

2014-08-15

Men's and Women's Abuse Talk in Group Therapy: A Discourse Analysis

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Zverina, M. (2014). Men's and Women's Abuse Talk in Group Therapy: A Discourse Analysis (Doctoral thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada). Retrieved from

<https://prism.ucalgary.ca>. doi:10.11575/PRISM/26881

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Men's and Women's Abuse Talk in Group Therapy: A Discourse Analysis

by

Michaela Zverina

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JULY, 2014

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Abstract

The creation of therapy groups for men who have been victims of intimate partner abuse, at times controversial, has led to a call for a contextualized understanding of men's and women's victimization. The nature, severity, and consequences of abuse are thought to be different for abused men compared to abused women. This project uses a discursive approach to examine how men and women participating in victim therapy groups construct and negotiate abuse accounts and their responses to abuse. My own and other previous research suggests that men in victim therapy groups must shore up their status as victim. This thesis attempts to answer how negotiations of abuse accounts compare between men's and women's therapy groups and how responses to abuse accounts compare between the men's and women's therapy groups. Two of the Calgary Counselling Centre's 14-week therapy groups were analyzed using the theoretical and methodological discourse analytic approach: "A Turn for the Better" group for abused men, and "You Are Not Alone" group for abused women. Archived video recordings of these groups were transcribed and analyzed. The women's and men's constructions of abuse and the process of negotiating appropriate responses to abuse were qualitatively different. First, the men engaged in extensive rhetorical strategies to position themselves as abused, while the women oriented to safety and protection and their victim status was assumed. Second, the men negotiated the gendered dilemma of responding appropriately to a woman's aggression without being aggressive in turn, while all women's responses were constructed as appropriate given their function of protection. Third, for the women, the topic to which everyone oriented, both facilitators and group members, was safety. I also analyzed the therapeutic process in terms of facilitators negotiating men's accountability for aggression, while women held themselves responsible for morally questionable acts which facilitators tended to endorse as resistance. I

address how this study contributes to gender relevance in the therapeutic process of abused men and women, the existing exploratory literature on men's abuse and therapy, and future clinical practice.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to thank my loving mother (Miluška Zvěřinová) for instilling in me the sense that I am one of a kind, with or without a Ph.D. Before and after your passing, your faith in me served as a guide through this test of endurance. I believe this dissertation is mainly your accomplishment. I hope I made you proud.

Alongside my mother, I wish to thank my father (Ivo Zvěřina) for his calm and consistent support, as well as his good humour that reminded me to never take anything too seriously along the way. To my lovely sister (Lenka Zvěřina), who knows me more than any other and kept me sane throughout it all. I am grateful to my husband (Pavel Podojil) - it has been a privilege building our lives together while pursuing my Ph.D. career. Your fearlessness in life and your faith in me were contagious and helped me push through. I appreciate the ease of which you handled my excitements and struggles throughout my working on this thesis. I am indebted to the rest of my family members for keeping me grounded throughout this wonderful and overwhelming experience, including Jana Dančakova (thank you for creating our now traditional Sunday lunches where we all reconnect and recalibrate), Julka Dančakova, Lubomir Dančak, the Mara's and Podojil's (who kept their fingers crossed for me in Czech Republic), as well as the rest of the Zvěřina's (aunt Jana, uncle Milan, and cousins Monika and Hana).

I have been very privileged to work with my supervisors, Dr. Henderikus Stam and Dr. Lorraine Radtke, on this thesis. I have been consistently amazed by their intellect, encouragement, good humour, patience, and ability to balance academic careers and personal pursuits. I truly appreciate their steady and profound influence on my research work and clinical career. Thank you for believing in me!

I would like to extend a thank you to my supervisory committee (Dr. Vina Goghari and Dr. Susan Boon) and examining committee (Dr. Tom Strong and Dr. Linda McMullen), for your useful feedback, helpful suggestions, and kindness.

I have also enjoyed the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada throughout my doctoral studies, thank you.

To everyone who has been involved and stood by me, thank you, we did it!

To the memory of my mother, Miluška Zvěřinová (1957-2007)

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Dedication.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Tables.....	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background.....	2
1.1.1 Terminology and definition of the problem of “domestic abuse”..	2
1.1.2 Continuum of violence and cycle of abuse.....	4
1.1.3 Effects of abuse.....	6
1.1.4 Abused women as victims or survivors?	7
1.1.5 Controversies in the abuse literature.....	8
1.1.6 Forms of abuse in the literature.....	10
1.1.7 Gender as a barrier for men’s help-seeking.....	11
1.2 What it means to take a discursive approach.....	12
1.3 Chapter Outline.....	16
Chapter 2: Intimate Partner Abuse Discursive Literature Review.....	20
2.1 Women victims of abuse.....	20
2.2 Men perpetrators of abuse	24
2.3 Comparison of abused men and abused women.....	26
2.4 Intimate partner abuse therapy.....	27

2.5 Discursive research contributions to intimate partner abuse therapy practice.....	28
2.6 Areas worthy of further exploration.....	31
2.7 This study.....	34
2.8 Guiding research questions.....	34
Chapter 3: Method.....	35
3.1 A Turn for the Better (The Men’s Group).....	35
3.1.1 Group description.....	35
3.1.2 Facilitators.....	37
3.1.3 Participants.....	38
3.2 You Are Not Alone (The Women’s Group).....	39
3.2.1 Group description.....	39
3.2.2 Facilitators.....	41
3.2.3 Participants.....	42
3.3 Procedure.....	44
3.4 Comparison between groups.....	47
Chapter 4: Analysis of Abuse Accounts.....	50
4.1 A Turn for the Better (The Men’s Group).....	50
4.1.1 Lengthy, detailed, play-by-play narratives.....	50
4.1.2 Negotiating victim identity.....	58
4.1.2.1 Reactions of people with credibility.....	58
4.1.2.2 Bad mothering positioning.....	59
4.1.3 Men assumed to be abusers.....	61

4.1.4	Summary.....	63
4.2	You Are Not Alone (The Women’s Group).....	63
4.2.1	Abuse as “it”, “what I went through”, or simply “abuse”.....	64
4.2.2	Recognizing abuse: Drawing on feminine intuition and bodily responses.....	66
4.2.3	Negotiating the dangers of remaining in an abusive relationship..	69
4.2.4	Summary.....	77
4.3	Comparison of men’s and women’s abuse account discourse.....	78
Chapter 5:	Analysis of Responses to Abuse.....	80
5.1	A Turn for the Better (The Men’s Group).....	80
5.1.1	Karpman’s Triangle: How not to respond to abuse.....	80
5.1.2	Construction of a gendered problem: How to respond to abuse without being aggressive.....	81
5.1.3	Mobilizing Karpman’s Triangle: Discouraging aggressiveness...	82
5.1.4	Walking away as the assertive response.....	90
5.1.5	Summary.....	98
5.2	You Are Not Alone (The Women’s Group).....	99
5.2.1	Karpman’s Triangle: Victim status assumed.....	99
5.2.2	Focusing on safety and protection.....	101
5.2.3	Identity work: Positioning women as strong, defiant, and independent.....	108
5.2.4	Summary.....	113
5.3	Comparison of men’s and women’s responses to abuse discourse.....	114

Chapter 6: Discussion.....	118
6.1 Abuse account constructions.....	118
6.2 Responses to abuse constructions	121
6.3 Relevance of gender.....	127
6.4 Implications for clinical practice/contributions.....	129
6.5 Limitations and future research.....	133
6.6 Summary.....	136
References.....	138
Appendix A: Facilitator Manual Themes Raised in TFTB Sessions.....	153
Appendix B: Facilitator Manual Themes Raised in YNA Sessions.....	159

List of Tables

Table 3.1. TFTB Participant Demographics.....	39
Table 3.2 YNA Participant Demographics.....	43
Table 3.3 Transcription Notation.....	45

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation will explore men's and women's accounts of and responses to intimate partner abuse within group therapy contexts. This work is gendered through and through, as the purpose of therapy addresses a gendered problem (i.e., partner abuse) and the groups themselves are structured in ways that segregate men and women. Inherent in the psychology literature and research on intimate partner abuse and violence is the notion of gender. Gender issues are both critical and unavoidable in discussions of partner abuse and are relevant to both same-sex and opposite-sex relationship contexts (Brand & Kidd, 1986; O'Neill, 1998; Renzetti, 1999). As such, since the birth of domestic violence research in the 1970s, the notions of gender and power have been explored and debated in the context of both women and men abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, Walker & Browne, 1985; Worcester, 2002).

Historically, the most predominant and initial research focus was on the prevalence, nature, and consequences of abuse towards women from their male partners. As part of the feminist movement, drawing public attention to this societal problem through research, statistics, and literature resulted in the creation and support of publicly funded programs and therapeutic services for women in need of physical protection from their male partners and psychological/emotional recovery from the abuse the men caused (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Hyden, 2005; Pizzey, 1974). The question of women abusing men became a topic somewhat later. The notion that men can be legitimate victims of women's abuse led to controversial debates in the intimate partner abuse field (Dasgupta, 2002; Miglioccio, 2002). One of the most recurrent and prominent issues raised about men victims of abuse were controversies about the nature, frequency, severity, and effects compared to woman abuse (Loseke & Kurz, 2005; Saunders, 2002). Issues of gendered power differentials and the gendered context were often

raised in these debates, both in terms of criticizing the kinds of gender comparative conclusions that were made based on quantitative research methods (e.g., Conflict Tactics Scale) and the lack of attention to the gendered context or power relations in general (Kimmel, 2002; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Schwartz, 2000).

