners, most of the batterers who left did not harass their former partners. The batterer who joined the military did continue harassment after the relationship ended and would contact her former partner and her family by phone or personally when on leave. This respondent felt unable to truly escape from the abuser even though it was the abuser who left the relationship.

Respondents in the Process of Separation

Three respondents were still involved with the batterers to varying degrees at the time of the interviews. Two of these respondents were attempting to end the relationship and felt difficulty in doing so. Both their
own feelings of isolation and vulnerability and the batterers persistence made it difficult for them to actually terminate the relationship. Both these women were harassed by their batterers and felt they had no control over their lives even when separated from them. They feared the batterers could appear at any time and cause physical harm or could cause them trouble at work or with family members.

The third respondent who was still involved with her batterer had made significant changes in her feelings about the relationship. She no longer felt she did not control her own life. She was in a support group for battered lesbians and her partner was in a batterer's group. They had a contractual agreement that the batterer would stay away if drinking and that the relationship would terminate if any incident of abuse occurred. The contract along with the support of the group gave the survivor a feeling of self-empowerment, and she realized that staying in the relationship was a choice and that she had the strength and power to end it if it caused her further physical harm.

**Realization that the Victim Had No Control Over the Abuse and that Serious Physical Harm or Death Was the Likely Outcome of Continuing the Relationship**

Fear motivated the victims to stay in the relationship. During this period in the relationship, the victim believed that she was responsible for the abuse inflicted upon her and that by altering her behavior, she
could minimize the batterer's violent incidents. Frequently, the victim began the separation process when she realized that there was nothing she could do to control or stop the violence. She realized that remaining in the abusive relationship could cause severe injury or death to one or both parties.

Some women realized that they could be killed if they stayed in the relationship and that the risks involved in leaving were worth the potential benefits of getting out. One respondent described herself as minimizing the abuse during the relationship. She feared her assailant, but at the same time needed to minimize the potential consequences as a survival tactic. Once confronted as a battered woman, by a co-worker in a battered women's shelter, she was able to recognize the real dangers of remaining in the relationship with the batterer.

When children were involved, the recognition of potential of harm to them became a motivating force to leave the relationship. Denial played a role here as well, and women described themselves as denying that the partner's behavior towards the children was abusive until the definition of battering was applied to the relationship.

Mary said "I want you to go and get cleaned up so your mother and I can use the bathroom" we all had to take showers and so forth. She was tired and said "I'm so tired that I don't want to get cleaned up. Mary literally jumped on the bed and ran over to her and grabbed her, threw the covers off of her, picked her up off the bed by her arms and shoved her or threw her, into the bathroom. I could not see around the corner into the bathroom, but I heard Annie hit
something. And I had been in the bathroom before and I knew it was the sink because the sink was right as you go in. I heard a thump and then I heard a crash. Of course I was moving about as fast as I could to intervene just to try to get between her and Annie. Annie hit the back of her head on the faucet. It wasn't bleeding, she had a nice knot there. There was a real progression of this kind of stuff. And Mary immediately realized what she had done and she pulled back and I stepped right in between them and said "Annie you should go out in the other room" and Annie was crying and scared and she went out in the other room and Mary looked at me and she said "I'm going to get it now aren't I?" and I said "no." It was hot, it was deathly hot, it was so hot and I said,"I know this was stress for you." As this relationship progressed, I just constantly thought of Mary's feelings. It seemed like I thought of her all the time and me less. It's been hot, you're tired, you have a lot of anxieties probably about this week together, you know, how it's going to turn out, I said it's ok.

**Validation of Reality of Being Battered**

Validation of the reality of being a battered lesbian seemed important to the respondent's taking action to leave the relationship.

Since most respondents did not recognize themselves as actually being battered women, they blamed themselves for the violence or minimized its impact. One respondent was confronted by her therapist as a battered woman. She was then able to begin talking about her experience in the relationship without shame and guilt. As she heard herself talk about her experience, she began to take the situation seriously and to see the potential dangers involved with remaining in the relationship.
Another respondent reported that she and her partner had begun to recognize the fact that the relationship was violent. The respondent became involved in a support group for battered lesbians and her partner went to a group for batterers. After attending the group and contracting not to be violent, the batterer again beat up the respondent. At this point, the respondent realized the seriousness of the situation and that the batterer was not likely to change. She left the relationship at this point.

While a serious incident may have triggered the realization that it was life-threatening to remain in the relationship, there were often other instances of violence which were equally serious and potentially life-threatening. For many respondents, it was not the actual event, but the ability to recognize the action as battering and to hold the batterer responsible for the action, which enabled them to leave the relationship. For example, one respondent had been so severely beaten by her assailant that she had permanent damage to her retina. The emergency room physician wrote on her chart that she was a battered woman. She felt shame and denial of this label and she could not recognize herself as battered because her partner was female. She also felt she was treated in a demeaning manner by the medical staff. She minimized the danger to herself in the relationship and tended to blame the batterer's behavior on alcohol abuse. When the batterer set fire to the house, she realized
the danger in remaining in the relationship. Another respondent had been chased by her batterer with a loaded and cocked gun on more than one occasion. She had left the batterer before, but always returned to the relationship. When the batterer chased her with a gun again, she recognized that the children were in the room and that they as well as she could be killed. While the batterer had not significantly changed her behavior, it was the respondent's interpretation of potential consequences which was different on this occasion. A friend came though from out of town and offered support and a realistic means to escape at the time this final event in the relationship took place.

Yea, I kept thinking it wouldn't happen again. And so I went back to her and then she didn't beat me again until we moved to another city. After we moved, the violence started up again. After the beatings started, I went for a week or so and then I just, it was like something clicked in my head and I realized you know, "this is stupid kid, you know, she is going to kill you, there's just no getting around it, eventually she's going to kill you" So I just said to her "I'm going to go get some fruit you want some?" and she said "no" and I said "ok, I'll be back in a minute" and I had slowly, but surely overnight been sneaking stuff into my vest pocket, my credit card and my money and stuff and I walked through the house and started running and ran nearly across town. I was in a complete panic because I knew she was going to follow me and figure out where I was.

**Recognition of Potential Harm to Children**

When children were involved, it was also the realization of potential harm to the children which motivated the respondent to leave
the relationship. Six respondents talked about their own children's welfare or the welfare of the batterer's children as being at least partially involved in the decision to leave the relationship. In the case cited above, the respondent was aware that the batterer had abused her children in the past, but believed she could protect them from further abuse by remaining in the relationship and being the one to receive the brunt of the batterer's rage. She came to the realization that she could no longer protect the children or herself. When children were involved, the decision to leave was particularly painful when the children were the batterer's children because there was no possibility of taking them out of the relationship.

It was like divine intervention when my friend called and offered me a place to stay in another city. I didn't have any feelings left, I didn't feel anything for myself. I knew I couldn't stay and figured that either I would be killed or one of the kids would get killed. I had tried to protect the kids, but I knew that wouldn't work. I did not see leaving as an option but when she suggested I go with her and go to the battered women's shelter in her community, it was like the sun broke through the clouds and I said "ah, maybe I can get out of this."

In some instances, psychological abuse of a child was minimized or denied. The need to see lesbians as nurturing of children as well as of partners seemed to play a role in this denial process. One respondent described the batterer as kind and involved with the respondent's
daughter at the beginning of the relationship. As time went on, she became jealous of any time spent with the child and was emotionally abusive to the child as well as to her partner. The respondent did not really come to terms with this element of the abuse until after she had left the relationship.

She was very jealous of my daughter but it wasn’t until the very end that either she was abusive or that I recognized the fact that she was abusive to her. One of the things that did happen right off the bat that I didn’t recognize either was that she was extremely jealous. Just.. I mean like, now I just think about and it’s like awesome.

Another respondent became aware of the abuse of her child by the batterer but still held on to the belief that the batterer would change. The batterer actually left the relationship and the respondent felt abandoned and depressed over the ending of the relationship. She was not ready to face the battering of herself or her daughter and minimized the batterer’s behavior.

Another respondent left the relationship after her batterer severely beat up her daughter. She knew the batterer had abused her own children and denied the emotional abuse of the child which occurred in the relationship. The batterer would tell the respondent that she was too easy on the child and set no limits on her behavior. Recognizing that there was a degree of truth to the batterer’s allegations, she was convinced that the child needed stricter disciplinary actions. The child
was also manipulated by the batterer who would take her places and buy her things to win her affection.

After the relationship was over for us, she would come over and bring my daughter things. And I would see her coming in the back door with armloads of stuff. And I'd been in contact with the shelter enough that I could see that for what it was and I said "no" and I wouldn't let her see my daughter alone. My daughter could not understand why she could not have all this stuff. She's not a shallow child, she's got a lot of depth and understanding, but she's a child.

Another respondent gave birth to a child because her batterer wanted a child but did not want to experience pregnancy. Gradually, the respondent began to recognize fear in the child's eyes in the presence of the batterer, who was the primary caretaker of the child. Initially, she minimized the child's reactions because she could not accept the fact that her partner would mistreat the child, although her batterer had been abused as a child by both female and male caretakers. It was concern for the child which motivated her to leave the relationship.

Relationship Addiction

One respondent, who was actively abusing drugs during the relationship with the batterer, was able to end the relationship after recognizing the "addictive" nature of the relationship. She described herself as growing up in a family with alcoholic parents. There were constantly crises in her childhood and she became used to experiencing
crisis and turmoil. Her relationship with the batterer was a repetition of this childhood experience and she described the addiction to the element of excitement and crisis. Once she realized that she was not getting many other needs met while satisfying the need for excitement, she was able to end the relationship with the batterer.

Recognition of Caretaking Role and Decision to Meet Own Needs

Another respondent was able to recognize the batterer as dependent and that she was acting as a caretaker in the relationship. While taking care of the batterer, she was denying many of her own needs. She finally realized that the batterer would not change and was able to end the relationship. She had begun to get involved with another woman and suddenly became aware of what a lesbian relationship could be.
CHAPTER VIII

Stages of Separation From Battering Relationship

One respondent had been out of the battering relationship for fifteen years at the time of the interview for this project. Two were in the process of separation, and one was attempting to maintain a relationship with the batterer. The others had been separated from the abuser for periods ranging from several months to several years. These differences in length of time that the interview was conducted after the termination of the relationship, along with the respondents' discussion of their experience, created the opportunity to develop a series of four stages which women go through in the process of terminating the relationship with the abuser. These stages will be described in this chapter.

The process of separation from a battering relationship is intensified for lesbian women because lesbians do not recognize that battering exists in lesbian relationships and most do not realize that they are being battered. This process of denial occurs in heterosexual relationships, but it is intensified when no one admits that battering is a possibility in the relationship.

131
One woman reported that when she talked to the only other lesbian couple she knew about her experience of being physically battered by her partner, they suggested that she just hit her partner back. This type of response denies the reality of battering and conveys the message that it is acceptable for lesbians to physically assault each other and that such assaults are not dangerous. Another respondent reported that when she finally did attempt to separate from her batterer, her lesbian friends responded by setting up a mediating session to try to reunite the couple. When a heterosexual woman is battered by a man, there is concern for the woman’s safety and she is helped to find safe space.

Counselors also played into this denial by working with the couple conjointly and by minimizing the seriousness of the abuse. Many women reported seeing counselors who conveyed the message that violent behavior could be eliminated by working together to express feelings or that it resulted from a mutual lack of problem solving skills. This type of intervention resulted in the victim receiving the message that she did have responsibility for the batterer’s behavior and that if she was understanding enough or was able to express herself in the "right" way, the situation would improve.
Initial Attraction

The respondents became engaged in battering relationships for the same reasons all people become involved in intimate relationships. For many respondents, the initial attraction was physical. For women who were just coming out, finding another woman with attractions to women was a powerful pull for a relationship. One respondent reported meeting her partner in a class she was taking. She noticed this individual because she had a rather "masculine" appearance and she felt she could express her lesbian feelings toward her without reprisal. While these women had little in common besides being lesbians, they became involved in an intimate relationship.

Homophobia and isolation of gays and lesbians make it difficult for lesbian women to openly and comfortably seek out partners. This issue is particularly critical for women in the early stages of the coming out process who have no support network and are not involved in groups which make it easier to find compatible partners.

It was a gradual getting to know each other. We saw each other at class and I was involved with somebody very heavily at the time, but there were some issues because we'd just moved to another city and another town and I felt real isolated from my friends. My current partner was 14 years my senior and I was recognizing that there were none of the people in my life who were peer appropriate for me. There were some issues in that because there were things I wanted to do like go out to the bars and so on that my current partner did not want to do and that meant, that I
would have to not go unless I wanted to be ridiculed for going out on her; which I wouldn't do. So, the person I met in the Social Work class, and I were getting to know each other. There was an attraction, but it wasn't an overwhelming thing for me. She would say things in class that would just blow my mind. Like, I would say, "God, I'm really having a miserable day" and she would say things like, "Well, you know, why don't you just be the cruiser and I'll be the tugboat." You know, little weird things that would be like, wow, you know you're really intriguing me, I want to know what goes on behind you and what makes you tick.

Other respondents reported becoming involved with the batterer because they shared mutual interests or found they could relate on an emotional level. Often the two women shared a common history of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and there was a bond between them. When the battering began, this type of bonding tended to hold the relationship together because the victim identified with the batterer's pain and therefore explained the battering in these terms. The intensity of emotional bonding and caring cemented the relationship and kept the women together.

Two respondents reported that they were not especially attracted to the batterer, but the batterer pursued them with great intensity. Both felt pressured to become intimately involved. One respondent reported the batterer as saying "I love you" so early that she could not believe this to be a legitimate emotion. She succumbed to the pressure, feeling flattered by such attraction to her, and gradually was pulled into the
relationship. These women did not want to hurt the pursuer's feelings by responding negatively to their intensity, nor was there evidence of danger at this point in the relationship.

We went out for dinner with a small group of people one night and I remembered Joan just as one of the women who was there and a couple of weeks later my friend, Tina, on the phone said, you remember Joan that we had dinner with? She's in the hospital. And it was like, well that's too bad you know. I'll send her a card. And I did, which is something I do for people I guess. What I didn't know until later was that she just took that really seriously. It was like I wanted to get involved with her and it was almost like a commitment to her.