Published research in the broad area of domestic abuse has been informed by a variety of research perspectives and epistemologies, some of which are fundamentally opposed. The predominant and more traditional theoretical research focus is positivist-empiricist (realist) in epistemology, where claims are made about the “realities” of abuse and victims/abusers based on research that is characterized by reductionism and focuses on the individual (Parker, 1989). Similar essentialist research proposes that the world is composed of underlying structures (e.g., psychological variables) and that there is one, true reality or way of understanding experience (Stoppard, 2000). The less prominent approach to studying gender and domestic violence, which takes into account broader social and cultural issues, involves a language-based, social-constructivist approach. This approach postulates that all knowledge is continuously negotiated through social interaction, and that discourse is the main site of its construction (Burr, 2003). In this introduction I will briefly address some of the main topics covered in the traditional clinical literature on domestic abuse, prior to examining the assumptions and value of the discursive, constructivist paradigm that I will draw on in this thesis.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Terminology and definition of the problem of “domestic abuse”. Prior to the 1970s little interest was shown in addressing family violence largely because it was regarded as a private issue that ought not to be addressed by the public or the legal system (Browne, 1989). In the 1980s, a feminist push towards the protection of women’s rights, especially within the hidden

sphere of their homes, created demand for researching and understanding how prevalent violence was and what kinds of consequences victims endured. As categories used to define types of violence changed (i.e., family violence encompassed child abuse, spouse abuse, and elder abuse), so did the definitions of violence. For example, Archer and Browne (1989a), described violence as not only physical force that causes injury, but also as resulting in interfering with personal freedom. Studies began to replace research on strictly physical violence with research on ‘spouse abuse’, which encompassed *both* physical and psychological violence. These terms were further differentiated into ‘normal violence’ which includes slaps, pushes, shoves, and spankings that are considered normative (i.e., that they are common) family life experiences, and ‘abusive violence’ which are acts that result or are likely to result in physical injury (Gelles and Cornell, 1985). Although less explicit than physical violence, psychological or emotional abuse was also captured by this literature. Psychological violence was defined by Edleson (1984) as “verbal or non-verbal threats of violence against another person or against that person’s belongings” (p. 237) and can include intimidation and humiliation.

What became increasingly recognized in the literature was that when researching abuse between two people involved in a heterosexual or homosexual romantic relationship (whether labeled as “family abuse/violence”, “spouse abuse/violence”, “intimate partner abuse/violence”, “partner/wife battering”) the phenomenon or experience that was the subject of research was not (and I would argue – could not be) straightforwardly operationally defined. Instead, the notion of abuse is multidimensional and includes far more than physical battering. For instance, by 1978 London concluded that spouse abuse was then widely recognized as including material deprivation, emotional, and sexual abuse, marital rape, and pornography. Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, and Sebastian (1991) have attempted to define the concept of emotional abuse by

describing six of its components: a) verbal attacks (e.g., crazy-making), b) isolation, c) jealousy/possessiveness, d) verbal threats of harm, abuse, or torture, e) threats of divorce, abandonment, affairs; and f) damage to or destruction of personal property. Rarely are such specified components of psychological abuse consistently utilized in research. However, it was proposed that emotional abuse is often a precursor to physical violence in a relationship and often coexists with physical abuse (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2005). Another kind of abuse discussed in the literature is financial or economic abuse. This refers to the maintaining of complete control over money and other economic resources to force the victim to rely on the abuser for all of their financial needs and thus limit his/her self-sufficiency, and may involve running up credit or debt for the victim or result from excessive gambling (Adams, Sullivan, Bybee, & Greeson, 2008; Fawole, 2008; Raphael, 1999; Tolman & Rosen, 2001). Thus, intimate partner abuse refers to not only the evident physical violence in which one partner's safety is compromised or whose life may be in danger, but more subtle ways in which one partner is controlled by another. The assumption is, then, that even after a partner ceases to be physically violent, they often increase the more subtle kinds of abuse against his/her partner, like manipulation and control.

1.1.2 Continuum of violence and cycle of abuse. The 'continuum of violence' literature originated with Liz Kelly's 1988 book titled "Surviving Sexual Violence". This book represents a feminist sociological research project based on Kelly's transcribed interviews with 60 women who experienced sexual violence of some sort. In this book, Kelly used the term "continuum" to describe the extent and broad range of sexually violent experiences in order to highlight that all forms of sexual violence are connected to accepted and commonplace gender power practices of men. Kelly (1988) proposed that "The concept of a continuum can enable

women to make sense of their own experiences by showing how ‘typical’ and ‘aberrant’ male behaviour shade into one another” (p. 75). The concept of the continuum was meant to capture the basic common character underlying the many different forms of violence (such as abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threat, and force men use to control women) in addition to the prevalence of these kinds of violence. Kelly did not use the term to represent the relative seriousness of different forms of abuse, as she postulated that all forms are serious and related to control (in which physical violence is only one of many ways of exerting control over women). She argued that the continuum of sexual violence ranges from everyday encounters with sexism (e.g., what appear to be innocuous remarks) to the murder of women by men. However, others, like Marie Leidig (1981), have used the concept of ‘continuum’ to represent the ordering of violence against women acts along a continuum of intensity and hurtfulness. Leidig (1981) proposed that certain kinds of violence, like domestic violence and incest, represent the extreme end of the violence hierarchy, and signal greater seriousness and thus more severe negative consequences. Thus, the continuum of violence was proposed to highlight the range of women’s abuse experiences from subtle and common interactions with men to explicit physical aggression, while also as a tool to measure abuse intensity in the literature.

The literature often references the cycle of abuse (including emotional, psychological, and physical abuse), which, as described by Walker (1979), consists of three phases: a tension-building phase; acting-out/abuse phase (i.e., the abusive incident or outburst of violence); and a state of reconciliation/honeymoon phase (i.e., following the act of violence the perpetrator is apologetic, affectionate or dismissing of the previous violence, assuring the other partner that this will never happen again). The notion that the cycle of violence was difficult to escape from or change stemmed from the power of the third phase, where the abusive partner is apologetic

and loving following the injurious act and the abused decides to remain in the relationship. Thus, the promise of change and a healthier future often prevented victims from leaving their abusive partners. The last phase of the cycle (i.e., the calm phase) is sometimes also discussed and included. This phase may be considered part of the reconciliation phase and represents a time of peace in the relationship, prior to more tension-building (Engel, 2005). In some discussions of domestic violence, this refers to the perpetuation of violence from one generation to another (i.e., victims of abuse become abusers) (Noll, 2005). ‘The cycle of abuse’ is routinely used in the literature, partially as a way of explaining why it becomes so difficult for women to leave abusive relationships, and to point to the recurring nature of abuse.

1.1.3 Effects of abuse. A large literature documents the various effects of abuse on victims. The most serious effect is death, where partners (most frequently women) are intentionally murdered by their abusers. Others include suffering from a variety of physical injuries and medical problems (e.g., chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, fatigue, psychosomatic symptoms, eating problems, increased risk of unplanned or early pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases), and psychiatric conditions (e.g., depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, etc.) (Black & Breiding, 2008; Coker et al., 2002; Ellsberg, Jansen, Heise, Watts, & Garcia-Moreno, 2008; Golding, 1999). Abuse is also considered to lead to feelings of shame, low self-worth or self-esteem, embarrassment and humiliation, especially when victims are isolated from friends and family or miss work due to the abuse itself (Carmen, Rieker, & Mills, 1984; Cascardi, Longhinrichsen, & Vivian, 1992). Other reported effects of abuse include the inability to form appropriate interpersonal boundaries, chronically poor judgment in relationship building, poor self-esteem, and impaired sense of self (Farrell, 1996; Landenburger, 1989; Langford, 1998). Research by Follingstand, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, and

Polek (1990) and Vitanza, Vogel, and Marshall (1995) indicates that women often identified psychological abuse as causing greater distress compared to physical acts of violence. In addition, there is an entire psychological literature on the negative effects of abuse on the wellbeing of children and babies who witness the abuse (McCloskey, Figuerdo, & Koss, 1995).

1.1.4 Abused women as victims or survivors? The question of whether abused women are victims or survivors has evolved over time in the intimate partner abuse literature. Concepts of “learned helplessness” (originating from Martin Seligman’s research; later taken up by Walker, (1979)) and “battered woman/wife syndrome” were used to explain cases where women had remained in the cycle of abuse for extended periods of time, perceived that they had no control or power over the outcome of the situation, and had given up trying to escape from it despite opportunities to do so. Similarly, the “hopelessness” theory of depression (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Abramson, Metalsky, & Alloy, 1989) implied that trait-like characteristics of learned helplessness were considered the cause of victimization, rather than simply being the consequence of abuse, which was conducive to blaming the victim for the abuse. However, Kelly (1988) argued that, what Walker and others termed “learned helplessness” and “battered woman syndrome”, was in fact how women living within abusive relationship coped to survive the abuse (i.e., to cope and manage it). She defined abused women’s “resistance” as a way of coping with the violence and stated that it means “to oppose actively, to fight, to refuse to co-operate with or submit” (Kelly, 1988, p. 161). She explored how women resisted verbally and physically, not only the violent behavior itself, but the control that is imposed on them. Similarly, Trudy Mills’s (1985) work based on ten abused women and their coping strategies indicated that the women’s responses were based on either avoiding violence or limiting injury.

“Resistance” has been documented as ubiquitous (Coates & Wade, 2004) because it can be assumed that anyone who is abused automatically opposes or resists the abuse in a number of behavioral, psychological, and unconscious ways (Davis, 2002; Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991; Hyden, 1999, 2005; Jackson, 2001; Leisenring, 2006; Reynolds, 2001; Todd & Wade, 2004; Wade, 1997, 2000). Wade (1997) proposed that resistance, in its many forms, could be understood as “any mental or behavioural act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect), or the conditions that make such acts possible” (p. 25). Michael White (in Denborough, 2010) stated the following about hardships in general (i.e., abuse and other traumas):

No-one is a passive recipient of hardship. People are always responding, whether they are children or adults. They respond to try to minimize the effects of hardship, or to try to make it stop, or to try to protect others, and so on. These responses are often overlooked and disqualified – so much so that people are often not familiar with their own responses (p. 41).

One of the most cited pieces of evidence of victim resistance is reflected in the abusers’ discursive efforts to conceal and suppress it (Scott, 1990). Another important aspect to this idea is that open defiance is the least common form of resistance (Scott, 1985, 1990), as physical or open retaliation could put a person (especially a woman) in life-threatening danger. Thus, the majority of resisting acts are viewed as more subtle, every-day ways of coping.

1.1.5 Controversies in the abuse literature. The possibility of men’s victimization by women is largely accepted in the literature. However, vociferous debates and controversies exist in the intimate partner abuse field regarding the extent and nature of women’s abuse towards men (e.g., Dasgupta, 2002; Miglioccio, 2002; Miller, 2001; Straus, 1999; Tutty, 1999). Contested issues include the specific nature of woman-to-man abuse, including the context of

abuse (see Loseke & Kurz, 2005; Saunders, 2002), definitions of abuse including motivation and severity of abuse consequences (see Hamberger, 2005), as well as the sources of data (see Seamans, 2007) and research methods used (e.g., Conflict Tactics Scale; see Kimmel, 2002; Morse, 1995; Schwartz, 2000).