Beginnings of Violence

Battering generally did not begin until the couple had been involved for a period of months and emotional bonding had occurred. Most women reported in retrospect being able to identify early signs of emotional abuse. These were generally denied at the time and related to stressful life conditions, or the victim believed that things would improve if their love became strong enough. Burch (1987) discussed issues of power and conflicts around power and dominance as being central to the formation of many lesbian relationships. It was not possible for the respondents to clearly distinguish their experience from normal power conflicts at early stages of relationship formation.

When we first got together, things seemed pretty balanced. Then we came back to the city and moved in together. That's when things changed. I felt like I wasn't a partner any
more. I was a possession. She put me down a lot. She didn't like my friends and always found an excuse why I shouldn't do things with them. I was feeling more and more isolated.

Often when the first incident of physical battering occurred, the batterer promised never to use physical violence again. One respondent reported being slapped by her lover who became very apologetic, and the respondent sincerely believed the slap to be a one-time incident. The batterer may have denied the seriousness of violent behavior and in some instances blamed the victim for provoking an attack. This blaming set the stage for the victim to feel responsible for the abuse and to deny it as battering. One respondent reported the following apology and focus of blame away from the batterer:

I don't know why that happened. I know I've hurt you., I've also made myself miserable. Please forgive me. Let's try again. I remember that phrase, "I've made myself miserable too." Then the focus became her and how much pain she was in. What she had just put me through became unimportant.

Batterers also were described as having a positive side to their personalities and were manipulative as well. Fifteen respondents described the "cycle of abuse" defined by Lenore Walker (1979) in relation to heterosexual battering. There were many positive elements to the relationship. After the battering incidents, the "honeymoon" period
served as a powerful reinforcer to remain in the relationship. The respondents continued to believe the batterers' promises to change and felt if they did the right things, everything would work out positively.

So she knocked the door down and I was waiting for the blow to come down. It never did. The way I was feeling at that point was get it the heck over with. I was numb. You go through periods where you just want the violence to be over with so you can get on with the honeymoon.

The element of fear must be discussed as an issue which played a role in the denial of battering and in the maintenance of the relationship. All but two respondents reported fear of the batterer. In many instances, this fear began in response to the first incident of battering. The victim was afraid, but at the same time denied the reality of this as a battering relationship. She often believed that if she did the right thing, the batterer would not strike again. Some respondents reported provoking the abuser at these times in order to get the abuse over with. The belief that the victim could prevent abuse or create it set up a false sense of control over an ultimately uncontrollable situation for the victim.

As time went on the abuse became more frequent and often more dangerous. One respondent reported the abuse as becoming less frequent over time and one reported that there was only one incident of physical abuse during the relationship. In both cases, the victim was very frightened by the acts of violence and responded by becoming totally
under the control of the batterer. Isolation became intense and both women were unable to express any individuality in the context of this relationship.

As time went on, the honeymoons were shorter and shorter. She would be romantic, but not apologetic. I was constantly on guard for signs of her anger.

Respondents reported feeling a great deal of confusion during this time period. Since they believed that lesbians are not battered, they could not define themselves as battered women. Most respondents also viewed themselves as strong women. There is a message in our society that strong women are not battered either. To admit to being battered would mean to give up an entire identity. "Lesbian women are strong and they are not battered. Therefore, if I am battered, I am weak and not really a lesbian."

The denial of the relationship as a battering one was particularly clear in situations where the victim was working in a battered women's shelter or in some other area of domestic violence. One respondent said that she worked with battered women every day and pointed out the elements of abuse on a regular basis. She did not connect this information to her own experience. Her denial was complicated by the fact that staff members often described the shelter residents in negative terms. Negative statements were made, for example, if a woman made
the decision to return to the batterer. It was difficult to talk about or confront her own painful situation because of the fear that others would look at her in a negative way.

Even though I had been working in the (battered women's) movement for a number of years informally as well as in the shelter, I did not recognize myself as battered. I did not realize what was happening in my relationship.

Many respondents (12) reported feeling that they could not trust their own experience in relation to the abusive relationship. As they became more isolated from the community, the batterer took on greater power in being the sole source of support and the only person with whom they communicated. The batterer would deny battering or blame the partner for causing her to lose control. If the victim fought back, the batterer used this as a means to deny responsibility for her behavior. One batterer bought her partner the Lobel book on lesbian battering. Another frequently told her partner that she was the abuser because she attempted to defend herself from her abuser's violence. Often the batterer would show bruises to friends and identify herself as the victim in the relationship.

I was feeling tired and I had a lot of self doubt. I was starting to feel periods of being crazy... She claimed to be in love with me, but she kept telling me I was not seeing things the way they really were... Your expectations are way out of kilter with the rest of the world.
One respondent reported that she felt no fear in the relationship because she became so depressed and hopeless that she could feel nothing. Over time, all respondents reported an erosion of self-esteem and a growing feeling of depression.

**Stage One of Separation:**
**Identification of Self as a Battered Woman**

It is important for the woman to recognize herself as a battered woman. This recognition freed her from blame and guilt and she was able to put energy in the direction of leaving the relationship.

I was working in the battered women's movement. I knew there were similarities (in my relationship) but I didn't use the word. At the end of the relationship, I recognized myself as battered.

Many respondents sought counseling because they felt they were the ones who needed to change. If the counselor or other supportive person helped them to identify themselves as battered, they were often able to begin the process of separating from the relationship. In instances where there were children involved, if the batterer began abusing the children, the respondent indicated that she was able to begin the separation process because she identified the batterer as a child abuser and she knew that continuation of the relationship would cause harm to the child.
Well, I went to a counselor hoping to change her. I got told pretty quickly that a person can't go to counseling to fix someone else. My thinking got a little clearer at that point... I was able to tell her to move out, but she was so charming and sincere that I let her move back in.

One respondent did leave the relationship prior to recognizing herself as a battered woman. When she met the batterer in a restaurant to discuss their relationship, she had gained enough distance to recognize the verbal abuse of her former partner. This awareness may have given her the strength at that point to actually avoid a return to the relationship.

**Stage Two of Separation:** **Seeking Safe Space**

This stage marks the point when the victim begins to move away from the victim position and begins the process of becoming a survivor. She begins to realize what her needs and emotions are. She also begins to take care of herself and to take steps in relation to her own safety.

Once the respondents recognized themselves as battered, they were more in touch with the element of fear in the relationship. Respondents often reported that they were afraid that the batterer would track them down and harm others in the process. A respondent indicated that her therapist was more fearful than she about the danger in the relationship. She finally realized that her life was in danger and began to
make preparations to leave.

Since the batterer was likely to become more angry and violent when the respondent attempted to leave, it was important to plan an escape which would decrease the element of danger.

And then I called my sisters one time and had them come get me, and I didn't tell her. And then when they got there, she started crying and how can you leave me? And I felt sorry for her, I felt sad. Well, earlier that day, what made go to call them is I went to go in the bedroom and she told me to get out of there, she wanted to be alone. And I said, Ok, wait a minute I was going to get something, and she shoved me out the door and slammed the door in my face. Then I was really... when I was mad, it was really easy for me to act on it because I was angry and so I went and called them and they came and got me. And then the very next morning she was at my sisters door.

Another respondent reported that her friends were afraid of her batterer because they knew she could be violent. If a friend provided help in an escape, she would be vulnerable to an attack on her person or property. This respondent was able to escape and a friend allowed her to spend the night in a shed behind her house. The friend had a child and both the respondent and the friend feared that the batterer would come to the house and that the child, as well as the adults, would be in danger.

This fear made it difficult to simply walk out of the relationship. It was important to find the resources to get away from the batterer. Many respondents had no independent pool of money, they could not stay with
friends because of fear or because the batterer had alienated the couple from others in the community, and many feared that the batterer would come to their place of employment and cause them to lose their jobs. In order to leave, plans had to be laid to deal with these issues. It was important for the persons providing support to recognize the seriousness of the situation and to help validate this experience for the victim.

One respondent had been chased by her partner with a loaded gun. She realized that she had to get away if she and the batterer's children were to survive. She had no place to go because they lived in a small rural community. A friend contacted her and recognized the severity of the situation. The friend came and picked her up and took her to a distant city where she was able to start her life over.

Stage Three of Separation: Isolation and Depression

Once the respondents had left the battering relationship, they reported feeling a wide range of feelings. Many experienced relief to be out of the relationship. Nearly all reported serious feelings of depression and isolation. Many found it difficult to talk to friends. One respondent reported that the batterer had told every one in the community that she had been abused in the relationship and that people did not want to hear the other side of the story. Some women described their batterers as very powerful women in the lesbian community and that people could not
believe that they were batterers. For example, one respondent was in a relationship with an abuser who was a therapist who did therapy with battered lesbians in the community. She found it impossible to get support in the community where she lived.

I haven't seen anyone since that time. I went through a period last year at this time where I was suicidal. I, you couldn't have told me that five years ago. I wouldn't have thought I could have come as far as I came in my life and feel that way. But I was feeling suicidal. The shelter had talked to me about things, encouraged me to talk to one of the local therapists. So I was in therapy for about three months. And he was dealing with abuse issues and I was comforted and he knew what I went through. As real as it was, what I was going through, it was not uncommon for a woman to go through in a relationship. Not only had my world collapsed, I was still believing it was me, and it has taken me almost a year to start to get my self-esteem. There were trust issues. I trusted no one. At the time the relationship was over I didn't have anybody. I couldn't even talk to my sponsor.

The feelings of depression and isolation made the respondents vulnerable either to returning to the battering relationship or to becoming involved in another abusive situation. Batterers often made attempts to contact the survivor and to rekindle the relationship. Two women who had recently left the battering situation were still in contact with their batterers and reported the difficulty in staying out of the relationship. They felt they had no one to turn to for support. While they recognized that the batterer's promises for a nonabusive relationship were
unrealistic, they longed for the relationship to change. One respondent had chosen to handle this period by screening all her calls on the answering machine. In this way she could avoid being caught off guard by the batterer on the phone. She reported great difficulty at times in not returning the batterer's calls.

She still calls me two or three times a day. I never answer the phone, I screen all my calls, but I still hear those messages. I'm terrified of her. She's so unpredictable when she's using. There's only one way she can get in. She could come up the fire escape and smash the window.

One respondent talked about the difficulty in getting herself physically and emotionally removed from her batterer:

P: Do you think if you, if you go to another city that you will get away from her? Do you think you can really get her out of your life?

R: Well, what I was planning on doing, I know just getting miles between us isn't going to get her out of my life. But when I go there, you know, like I told you, the lady on the hotline and stuff. I want to talk to her again and maybe I can get into counseling. And that's what I'm planning of doing. I know that just getting away from her isn't going to do it. I need to go to counseling for probably more reasons than just her. And, she knows the fact that she's the first, my first lover and all that stuff. But she uses that against me, like she says maybe you'll find some woman better than me. You know what I'm saying, I hope so, but I don't say that cause I know she wouldn't react good. And like she cries and swears she never does things again and turns around and does it again! But I'm, I guess you could say I'm kind of used to it and I'm just starting to believe that things won't change.
One respondent described her difficulty in separating from the batterer as an addiction. She wanted to end the relationship but felt pulled back into it each time the batterer called. She also felt so lonely and isolated that she initiated calls to the batterer. She had no other source of support:

She gave in too, you know, she'd call me too. We called each other. We'd get moments of weakness and we would just call each other. It was just really sick, you know, I was going to therapy at my college and the woman I was seeing there told me that I was just addicted to her. That basically she was just another drug. Another thing to be addicted to. Which is basically true!... I also felt like she was my only connection to the lesbian community. We went to the bars together.

Another respondent reported being separated from the entire community she had known with the batterer. The couple had lived in a small rural community. The respondent had built relationships with many of the townspeople, as well as with the batterer's children. She had moved to a new location and felt she had lost virtually all her meaningful relationships. Her feelings of isolation were severe. Even though her friend was able to help her connect with the lesbian community in her new location, her sense of loss was severe.

One respondent talked about losing straight friends and having no gay friends to rely upon when the relationship ended. She had told a few friends about her lesbianism and they told some others. These rumors
caused her straight friends to pull away. She and her partner had few lesbian friends, which left the respondent feeling totally isolated after the relationship ended.

Some respondents returned to the batterer because of fear. One respondent reported that the batterer continually tracked her down. She felt that if she stayed in a relationship with the batterer that it at least gave her the control of knowing when and where the batterer would appear in her life.

One respondent reported becoming involved in another physically abusive relationship after leaving the batterer. Her self-esteem had been eroded by the battering experience and she was an easy target for another abusive person. Three other respondents reported becoming involved in relationships which were verbally abusive or with an alcoholic after leaving the batterer.

It appeared that these women were not seeking abuse, nor were they likely to continue to become involved in abusive relationships. They were vulnerable to someone with a high need for power and control at the time they left the physically abusive relationship because they were still suffering the effects of the abusive situation. Their self-esteem was low and they had no strong support system.
Stage Four: Healing

Respondents reported coming to a point where they realized that they needed to move on with their lives. One respondent reported that she spent several months in a deep state of depression. She was able to function at work, but she would come home and sit in the dark for the entire evening. She gradually recovered enough to begin contacting friends and to begin the process of rebuilding her life. This respondent left the battering relationship in 1978. At that time, there was no discussion of lesbian battering and she was unable to talk to anyone about her experience.

Another felt alone and isolated and finally forced herself to go out and meet people. She initially was terrified to venture out alone in the lesbian community. She was aware that she had been the subject of gossip in the community and felt she had lost the support of her friends who heard the stories of her batterer. She feared that if she met a new person, that individual might already have heard negative things about her. She realized that she had to deal with this issue if she was going to move forward in her life.

Many respondents expressed fear of relationships as they went through the process of recovering from abuse. The more there was support available from lesbian friends or therapists or survivors groups,
the easier it was for the respondent to regain her confidence and to engage in healthy relationships. Many respondents expressed anger at having to identify themselves as battered lesbians, which still carries stigma in the lesbian community.

The healing process, like recovery from all painful emotional experiences, is never totally complete. The respondents reported that it usually took approximately one year of direct working through issues in therapy or in a support group of some sort, to regain a sense of self esteem and control over her life. At this point, the respondents reported being able to engage in positive intimate relationships and were often able to publicly address the issue of battering in the community.

Recognition of these stages is important for women in battering relationships as well as service providers. It is important for a woman trying to escape from a battering situation to first of all recognize that she is battered. Validation of her experience can give her the strength to plan for her escape. It is important for professionals and the lesbian community to recognize that the woman needs help in finding resources for survival once she leaves the relationship. It is also important for the woman to recognize that she is vulnerable at the time of leaving the relationship. If she does return to the batterer, or becomes involved in another abusive situation, it is important that she recognize this as temporary rather than begin to reassume the victim identity.
It is also important for the lesbian community to recognize that the batterer may continue to harass the former partner and to develop strategies for community accountability around battering behaviors.
CHAPTER IX
A Profile of the Batterer

It is a complicated and not completely understood process by which women become batterers. This chapter will describe the profile of a batterer as described by the respondents' descriptions of their abusers and by the respondents who self identified as batterers. Societal issues and prior exposure to abuse are important factors in the development of a batterer. Personality characteristics as described by respondents include, charm and manipulation, dependence, and need for control.

Societal Factors

We live in a society which promotes violence. The media encourages us to applaud violent acts of retaliation and self-defense, rather than helping us to construct models of nonviolent relationships. While our society promotes violence, women are taught to be submissive and to be the victims of male perpetrators.

In the patriarchal society, we are all trained in the culture of violence. However, individuals respond to societal messages differently and while we all have the potential to commit violent acts under certain conditions, people are not equal in their needs for power and control or in the likelihood of
Straus (1980) has discussed the impact of societal acceptance of violence as a factor related to wife abuse by males. There is an interaction of societal permission for violent behavior and exposure to violence in the home which leads to male perpetrator behavior. The same type of interaction process is likely to produce perpetrator behavior in females. The impact of societal violence and the acceptance of violent behavior by the larger social group was not directly addressed in this study. However, it is probable that these societal factors have played an interactive role in the development of lesbian abusers. Direct exposure to violence in the family of origin and childhood victimization were clearly indicated as factors leading to becoming an abuser in adulthood.

Childhood Victimization

The two respondents in this sample who identified themselves as acting in the role of batterer discussed severe victimization in childhood. The respondents who were victimized talked about abusive experiences which their abusers experienced in childhood. While several respondents doubted the validity of their batterers' stories, it seems clear that experiencing abuse in childhood is typically a prerequisite for acting violently towards an intimate partner in adulthood. Boys may learn to be abusers by watching a father abuse a mother (Straus, 1980). From the stories of the respondents in this study, it seems more likely that women
who become batterers were the direct recipient of severe physical and/or sexual abuse in childhood. Two respondents indicated no knowledge that their abusers had been abused as children. It is possible that abuse did take place but was not shared or not remembered by the abuser. However, given these examples, it must be recognized that abuse in childhood is not always a prerequisite for a woman to become a batterer.

One of the respondents who was not aware of abuse in her batterer's childhood, reported that the batterer had been abused by her husband in a heterosexual marriage. Another respondent who was the victim in her relationship reported developing a pattern of self abuse as a way to reduce tension in the battering relationship. She was not abused in childhood. The development of self abusive behavior illustrates the power of abuse to shape behavior patterns even in adults. It is possible that the former individual, battered by her husband, became an abuser in response to this adult experience with victimization.

A batterer told her story of childhood victimization as follows:

I was abandoned by my birth mother. She went to a birthing house. She went there to give birth to me, her illegitimate child. She came to their door in very poor physical condition. It's a story that I got from social workers. They said that she was about ready to deliver... And then they wanted her to sign me over to the Catholic charity institution. She would not sign me over. She was in poor health and so was I, they agreed keeping her longer than usual. She was there for a couple weeks with me and then took me after she got a job. It ended up that she couldn't hold down a job and take care of me. So, several weeks
later she returned me to the institution and said she wanted them to keep me until she got settled. Nobody ever saw her again after that summer. She had not signed the papers so I could not be adopted for seven years at least. So I was in an orphan home then from several months and then back and forth from foster homes to the orphan home. It's hard to be adopted when you get older. Anyway, I was not the most attractive child and I acted pretty tough from being pushed from place to place and beat up by foster parents. When I was in high school, I got kicked out of a foster home for being a lesbian. By then I had lots of problems in school and the nuns used a lot of physical punishment to control me. There was a lot of abuse all the way around as I grew up...After I was kicked out, they told me I was going to another foster home. I was sent to the detention center and from there to a work home, where I supposed to be an indentured servant for a rich family. I decided I had enough and hit the street. I connected with an older woman and she taught me how to survive on the street. She died last year. I loved her.

Another respondent who described herself being victimized early in the relationship and then becoming the abuser gave the following account of victimization as a child: Her childhood background was extremely violent and abusive. She spent much of her adolescence in institutional settings where she was subjected to repeated incidents of physical and sexual abuse by adult caretakers who never were held accountable for their actions. Her father sexually abused her, and her mother was physically abusive. She was removed from the home early in adolescence and sent to live with relatives. This home seemed to be free from violence, but by the time the respondent arrived there, her
behavior had become unmanageable and the relatives sent her to a juvenile facility for an evaluation of her psychological condition. She was institutionalized at this point and was abused by institutional staff members. She lashed out at people by physical aggression and received the message that she must stop her violence, but that adults did not have to be accountable for their violent acts towards her.

I was told that I was going in for 3 days of evaluation and testing and I was in that particular place for 15 months. I didn't care. There wasn't anyplace else, it's not that I wanted to be there, there wasn't anyplace else I wanted to be. I couldn't recall a single day I'd ever been happy anyplace. So it really didn't matter to me, I said," Ok, fine, you want me to be a crazy, I'll be crazy, I'll be the craziest person ever hit this place, you know?" Crazy people get away with everything, including murder, you know. The staff there some of them were very nice, in fact I still have contact with one of the women that was a nurse there. She doesn't work there anymore, but we still have contact. Some of them were very abusive, had no business working with little kids in the first place. And, there I got in touch with my own anger, I guess you'd say. And batterers turn everything off and don't feel it when they hit you and kick you around went beyond that and I would black out. Almost like a drunk or something only I wasn't drinking! The shrinks claim that I didn't want to have to feel guilty for anything I did, so I conveniently didn't remember it. I don't know if there's any validity to that claim or not. But I would black out and go on a nut. And I would beat the shit out of a lot of the staff there, I never ever hit another kid. In fact there were times when the little kids, cause there were people there as young as 5 and 6 years old! And if these adults, which were the enemy, were dragging some little kid off to seclusion and manhandling 'em, roughin 'em up or whatever, I'd jump on em. And it got to the point that there was a lot of the adult males there that were afraid of me. I was like 14-15 years old beatin the shit out of them. A lot of them quit, a lot of them transferred, I broke a lot of their
bones. I put some of them in traction for months. I don't know if it was all the rage from all the beatings I'd had as a kid or what, but if they were beatin on a little kid, I'll beat the fuck out of em. I'd just reached my limit, I wouldn't take any more. After 15 months they transferred me to a place that was supposed to be maximum security because they had lost so many staff members and I had attacked so many of the people there because originally it was if a bunch of them ganged up on me then I would go nuts and then more and more, it got to the point to where I would attack them for no reason at all. No reason at all. And I can look back on it now and I remember it in little splots and I'm not sure what I remember because it was told to me over and over, you did such and such. And what I remember is actual memory. A lot of it's fuzzy, a lot of the things they claim they did, to this day I don't remember.

It is not possible in this project to clearly delineate whether the above respondent was a victim or batterer or both. From her account of the relationship, both individuals engaged in violent actions. They met in the military and felt they were the only two lesbians in their community. Military rules about homosexuality forced the couple to be isolated about their lesbianism and certainly about the battering in the relationship. It is possible that the balance of power shifted over time, and the roles of batterer and victim were reversed. It is also possible that this individual was the victim in terms of power dynamics and lashed out physically to protect herself, as she had done as a child. She did indicate that her partner would not leave her alone after the relationship had finally ended. This case illustrates the complicated issues which arise in identifying the victim and batterer in a relationship. It would be
dangerous to ignore the underlying issues and label this situation as a case of mutual abuse.

**Mutual Abuse**

In response to the issue of mutual abuse, it is possible for two individuals with a similar history of childhood violence and abuse to become involved in a relationship. Both are in extreme pain and connect with each other because their similar background provides a basis for some minimal level of trust and understanding. Both fear intimacy because they have learned that those who love you hurt you, and at the same time are seeking a relationship which will provide the security never received in childhood. Both are susceptible to being battered because of their lack of self-esteem and inability to clarify boundaries. Both have the fear of intimacy and lash out at those who come close to them emotionally. Both feel shame and guilt over their violent actions.

As discussed in Chapter 4, all but two respondents who identified as victims indicated that their abusers had been victimized in childhood. One of the two abusers identified as victimized in childhood was abused by her husband prior to her lesbian relationship. While it cannot be assumed that all batterers have been severely victimized as children or adults, it is probable that victimization does play a significant role in the development of female batterers.
**Charm and Manipulation**

One respondent reminded us that if a batterer was abusive on the first date, she would not have gone out with her again. However, initially she was loving and caring. She was perhaps a bit strong in pushing the respondent into a commitment early in the relationship, but she had charm. By the time the first episode of physical abuse took place, the respondent had already established a bond of love and trust. She believed her when she said it would never happen again.

Charm and manipulation were words used to describe batterers. One respondent described her abuser as initially becoming very involved with the respondent's child, only later to become extremely jealous of time the respondent spent with the child. "We all seemed to hit it off. My daughter loved her, and she would play ball and things I really don't like to do."

While some batterers were known as violent and feared by others in the community, others were publicly known and respected. One respondent described her abuser as a therapist who worked with lesbian couples. No one suspected she was a batterer. It was very confusing to the respondent to hear others talk about how fortunate she was to be in this relationship. Three other respondents echoed this sentiment and found it impossible to be recognized as victims in the relationship.
All respondents discussed the cycle of abuse as contributing to their feeling of being trapped in the relationship. The manipulative side of the batterer came forth during the honeymoon phase and as one respondent indicated, "The honey moons were so good. I really wanted to believe her when she said it would always be this way." As the couple became more isolated, the respondent became totally dependent upon the honeymoon stage as her sole source of a caring relationship. The batterer was often able to convince her that she was responsible for the abuse and she felt good that the batterer was able to care for her and give her love during this time period.

**Dependence**

The respondents described the abusers as dependent and needy individuals. Often they were described as having a very childlike side to their personalities and as needing constant approval. Battering often took place when any indication of leaving the relationship came up. One respondent indicated that her abuser threatened her and tore up the apartment when she told her the relationship was over. After the violent episode, the batterer sobbed and begged for forgiveness and indicated that she could not live with out her partner. Respondents felt responsible for the batterers and the dependency needs often hooked them deeper into the relationship.
Control

Physical abuse, threats, and emotional abuse were means used by the batterers to keep control in the relationship. It appears that their abusive experiences in childhood and training in patriarchy had given them the view of the world as be in control, be dominant, or you will be hurt. It is likely that the partner was selected because she was perceived as vulnerable at the beginning of the relationship. This does not mean that the partner was less than a strong woman. Often, she was in the early stage of the coming out process and needed to be with someone that could connect her to the lesbian community. She may have been recently separated from an abusive heterosexual marriage. There are numerous reasons why a person appears vulnerable at various points in life. The batterer was there to respond as a caring individual. She felt in charge. Obviously, if the batterer had intense needs to be in control, it would not take long before she would feel that she was losing ground. Any display of assertiveness or any relationship with another person, even a family member or the partner's own child could trigger a violent response.

A means of control which was often used by batterers was to force the victim to stay in a room and listen to her verbal abuse, when the victim wanted to remove herself from the situation to allow the parties to
cool off. This tactic sometimes occurred in the bedroom, in the middle of the night when the victim was attempting to sleep. Two respondents indicated that the batterers kept them awake nearly all night forcing them to listen to verbal abuse.

Another subtle means of control, often used at the beginning of the relationship, prior to the initial incident of actual abuse, was the use of physical force under the guise of play. Neither of these respondents wanted to engage in this wrestling or aggressive form of play. The batterer in both instances used excessive force to beat her opponent. One respondent described "the game " as follows:

She would tell me that the object was to kick the other person off the bed. I said I didn't want to play, but she forced me into it and grabbed me and pushed me off, telling me to get back on the bed. I thought we were done, but she kicked me off again. this time, she kicked me hard, leaving a bruise in the area of my kidney. The message was,"I can overpower you." I was a little wary of her after that.

One the physical abuse began, it was likely to escalate over time. In one case, it only happened once in the relationship and from that point forward, threats were sufficient to intimidate the partner. Threats were often powerful and were used by many batterers to maintain control.

As indicated earlier, five batterers left the relationship. This seems inconsistent with the literature on domestic violence. It is possible that the batterers became aware that the balance of power was changing and
that the partner was planning to end the relationship. One respondent indicated that she had secretly developed a close friendship with another woman, with whom she later became sexually involved. She was also saving money and planning an escape from her abuser. Suddenly, her abuser became involved sexually with a former lover and the relationship ended.

In other cases, the batterer may have felt guilt about her abusive behavior and left the relationship believing her life would change. This explanation seems plausible in three cases where the batterers left the community and attempted to completely change their lives. One of these batterers subsequently became involved in a heterosexual relationship.

When the respondent reported that she was the one to initiate the separation of the relationship, the batterer was likely to use violence, harassment, and threats to regain control. Societal homophobia was an issue of particular significance to lesbian women because the batterer often threatened to report that the victim was a lesbian to an employer, family member or ex-husband. These threats were particularly frightening to the respondents because they posed a possibility of serious damage to their careers, family relationships, and could cause a loss of child custody.