Research on whether intimate partner abuse disproportionately affects women is highly controversial. The growing literature on “gender symmetry” that relies on the Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979) and similar scales like the General Social Survey on Victimization (GSS) (Statistics Canada, 2000) emphasizes that women are as often perpetrators as men. Such research based on the CTS and similarly GSS (questions in GSS are borrowed from the CTS with the addition of limited context questions about injury and fear) has been critiqued at length. Documented problematic aspects of the CTS and GSS include their self-report nature, omissions of sexual harassment, emotional abuse, and many contextual factors including the purpose of violence (e.g., retaliation or self-defense), the abuser’s intent, and the weapons used (Jiwani, 2000; Kimmel, 2002; Saunders, 2002; Loseke & Kurz, 2005). These critiques suggest that the above methods of data gathering are often used to minimize the reality of the overwhelming prevalence of men’s abuse towards women. Generally, one of the main criticisms of CTS-like methods is that the questions equalize all forms of violence due to a lack of accounting for meaning, consequences, motivation, and intention of the abuse (Jackson, 1999; Schwartz, 2000). Thus, these scales obscure the realistic possibility that women experience more severe forms of abuse in greater frequency and suffer greater impacts of this abuse compared to men (Jiwani, 2000). Thus, in contrast to the “gender symmetry” research, others argue that women’s victimization is a greater problem (see Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg & Walker, 1990; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Swan & Snow, 2006) and that the kinds of abuse

between the genders are qualitatively different: i.e., that men perpetrate more controlling and extreme abuse than women (see Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000, Straus, 2005), and women's violence is often motivated by self-defense or as a retaliatory action (see Dasgupta, 1999; Hamberger & Guse, 2002; Swan & Snow, 2002).

1.1.6 Forms of abuse in the literature. Three different forms of abuse have been documented in the literature, partly to help differentiate the kinds of abuse women and men endure (intimate partner terrorism, common-partner violence, and violent-resistance). "Intimate terrorism", also termed "patriarchal terrorism" is regarded as the most severe, with the purpose of the abuse being to control and manipulate the partner (Johnson, 2005). It is largely concluded that women tend to endure more of this kind of abuse from their male partners than do men from their abusive female partners. The consequences of this type of abuse can be critical and life-threatening, for example, when women are killed by their male partners. As a result, many women, but not many men, who have experienced this kind of abuse report fear, often itself representing the meaning of violence (Cascardi, O'Leary, Lawrence, & Schlee, 1995; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, & Thorn, 1995). Stark (2007) further expands on the notion of "intimate terrorism" with his notion of "coercive control" (or Coercive Controlling Violence), which refers to an underlying relationship dynamic, motivation, or pattern of violence, intimidation, isolation, and control where the main goal is to restrict the other person's liberties.

On the other hand, as noted above, others argue that rates of abuse are mostly symmetrical among men and women who experience "common-couple violence", defined as minor violence that is not embedded in a general pattern of power and control from both partners (Johnson, 2005; Straus, 2005). Common-couple violence is argued to be by far the most common and includes actions by both partners in the relationship.

Finally, “violent-resistance” is a term used to represent the abusive actions that one partner perpetrates in the service of retaliation or self-defense from the other partner’s violent and controlling behavior (Swan & Snow, 2006). Thus, many argue that research on rates of intimate partner abuse among men and women needs to be put in context (DeKeseredy, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Stark, 2007).

1.1.7 Gender as a barrier for men’s help-seeking. Research has also focused on how gender serves as a barrier to men seeking help. Research by McKelley (2007), Noone and Stephens (2008), and Rentoul and Appleboom (1997) indicates that societal perceptions of gender differences that overemphasize men’s physical capability to repel abuse, societal expectations of men’s financial and physical ability to resolve their own issues, and the struggles for men to reconcile their victimized status with masculinity prevent many men from seeking help when they are involved in intimate partner abuse. The literature suggests that violence towards men by women is generally perceived as more acceptable by the public as male victims were blamed more than female victims for the endured abuse (Lehmann & Santilli, 1996). In addition, the gender stereotypes related to male physical strength is an often cited reason why men do not report their problems. Specifically, men reported a fear of being humiliated, made fun of, or reversely accused of being the abuser due to a belief that men are physically capable of fighting back when being challenged (O’Brien, Hunt, & Hart, 2005).

The above brief overview of a number of key topics derived from the traditional research literature captured the following: abuse terminology and definitions, continuum or violence and cycle of violence, various effects of abuse, abused women as victims or survivors (i.e., learned helplessness and its critique), controversies in the women abuse literature, forms of abuse relating to both men’s and women’s abuse experiences, and abused men’s barriers to help-

seeking. This review of the literature sheds light on the evolving and at times contradictory research findings about intimate partner abuse. There is certainly no consensus about the categorization of abuse, the varied effects of abuse, or the categorization of peoples' experience (e.g., if a battered woman is a victim or survivor) in the literature. Rather, the literature in this area is controversial and contested, particularly as questions of gender and power play a key role in these debates. Nevertheless, this review does provide a broad introduction to the various ideas about abuse that have and continue to be taken-up by researchers. Some of these concepts have become routinely accepted as "truths" about domestic abuse in the Western culture's media and provide a common and accepted kind of understanding about the abuse phenomenon in the academic community and in our institutions (e.g., psychological therapy groups, legal systems, women's shelters, medical contexts). Such research has provided grounds for the development of victim programs and continues to inform the content of our helping, therapeutic services for women and men who have been abused. That is, professionals who lead such programs (e.g., psychological therapists, women's shelter workers) are often knowledgeable about this research literature, which, in turn, impacts their delivery of therapeutic services, including their language use. The following section will focus on the importance of analyzing the problem of abuse through a discursive lens, with an explicit focus on the study of language.

1.2 What it Means to Take a Discursive Approach

Another, less prominent, approach to studying gender and domestic abuse involves an explicit and privileged focus on the use of language. Such a language-based or discursive theoretical approach investigates the practical utilization of categories (e.g., gender, group membership, etc.) in discourse (Wood & Rennie, 1994; Zverina, Stam, & Babins-Wagner, 2011).

Discursive researchers study language based on the assumption that people's verbal responses are fluid performances or active constructions of accounts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Although there are many different kinds of discursive theories and research approaches with slightly different basic tenets, the particular discourse analytic theoretical perspective that I will draw on is in the tradition of Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Edwards and Potter (1992). As noted above, in this approach, language is regarded as performative rather than serving a purely communicative function. That is, through natural language (i.e., conversation between speakers in particular social contexts) people create their social experience and construct specific momentary identities.

To examine how talk performs action, the discourse analytic tradition is oriented around three features of talk: function, construction, and variation. The focus on "function" refers to the action-oriented nature of language in which speakers accomplish specific things rather than merely describe events. These achievements can take the form of "doing" gender (i.e., male or female), specific identities (e.g., victim, abuser, expert, patient, etc.), and constructing accounts of experience and events (e.g., constructing a violent and dangerous situation; constructing how one comes to recognize abuse in their lives). The notion of "construction" is based on *how* language is taken up and utilized by the speakers to achieve what they are creating (including both constructions of identity as well as versions of events and objects). That is, through conversation, people shape their identity positions (as well as gender and event constructions) by making accusations, criticizing, posing questions, discounting, interrupting, and using exaggerated language when they converse. The final tenet of discourse analysis, "variation", refers to the different ways in which peoples' positions in conversations are managed through talk in interaction based on how people negotiate and renegotiate their identity positions and

constructions of accounts. These varied versions of accounts and identity positions serve to rhetorically manage people's stake and accountability in conversation through moment-by-moment enactments. For example, a victimized woman may interact with police (when they are evaluating whether the situation was abusive) in ways that maintain her victimhood or stake in the conversation (Potter & Wetherell, 1995). Similarly, accountability refers to the way discourse serves to maintain the speaker as intelligible and/or credible in their positioning (e.g., blaming, justifying, praising positions). Edwards and Potter (1992) stress that one of the analytic tasks of discursive psychology is to explore the way accountability is "constructed and defended in specific contexts, and the way different kinds of activities pose different sorts of accountability concerns" (p. 166). Thus, through language, people can position themselves and each other in various strategic ways for limited periods of time. Through the following conversational turns, their identity positions can be renegotiated and reconstructed as these features of talk result in certain discursive consequences, and so on. This same concept applies to speakers' construction of events or accounts (e.g., interpersonal abuse or bad mothering). See Edley and Wetherell (1999) for an example of male identity and fatherhood constructions.

An important concept that structures this discourse analytic framework is subject positioning. Although a brief overview of this discourse analytic feature was already provided, its importance is worthy of a more detailed explanation. Positioning, defined as "the discursive process by which selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 48), is emphasized at the expense of stable or fixed identities. Rather, people are capable of taking up different versions of themselves (i.e., "multiplicity of selves") or subject positions which are both fluid and restricted or defined by specific talk and interactional contexts (Edley, 2001). Thus, identity positions are

shifting and flexible. Drawing upon often contradictory subject positions (or momentary identities) can be understood as strategic in the sense that it is always rhetorical and accomplishes some sort of action in conversation. That is, in conversations, people take up particular identities at certain times (i.e., “locations”) and then take up different identities at other times to serve different conversational purposes. One’s own positioning further influences other speakers’ negotiation and renegotiation of their own positions. In other words, positioning allows people to manage their stake in conversations based on the available cultural resources.

Taking up subject positions is a naturally-occurring process or feature of talk that is both enabled and constrained by the specific context. An update on positioning outlined by Harre, Fathali, Cairnie, Rothbart and Sabat (2009) highlights the importance of attention to rights and duties (i.e., normative presuppositions that bind what people say or do) in the management of social action. Although rights and duties declared by laws or constitutions are excluded from the domain of positioning theory, people may position themselves with respect to these based on the “frame” or the story-line genera (e.g., medical frame, legal frame) they take up in conversation. For example, a facilitator of group therapy may slip into a cluster of normative presuppositions while interacting with group therapy participants that fits within the “therapeutic frame”, such as leading the group, introducing psychological topics, addressing certain group tasks as agenda items, making certain that all clients are heard or have space to participate, and monitoring that the group talk is “on topic”. As such, the therapist’s footing within a social episode is based on some recognized rights as an expert in psychological therapy. Such claims about relevant personal or professional attributes which involves “listing and sometimes justifying attributions of skills, character traits, biographical ‘facts’, deemed relevant to whatever positioning is going forward”, is defined by Harre et al. (2009) as the process of prepositioning (p. 10). This concept

is particularly relevant for examining group therapy discourse, where group facilitators and the group participants likely engage in different processes of prepositioning. Additionally, both the facilitators' and the group members' positionings are inevitably enabled and constrained by different conversational factors within a therapeutic setting, and may be momentary.

By using a discursive lens and examining language use related to the topic of abuse, I will have the opportunity to highlight ways in which men's and women's talk in group therapy allow for a unique perspective on understanding intimate partner abuse. Through analyzing the problem of abuse and responses to abuse discursively, I can explore the development and negotiation of multiple categories as well as novel dynamics in abuse talk. Examining how both participants and professionals working in the field of intimate partner abuse construct abuse and responses to abuse in interaction provides new understandings about the nature of therapeutic discourse in the context of domestic abuse and the gendered nature of this talk. This is particularly important as the groups were segregated by gender and the analysis may shed light on important differences and similarities within these contexts while also making visible the socio-political context that was negotiated by the therapists, men, and women. The privileging of social interaction (within a group therapeutic context) as the source of data from which I draw conclusions may lead to novel implications for the identities men and women construct, the possibilities related to responding to abuse once endured, as well as the therapeutic interventions designed to help them move past the abuse.

1.3 Chapter Outline

The remainder of this thesis is laid out in seven chapters. In Chapter two, I will provide a literature review of the analytic contributions of discursive research on partner abuse. First, I will review discourse analytic research of women's victimization accounts in heterosexual

relationships (including rape accounts), the discursive process of women's problem definition and negotiation of abusive relations/victimization, as well as women's socially constructed dilemmas that served to silence them from talking about their endured violence and made it more difficult to leave an abusive relationship. Second, I will review abuse-related discourse studies of men's talk, which solely addresses men's accounts of abuse perpetration and the documented conversational rhetorical strategies serving to avoid or resist the "abuser/perpetrator/rapist" label. Third, I will review one study that provides a comparison of abused men's and abused women's reported experiences. Next, I will summarize discursive research on intimate partner abuse therapy and the contributions of such research on the development of therapy practices using this language-based approach. This will include the findings of my Master's thesis, which led up to this study. I will discuss areas worthy of further exploration, particularly in the discursive context of psychotherapeutic conversations for women who were abused by male partners and men who have been abused by their female partners. Finally, I will provide a summary of my study and state my research questions:

1. How do the separate analyses of the "abuse" negotiations in each gender group compare to one another (i.e., what are the discursive similarities and differences between these groups)?
2. What does the language of responses to abuse accomplish in conversation and how do its discursive consequences compare between men's and women's groups?

In Chapter three, I present my methodology, including an overview of the men's and women's therapy groups, as well as descriptions of the therapy facilitators and participants of each group. I present the discourse analytic procedure and address how I will conduct the comparison between groups.

Chapters four and five contain my analyses. In Chapter four, I compare the men's and women's constructions and negotiations of abuse accounts themselves. I begin by focusing on what is interesting about the men's talk, such as how the men use vivid language and spend the majority of the group talk providing detailed accounts of their victimization. I also demonstrate various rhetorical ways that the men negotiate their victim identities and their orientation to the common notion that men are abusers instead of victims. I then switch focus and demonstrate how it was difficult to locate women's explicit accounts of their abuse. Rather, the women used short phrases and individual words, such as "abuse" and "it" in place of descriptions of abuse accounts, which did not produce any problems in conversation. I address women's talk of recognizing abuse through their orientation to female intuition and bodily feelings, and then of negotiating the dangers of remaining in abusive relationships by describing life-threatening physical abuse.

In Chapter five, I will focus on comparing the men's and women's accounts of responding to abuse and the facilitators' positioning work in response. I will explore how men's reported accounts of how they responded to (and were to respond) or coped (and were encouraged to cope) with abuse was negotiated. The men constructed a gendered dilemma that they continually drew on, and did not position themselves as responsible for their constructed responses or language use that could be labeled aggressive. Thus, I will investigate facilitators' responses to this (i.e., mainly how they challenged the men and repositioned them to take accountability). I will then focus on constructions of responses to abuse among the women, who routinely first positioned themselves as taking responsibility for their responses, and then were positioned by the facilitators as engaging in such responses to secure their safety. Following the women's constructions of their varied responses to abuse, notions of defiance, independence, and

resistance were utilized discursively in order to position the women as “survivors of abuse” who were justified in their retaliation in service of their own protection. I then provide a comparison between the men’s and women’s positioning with regard to responses to abuse.

Chapter six consists of a discussion of my analyses, their implications for therapeutic work with men and women in the context of domestic abuse, the relevance of gender, various implications and contributions of my analyses for therapeutic practice, as well as limitations and future research directions. I then provide my overall conclusions to this study.

Chapter 2: Intimate Partner Abuse Discursive Literature Review

Qualitative research, including discursive, narrative studies and grounded analyses, has increasingly provided the domestic violence field with fruitful insight about the ways in which language and narrative is used to construct complex experiences of abuse and victimization, and makes evident some of the problematic cultural discourses that are commonly drawn on about violence, victims, and abusers. I will provide a review of the qualitative research on domestic abuse, beginning with a focus on women victimization literature, followed by a review of men perpetrators of abuse, and a review of psychological therapy targeting the problem of abuse. In this review, I will summarize my Master's thesis work on managing victim status in group therapy for men using a discourse analysis. I will then focus on the kind of research that is needed about domestic abuse therapy groups and state the current study's research questions.

2.1 Women Victims of Abuse

Probably the most recurrent notion in discursive studies on gender, victims, perpetrators, and abusive contexts is that these discursive constructions are ambiguous and often contradictory (Boonzaier, 2008; Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Jackson, 2001; Leisenring, 2006; Wood & Rennie, 1994). That is, abuse and victim/abuser statuses are constructions performed through social interaction rather than representing stable or fixed conditions, as the ways in which they are discussed positions people in important rhetorical ways in conversation.

In a study examining how abused women and their partners who perpetrated violence against them jointly constructed narratives about their violent relationship, it was evident that both partners constructed "a blurring of the roles of 'victim' and 'perpetrator'" (Boonzaier, 2008, p. 191). The identification of 'true victims' or 'true perpetrators' proved to be a very complicated and ambiguous endeavor that was very context-specific in conversation:

At particular moments, women were able to construct themselves as victimized by a dominating male partner and at other moments they were able to acknowledge their own agency and draw on discourses of power and resistance. Similarly, the men in this study were able to admit to their control and domination, while also being able to construct themselves as powerless (Boonzaier, 2008, p. 202).

The context of this shift depended on the desired interpretation from the audience at a particular place in conversation. That is, in order to get a sympathetic hearing and have action taken to protect them and punish the perpetrator, the women established accounts of victim identity. As there are disadvantages associated with the victim subject position, the women were consequently placed in dilemmatic situations. On the one hand, they needed to claim victim status to get help and prevent being harmed in the future, but on the other hand, they needed to claim “normal” human being status to retain the right to make decisions and to take action to protect themselves. In addition to the narratives being characterized by ambiguity around ‘perpetrator’ and ‘victim’ identity positions, other features of talk included constructions of violent relationships as cyclical, and of abuse being a ‘psychological’ or reciprocal/mutual problem.

Most research, however, has focused on female victims’ accounts of their experience. Leisenring’s (2006) grounded theory study of forty women who reported experiencing violence in a heterosexual relationship concluded that victim identities were constructed with certain rhetorical purposes: in order to demonstrate that they suffered harms that were beyond their control, that they were deserving of sympathy, and that some type of reparatory action was required to be taken against their abusers. Successful constructions of victim identities served to provide the women protection through access to social assistance and intervention as well as gaining them sympathy and securing them the right to suffer. On the other hand, it became clear that adopting a victim status involved the appropriation of traits not valued by society (e.g.,

weakness and passivity) and even provided grounds for blaming the victim for the abuse. Thus, at times, the women also rejected victim identities by claiming agency to demonstrate that they were not powerless and weak and that they were not blameworthy for their abuse. Leisenring (2006) proposed that the women's use of multiple discourses in their identity work, represented by each of the functions of victimhood described above, was dependent on notions of agency, responsibility, as well as victimization.

Similar discursive variability and contradictions were depicted in Jackson's (2001) analyses of young women's narratives of abuse in past heterosexual love relationships. The women avoided constructing their boyfriends as abusers and the situation as abusive mainly through ambiguous language-use in order to escape the negative victim labeling consequently directed at them. At times, however, they also strategically positioned themselves as vulnerable victims in order to secure their rights as damaged and to counter the negative consequence of their accounts as potentially being responsible for the abuse. Thus, the context for their multiple identity counts depended on their stake in conversation (i.e., their need to have clashing yet equally important representations depicted).

Wood and Rennie (1994) examined the discourse strategies that were used to formulate women's rape experiences and to negotiate both their victim status and their abusers' villain identities. Like many constructions of abuse, Wood and Rennie (1994) demonstrated the women's discursive difficulties in naming the experiences "rape" given the language of mutual consent and participation, and articulated how accounts of blame and responsibility were integral to the women's identity constructions. That is, the relationship of victim identity to attributions of self-blame and responsibility were complex and paradoxical, as victim accounts that signaled

lack of blame/responsibility engendered positive support and sympathy on the one hand, and negative lack of control and independence on the other.

The discursive process of problem definition and the negotiation of abusive relations/victimization were explored in an online support group for intimate partner violence (Williston & Wood, 2009). The analysis of discussion threads indicated that women expressed desires to discover whether their experiences fit definitions of abuse. The term '*maybe* abused' was allocated to the advice seekers who claimed to lack knowledge about what qualifies as abuse and constructed their situation ambivalently. Williston and Wood (2009) depicted the complex discursive ways in which advice-seekers' initial constructions of 'maybe' abuse were transformed into more robust formulations of abuse. That is, the women's initial formulations that were characterized by hedging, minimizations and ambivalence were rejected in favour of formulations that characterized the relationship or partner as abusive. The main conclusion was that intimate partner abuse problem definition (which entails a claim of victimization) was not a straightforward process; rather, abuse formulations were marked by ambivalence and uncertainty.