Often the intimidation continued long after the separation took place. Several respondents reported that the batterer would deliberately
bump into them at a community gathering, a behavior which held meaning for the respondent, but not to onlookers at the event. Coming into a bar, looking around to identify the former partner, and then deliberately sitting at the table next to her is an example of a subtly harassing behavior. The respondent would feel discomfort, but the behavior caused no real damage, so others were likely not to take a complaint seriously. Such behaviors raised real fears that the batterer would come around later when the respondent was alone and cause real harm or conveyed the message that the batterer still could keep a certain amount of control. One respondent described her awareness of these behaviors as follows:

   It's like a batterer will come into a (AA) meeting. She'll block the entrance and stare at her victim. Most people don't pick up on it, but I've been through it, so I know what is going on. It is meant to intimidate.

   The characteristics of childhood victimization, manipulative behavior, and high need for control were in some way described by all respondents in relation to their abusers. These characteristics seem to create a profile of the typical abuser. Further research in this area is necessary.
CHAPTER X
Community Responsibility

This chapter will focus on the issues which face the lesbian community in confronting violence between intimate partners. The community carries great power in shaping the perpetrator’s and survivor’s self perceptions. Communities must develop ways to support individuals but not to condone violent and abusive behaviors.

A major question which arises out of confronting violence in lesbian relationships is: What can and should the lesbian/feminist community do to prevent and reduce the incidence of violence in the lesbian community? The typical community reaction in the past has been to ignore and deny that violence exists. Violent behavior is defined as a male behavior and lesbian relationships are considered safe because no male is present.

The recognition that violence does exist in the lesbian/feminist community poses complicated issues because proper identification of the perpetrator versus the victim becomes difficult. As long as violent behavior is attributed to males, we can support women who identify themselves as battered and protect them and ourselves from the males.
who batter. Since perpetrators often claim to be victimized, the process is complicated when both parties are women. It is also difficult to deal with separation of parties in an often small and closely interrelated lesbian community. When heterosexual couples split up, it is possible for each to go separate ways and find individual support groups. Friends may end up divided on whom to support, but each is able to find other relationships and community activities which allow for separateness. In the lesbian community, there are only a few activities and events, and it is difficult for the parties to separate without continued contact. It is also more difficult for friends to deal with the ending of the relationship, because of the intertwining of relationship networks.

Since the batterer is sometimes a revered and powerful member of the lesbian community, seven of the respondents expressed the difficulty in getting support as a battered woman because other lesbians felt very positively about the batterer. It is often hard for these women to even voice their feelings because of a "lesbian ethic" not to trash other lesbians in the community, particularly your partner or former partner. The other community members often gave strong statements of support about the batterer, i.e., "You're so lucky to be in a relationship with such a wonderful and powerful person who is so respected for her community achievements," or "You're so lucky to have such an attractive partner,
and other women are in line to be with her." Such statements created confusion for the victim and reinforced the "crazy-making" statements made by the batterer that the victim was responsible for the violence, or that it was not really so bad. After all, if the perpetrator was really a violent person, she would not receive accolades from others in the community.

Three respondents indicated that their batterers had committed violent acts toward others in the community and expressed the fear that they would harm others who provided shelter or protection to the victim. Other respondents expressed fear that the batterer might harm others even when they were not aware of such actions in the past. Often the batterers made threats of harming children or friends of the victim. This fear created an additional pressure on the victim to maintain silence. One respondent reported that she spent the night in a shed behind a friend's house in the process of escaping from her batterer. Her friend wanted to be supportive but had a child and feared that the batterer would come and pose a threat to her and her child. Another respondent reported that her friends made statements which indicated that they knew her partner was violent and potentially dangerous. They suggested that it was the victim's responsibility to keep the batterer under control, and indirectly indicated that it was better that she took the abuse than to allow the batterer to beat up other community members.
Most respondents reported at least some attempt to talk to friends about the battering. Only one respondent indicated that she made no attempt whatsoever to talk about her experience with the batterer. She was totally isolated from the lesbian community during the course of the battering relationship and felt that she was responsible for her partner's lesbianism as well as for the battering. She did not identify herself as battered until long after the relationship was over. She had been in therapy during and after the battering relationship, but it was not until circumstances forced her to transfer to a new therapist that the therapist confronted the issue and helped her to recognize that she had been battered.

When respondents attempted to talk about their experience, they often received messages to keep silence. These messages included the following: Battering does not occur in lesbian relationships. The victim must be responsible for being battered. The victim should just fight back. Fighting between women is not serious.

Again, responses such as these reinforced the notion that the respondent should not talk about her experience and that her problem, while often life-threatening, was not taken seriously by lesbians or heterosexual women who were part of her support network. The community inadvertently maintained the silence of victims of violence.
Several respondents indicated that part of the problem was that they were feeling people out for a response and were not very direct in their attempts to talk about the experience. In the few instances where a friend confronted the issue, the respondent was likely to deny the battering herself. If the respondent was indirect or denied confrontations which took place, the community members were likely to be left feeling confused themselves and did not know how to deal with the situation at hand.

When the batterer reported herself to the community as a victim, this further complicated the community's ability to deal with the situation. Often, the victim was silent and spoke only to a few close friends. The batterers who defined themselves as victims were described as wearing their bruises as badges of victimization. Battered women described themselves as wearing long sleeves on hot days to cover the bruises for which they felt responsible. The batterers, if marked in an altercation, might have worn short sleeves on cold days to prove themselves victims. If word spread through the community that a couple experienced battering in the relationship, often both were ostracized. Members might side with the batterer, who was manipulative and could argue her case. This might be the response when only the batterer talked about the abuse. If both described themselves as battered, the community became
confused, thought of the situation as mutual abuse, and often isolated both parties. In these cases, the battered lesbian felt she had no support and was alienated from the community.

One respondent who was in a relationship with a black batterer gained her primary support from the black community. The couple lived in a small rural town and it was her perception that the community was not generally comfortable with gay/lesbian relationships, but were accepting of community members regardless of their behavior. She felt that the black community had more understanding of violence and that she was accepted as a part of the community because her partner was a longstanding community member. The community knew about the batterer's violence and she was known to have previously battered her husband and her children, and possibly other people as well. Violence was considered part of her personality, and while understanding of the violence was conveyed, there was also a reinforcement of the idea that there was no way out. The respondent felt she received the message that "violence is just the way things are and there are no possible alternatives to remaining in the relationship." Several respondents in relationships with white batterers, often feminist by their own definition, reported similar community response.
Accepting Responsibility as a Community

There is no simple answer to how a community should respond to violence among intimate partners who are community members. It is extremely important for the lesbian community to acknowledge the existence of violence in lesbian relationships. Only one respondent was already plugged into a network dealing specifically with lesbian violence at the time she was battered by her partner. This connection helped her to take court action, and while she remained in the relationship for approximately one year following the first and most serious physical incident, she was able to recognize herself as battered and realize that she did not deserve physical abuse. All other respondents gave some indication that they did not identify themselves as battered women because they believed the myth that lesbians do not batter. All shared the feeling that the community's denial of battering contributed strongly to their own denial and reinforced the belief that they must be responsible for what was happening to them, or that it was not serious enough to come under the definition of battering.

The community can take action to eliminate the myth that battering does not take place in lesbian relationships by holding educational programs on battering and by holding public discussions of the issue, so that people can learn responsible ways to respond to violence and to
become accountable for their own abusive behaviors.

Some radical survivor's groups have suggested that public lesbian events be made safe for survivors by disallowing participation by known batterers. The problem with such an approach is that only identified batterers would be eliminated and those who were undetected would remain at large. Also, it may be difficult for the community to accurately police events, and community polarization could occur around protection of individuals, etc.

Safety and protection of survivors is an important issue. One respondent expressed anger because after leaving her batterer, she discovered that there were many people who knew her abuser had battered a previous lover and did not warn her at the time she entered the relationship. She said that she would have been unlikely to have heeded the warning and would have denied the potential danger at the time. Also, the batterer was manipulative enough to have convinced her that the relationship was safe. Two respondents who had knowledge of prior battering relationships entered the relationship anyway. One felt that her partner's former lover had been alcoholic and therefore brought on the abuse, and the other believed that this relationship was different and her love would transform the batterer. If knowledge did not prevent these women from entering the relationship, it could help women to leave the relationship sooner. Had any of these women felt support for their
position, they might have been able to leave prior to having their self
esteem totally eroded or before suffering severe and sometimes
irreparable physical injury. For example, the respondent who described
the former lover of her batterer as alcoholic may have recognized sooner
that consuming alcohol does not mean that a person deserves to be
beaten. By silence, the community reinforces the message that one
deserves what she gets.

Violence is often reinforced in our society. The media presents
violent actions as an acceptable means of preserving that which is
defined as good. More subtly, power and dominance over others is
promoted and those with power are viewed as valued members of the
community. Issues of power and dominance need to be examined by the
lesbian community and alternatives to dominance need to be developed.
Decision making by consensus, and valuing feeling and intuition as well
as rational thought processes, are examples of alternatives which are
being explored and developed. Respondents pointed to power seeking
and aggressive behavior by batterers being viewed in a positive light in
the community, thus giving subtle reinforcement to the need to control the
partner, using physical aggression if necessary. Being reared in our
culture, it is impossible to completely rid ourselves of actions of
aggression and dominance. It is important for the lesbian, feminist
community to confront these issues directly and to reduce the
reinforcement of aggressive behavior. It is important to confront acts of physical violence, intimidation, threats, name calling, and other clear instances of psychological abuse when they occur at community events. By doing so, the message is given that abusive behavior is not supported by the community, and abusers will at least be forced to evaluate their behavior and to control it in public. Recognition of violence as inappropriate and as intolerable may make it easier for the partners of abusers to recognize the nature of the relationship and to leave sooner for their own safety.

What constitutes abuse is often an individual matter. We can confront physical altercations or threats of violence, but more subtle forms of abuse are often hard to define. A term of endearment for one couple may be the same term used by someone who sexually abused another individual. To the person who was abused, that term would carry a negative connotation. A respondent said that her batterer could subtly say and do things that others might not notice as abuse. For example, at community events, she would block the entrance or exit as the former partner approached. This action was symbolic of the times when the abuser would force her partner to stay in the room while she verbally and physically abused her. For others, a person standing in a doorway posed no threat. Using words often associated with abuse were also perceived as threatening to survivors.
The only way to know what a survivor needs from the community is to ask. Each individual has different needs and each woman and her individuality must be respected. The amount of distance needed from a batterer is different for different survivors and is influenced by the specific behaviors of the batterer as well. Some survivors indicated that they were not uncomfortable at community events with the abuser present as long as a certain amount of distance was maintained. For others, the batterer's presence created fear and discomfort. Asking the survivor what kind of help she would want from friends in situations where the batterer might be present was defined as valuable by respondents. If the survivor is confused about these issues, she may need to talk out her feelings and get support and feedback from friends.

Survivors are angry. Some of their anger is directed to the lesbian community and to the silence about battering which has contributed to their pain and isolation. Some survivors feel that limited resources should not be directed to batterers because batterers are excellent manipulators and easily get others to feel sorry for them and to take care of them. These are valid issues. Support for survivors should be given priority in funding.

At the same time, it is important for the community to reinforce accountability and help-seeking by batterers. Defining accountability is important. The batterer must accept responsibility for the pain caused to
her victims. If a survivor does not want to play softball with her abuser because she feels intimidated by the abuser's presence, accountability might mean that the abuser will find another softball team.

It is possible for batterers to get help. Too often, help is lacking in communities, and while programs exist for male batterers, few exist for lesbians. Individual therapy might be helpful if the therapist understands the dynamics of abuse, but support groups are most helpful because the batterers can both confront and support each other. Since batterers themselves have often been victimized as children, they need support when confronting their own pain. At the same time, pain and prior victimization is not an excuse for abusing others.

There are no complete answers for a community attempting to confront violence and to develop new ways of interacting without dominance and power plays. It is important for each community to try out new models and to communicate these to others. The most important issue for the lesbian community is to listen to survivors and to allow women who have experienced violence in their lives to give input into the process and to validate their experience.
CHAPTER XI

Treatment Issues

Every respondent in this study had sought treatment as some point in the process of dealing with the violence in her life. This chapter will focus on issues related to successful treatment of lesbians experiencing violence in their intimate relationships. Therapy, battered women's shelters, the legal system, AA and Alanon, and survivor support groups will be discussed.

Therapy

Every respondent shared stories about therapy, Alcoholics Anonymous, the court system, and support groups. Some of these experiences were helpful, while others hindered the recognition of a battering relationship. Whether helpful or not, these stories provide therapists and other providing services to lesbian women with useful information about the treatment of battering.

Many women went into treatment for issues not directly related to battering. They did not go to a therapist initially indicating that they were battered by their partner and wanted help with that area of their lives. The fact that all the respondents sought therapy does not mean that all battered lesbians seek help. The fact that these women were open enough to talk to
the researcher about their experiences may mean that they differ from many battered lesbians who are less able to share their experiences. However, the fact that all the respondents went for some type of help means that many battered lesbians are being seen by therapists, with the issue of battering often going unidentified. A therapist reported that she routinely asks about battering as she asks about sexual abuse, etc. Nearly all her lesbian and heterosexual clients indicate that they are not battered. If a therapist asked clients about sexual abuse in childhood and when a negative answer was given, closed the door on that subject forever, that therapist would be considered professionally irresponsible. A client may not remember abuse at the time of entering therapy or she may be too ashamed to reveal her experience. Battering must be viewed in the same light. Many lesbians who believe that battering does not occur in lesbian relationships would have no idea that their experience was that of a battered woman. Many would be too ashamed to reveal the nature of their relationship and many have been sworn to secrecy by the batterer.

One respondent said that her partner made her swear that she would never talk to anyone about the incident of severe physical violence which occurred in their relationship. The respondent felt loyalty to her partner and did not talk about this issue in therapy, even though she
greatly feared her partner's potential for life threatening abuse.

It is important to ask questions about abuse in ways which are acceptable to the client. For example, it is counter productive to ask about violence in the relationship if the client does not perceive herself to be battered. She may be denying to herself that she is battered and therefore not perceive her partner as violent, even though severe abuse may be occurring. More subtle questions about the use of physical means to resolve conflict may enable the client to initially talk about her experience.