These analyses point to the notion that, depending on the conversational context and the participants' stake in the interaction, victim status presents different advantages and disadvantages. That is, victim labeling may lead to practical consequences in abuse talk, both positive and negative. For example, successful constructions of a victim identity may provide the person with access to support (i.e., psychotherapy and counselling) while gaining understanding (Leinsering, 2006; Wood & Rennie, 1994). Ironically, the adoption of a victim identity may simultaneously result in the person appropriating various characteristics not usually valued by society (including helplessness, passivity, weakness, powerlessness etc.) that carry shame and

humiliation (Lamb, 1999). These traits associated with victim status provide grounds for blaming the person for the victimization (Leisenring, 2006). In addition, once the construction of a victim or abuser identity is unstable, the articulation of agency and power may serve to quickly reposition a previously identified “victim” into a “non-victim” or even “abuser” position (Leisenring, 2006; Wood & Rennie, 1994). Thus, it is evident that identity work involves a balance where victim identities are both embraced and resisted depending on the conversational context.

In Towns and Adams’s (2009) discourse analysis of 20 women who had experienced violence from their male partners and eventually left their abusive situation, they explored various socially constructed dilemmas for the women that had silenced them from talking about their endured violence and made it more difficult to leave their partners. Towns and Adams (2009) utilized the discourse analysis to show how common-sense notions of patriarchy, equity, individualism, and collectivism impact women’s talk of violence in their lives, and discussed how these contradictory and ambiguous notions are generated through language and are deeply gendered. They concluded that these notions contribute to either silencing women or leading them towards resistance. Thus, the authors claimed that it is critical for women in abusive situations to remain in conversation and contact with others who care for them to explore such dilemmas.

2.2 Men Perpetrators of Abuse

Abuse-related discursive research targeting men almost exclusively targets men perpetrators of abuse (rather than victims) and suggests that abusers use language strategically in combination with power to “isolate and threaten the victim, manipulate public appearances, and avoid responsibility” (Todd & Wade, 2004, p.145). The literature suggests that men resist the

negative “abuser/perpetrator” label through the use of available hegemonic gendered discourses and a number of rhetorical strategies (Adams, Town, & Gavey, 1995; Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Boonzaier, 2008; Wood, 2004).

LeCouteur and Oxland (2011) examined the interview discourse of men who were recruited from domestic violence counselling groups about their violent or abusive behaviour and illustrated how the men engaged in various moral practices of warranting and justifying the violence, themselves, and their partners. Both men who overtly denied and acknowledged the wrongness of their abusive actions routinely utilized feminine categorizations to subtly depict their women partners as having breached the normative moral order and thus positioned the women as causing or being responsible for the domestic violence they perpetrated. Examples of positioning the women into categories defined by exclusion from common sense and moral orders of appropriate gender behaviour include “poor mothers or housekeepers,” “inappropriate wives,” and “lacking self-discipline.” Discourse analytic research has also recently contributed to the psychosocial literature and debate by focusing on how men’s language is used to silence women’s talk of their male partner’s violence towards them and thus make their resistance (e.g., leaving the abusive relationship) more challenging (Towns et al., 2003).

Wood (2004) explored incarcerated men’s accounts of their own perpetrated violence against their female partners in relation to their understanding of masculinity and manhood. The men provided justifications (e.g., that women partners disrespected their authority as men, that the women provoked them, that they had the right to discipline their women, etc.), dissociations (i.e., accounts of disconnection from their violence or from their identities as ‘real abusers’), and remorse (i.e., accounts of apologies that seemed to acknowledge both their violence and that it was wrong). Furthermore, they upheld two contradictory but not independent views of manhood

(i.e., men as dominant and superior, and men as protectors of women) when discussing their abuse (Wood, 2004). These common versions of masculinity were contradictory because, on the one hand, a dominant and superior view of manhood legitimized their superiority over women and their supposed rights to injure them, while on the other hand, a protector view of manhood stressed the need to use manly strength to ensure women's safety when threatened by other men. In Boonzaier's (2008) study, what was at stake for the men was their categorization as perpetrators. Thus, they worked up non-perpetrator identity positions through representing their experiences as minor communication problems rather than abuse, and by shifting conversations away from the past with eagerness to discuss the present.

Overall, the literature suggests that men rhetorically utilize hegemonic gendered discourses to resist positioning themselves as abusers. Part of this positioning incorporates positioning women as having violated their feminine normative order. Additionally, views of masculinity that are drawn upon are often contradictory. Thus, literature on men's narratives of violence supports the claim that men's violence represents a gendered practice, whereby men "accomplish" or "do" gender (Boonzaier, 2008; Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Hearn, 1998).

2.3 Comparison of Abused Men and Abused Women

There is a general lack of discursive research comparing abused men's and abused women's discourse. Migliaccio (2002) analyzed the narratives of 12 men who claimed to have been abused by their partners and compared these stories to the narratives and findings of past wife abuse. He concluded that the relationship accounts of battered women and men followed similar patterns. His analysis noted similarities in their accounts of the structure of the relationship (e.g., initially unable to recognize the violence was wrong, abuse involving verbal abuse and isolation), acceptance of the abuse (e.g., first rationalizing and then dealing with the

violence), and social context of the situation (e.g., lack of police involvement, unequal distribution of wealth, protecting children and stigmatization of divorce). He argued that the abuse claims made by abused men highly resembled the abuse claims made by abused women.

2.4 Intimate Partner Abuse Therapy

Few studies have explored the discourse and identity positioning of participants within psychotherapeutic contexts for interpersonal violence or abuse. Lea and Auburn (2001) explored the rape narratives of men engaged in a prison-based Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) in Britain using a discursive perspective. The analysis suggested that the convicted rapist drew on the practical ideologies of coercion (i.e., talk of rape) and mutuality (i.e., talk of sex), which often incorporated popular rape myths (e.g., victim blaming and women's exaggerated claims of rape after the event). Three positioning themes were identified to have drawn on the two practical ideologies, including: (a) the ambiguity of the victim's role and motive, (b) the storyteller as passive and empathic, and, (c) the co-perpetrator as a brutal rapist (Lea & Auburn, 2001, p. 17). Lea and Auburn (2001) stressed how the construction of ambiguity in the man's account served to complicate the series of accounts as being interpreted as rape or consensual sexual intercourse.

In Lea's later research in 2007, she further examined victim responsibility in the talk of convicted sex offenders and 23 professionals and paraprofessionals who work with the sex offenders. Again, the discursive data were based on taped SOTP therapy sessions. Interestingly, Lea (2007) identified the presence of the discourse of desire and the discourse of commonsense among *both* sex offenders and the professionals who worked with the sex offenders. This analysis indicated how such discourses resulted in assigning some responsibility to the victims and conceptualizing rape as sex rather than rape as motivated by power and control. Perhaps

more importantly, it shed light on how the stereotypical rape victim construction is not only unchallenged but perpetuated among both treatment professionals and treatment clients in the sex offender therapy group. This analysis pointed to how taken-for-granted knowledge about rape in our culture continues to be largely ignored and unquestioned in our institutions, including therapeutic treatments, and how the language of perpetrators and service providers (and possibly victims) needs to be challenged.

Kurri and Wahlstrom (2001) explored how complex issues of morality were discursively managed by participants of domestic violence counselling sessions. The authors argue that the construction of morality in counselling serves to preserve the moral agency of a client (i.e., respect the client's decision, even if the decision keeps her in the abusive situation) and simultaneously serves to prescribe the ideal of a "good life" (i.e., construct the notion that "violence is always wrong"). These two discursive outcomes of the construction of morality are contradictory, and thus the resulting dilemma is continually negotiated in therapy talk.

2.5 Discursive Research Contributions to Intimate Partner Abuse Therapy Practice

Through Tod Augusta-Scott's (2007) narrative therapy focus, he reformulated domestic theorizing as stories about how abuse works that therapists can draw on and utilize in therapy for violent men. He proposed that the dominant story is one of power and control where men want, use, and get power and control through abusing female partners (Adams & Cayouette, 2002; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992; Pence & Paymar, 1993). This story focuses on men's responsibility and maintains that women are powerless victims and men are powerful perpetrators (Augusta-Scott, 2007). Augusta-Scott (2007) described how, in using this dominant story in therapy, any attempts violent men made to discuss their own experiences of being abused were interrupted immediately by therapists and interpreted as the men's attempts to avoid

responsibility. Women's abuse was redefined as self-defense that was fully comprehensible based on the power and control framework. Augusta-Scott (2007) critiqued the reliance on the power and control story in terms of shutting down conversation with men who continually worked at gaining acknowledgment that their partners were violent towards them as well. Based on a reflection of his own previous therapy work, where he previously did align with the dominant power and control story, he "replicated dominant masculinity by negating men's experience of pain through challenging and confronting men in an oppositional manner" (p. 204). He stated that his masculine practice that men were well accustomed to prevented the men from working toward offering alternative ways of relating to others.

As a consequence of research of women's victimization discourse, Todd and Wade (2004) proposed that, in therapy, a "language of effects" (that indicates strictly determined outcome lacking agency) should be replaced with the "language of responses" or language that demonstrates a victim's will, judgment, and effort (i.e., resistance) rather than a strictly determined outcome lacking agency. This is consistent with the resistance literature cited in Chapter one. Thus, one well-documented consequence of discursive research has been to establish a therapeutic practice wherein abuse resistance talk or response talk becomes the main topic of therapeutic conversations and has been utilized as a common reframing strategy by professionals in the helping professions who work with victims of abuse in order to provide them with a sense of control and agency within their often perceived powerless situations. For example, as a result on the specific focus on discourse, Linda Coates, Nick Todd, and Allan Wade have constructed a "response-based" approach to therapeutic interviewing which has required the development of specific interviewing practices and the modification of practices developed in the brief, systematic, solution-focused, narrative and feminist approaches (Todd &

Wade, 2004). This implication resulted in finding ways to ask questions that elicit individuals' construction of their pre-existing ability to physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually respond to specific acts of violence and other forms of oppression and adversity (Wade, 2007). Specifically, their approach encouraged clinical practice to move away from therapeutic language getting at the negative ways in which victims were impacted by abuse and their inability to protect themselves (thus supporting hopelessness and drawing out more pain).