It is also important to question the client thoroughly if she identifies herself as the abuser. A therapist might perceive a couple as two equals using physical means to settle disagreement and miss the issue of power and control which makes one party clearly the abuser. People differ greatly in their response to violence. Some fight back on a regular basis, while some never engage in physical aggression. Most respondents reported using physical means at least one time during the relationship. This was sometimes directly as self-defense, and at other times the violent altercation was initiated by the victim. One respondent talked about the build-up of tension before the violence took place. She said that there were some occasions when she wanted to get the violence over with so the honeymoon phase could begin. She used verbal or physical aggression to provoke the batterer so the tension would end.
Another respondent reported that her abuser would tell her that she was just as responsible for the abuse and point out how she had used violence to fight back and to protect herself. Often these women felt guilt and responsibility and had difficulty revealing the violence to a therapist.

If drugs and alcohol were involved in the relationship, the couple often sought treatment for chemical dependency. Counselors who specialized in chemical dependency often did not directly confront the abuse. The clients were told to focus on the chemical dependency and the abuse was seen as related to the use of chemicals. One respondent said that she believed that if her partner stopped drinking, the abuse would stop as well. Another believed that if both she and her partner became sober, abuse would not be an issue in the relationship. In both instances, the abuse continued after the use of drugs or alcohol was under control. It is important that abuse be addressed as an issue separate from chemical dependency and be directly treated.

Several respondents went to therapy with their batterer and were seen conjointly. They were often treated as a couple even when issues of abuse were brought out in the open. If abuse was discussed, it was often minimized by the couple. The batterer downplayed her violence and the victim supported minimization out of loyalty or fear. One respondent reported that she and her abuser were seen conjointly and separately as well. Each had an individual therapist and both therapists
were present during the conjoint sessions. She described the batterer as manipulating and controlling of the therapy sessions. The batterer threatened to terminate treatment if she was heavily confronted or if things did not go her way. The batterer also threatened the respondent with further violence if she discussed the true nature of the relationship. The physical battery was mentioned but the depth of the violence was hidden. Because the batterer seemed to manipulate the therapists, the respondent said she felt greater fear. Inadvertently, the therapists were modeling the victim role. Confrontation of the batterer would cause her to leave treatment, so the respondent felt the therapists were playing into her games.

Another respondent had been in individual therapy prior to her relationship with the abuser. She felt the therapist had been helpful, so she returned with her partner after the abuse became severe. The therapist minimized the abuse and related it to the stress of coming out, and of merging households, since this was the first lesbian relationship for the batterer. The batterer had previously abused her daughter so there was a history of prior abuse which would have signaled inquiry into her present behavior.

Another respondent reported that her therapist told her that her abuser needed treatment much more than she did. The respondent felt this response to her plea for help reinforced her caretaking role. She
was not encouraged to take care of herself and to take protective measures in relation to the batterer. Instead, she and the therapist discussed ways to keep the batterer in treatment.

In contrast, another respondent who sought therapy to help her take better care of her abuser was confronted directly by her therapist. The therapist acknowledged that the batterer needed treatment but helped the respondent recognize herself as battered and helped her to devise a plan to take care of herself. Through treatment, the respondent was able to identify herself as a battered woman and ultimately able to separate from the relationship.

When therapists were helpful, they separated the couple for treatment. No respondent reported couple counseling as effective and it reinforced feelings of blame and powerlessness on the part of the victim. Batterers are manipulative and can trip up the best of therapists. When a victim feels her therapist is being manipulated, whether this is actually occurring or not, it reinforces the feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. It can also be dangerous for the victim if she says too much to the therapist. The batterer may retaliate if she feels betrayed by her partner in therapy. Since batterers have an extraordinary need to be in control, the therapy session can become an arena for a power struggle. Such struggles are better handled individually between the batterer and the therapist.
One respondent reported the most helpful thing about therapy was finding a therapist who would listen to her. Believing the victim and not minimizing abuse was significantly helpful. Many respondents reported personally minimizing the abuse in therapy. If the therapist responded with equal or greater minimization, treatment was not effective. This respondent said that hearing herself talk about the abuse made it real and she began to realize the danger in the relationship.

Confrontation of the victim as a battered woman by her therapist was helpful to the respondents. Many did not see themselves as battered because they believed battering does not happen in lesbian relationships. Some therapists have an unrealistic view of lesbian relationships and hold similar beliefs about battering. If a therapist does not want to admit that lesbians can be abusive to each other, she cannot be effective in helping lesbian women cope with the problems they face.

Another respondent brought up the issue of control. She said her therapist always let her feel in charge and she was allowed to make her own decisions. She felt that many therapists take power away from clients. For a person who has been battered, it is important to feel in control of the therapy situation. When living with the batterer, the respondent felt she had no control over her life. This respondent believed herself to be a batterer when she entered treatment. She
resisted efforts by the therapist to redefine her role and told the therapist she was going to join the batterers' group. She attended one group session, and was clearly told by the group members that she did not belong there. She returned to therapy and asked the therapist why she had let her go to the group. The therapist responded by asking her if she would ever have recognized herself as battered if she had not attended the group. The respondent realized that she would not have been able to accept the therapist's word that she was not an abuser.

Another respondent who sought treatment in a battered women's shelter felt that it was helpful to be given permission to fail. A staff member told her that it is not uncommon for a battered woman to return to the abuser but that does not mean she will not leave the relationship when she is ready. She felt that she could come back to the shelter when she left the batterer again. Too often the victim is given the message that she should leave the relationship immediately, even though she is not emotionally ready to do so. Helping the victim devise a safety plan and an escape plan are more effective means of treatment.

It is also important that violence not be condoned by the therapist. While fighting back should not cause the therapist to define the victim as a batterer or define the situation as mutual abuse, violence cannot be condoned. The victim must recognize her violent actions as abuse and she must learn alternative behaviors for her own safety as well as for the
safety of others.

Battered Women's Shelters

Many women were fearful of using battered women's shelters. Some personally knew lesbian women on the staff and feared their confidentiality would be violated. Some respondents worked in the battered women's movement and feared that their credibility as professionals would be damaged if they used shelter services. One respondent was a human service professional and feared openly discussing herself as a survivor of a battering relationship because she believed professionals in her community to hold a double standard and that the expectation for professionals to be close to perfect was still upheld.

For women who used shelter services, the response was mixed. Some found the shelter staff to be empathic and supportive of lesbians. Often the residents displayed homophobia and respondents felt staff did not do enough to deal with this issue when homophobic comments were made. One respondent said she believed the staff at the shelter downplayed the lesbian issue because many men who batter their wives use the issue of lesbianism at the shelter as a threat. A shelter worker who was interviewed said she believes shelter staff need ongoing training to deal with homophobia. Shelter staff have a high turnover and when training is done, it may be only a few months until there is new staff
who have not been trained.

One respondent reported a negative response to her call to a battered women's shelter hotline. She told the counselor she was a lesbian and felt she was not taken seriously. The counselor seemed to rush her off the phone and did not offer shelter services to her. Another respondent who called a shelter crisis line reported that it was through phone calls to the shelter line that she recognized herself as battered. This counselor was able to help the respondent realize that lesbians could be batterers. It is important to note that the shelter discussed by this respondent was in a rural community and it was not likely that many identified lesbians were served by the shelter's programs. At least one staff member was empathic and supportive of lesbian women.

One respondent reported getting into a relationship with a shelter staff member who identified herself as lesbian. The respondent felt this woman was an abuser and was able to get out of the relationship. Other respondents who worked in the battered women's movement and a shelter director interviewed supported the fact that there are lesbian batterers who work in the shelters. The issue of batterers as employees in shelters or as counselors working with victims and survivors is an issue which needs to be addressed. It is also important for shelters to address the issue of professionalism and it is not appropriate for staff members to engage in relationships with shelter residents.
One respondent reported that her abuser came into the shelter and identified herself as a battered woman after the respondent had entered the shelter. The respondent had not identified herself as a lesbian and was unable to confront her abuser within the shelter. She felt helpless and left the shelter with the belief that this could not be a safe place for her in the future. This instance points out the importance of homophobia training of shelter staff and the need to encourage lesbians to come out and to be able to get their needs met in shelters.

Obviously, lesbians have special needs for safety in the shelter setting. At least male batterers cannot walk into the facility and be admitted as residents. There are other special needs of the lesbian population which must also be addressed. The intense identification in relationships between women make separation from the batterer more difficult. Isolation from the lesbian community makes it harder for the lesbian woman to cope with her single status after leaving the batterer. Fears about facing the abuser at community events is a greater issue for lesbian women because there are not many options for socialization within the gay community.

The Legal System

Six respondents contacted the police or used the court system as a means to limit the batterer's abusive behavior. Four of these respondents reported positive outcomes from these attempts at legal
intervention. Several respondents reported that they did not use the legal system because of fears about the way the police and courts react to gay men and lesbian women. Communities may differ widely in the amount of training given to police in the area of domestic violence in general as well as in the amount of training around gay/lesbian issues. It is impossible to draw any conclusions from these data about the likelihood of a positive response by the legal system to a battered lesbian in any given community.

Many heterosexual battered women report that the legal system cannot provide them with adequate protection from their abusers. The respondents in this study seemed more likely to feel positively toward the legal system if they felt they were treated in the same manner a heterosexual woman would be treated. The limited amount of protection available through legal channels may have been of lesser significance. It is possible that a female abuser is more likely than a heterosexual male to take legal restrictions such as a restraining order seriously. A male batterer might laugh off a restraining order and believe he can get away with a violation, while a lesbian might fear serious retaliation from police and the court if she violated such an order.

Of the positive responses, two women were able to get restraining orders against their batterers. Both felt these orders prevented the
batterers from further physical assault and that the batterers were aware of potential negative consequences for violating the orders. Two other women used police intervention and found the police helpful in making the batterer understand that they would not let her get away with assaultive behavior. One of these respondents did not identify herself as a lesbian. She lived in a small community and said she was assaulted by a female friend. The police said they could not file a restraining order because this was not a male/female relationship. They did charge the abuser with assault and watched the respondent's house to see that further violations did not take place.

One of the respondents who reported a negative experience with the police said that she called the police for help, and when they arrived, the batterer said she was being abused and they believed her story. The respondent was told that she would be charged with assault if further incidents occurred. The batterer viewed this as a victory and the respondent felt further helplessness in relation to her assailant. Another respondent called 911 when she was seriously beaten by her batterer. When the person who answered the phone discovered the assailant to be another woman, she seemed minimally concerned and the police did not arrive on the scene for at least a half hour after the call was made.

The negative reactions by police indicate a need for training of personnel in the area of homophobia, as well as specifically in the area
of lesbian violence. Homophobic officers may react negatively to calls by lesbian women even if they are aware of the possibility of violence in lesbian relationships.

Alcoholics Anonymous and Alanon

For women who went to AA or Alanon, the response of the groups varied. In some AA groups, particularly in large cities where gay/lesbian groups have developed and where battering has been confronted by the community, the respondent was confronted about the battering in a supportive way by the group members. In smaller communities, respondents indicated that many AA members battered their wives and children and that violence was an issue which was not to be discussed in the groups. One respondent said that alcoholics do terrible things when drinking and these horror stories are shared in the AA group. Thus, battering is just among the terrible things alcoholics do when drinking and it is not viewed as a serious threat which must be addressed as separate from the issue of alcohol or drug abuse.

Survivor Support Groups

Survivor support groups have been used successfully in the recovery process of heterosexual women. While respondents had opportunities to experience support groups for battered lesbians, those who did had positive reports of their experiences in these groups. Perhaps the most important benefit of such a group was the opportunity
to discover that one was not the only person to experience abuse in a lesbian relationship. The group also provided the opportunity to overcome the feeling of isolation common to survivors of violent relationships. The difficulty in getting support from the lesbian community made this isolation even more intense for the respondents and the group provided opportunities for new friendships and enabled the members to go out together to community events, thus enabling the members to become reintegrated into the community.

Support groups often gave the survivors the strength to confront their batterers about continued harassment. Survivors also gained the strength to speak to others in the lesbian community about their painful experience. These were steps often described by respondents as important in the healing process.

The support group could also become powerful as a political force with members speaking out about violence in the lesbian community. The community is likely to resist such discussion. Strategizing in the group is important to develop effective ways to communicate to community members. It is also helpful for members to support each other if negative reactions are received when someone does speak out.

A support group may be facilitated by survivors themselves or by a professional therapist. If survivors facilitate the groups, it is important that they educate themselves about group process. They should also
process their own experience and develop a positive self awareness and understand how their experience with violence may be similar to or different from the experience of others.

If a professional therapist facilitates a support group for survivors of violent relationships, she may or may not be a survivor herself. It is important that she be a lesbian who is out in the community and has a good understanding of the community politics. It is also important for her to be willing to speak out against violence in the lesbian community and act as a positive force for creating safe space for all lesbian women. She must also remember that the group exists for the purpose of support and not mix her role of facilitator of a support group with that of a therapist in a therapy group.
CHAPTER XII
Discussion

Theoretical Issues

This study is framed within the context of feminist and conflict theory. These two theoretical models have been merged (Bricker-Jenkins and Hooyman, 1986) and both have viewed violent behavior as stemming from the patriarchal and heterosexual values and structure of our society. While many conflict theorists have focused on broad class struggles, Gelles and Straus (1980) have applied this model to interpersonal and familial violence in a heterosexual context.

From a conflict perspective, society is structured by social class. In such a system, the social elite must struggle to maintain power over the groups defined as the underclass. The elite group is able to maintain power by creating social rules which are empowering to the ruling class. Violence, which has high costs to the powerful, as well as to the powerless, is only used when other measures of control fail. Often threats of violence are sufficient to suppress an uprising of a less powerful group. In the family, men are accorded power by the definition of their social role. Traditionally, the man is "king of his castle" and the
wife is expected to "love, honor, and obey." While social roles are changing in our society, men are still ascribed power in familial relationships. Studies of police response to domestic violence calls have indicated that police officers tend to blame the victim rather than provide protection from abuse (Bowker, 1986). Women are viewed as less powerful in the marital relationship and violence against them is acceptable if other means of control by the male partner fail.