In my Master's thesis (Zverina, 2009), I investigated the most salient identity constructions and abuse conceptualizations among participants of group psychotherapy for men who have been abused in intimate, heterosexual partner relationships. The discourse analysis of the men's group talk suggested that the men continued to work through the ambiguity of abuse throughout the sessions. It became clear that despite this ambiguity of what it means for a man to be abused, the group agenda was to have the men identify themselves as victims. This was an interesting analysis in the sense that one would assume that victim status would be automatically granted by mere participation in this group. Through language, both the facilitators and the men in the group actively constructed "true victim" subject positions. They accomplished this at times in talk by drawing on and resisting the interpretative repertoires of "men as perpetrators" and "abuse as physical violence". Furthermore, it became evident that a particular strategy used to manage victim status (i.e., the therapeutic language of "resistance") required extensive negotiation as it risked having the men position themselves as abusers rather than victims. I proposed that a victim-versus-perpetrator dichotomy was difficult to consistently uphold in therapy talk (Zverina et al., 2011).

As can be seen in the above critiques of dichotomous thinking (Augusta-Scott, 2007; Derrida, 1998; Zverina, 2009; Zverina et al., 2011) derived from a language-based research

perspectives, these issues are being increasingly raised in the domestic violence literature, particularly in the therapeutic domain. The suggestion being that acknowledging both women's and men's power and powerlessness, their experience of perpetrating abuse and being victimized by abuse, can lead to them taking responsibility for their own choices (Augusta-Scott, 2007). Similarly, Zverina et al. (2011) concluded that victim-versus-perpetrator dichotomy is difficult to uphold in therapeutic discourse and, while embedded in victim services, creates pitfalls. Such research calls for a need to bridge this victim-abuser dichotomy in therapy.

2.6 Areas Worthy of Further Exploration

Based on the noted implications to practical therapeutic practice that discourse analytic research can provide, research of this nature is needed within the intimate partner abuse field. Discourse analysis research is required in order to focus on the *process* of *how* therapy is performed. That is, it allows for an exploration of how abuse accounts are constructed which in turn determines how therapy clients position themselves, which then also sheds light on how facilitators respond and reposition group participants. Although therapy groups are routinely divided by gender, there has not been any attempt in the current literature to explore how the process of therapy compares between women and men's groups.

For women's victimization, there is a lack of discourse analytic research focusing on the ways in which both the women and the therapist negotiate resistance towards abuse within a psychotherapeutic setting. Thus, although Todd and Wade (2004) proposed this change in language use in theory, no study to date has explored how the notion of response/resistance to abuse is worked up and what the discursive consequences of this are.

With regard to men's victimization, the literature solely focuses on men as abusers, not as victims of abuse, with the exception of Zverina et al. (2011). Thus, the identity positioning,

abuse constructions, response to abuse constructions, and constructions of avoidance of future abuse have not been sufficiently explored, especially within a psychotherapeutic context. Zverina et al. (2011) pointed to the common strategy of resistance which was used by therapy facilitators to manage victim status and resulted in further negotiation as it risked positioning the men as abusers rather than victims. Although Zverina et al. (2011) hypothesized ways their analyses of men's group talk may differ from the identity work present in women's victim therapeutic groups, this has not yet been investigated. Most strikingly, there is no literature on how men position themselves as appropriately and effectively responding to their female partner's abuse, a topic that is crucial for any therapeutic encounter. Thus, these areas require further discursive investigation.

A comparative discourse analysis of women's and men's victimization therapy groups could explore the appropriateness of gendered theories and how they are applied. Intimate partner abuse theories have been refined for women victims, have informed therapeutic agendas, and contributed to the development of abuse-related language which has been taken up by women victims. This has only recently been applied to therapy work with men. This is partly an assumption, as historically victim psychological services targeted women clients first and then services (although rare) were extended for men who claimed victim status. My assumption was also supported by a brief review of the men's and women's group manual (see Chapter three, Appendix A, and Appendix B), which used identical terminology when stating its tasks and goals for therapy. Thus, the ways in which the men versus women (along with their corresponding facilitators) in each group therapy use language to position themselves, construct the category of abuse, and negotiate their resistance or response against abuse is of interest in this study.

As alluded to above, the need to further investigate how abuse accounts are constructed and how men and women are positioned with regard to responding to their partner's abuse, is highly gendered. First, the therapy groups I will investigate here are routinely segregated by gender in and of themselves. Both of these groups are likely to be engaged in a performance wherein gender often matters and sometimes does not (i.e., gender may be topicalized and make relevant in the talk itself). However, gender too is a performance. Finally, I will situate the analysis within the literature that makes gender explicit in its theories and debates.

Finally, there is a need to explore therapy talk in a natural context (i.e., during the group therapy session), using archival therapy group data. What is unique about analyzing archival group therapy talk is that no particular research constructs are imposed on the therapy talk itself. Thus, the group participants' talk is not impacted based on certain participant expectations of how they should or should not present themselves from a research perspective, as is the case in most traditional research designs (including interview formats) where participants are required to provide fully informed consent about the purpose of the study. Rather, archival therapy conversational data are simply present and available to analyze using a discursive perspective. In this way, the analysis of previously conducted therapy sessions, in itself, provides a unique advantage as it provides a platform from which to explore the social, discursive ways that people are moved in conversation without an imposed research context. The talk is naturally-occurring rather than being structured as part of a particular research purpose or research agenda. This makes the analysis of such talk less constrained and influenced by the speakers' assumptions of possible researchers' expectations (which is often delineated in the informed consent process). It provides a unique perspective and research opportunity.

2.7 This Study

This dissertation will focus on the construction of abuse accounts and responses to abuse within men's and women's victim therapy groups. I will explore these abuse conceptualizations and response to abuse positionings among participants of group psychotherapy for men who have been abused in intimate relationships (i.e., Calgary Counselling Centre's 14-week group program titled "A Turn for the Better") and among participants of group psychotherapy for women who have been abused in intimate relationships (i.e., Calgary Counselling Centre's 14-week group program titled "You are Not Alone"). My analysis will provide a comparison of the kinds of identity positioning work that takes place between the men and the women, along with their facilitators.

2.8 Guiding Research Questions

1. How do the separate analyses of the "abuse" negotiations in each gender group compare to one another (i.e., what are the discursive similarities and differences between these groups)?
2. What does the language of resistance or responses to abuse accomplish in conversation and how do its discursive consequences compare between men's and women's groups?

Chapter 3: Method

Two of Calgary Counselling Centre's psychotherapy groups, held in 2009, were analyzed: (a) "A Turn for the Better" for abused men and (b) "You Are Not Alone" for abused women. Calgary Counselling Centre is a nonprofit organization in Alberta, Canada. A more detailed overview of each of these group's goals, structure, and participants is provided below. In this chapter, I will also review the discourse analytic procedure and how the comparison between each group was conducted.

3.1 A Turn for the Better (The Men's Group)

3.1.1 Group description. The Turn for the Better Group (TFTB) was advertised online as a 14-week therapeutic program for male victims of violence in intimate, heterosexual relationships. This program was labelled as a program for therapeutic change for abused men who want to pursue non-abusive futures and develop healthy relationships. The Calgary Counselling Centre began running TFTB groups in 2002. The 2009 group analyzed here was the tenth TFTB group hosted by this organization.

Appendix A provides a summary of only the portions of the TFTB manual that were raised in the 2009 group itself. Based on information provided in the TFTB facilitators' manual, this group "starts with the premise that all of the men in the group have been abused in intimate relationships, and that they have been primarily victims rather than being in a mutually abusive relationship" (Calgary Counselling Centre [CCC] A Turn for the Better [TFTB] manual, 2002, p. 1). Special care and attention in assessing the men's victim status prior to placement of the men in this group was highlighted in the manual, as it was acknowledged and made explicit that "perpetrators often present themselves as victims" (CCC TFTB manual, 2002, p. 1). Thus, the men had to attend a minimum of four individual sessions in order for a thorough interview-based

assessment of the men's "primary victim status" to be made prior to assigning the men to this group. The following reminder was provided regarding the men's possible retaliatory abusive behaviour and the recommended response by the facilitators:

It is important to remember that all victims, male and female, may have themselves become abusive in a retaliatory manner. It is important that facilitators, while not condoning the violence, do not overreact and become overly aggressive in their challenging of these behaviours. The men are used to being blamed for the violence, as well as having their victimization disbelieved. Any hint of condemnation, especially in the early stages of the group, will be counterproductive to the process (CCC TFTB manual, 2002, p. 2).

Theoretical basis for the group was described as stemming from "the Calgary Counselling Centre's belief that family violence occurs within a family system where the dynamics are such that the system is vulnerable to abusive behaviour", and where both the victims and the offenders are responsible for their own actions and their well-being (including the well-being of their children) (CCC TFTB manual, 2002, p. 1).

The goals of the program include; (a) participants recognize and understand abuse dynamics, (b) participants take responsibility for choices related to their own and their children's well-being, and (c) participants gain confidence in their ability to co-create healthy, abuse free relationships (CCC TFTB manual, 2002, p.1). The five principal sections in the group include (a) validation that the men are or have been victims of abusive relationships, (b) identification and recognition of abusive behaviours, (c) reconnecting with affect, (d) challenging prevailing belief systems, (e) regaining confidence in the ability to have healthy, non-abusive relationships (CCC TFTB manual, 2002, p.1).

The group manual provided a general outline of all 14 group sessions, which included general themes, objectives, and activities (see Appendix A). However, it was also made clear that "there is no schedule for each group" (CCC TFTB manual, 2002, p.1). Rather, the

facilitators were welcomed to focus time on topics as they saw necessary (i.e., “they may change the order or importance of topics”) based on their assessment of what was most beneficial for that particular group (CCC TFTB manual, 2002, p.1). It is for this reason that the themes and topics outlined in the manual will not be presented in detail. Instead, the specific topics will become relevant when (and if) they are explicitly covered in the 2009 group and in what way the group participants take them up.

3.1.2 Facilitators. A man-woman team facilitated the 2009 TFTB group. Linda (pseudonym for the female facilitator) introduced herself to the group as a “Masters level counselling psychologist”, who had been facilitating groups for approximately three years. Ed (pseudonym for the male facilitator) shared with the group that he “completed his Masters degree in marriage and family therapy” one year before facilitating the analyzed group, and that he was employed as a counselor for the CCC for approximately two years (his internship consisted of one of these years). The facilitators explained their specific roles in the group in the following way (TFTB Session 1, 18:13):

- 1 **Linda:** And we do have some themes and topics and ideas that guide Ed and I, **but** we
- 2 are not the experts by any stretch of the imagination. I don't see myself as an expert, it's
- 3 really (2.0) you come here to change and to collaborate with others and hopefully you
- 4 will experience a shift (1.0) towards something better. And then think of your goal. So
- 5 the more you participate, the more you get out of it, and the more others get out of it
- 6 **Ed:** Yeah, I like what you said about not being the expert. We have certain topics or
- 7 views to cover but that's not, that is just to serve as a **platform** for talking about what
- 8 issues are important for you....so if you bring something up, we will all collaborate on
- 9 **Linda:** But also we will have some topics on the board

Based on the discourse analytic framework of this thesis, it is important to keep in mind the differentiation between what the therapists say and the discursive analysis of what they say. As shown in the excerpt above, the facilitators positioned themselves in a certain way at the outset of the group.

The facilitators made it clear that their sessions were to be guided by certain topics and themes. However, those topics were meant to serve as discussion points and allow the men to talk about what issues were relevant and important to them. The facilitators also positioned themselves as non-experts; rather, they presented themselves as collaborators with the rest of the men. Thus, the facilitators were positioning themselves as collaborators and balancing that against the agenda that they have outlined in their manual.

3.1.3 Participants. In 2009, six men (ages 24 to 55 years) participated in the CCC's TFTB group. Four men identified themselves as "single" and not living with their abusive ex-partners. Two men continued living, common law, with their abusive women partners throughout the duration of the group. Two men were previously married. Four men fathered children with their abusive partners and one man fathered a child with an ex-nonabusive partner. Five men indicated that they were heterosexual and interested in women partners. One of the men (age 24 years) shared during the second week of the group that he was gay. His open disclosure of his sexual orientation was welcomed and accepted by the group and the facilitators (TFTB Session 2, 19:27):

- 1 **Ted:** ... and my situation is a little different because I was with ahhh, with a **guy** the past
- 2 two years
- 3 **John:** [Well we don't mind, it's still the same

Five men indicated that they earned a University degree and one man completed full military education and training. Five of the men were employed full time (i.e., peace officer, nurse, teacher, paralegal, oil and gas consultant), and one man was on Long Term Disability (previously employed in Pharmaceutical Sales). All men identified themselves as European Canadian and that English was their native language.

Table 3.1 is a summary of the men’s demographic information. A more detailed summary was not provided in order to protect the men’s confidentiality.

Table 3.1

TFTB Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Living Arrangement	# of Children
Ken	32	Common Law	With CL partner	2
John	55	Common Law	With CL partner	1
Richard	55	Widowed	Blended Family	2
Neil	32	Separated	Single Parent	3
Ted	24	Single	Nuclear Family	0
Chris	30	Single	Single Parent	1

3.2 You are Not Alone (The Women’s Group)

3.2.1 Group description. The You Are Not Alone (YNA) 14-week group program was created by the CCC for victims of violence in intimate relationships. It was designed to help women understand the impact their partner’s violent behavior had on their mental, emotional, and physical health and the health of other family members, especially children. It was proposed that the women learn how to deal with the effects of violence, and focus on being in abuse-free relationships. The CCC began running YNA groups in 1986. The 2009 group analyzed for this project was the 103rd YNA group held at this organization.

Similar to the information provided in the TFTB facilitator manual, the YNA facilitator manual stipulated that participants of the YNA group should be those who have been abused by their partners, and that care was to be taken to ensure that the relationship was not mutually

abusive (CCC YNA manual, 2002, p. 1). For a summary of the manual topics that were actually raised in the YNA 2009 group, see Appendix B. The manual states that the “woman [was] not an instigator of the abuse and the primary response to abuse [was] not becoming either physically or emotionally aggressive” (CCC YNA manual, 2002, p. 1). It was acknowledged that since some women become “somewhat aggressive over time”, they may need to be placed into a group designed for abused women, depending on the severity of their perpetration (CCC YNA manual, 2002, p. 1). The importance of attending to the women’s physical and emotional safety was stressed. However, it was made clear that “it is not the facilitator’s job to make decisions for the women” (CCC YNA manual, 2002, p. 1).

The theoretical basis for this group, similar to the men’s group, was based on the CCC’s belief that “domestic violence occurs within a family system that is vulnerable to abusive behaviour” (CCC YNA manual, 2002, p. 2). In addition, it was noted that “lasting change cannot happen in an educational setting, second order change at a belief system level is necessary” (CCC YNA manual, 2002, p. 2). In the CCC YNA Theory of Change Statement (2002), it was indicated that prior to 1999, the YNA group was based on a “psycho-educational model” which “emphasized issues of safety for participants and their children”. A clinical review of the YNA program (i.e., using the psycho-educational model) in 1999 reportedly indicated that it “tended to reinforce helplessness, a sense of not being responsible for the self, and a sense of dependency”. Thus, the primary objective of the group following 1999 was “to help participants alter their belief systems so that they are able to avoid abuse and be less vulnerable to abuse in their relationships” (CCC YNA theory of change statement, 2002). The objective was to be accomplished by “challenging participants’ perceptions of themselves as victims who have failed to make their relationships work, as well as helping participants to no longer support the social

sex role beliefs about women being passive and unable to manage their lives” (CCC YNA theory of change statement, 2002).

The goals of the program include “(a) participants recognize and understand abuse dynamics, (b) participants take responsibility for their choices, (c) participants start to trust their decision making skills, (d) participants gain confidence in their ability to form healthy, and (e) abuse free relationships” (CCC YNA manual, 2002, p. 2). The five principal sections in the group include, “(a) acknowledgement that the women have been victimized by their partners, (b) identification and recognition of abusive behaviours, (c) re-connection with the “True Self”, (d) challenging the prevailing belief system about self and the world, and (e) regaining confidence in the ability to have abuse free relationships” (CCC YNA manual, 2002, p. 2).

The YNA manual provided a general outline of all 14 group sessions, which included general themes, objectives, and activities (see Appendix B). As was stated in the TFTB group manual, the topics and themes were meant as a guide, but flexibility in adapting the program was necessary for the group’s success. Relevant topics covered in the 2009 group will be outlined in the analysis.

3.2.2 Facilitators. A man-woman team also facilitated the 2009 YNA group. Adam (pseudonym for the male facilitator) introduced himself to the group by sharing that he had worked at the CCC for five years, mainly with clients who experienced family violence (i.e., with abusive men, abused women, and couples). Jody (pseudonym for the female facilitator) introduced herself by stating that she was employed as a therapist for the CCC for two years and that she worked for a long time within the Child and Family Services system.

During the first session, Adam described the nature of the group as well as the facilitators’ roles in the group in the following way (YNA, Session 1, 18:14):

1 **Adam:** This group is mainly designed for those who are coming from relationships where
2 they were hurt emotionally, physically, exposed to mind games, all kinds of experiences
3 that are hurtful and that crushes you if you are in it for a very long time... So this group is
4 meant to empower yourself and rediscover yourself. This group will not take you back to
5 where you were before, but to give you higher growth. This will be part of your own
6 journey and in 14 weeks you won't reach the end of your journey, you began that before
7 you came here. But while being in this group you will **crystallize** some of your thoughts
8 and feelings, in your mind and in your heart. And you can use this group to expose
9 yourself a little bit. Jody and I will not give you answers, but you will find the answers
10 within yourself and even when you talk to each other. And we will give you some tools
11 along the way. If you are looking for answers you will look for them for the rest of your
12 life

Following this excerpt, Jody echoes Adam's claim. They construct an account that the group is designed to "empower and rediscover" who the women are after experiencing abuse by their partners. The group's purpose was described as helping the women "crystallize their thoughts and feelings". In addition, the roles of the therapists were made clear, as they indicated to the group of women that they will not "give [them] answers" or make decisions for them. Rather, it will be the women's responsibility to reach their own conclusions and decisions by themselves and through talking with the other women in the group.

3.2.3 Participants. In 2009, 12 women (ages 24 to 52 years) participated in the CCC's YNA group. Seven women identified themselves as "single", three as "separated", and two as "married". Three women continued living with their abusive partners throughout the duration of the group. Eight women indicated that they mothered children with their abusive partners and one shared that her children were apprehended by social services. Although the women's sexual orientation was never explicitly discussed, the women only discussed experiences that concerned men partners.

The women provided the following information about their levels of education: four women with Grade 9-12; four women with Technical/Vocational; four women with University education. Their work status consisted of the following: six employed full-time, one part time,

three self-employed, and two were unemployed. Their occupations included: esthetician, server, bartender, registered nurse, administrator, house cleaner, teacher, artist, accountant, and assistant manager. With the exception of one European American, all women identified themselves as European Canadian. English was noted as all of the women's native language.

Table 3.2 provides a general summary of the women's demographic information. A more detailed summary was not provided in order to protect the women's identities.

Table 3.2

YNA Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Living Arrangement	# of Children
Diana	49	Separated	Single Parent	1
Jen	32	Single	Alone	Unknown
Tara	46	Separated	Single Parent	3
Gabi	27	Single	Room-mate	1
Pam	52	Married	Blended Family	3
Steph	26	Single	Alone	Unknown
Katy	26	Single	Single Parent	1
Lora	25	Single	Room-mate	0
Lanette	48	Married	Immediate Family	2
Elyssa	31	Separated	Room-mate	Unknown
Claire	24	Single	Common Law	1
Amanda	30	Single	Immediate Family	1

3.3 Procedure

When the therapy groups were conducted in 2009, all group members provided verbal and written consent to have their sessions digitally recorded and used for research purposes. The digital recordings were retrieved from archives when I requested to view them for the purpose of this research. This research was approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Ethics Review Board.

The analysis process began by me watching and re-watching the recorded sessions and noting the exercises and activities that were presented by the facilitators. At times I would refer to the group manuals to gain a better understanding of concepts that various activities were meant to address, especially when I was not able to see the whiteboard to which the facilitators were referring. I then transcribed the majority of the group session conversations, based on the conventions presented in Table 3.3. The transcription notation was developed by Gail Jefferson (1985) and Atkinson and Heritage (1984). The anonymity of participants was preserved through the use of pseudonyms.