An additional issue related to the power and role of women arises from feminist theory. Behaviors and characteristics typically associated with males in our society are valued, while those associated with women are devalued. Both aggression and assertion are socially valued behaviors, while nurturing and caretaking responses are devalued (Bricker-Jenkins & Hooyman, 1986). Thus women are viewed in our society as having less social power and as possessing qualities which maintain the weaker position in relationships.

From a perspective of learning theory, these behaviors are learned and do not arise from biological differences between males and females. Men are rewarded for aggression and punished for nurturing and caretaking. The reverse holds true for females. However, since male identified behavior is rewarded and leads to social success, some females may be willing to accept punishment and social ostracism.
because there are still rewards to be gained from male identified behavior. It follows, that some women will use violence as a means to gain a greater amount of social success or control over their lives.

Studies of victims of domestic violence indicate that there is a correlation between one's exposure to violence in childhood and being a victim or perpetrator as an adult (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). The typical pattern is that the female who is battered or who witnesses violence in the family becomes an adult victim and the male becomes an adult perpetrator. It is possible for the female who is exposed to violence to take on the role of perpetrator as a means of self protection. As a result of victimization, she learns to dislike her vulnerable, female characteristics and to value aggressive, male qualities. As a means to protect herself from perceived victimization, she becomes an abuser.

According to Straus (1980), one of the lessons learned in a violent family is that love is abuse. For lesbian women who have experienced violence in childhood, it is possible to become an abuser as a means of self protection. The batterer feels vulnerable in an intimate relationship; therefore, strikes out in self protection.

While women receive social rewards for dominant and male identified behaviors, battering is in total opposition to the expected role for females in our society. It is possible that the female batterer feels a higher level of guilt and shame over her abusive behaviors than her male
counter parts. Zemsky (1990) has found female batterers to be more likely to seek and to be successful in treatment than male batterers.

These data have provided a description of the phenomenon of lesbian battering. Lesbian women have been able to talk about their experiences in battering relationships from their own perspectives, rather than to have their experiences defined by a researcher or person outside of the battering experience. This process has brought out individual differences in experience, while emphasizing the similarities and the common threads among lesbians who have been battered by a lesbian partner. The respondents' experiences also support the work of Gelles, Straus, Walker, and others in the area of domestic violence.

Carrol (1977) found a correlation between the violence in marriage and receiving physical punishment in childhood. This study supports this correlation. Many respondents reported that they and/or their abuser had experienced abuse in childhood. Emotional and sexual abuse were also cited by respondents. Perhaps the experience of victimization in childhood (physical or sexual) is more significantly related to violence in adult relationships than physical punishment. It is important to note that two respondents in this study reported no identifiable victimization experiences as children.

Gelles and Straus (1978) listed eleven factors which differentiate families from other social groups. These factors are as follows: 1) Time
at risk. 2) Range of activities and interests. 3) Intensity of involvement.

4) Infringing activities. 5) Right to influence. 6) Age and sex discrepancies. 7) Ascribed roles. 8) Family privacy. 9) Involuntary membership. 10) High level of stress. 11) Extensive knowledge of social biographies.

With the exception of sex discrepancies and ascribed roles, the data in this study support these factors being related to violence in lesbian couples. While there were no legal binds in the relationships studied in this project, the feeling of commitment and permanency of relationships was reported by the majority of respondents. The relationship was viewed as a marriage in many cases and this contributed to the feeling on the part of the respondent that membership in the relationship was involuntary. The issue of family privacy as described by Straus was reported to be intensified in lesbian relationships by issues of lesbian ethics and protecting one's partner in the lesbian community and certainly by the ethic that lesbian women do not talk to heterosexual friends or family about relationship problems. Extensive knowledge of social biographies was often cited as a bond and a means of identification between the partners, creating a belief that understanding and love would eventually solve all problems. Intensity of involvement was reported to be a key factor in holding the relationships together.
Peplau, Padesky, and Hamilton (1982) examined factors related to satisfaction in lesbian relationships. They found equality of power and high levels of similarity to be related to relationship satisfaction. Reasons cited for break up in the relationship were related to feelings of a loss of independence in the relationship. The violent relationships described in this study were described as problematic in the area of power and control and in dependency as well. Respondents reported little opportunity for separateness in the relationship and as the relationships progressed, the respondents had more limited opportunity for gaining any satisfaction from outside sources.

Brooks (1981) examined the concept of minority stress in lesbian women. This study found stress to be conversely correlated with socio-economic status and those exposed to feminist ideology were considered to have lower levels of stress than those not exposed. Minority stress appeared to be a factor related to violence in this study. In some instances, the violent episodes were triggered in the perpetrator when difficulties in accepting a lesbian identity were encountered. This might occur around sexuality and intimacy or around fears that the partner would return to a heterosexual relationship. For the woman being battered, minority stress was identified as a factor which made it difficult to leave the relationship. It was not possible to discuss the relationship with either straight friends or family or with other lesbians.
While Brooks described knowledge of feminism as leading to a state of reduced stress, the respondents in this study described a different type of stress being created by adherence to feminist ideology. Being a "feminist" meant to these women that they were required live up to the ideal of equality in a relationship and violence between intimate partners could not even be considered among those with a feminist perspective. Therefore, feminism contributed to feelings of isolation and that one must be responsible in some way for the violence which was a part of their lives.

Lobel (1986) studied lesbian violence and described power and control as the key factor related to violent relationships. Control was reported as a major factor by all respondents in this study. The batterers needed to feel in control of the relationship. Often, discussion of separation would trigger a violent incident by a batterer. The batterers were described as having great dependency needs and could not tolerate separation or independence on the part of the partner. This dependency was at times described as leading to a relationship in which neither partner could have separate interests or activities.

Gilligan (1982) has discussed the issue of relationships as a key factor in the development of a moral perspective in females. The respondents in this study described their intimate relationships as one of
the most important features of their definition of self. For women early in
the coming out process, having an intimate partner was important to their
lesbian identity. For women who had been out for long periods of time, it
was important to their identity as women to be able to maintain a long
term, committed relationship. LaRosa (1980) and others have focused
on the lack of external resources as a reason for remaining in a violent
relationship. The respondents in this study were not materially
dependent upon their partners. Most were able to be self supporting and
as lesbian women whose self definition precluded dependence upon a
male for material support, clearly recognized their ability to be self
sufficient. Most respondents remained in the relationship for emotional
reasons. Feelings of caring for the batterer and the need to maintain an
intimate relationship were the most often cited reasons for continuing the
relationship with the batterer. These issues seem to support Gilligan's
theory of female development and are contrary to studies focusing on
material reasons for women remaining in abusive relationships.

Many people, including lesbian women, have difficulty in
accepting the fact that lesbians actually experience domestic violence.
Often in discussions about the content of this project, feminists, lesbian
women, therapists and others made the following kind of comments:
"Women are not violent, therefore, battering does not exist among
lesbian couples," "Two women hitting each other is not the same as a
man and woman hitting each other," or "If lesbians do experience battering, this only happens in 'butch-femme' relationships. The respondents in this study clearly demonstrated that lesbian couples do experience violence in their relationships, that this violent behavior is as dangerous to the lives of the participants as it is to heterosexual couples, that there is an identifiable perpetrator and victim in the relationship, and that the women may or may not identify with the feminist community and may, in fact, be powerful figures within the lesbian-feminist community.

It is impossible to accurately identify the number of lesbian couples who experience violence in their relationships. Lesbians are hidden members of our society, so any study will only tap those members of the community who are most visible and ready to recognize the violence in the relationship. The respondents in this study and the professionals who are providing services to battered lesbians estimated that the rate of battering is likely to be similar to the rate in the heterosexual population.

It is difficult for many people to believe that women can be as violent as men, and yet the social structure in which we live promotes violence and dominance over others as a means of survival and social success. While women are most often expected to be in the role of victim and powerless, it logically follows that some women, lesbians or heterosexual alike, will adopt the typically male role in its extreme form.
This role includes battering behavior as well as other means of maintaining power in relationships. By adopting the male role, a woman can protect herself from the victim position and feel greater degrees of power and control, even if she experiences social ostracism for adopting predominately male behavior.

Issues for Social Workers and the Feminist Community

This research documents the existence of violence in the lives of many lesbian women. From a social work perspective, it is less important to count numbers of cases, than to provide treatment effectively to persons seeking treatment for the problem of violence. Typically social workers, even those who identify themselves as lesbian or as feminist, are not informed about lesbian battering.

Our profession must develop sound treatment strategies to deal effectively with this population. Every respondent reported seeking therapy at some point during the battering relationship. While most did not directly seek help for battering, this was a problem in their lives at the time they sought treatment. From these data, it is clear that professionals must ask direct questions about battering and emotional abuse, and that a negative response should not automatically indicate that battering is not an issue for the client. It is possible that the woman is too ashamed to admit that violence is occurring in the relationship or she may not even
believe that the definition of battering applies to her relationship.

If violence is discovered to be an issue for a couple, it is important to attempt to identify the perpetrator and the victim. Passing the situation off as mutual abuse minimizes the seriousness of the problem and reinforces the batterer's manipulative behavior. Often, the physical abuse is minimized in therapy and the victim may fear serious retaliation if she reveals the couple's secret about battering.

Some of the issues important in determining the nature of the battering relationship are manipulativeness, power and control tactics, and denial of responsibility. Typically, a batterer denies responsibility for her abuse, blaming others, while the victim frequently takes responsibility for her batterer's behavior. In some cases, this may be a difficult determination to make, but conjoint treatment may intensify the problems.

Staff in battered women's shelters need to be aware of the dynamics of lesbian battering and staff must overcome homophobia and be prepared to provide treatment services to women in need. Again, the problem is complicated because a heterosexual woman can come in to a shelter and be guaranteed that her batterer will not be admitted to the program on the following day. If a woman feels she can be open about being a lesbian when she enters the shelter, it is possible to help her clarify her situation, and at the very least, her partner can be identified if she attempts to enter the shelter as a means to regain power over her
It is important for the lesbian community to be educated about violence within gay/lesbian relationships. Prevention programs must help people identify behaviors and patterns which are emotionally abusive and go beyond typical power struggles in relationships. Whether emotional abuse escalates into physical abuse, or remains in the psychological realm, it is destructive and painful to the victim. Most respondents indicated that physical violence occurred after a long period of emotional abuse, and it was difficult to walk out of the relationship when the person she loved become loving, apologetic, and promised never to hit her again. Helping couples develop constructive ways to disagree and to reduce the acceptance of psychological abuse in the lesbian community can empower all women and greatly reduce the incidence of violence.

Murray Straus has said that violence erupts in families for many reasons. One reason he has given for heterosexual family violence is that men learn in our society that violence is acceptable under certain conditions. Men are supposed to be in charge in the family and if other means of control fail, violence is often viewed as acceptable behavior. The respondents in this study often described their lesbian abusers as having high needs for control. Many of the abusers were reported to have been victimized physically or sexually as children and the literature
describes these individuals as frequently having high need for control. Since women are raised in the same heterosexist society as males, and see men reap positive rewards for violent and abusive behaviors, it is probable that some women will incorporate these male identified actions into their own behavioral repertoire. Since women are not supposed to be perpetrators of violence in our society, those who behave violently are likely to have higher levels of guilt over their abusive behaviors than males in similar situations. Beth Zemsky who has treated lesbian batterers in Minneapolis believes that it is easier for female batterers to get in touch with their own pain and to be more easily able to realize the pain they have inflicted on others.

Straus has also indicated that intrafamilial violence erupts because of the intensity of family relationships. The respondents in this study have described their relationships with the batterers as intense at the emotional level. The ability of women to identify with each others experience was often given as a reason for continuing the relationship after physical violence had occurred. Given Gelles and Straus' (1978) proposition that intensity of family relationships contributes to the likelihood of violence occurring, one might expect violence to be more prevalent in lesbian relationships than in heterosexual relationships. Given the hidden nature of the lesbian community, it is impossible to get an accurate estimate of the level of violence in this group. The
respondents in this study and persons interviewed who work with lesbian perpetrators and survivors, believe that the rate of violence in the lesbian community is very similar to the rates reported for the heterosexual community.

The fact that most women in our society receive strong messages against acting out physical aggressions, it is possible that this acts as a mediating force in relation to violence erupting out of relationship intensity. Therefore, the level of violence in the lesbian community may not be greater than it is in the heterosexual community even though there is reportedly a higher level of intensity in relationships between women, based on greater degrees of identification, empathy, and understanding of the other's experience.

It is important that the information in this study not be used to weaken the clearly documented argument that women, heterosexual or lesbian, are most likely to be physically harmed by men in our society. At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that violence can and does occur between lesbian partners. It is important to validate the experience of battered lesbians and their perpetrators and to develop services to meet the specific needs of this population.

These data provide a picture of violence in lesbian relationships which is similar to violence in heterosexual relationships. There are some differences which need to be highlighted. The respondents
indicated that the relationship with another woman is emotionally intense and discussed the identification which takes place between the partners. These women felt it would be easier to identify themselves as battered in a heterosexual relationship and to get out of the relationship. Those women who were previously battered by men felt themselves less emotionally embroiled in the heterosexual relationship. It could be argued that these women were women identified by nature, and therefore less intensely involved with their male partners. The respondents discussed, however, the strong feelings of identification with the pain of the female batterer which does not seem consistent with the literature on heterosexual battering. Men may make appeals to be taken care of by their female partners, but are less likely to share their own experiences of victimization.

The literature on battered women often cites economic dependence and lack of resources as a primary reason for a woman to remain in a relationship with a battering male. Since it is often the case in our society, that women make less money than men, there is a high probability that in a heterosexual relationship, the male will have greater financial resources than the female. Based on this theory, programs for battered women often focus on building self esteem through job training or education which will result in greater financial independence. While
this type of programming is helpful to a woman who will have difficulty supporting herself once separated from the batterer, this research brings out other reasons for remaining in a relationship with a batterer. Since the literature on lesbian women demonstrates that lesbians are socialized into female sex roles and show little differences in relationship patterns from heterosexual, it is likely that the reasons given by the lesbians in this study for remaining with their female abusers could be applied to heterosexual women as well.

The two most frequently expressed reasons for staying in the relationship were fear and caring for the batterer or believing that by staying in the relationship, the victim could help the batterer. Fear is often cited as a reason for heterosexual women to remain in an abusive relationship and should be given serious attention by anyone working with people who are battered. Any attempt to leave the relationship can incite unprecedented rage in an abuser of either gender. Often threats have already been made about the consequences of an attempt to escape, and these may be carried out if the victim actually attempts to leave the relationship.

Many heterosexual women feel that the court system does not go far enough in offering protection from a batterer. Most women in this study did not attempt to use the court system, expecting little help, or a negative response. Those who did found the court helpful. The
respondents who used the court system gave much more positive responses than I expected, given the negative attitude toward homosexuality which prevails in our society. It may be that the respondents had lower expectation for the court system than heterosexual women. The basis for a positive response about the court or police intervention was that the respondent was treated as she expected a heterosexual woman would have been treated in a similar situation. Whether she was actually protected from further abuse or harassment seemed of lesser importance.

An example of the attitude of lesbian women toward the courts was expressed by a respondent who is an attorney. She has been harassed by her abuser for several years after separating from the relationship. In response to my questions about the legal systems ability to help her, she replied that the system is highly structured and is very limited in its ability to really help a woman free herself from a batterer. A restraining order will not stop an abuser from calling an employer and making trouble at work or from talking to friends and thus isolating the victim from a support system. If a batterer wants to continue harassment, he/or she can devise ways to do it, and ongoing harassment from a batterer is a way of life for many battered women.

Fear of the consequences of leaving a battering relationship is real and should not be minimized by professionals or supportive lesbians
in the lesbian community. Escape plans and ongoing plans for safety should be thoroughly explored with each woman. The specific behaviors of the individual batterer need to be identified, so that the woman can prepare herself for the likely consequences of leaving the relationship.

The least recognized reason for remaining in the relationship in the general battered women’s literature is caretaking and emotional attachment. It may be that women in our society are trained to give unconditional love. It is difficult for many people to imagine continuing to hold intense emotional feelings for someone who physically and psychologically abuses you, but many respondents talked about this issue as a reason for remaining in the relationship with the abuser. The manipulativeness and the overwhelming positiveness of the honeymoon phase, contributed to the feelings of warmth toward the batterer, but the respondents indicated fear of the abuser and recognition of the potential for harm throughout the course of the relationship.

Heterosexual battered women have reported similar feelings, but these are often downplayed by those providing programming for these women. The issue of love, caring, and need to help the abuser overcome her/his problems may be the most important reason for battered women to stay with a batterer. Putting her own needs before those of her partner is something that women are not trained to do in our society. Women still put their own needs second to those of spouses and
It is important to confront the issue of caring and caretaking in treatment programs. It is likely to be counter productive to present the issue as negative to the woman who is confused about her desire to remove herself from a battering relationship. If these issues are addressed in treatment programs, the need for a woman to respond in a caring manner is often framed negatively as co-dependent behavior or as "women who love too much." The qualities which society has assigned to women are termed negative and can become victim blaming in their application. Nurturing behavior is a female attribute in our society. The social or biological underpinnings of such actions can be argued, but this can be viewed as a positive quality regardless of origin. A battered woman needs to learn to value herself as a caring and nurturing person, while recognizing that continued caretaking of the batterer is not likely to change her/his behavior and will never contribute to the well being of the victim herself. Helping the woman to let go of the relationship, without having to give up a valued part of herself may make it easier for her to recognize the need to take care of her self.

The issue of caring and unconditional love also supports Carol Gilligan's (1982) theory of women and relationships. The women in this study valued relationships and felt that intimate relationships were a priority in their lives. It is important to note that these were women who
viewed themselves as self supporting and many had earned professional
degrees and respect in their chosen careers. While relationships were a
primary source of self identification and worth, they could gain self
esteem and value through other channels as well.

Homophobia was another factor influencing the respondents' relationships. Even when the respondent was directly involved in the
battered women's movement, she was likely to feel that the information
pertaining to violent relationships did not apply to her. There were
messages given by lesbians, as well as heterosexual women in the
movement, that battering does not take place in lesbian relationships.
This message reverberated throughout the lesbian community and
battered lesbians found it difficult to find support from other women.

Homophobia also affected the respondents' ability to talk to
heterosexual friends and family members about the abuse. Many
lesbians receive the message from parents and friends that lesbians are
unhappy and do not have satisfying relationships. There was often a
need to hold onto an abusive relationship to prove this myth wrong.
Certainly talking to heterosexual people about one's battering situation
would be likely to reinforce this myth and would not bring support to the
woman sharing her painful experience.
Homophobia influenced the control and power mechanisms available to the batterers. Frequently threats were made to reveal the nature of the relationship to employers and family if the respondent attempted to leave the relationship. There were examples of batterers carrying out these threats. Fear of losing employment or family ties can be a very powerful issue for lesbian women. Even more powerful were threats to expose a woman as a lesbian to an ex-husband who might fight for child custody.

Societal homophobia increased the level of vulnerability to manipulation by batterers. Increasing the level of tolerance of gays/lesbians in our society would reduce the number of control mechanisms available to lesbian batterers.

The general denial of battering in the lesbian community was a serious problem for battered lesbians. Often friends would not provide support to the victim because the seriousness of the situation would be minimized. Victims were frequently ashamed to talk about the battering because of fears of rejection by friends. Also, there is a strong ethic in the lesbian community to be careful about spreading gossip about one's lover or former lover. This principle made it difficult for women to discuss their experience and also prevented batterers from facing community sanction and accountability.
Problems Encountered in Collecting Sample

It was more difficult than anticipated to find respondents who were willing to share experiences in battering relationships. Ultimately the method of sampling was successful but some changes were necessary in order to find an adequate number of respondents. The following problems were encountered and corrected in the process.

The major newspapers were very expensive with little positive result. No responses were generated from an ad in the Columbus Dispatch. Three were generated from an ad in the Detroit Free Press. Only one of these three turned out to be legitimate. One respondent did not include her exchange in her phone number. Her error may have been a result of extreme nervousness in responding to my ad. The second respondent indicated she had not responded to an ad when telephoned. An angry boyfriend, co-worker, etc. may have sent her name and number in response to the advertisement. It is also possible that she had responded and subsequently became frightened and denied knowledge of the ad when telephoned. It is also possible that the batterer was present when during the call and therefore she could not talk openly.

Newspaper advertisements were expensive and yielded limited results. The following problems were encountered with the general press. One newspaper initially refused the advertisement for respondents
for this project. After several discussions with supervisory personnel, they were convinced that the material in the advertisement did not violate the policies of their paper. This type of reaction is indicative of the homophobia which permeates our society. Since the ad made no mention of issues related to sexual practices, it was simply the word "lesbian" which offended the press.

Placing advertisements in the gay/lesbian press also yielded limited results. In the ads, the researcher was identified as a lesbian, feminist, social worker who was undertaking a research project on lesbian battering. It was this researcher's assumption that women would be comfortable talking to someone with whom they could identify. In the interviews, it became apparent that lesbian women who had experienced battering relationships had had negative experiences with lesbians, feminists, social workers, and researchers. These negative experiences were likely to reduce the number of potential respondents who were willing to share their experiences.

Another problem encountered with the gay/lesbian press was the possibility of someone who wanted to harass the lesbian community placing an ad defining herself as a researcher. Being female probably gave this researcher more credibility with the community than a male would have. One newsletter requested documentation of my affiliation with The Ohio State University and verification that the project had the
approval of the human subjects review committee. This particular newsletter had previously encountered a problem with a "researcher" purporting to study the gay male community. It would be a good idea for newsletters to follow a similar practice of verification of ads for research or other situations where someone is using the ad to make personal contact with readers.

Many gay/lesbian organizations did not respond to the letters sent by this researcher indicating that she would be willing to speak to their group about lesbian battering. The topic is painful to many members of the lesbian community and there is still a question in many people's minds whether battering is a "politically correct" topic. To discuss battering may be perceived as a threat to many lesbians who do not want to think about violence and how it impacts their personal lives or their community as a whole. The women interviewed by this researcher shared many personal experiences of rejection by the lesbian community and by friends.

Some respondents had talked to other people researching lesbian battering or similar topics. The respondents felt used by the researchers and believed that nothing had come from their efforts. Frequently, the women interviewed would ask about the interviewer's reasons for undertaking this project. When the interviewer shared her experience in counseling women in battering relationships and that she would like to
address the lack of professional knowledge, the interviewees seemed comfortable and were open in sharing their experience. The majority of women interviewed felt it is important for the lesbian community and professionals to become aware of the issues involved in lesbian battering and to begin to work on addressing these issues.

Again, the women interviewed also had negative experiences with social workers and counselors. Many felt that they were not taken seriously by professionals and that the battering was not treated as a serious problem, as it is when the batterer is male. For example, several women reported that a counselor worked with the couple and did not separate them as is standard practice in heterosexual battering situations.

Expanding the range of the sample to include cities which had developed a network of services for battered lesbians proved most helpful. The level of consciousness around lesbian battering in Minneapolis and St. Louis made it possible for women to identify themselves as battered lesbians and to tell their stories. Those women interviewed in this project are a select group because most battered lesbians do not identify themselves as such. Every respondent shared her experience with denial of the nature of her relationship. It is impossible to locate those women who are being battered, but as yet have not recognized themselves as battered women. Greater awareness
of battering in the lesbian community, and the development of support
groups for women who experience battering relationships will make it
possible to find more women who identify themselves as battered in the
future. This process can be seen as parallel to the process which has
occurred in the general battered women's movement. The increased
awareness of the existence of battering in lesbian relationships and an
increase in self identification of battered lesbians will facilitate further
research efforts to better understand the issues of violence specific to the
lesbian population.

The most productive means of getting respondents was through
personal contacts and use of key informants. Once contact was made
with women working professionally or informally in the network of
domestic violence against lesbians, it was possible to reach women who
had personal experience with violent relationships. Since trust is a major
issue for these women, it was helpful for someone whom they already
trusted to give approval of the interviewer and what her motives were.
Once the researcher was able to connect with these women, and they
were able to see her as a trustworthy individual, most were eager to
share their stories. The primary reason for their eagerness to share was
the hope that silence will be broken and the lesbian community will
become actively involved in eliminating violence between ourselves.
One additional difficulty with this method of gathering respondents is that typically, one can get a snowball effect through the friends and acquaintances of respondents themselves. It was possible for a few respondents to identify other lesbians who were battered and who would agree to be interviewed. However, the majority of respondents found it difficult to talk about their experience with violence openly in the lesbian community, and therefore were unable to pass along the word that I was seeking women to interview. Several women were also isolated from the lesbian community in general and had few contacts with other lesbian women.

All but three of the respondents were out of the battering relationship at the time of the interviews. The three women who had not separated from the battering relationship were aware of the issues involved in battering and were in the process of redefining the relationship. One respondent was attempting to develop a different kind of relationship with her batterer, who was in treatment for battering and for substance abuse. There was a relationship contract that the relationship would end if battering occurred again. The other two respondents seemed to be in the process of separation, but still felt trapped by the batterer's harassment. Both of these women were still responding to the batterer's self-presentation as needing them as caretakers and to the batterer's statements that the victims would not find
other partners. All but one of the women interviewed indicated that they were in the relationship for a long period of time before recognizing it as a battering one. Given the secrecy of the issue within the lesbian community, it is likely that many women who are currently in battering relationships have not identified them as such, and feel responsible for the abuse which is inflicted upon them. It is important to note that the respondents interviewed for this study were in varying stages of processing the nature of the relationship.

Issues for Further Research

This study has raised many issues for further research. Examining the frequency and intensity of violent relationships in the lesbian community is an important issue which needs to be addressed. Any attempt to gather data of this nature is subject to severe criticism because of the hidden nature of the lesbian community. In spite of this, it is important to gather such information in order to develop effective intervention strategies for larger segments of the lesbian community. In addition, it is important to develop studies of specific groups within the lesbian community in order to identify differences in battering among these groups. Most of the respondents in this study were white, educated, professional women. These women are most likely to identify as feminists and read gay/lesbian publications and to use professional helping services. There were three respondents who identified
themselves as working class. In addition, one woman reported having been in a relationship with a black lesbian, one with an hispanic woman, and two with native American woman. It is difficult to draw conclusions about these populations who were so limited in representation. It is also difficult to draw conclusion about minority populations based on the reports of partners of majority status.

It is interesting that a majority of respondents were battered in their first lesbian relationship. It is important to study this phenomenon further and to develop effective educational strategies to reduce the vulnerability of women early in the coming out process. If batterers seek vulnerable people who can be controlled and manipulated, these women are likely to be easy targets. Women early in the coming out process tend to be insecure about expectations for behavior in the lesbian community and often seek someone who appears to be strong and confident in her lesbian identity. While batterers are weak and emotionally vulnerable, their manipulativeness enables them to present themselves in a positive and supportive manner.

It is also important to examine the population of batterers further. It appears that early, serious victimization is a prominent feature in the batterers' lives. Specific identification of life experience and personality characteristics which lead women to become abusers can help in the development of effective treatment programs.
Further examination of factors which facilitate leaving a battering relationship is also important in the development of effective treatment programs for victims. The stages of separation identified in this study need to be further explored and effective treatment strategies need to be developed for women in each of the stages. For example, a woman who is just beginning to recognize herself as battered will need a clear and specific safety plan to help her physically escape when the batterer makes an attempt to attack her. To pressure this woman to leave the relationship is not likely to be an effective intervention at this point in her process. If she is pressured to leave and then stays in the relationship, she is likely to feel guilty and believe she is trapped between pleasing her therapist and taking care of her batterer.

Research needs to be done on the lesbian community to develop effective community responses to battering within the lesbian community. Effective education programs need to be developed and compared. It is also important to build models of interaction which are not patriarchically based and do not rely on power and dominance. Feminist models built on consensus and sharing of power need to be further analyzed and developed.

Conclusion

In summary, violence in lesbian relationships is a serious problem. The incidence rate of partner abuse within the lesbian community cannot
be determined because of the difficulty in establishing the parameters of the lesbian community as well as the difficulty in getting those women who have experienced violence to come forth and acknowledge their experience. It is clear from this study that the problem does exist in the lesbian community and it deserves the attention of professionals and lesbian-feminists. There are similarities between lesbian women and heterosexual women who have experienced abuse. There are also differences. It is important that services be developed to provide treatment which is sensitive to the special needs of the lesbian population. It is also important that the lesbian community acknowledge the existence of partner abuse and to develop a response which will facilitate both the awareness of violence and its reduction in the community.
APPENDIX A

LETTERS
Dear Mr. O'Jibway:

This letter is in response to your request for further information regarding my study on lesbian violence. I certainly appreciate your concern for the protection of your readers.

The proposed project is being undertaken for my doctoral dissertation. I am a student at Ohio State University, College of Social Work. My advisor is Roberta Sands, PhD. (614-292-8162).

In addition to being a doctoral student, I am an associate professor of social work at the University of Toledo and I have a small clinical practice, of which at least 50% involves counseling with lesbian women. I became interested in the topic of lesbian violence a number of years ago through my professional experience. I was involved with the battered women's movement and we were working on the development of services for heterosexual battered women. Like most lesbians and feminists, I thought battering was something that men did to women. I was quite shocked when I saw a lesbian
couple for counseling and they reported an incident which had sent one of them to the emergency room. After this experience, I began to pay more attention to the cues given by my clients and asked more questions about physical aggression. Quickly, I realized that battering was not just perpetrated by males.

As a clinical social worker, I believe that it is important to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of violence between women so that as professionals we may respond more appropriately to the needs of our clients. I hope that the results of my work will be published in a professional journal.

If you need further information, please feel free to contact me. By phone, I can be reached at 419-472-7644 or 419-536-3356. You may call collect.

Thank you for your interest in helping me to complete my project.

Yours truly,

Patricia A. Groves
Thank you for your interest in helping me find participants for my dissertation on violence in lesbian relationships. I am sending this letter hoping that you may share it with clients and other professionals who may be working with lesbian women in battering relationships.

I am a social worker and a doctoral student in the College of Social Work at The Ohio State University. I have been interested in the issue of domestic violence for a number of years. I have been a member of the Battered Women's Task Force in Toledo, which is one of the groups responsible for the development of the Toledo crisis shelter for battered women. I have also served on the Family Violence Council and have been an evaluator for the county commissioners to determine the eligibility of shelters to receive state marriage license monies designated for shelters. I also have a small private practice in social work where I work with lesbian women and couples. About 10 years ago, I first encountered a couple who talked about battering in their relationship. Having no where to turn for information, I struggled through the process of working with them. To mention the topic of lesbian battering over the years has resulted in being shunned by some, and most often to have the subject immediately changed. I am finally at the point in my academic career to undertake the big dissertation and, perhaps fortunately, my timing coincides
with the issue of lesbian battering finally coming out of the closet.

I consider myself a feminist and would like to undertake my project in a manner which fits into a feminist philosophy. I have chosen to use a qualitative design and to interview women, allowing them to tell me their stories and experiences, rather than imposing a structured interview upon them. I believe that the only way we, as professionals, can understand the pain and the issues involved in lesbian battering is to listen to women and learn from their experiences. I will carefully maintain confidentiality, deleting names from my material, as well as any other identifying information.

I would greatly appreciate your help in finding women who are willing to participate in my project. If you are working with women or have worked with women who are involved in or have been involved in a battering relationship in the past, I would appreciate if you would share this letter with them.

I am aware of the painfulness of discussing the violence in one's intimate relationship. I hope I can approach each participant with empathy and understanding. I have found that the women I have interviewed so far are eager to tell their stories, finding relief in my interest in the issue, and some comfort in knowing that they are not alone with their pain.

I can be reached by phone after 8 in the evening at 419-472-7644. Please call collect, and try again if I don't answer!
Thanks for your interest in my project. I would be happy to talk with anyone who has an interest in lesbian battering.

Yours truly,

Patricia A. Groves, MSW, LISW
Dear

Thanks for your response to my ad in the LC. Sorry to have taken so long to respond. I was on an extended trip in May and June and have been trying to catch up with my life since my return. I hope it is ok to contact you by letter rather than phone. I decided that this would be easier than talking to everyone's answering machines.

I am a doctoral student in Social Work at Ohio State University and became interested in the issue of lesbian battering about 10 years ago through my experience in counseling lesbian women. I know this is an issue which we have long avoided, both in the lesbian and professional communities. If we are to help each other to grow to our maximum potential as lesbian women, we cannot afford to stick our heads into the sand!

The response to my ad has been rather overwhelming. From the perspective of a researcher, I am pleased with the response, but as a lesbian, I am sorry that so many of my sisters have experienced battering relationships.

I am primarily using an interview method for my dissertation. Since there is little published information on lesbian battering, I decided it would be presumptuous on my part to devise a questionnaire. Instead, I have chosen to allow women to tell their stories on tape. Obviously, it would be best if we could meet face to face, but I cannot afford to travel great distances.
I have enclosed a tape and would appreciate your response. Simply tell me about your experience and how you view the battering relationship. Basically, let me know what occurred and how you have processed the experience. Your feelings are most important to me. Please include some basic statistical information about yourself and partner: age, education, occupations, prior battering relationships with women or men, was either partner a victim of child abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), drug or alcohol abuse in the relationship, was this the first lesbian relationship for either of you, and do you define yourself and partner as feminist (include your definition of feminism).

I am enclosing a release of information form, as required by the university's human subjects review committee. You may sign with your first name if you wish. I will change all names and any other identifying information which may be on your tape. The tapes will be transcribed and become a part of my dissertation document with identifying information deleted. Any publication of dissertation material will only contain excerpts of data and confidentiality will be maintained. By the way, if you decide after mailing the tape that you do not want your story included in my dissertation, you may send me a note to that effect and I will immediately destroy your tape.

I sincerely appreciate your willingness to participate in my study. It is my goal to gather information which will help me in my work with other lesbian women and also to share this information with lesbians and social workers who work with lesbians.

In Sisterhood,

Patricia A. Groves
Dear Editor:

Enclosed is copy for an ad which I would like to place in your paper. I am not sure how you categorize this material since I am advertising for participants in a research project. I am a doctoral student and am on a tight budget. I am not making money on this project, nor am I undertaking it for personal pleasure and enjoyment! Since I do not know the cost of printing my material, please bill me for the cost of printing. I would like a copy of the publication in which my ad appears.

I have been asked by another publication to give some identifying information to verify the fact that my work is legitimate. The following information is enclosed for verification purposes if you feel the necessity to have such information:

The proposed project is being undertaken for my doctoral dissertation. I am a student at Ohio State University, College of Social Work. My advisor is Roberta Sands, PhD. (614-292-8162).

In addition to being a doctoral student, I am an associate professor of social work at the University of Toledo and I have a small clinical practice, of which at least 50% involves
counseling with lesbian women. I became interested in the topic of lesbian violence a number of years ago through my professional experience. I was involved with the battered women's movement and we were working on the development of services for heterosexual battered women. Like most lesbians and feminists, I thought battering was something that men did to women. I was quite shocked when I saw a lesbian couple for counseling and they reported an incident which had sent one of them to the emergency room. After this experience, I began to pay more attention to the cues given by my clients and asked more questions about physical aggression. Quickly, I realized that battering was not just perpetrated by males.

As a clinical social worker, I believe that it is important to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of violence between women so that as professionals we may respond more appropriately to the needs of our clients. I hope that the results of my work will be published in a professional journal.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Groves
Editor

Dear Editor:

Enclosed is a copy of an ad I would like to have printed in your newspaper. I do not know the cost of classified ads, so I would appreciate your sending me a bill.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Groves
MOHR Information  
17520 Woodward Ave.  
Detroit, MI. 48203

Dear Editor:

I am a doctoral student at O.S.U. and I am doing dissertation research in the area of violence in lesbian relationships. I have enclosed the copy for an ad which I hope you can print in your newsletter. If there is a charge for classified ads, please bill me. As you may guess, I am doing this project on a very tight budget!

I would also be interested in speaking directly to your group as a means of soliciting project participants. I would be willing to discuss my project and the general issue of violence in lesbian relationships if your group would be interested in this issue as a topic for a meeting. Or, if you would prefer, I could simply attend the next meeting of your group and give a brief presentation specifically directed toward the solicitation of project participants.
If you would be interested in having me speak to your group, please send a note to my P.O. box so that we may arrange a date. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Groves
APPENDIX B

ADVERTISEMENTS
AN ANALYSIS OF PHYSICAL AGGRESSION IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT: script

Researcher looking for participants in study on lesbian battering. Lesbians who are presently or have been in relationships where physical aggression has occurred. Participants will be interviewed and asked to share their experiences as victim or batterer. Confidentiality will be maintained. Send first name, phone number, and time to be safely reached to P.O. box 13313, Toledo, Oh., 43613.

PHONE RESPONSE TO POTENTIAL SUBJECTS ANSWERING AD: script

May I speak to ---? This is Pat Groves. You responded to my ad seeking participants in a research project on lesbian battering. Can you talk safely for a few minutes now? (If not, when can I contact you?) Are you or have you been in a relationship with a woman where battering has occurred? I would like to set up a time to interview you. I have arranged to meet participants at the Y.W.C.A. Can we meet at --Time--?

I am going to ask you to share your experiences with battering and to talk about your feelings and thoughts about this issue. I know that it may be hard for you to talk about some of these
experiences, and I will try to be supportive in the process. Your confidentiality will be maintained. I am a doctoral student at OSU and I am studying lesbian battering for my dissertation. I am also a social worker and I think that this information is important for social workers to improve their understanding of how these issues affect their clients. Do you have any questions for me at this time? I will be happy to answer any further questions when we meet.
SOLICITATION SCRIPT FOR APPROACHING POTENTIAL PROJECT PARTICIPANTS AT ORGANIZATIONAL MEETINGS:

I am a doctoral student at OSU in the college of social work, and I am also a social worker. I have worked with lesbian women and lesbian couples in therapy. An issue that I have become aware of in my work is that physical aggression occurs in lesbian relationships. I think it is important that social workers and other professionals become more aware of this issue and how it affects women. I have decided to do my dissertation on the subject of lesbian battering. I am looking for women who are or have been in relationships where physical aggression has occurred. I would like to interview these women and to talk with them about their experiences with physical aggression and to gather their thoughts and feelings about this subject. Confidentiality will be maintained.

I will pass out a sheet of paper with my name and phone number. If you have had experience with a battering relationship or perhaps have a friend who has had this experience, I would like the opportunity to talk with you or your friend. If you have experienced a battering relationship and do not want persons in this group to know that, you may call me at a later time so that we can set up a time to meet. I have arranged to meet participants at ----, so that we can talk in private. I would be happy to answer any questions. (I assume that a general discussion of battering in gay/lesbian relationships will follow and responses will reflect the literature review in the proposal submitted).
REQUEST FOR FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW:

I would like to have the opportunity to interview you at a later time and to give you the opportunity to look over the information you have provided to insure that I have accurately reflected your experience and information. We might also discuss some issues that have arisen during the course of this project and I may ask you what you think about some of the ideas which have come forth regarding the nature of battering relationships.

I agree to have my name and phone number kept in a confidential file until I have completed the second interview as described above. I understand that all identifying information will be destroyed upon completion of the second interview and only the content of my interviews will be kept and recorded in the dissertation document. I understand that I have the right to request that my name be removed from the file at any time and that I may withdraw from the project and ask that my interview material be deleted from the project results up until the time that the interviews are completed and the results are written into a final document.

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participant's signature       date
Doctoral student looking for participants in study on lesbian battering. Lesbians who are presently or have been in relationships where physical aggression has occurred. Participants will be interviewed and asked to share their experiences as victim or batterer. Confidentiality will be maintained. Send first name, phone number, time to be safely reached, or address for mail correspondence to Pat Groves, P.O. box 13313, Toledo, Oh., 43613.
Columbus
Good Times
P.O. Box 8190
Columbus, Oh. 43201
Carol Cohen, Executive Director
Stonewall Union
P.O. Box 8190
Columbus, Oh. 43201

Detroit Metro.
Cruise Magazine
19136 woodward Ave., North
Detroit, Mi., 48203
DAGLC
Box 20285
Ferndale, Mi., 48220
METRA
BOX 20070
Ferndale, Mi., 48203
MOHR Information
17520 woodward Ave.
Detroit, Mi. 48203
Motor City Business Forum
Box 21832
College Park Station
Detroit, Mi., 48221
Ann Arbor

Crossfire
C/O Lutherans Concerned / Michigan
Box 7422
Ann Arbor, Mi., 48107-7422

Lansing

Center News
Ambitious Amazons
P.O.Box 811
East Lansing, Mi. 48823
LESBIAN-FEMINIST SOCIAL WORK RESEARCHER LOOKING FOR WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL ABUSE IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER WOMEN. VICTIM OR PERPETRATOR WILL BE INTERVIEWED. CONFIDENTIALITY RESPECTED.
I am a social worker and a doctoral student in the OSU School of Social Work. I am doing a study of physical aggression and abuse in lesbian relationships as a dissertation project. I am using an interview method and will basically ask project participants to talk about their experiences with violence. I believe that it is important to develop an understanding of abuse in lesbian relationships so that we can learn how to respond to women in these painful situations. Confidentiality of participants will be maintained and a participant may withdraw from the project at any time.

If you would be willing to share your experiences with me or if you would like more information about my project, please call Pat Groves, evenings between 9 and 11, collect: 419-472-7644, or leave message any time with safe time to return call: 419-536-3356.
AD COPY:

Doctoral student looking for participants in study on lesbian battering. Lesbians who are presently or have been in relationships where physical aggression has occurred. Participants will be interviewed and asked to share their experiences as victim or batterer. Confidentiality will be maintained. Send first name, phone number, time to be safely reached, or address for mail correspondence to Pat Groves, P.O. box 13313, Toledo, Oh., 43613
REFERENCES