Table 3.3

Transcription Notation

Notation	Description of Notation
.	Short pause of less than 1 second
(1.0)	Timed pause (in seconds)
...	Material deliberately omitted
(text)	Clarificatory information and behavioural observations
text	Word(s) emphasized
“text”	Quoting themselves or others
[]	Overlapping utterances
?	Upward intonation

The conversations that I chose not to transcribe or transcribed in a very broad way (i.e., transcribed what was being said without including the timed pauses, word stresses, overlaps, etc.) included parts of the conversations that I did not consider to be part of the therapy sessions (e.g., small-talk prior to the official start of group and at the end of the group) and times where conversations strayed away from the group’s focus on abuse (e.g., when group members talked about sports or other unrelated topics for extended periods of time). The genogram portions of the sessions were roughly transcribed as I was aware of the highly confidential information that was shared and the lack of conversation-style interaction during these parts. I also made the choice to disregard conversational material when the empty-chair exercise was the focus of the therapy group, as talk largely consisted of brief therapist questions and even briefer participant answers which lacked the thick, back-and-forth conversational context that is most useful for

discourse analysis. Overall, I was mindful of the large amount of conversational data that was provided during the rest of the group sessions, and transcribed in detail the sections of discourse that related to abuse talk.

The analysis of the transcribed portions of the sessions was based on the reading, coding, analysis, and writing steps outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987). Multiple re-readings of the transcripts were important in order to familiarize myself with the data, gain a general understanding of the group, its content, and broad patterns of discourse.

The coding step refers to the selecting out of the transcribed material segments of text that relate to the research questions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In this study, I classified portions of the conversational material that were relevant to the construction of abuse and the response to abuse. In a broad way, this coding stage was already being utilized while I was transcribing the conversational material, as I needed to decide which material was and was not going to be transcribed (please see above). Overall, however, the coding was meant to be as inclusive as possible, as it was meant to pragmatically collect together conversational instances to be analyzed.

The analysis stage consisted of searching for patterns (i.e., both variability and consistency) in the constructions and functions of accounts and identity positionings, as well as the discursive consequences (i.e., implications of these accounts). This included analyzing *how* group members discussed what happened to them and how they responded, and the features of these constructions. It also involved identifying the patterns in how they positioned themselves as responding to the abuse and the discursive implications of this (i.e., how it positioned others and was consequently responded to by others). In addition to examining patterns of ways that group participants and facilitators positioned themselves and each other in conversation, I

explored their abuse and responses to abuse accounts as well as the inconsistencies and variability in their accounts.

The last phase involved the writing process of the analyses and situating these analyses within the available published literature. The analysis and writing stage often went hand in hand as the writing about the analysis of the talk was dependent on the detailed transcriptions of conversational turns. Thus, the content of the written analysis is connected to and grounded in the specific group therapy talk transcripts themselves (hence the continual orienting to portions of excerpts in the written analysis).

3.4 Comparison between groups. I followed the above outlined analytic stages for both of the men's and women's group therapy sessions separately. That is, I first conducted a full, independent analysis of the women's group, where I had written up the patterns in talk related to the construction of abuse and the response or resistance to abuse. After my analysis of the women's group was complete, I put this analysis to the side and began analyzing the men's group for patterns in talk, also based on their constructions of abuse and their responses to abuse. Only when I had two separate women's group and men's group analyses completed and written out, did I begin comparing the patterns between the women's and men's groups. Thus, I fully analyzed the discursive data of each group separately before comparing the ways in which abuse was constructed and abuse was resisted between the men's and women's groups.

At this stage, for each group, I had a number of excerpts that demonstrated two general analytic problems, including (a) the ways in which abuse accounts were constructed and (b) the ways in which clients positioned themselves as responding to abuse (and the resulting discursive consequences). Thus, the comparison phase of my research included repeatedly re-reading the excerpts in detail from each of those two areas in both groups. Through this back and forth

process, I was able to identify ways in which the groups differed, mainly by way of the discursive consequences to similar subject positionings. I talked about how the two groups in their particularity took up different issues or topics in different ways. I could only claim gender differences when gender was a topic; otherwise they were just differences between a men's group and a women's group and drawing any final gender-based conclusions was not possible.

When I wrote up my comparisons of analyses between the men's and women's group, I structured it in such a way to show the comparisons under each research question, rather than writing up each group's analyses separately and then at the end comparing the men's and women's group. I made this decision to write up the comparisons for men's and women's groups based on one separate research question at a time in order facilitate organization for better flow and ease of reading.

Finally, I summarized the themes of each manual's agenda (as found in Appendix A and B) following my complete analysis because I did not want these notions and literature to influence my reading and analysis of the discursive material itself. An exception to this process was when I referred to the manuals at times when I could not read what the facilitators were writing on the board while transcribing. My goal was to rely, as much as possible, on the actual talk and the discursive consequences following speakers' positionings and utterances. However, I also wanted to acknowledge that language, informed by abuse theories and concepts originating from the traditional interpersonal partner abuse research literature (some of which has become part of our broader social discourse), likely influenced the conversations and positionings of the facilitators (more directly) and the group participants themselves (more indirectly or subtly). In Appendix A and B, I lay out which concepts were explicitly referred to in the sessions and note specific literature that was cited in the group manuals. Thus, the Appendix A and B tables

provide direct quotes from the TFTB and YNA group manuals. In addition, certain activities from each group were deleted if they did not address topics present in the intimate partner abuse literature (e.g., icebreaker/getting to know each other activities, reflection team events, hypnosis component, ending check out) or if they were already explained in the theme description. It should also be noted that each theme was accompanied by a list of “key questions” for the facilitators to draw upon in the manual. These questions are not included in the Appendices.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Abuse Accounts

Discussing the concept of intimate partner abuse was the main purpose of the groups. As such, what counts as abuse was an explicit topic in both groups (e.g., was an exercise itself) and was continually negotiated throughout the groups (e.g., participants had numerous opportunities to talk about their own experiences in relation to whatever abuse-related issue was being addressed by the facilitators). Thus, prior to addressing the patterns of talk related to abuse experiences (e.g., how women and men positioned themselves as responding to or resisting abuse, or avoiding it in the future), I think it is fruitful to examine the various accounts of the participants' abuse experiences. In this chapter, I first identify the patterns of talk related to abuse accounts that are most interesting in terms of what the talk accomplishes and how the conversation participants in both the men's group and the women's group were positioned. I then summarize and compare these patterns between the men's and women's talk.

4.1 Turn for the Better (The Men's Group)

This section explores a common pattern of the men's accounts of abuse. Specifically, the men provided play-by-play (or "he said, she said") narratives that were lengthy and detailed. Nevertheless, they also negotiated whether or not these experiences constituted abuse. This analysis also includes the various resources the men used to build their abuse accounts and thus negotiate their victim identity. Finally, this analysis works through men's claims of not being believed when they positioned themselves as victims.

4.1.1 Lengthy, detail-oriented play-by-play abuse accounts. This excerpt (Session 3; 18:34) is taken from the beginning of the third session in which the men were asked to check in regarding how their previous week had been. At the beginning of the session, the facilitators clarified that these check-ins were explicitly about abuse. During Ken's check-in turn, he

provided a detailed account of how his wife got into a conflict with her family members during a family event and how this developed into a fight between the two of them later in the evening (Session 3; 18:28).

- 1 **Ken:** You (referring to his wife’s mother) abused **her** and now **she’s** abusing **me**, I just, I
2 knew that I knew that I knew...
- 3 **Ted:** Why were you fighting?
- 4 **Ken:** Well you know, it was everything, it’s hard to condense six hours into a few
5 minutes but (1.0) later on in the night Kathleen wanted to get her stuff packed and (3.0)
6 she gets really bossy, and she says “Ken, get your suitcase organized, do it **now**” and I
7 said “listen, I don’t need to do it right now”, I looked at the clock, we got home at 9:20
8 and the game is on until 9:30 I **just** sat down, I **just** came back from the store and I sat
9 down and I said “I will just look at the score (hockey game score) and then I will do it”.
10 And at 9:26 she says to me like “okay **Ken**, now do it” and I said “**Kathleen**, I’ll do it at
11 9:30”. And **then**, at 9:30 and thirty seconds I start to do it (3.0) well, she starts **ragging**
12 on me about something and I can’t remember exactly what it was and we just started
13 yelling back and forth and then she **claims** at the time that um, I didn’t start, um, packing
14 until 9:40, you know? I was like “what?” so now we are getting all the times confused
15 and she’s saying “you know, I wished you participated in the family instead of sitting
16 your **ass** in front of the computer” and she just starts going off (1.0) and I said to her, you
17 know what? It’s not appropriate that we are fighting in Jo’s apartment like this. If you
18 want to fight like this or have a conversation then we need to step outside and go for a
19 walk. And uh, she basically **pushed** me out of the way and stomped down the hall (2.0)
20 and said “**fine** let’s go for a walk” and maybe that’s what stood out the most because she
21 was acting like her mom was, and I was like “this is **BS**, like I could throw you out of a
22 window”. Like I’m a strong guy but **you women** you’re acting like (1.0) you’re wearing
23 the pants, **you** have the **balls**, like you know? Like what the hell is going on?
- 24 **Linda:** I wonder if when you use the term “You women” you are talking about your
25 partner?
- 26 **Ken:** Yeah my partner and **her mother**. Because it’s almost (2.0) like it occurred to me at
27 that moment that they were cut from the same cloth.
- 28 **Ted:** You didn’t mean all women
- 29 **Ken:** No no, I didn’t mean, to **rampage all females**. But no, just those two women (2.0)
30 like my mother, I love her, and my sister, we are close too. I have female friends (4.0) **I**
31 don’t know, the thing is, and I don’t know if I’m answering your question I don’t think

In response to Ted’s question about why he and his wife were fighting, Ken first noted that it was complicated (“it was everything”) and that it was difficult to condense the lengthy event into a few minutes. However, he then oriented to a specific incident that occurred “later that night” and constructed a lengthy account (i.e., a total of 20 lines of non-stop talking)

characterized by detailed and vivid descriptions (Edwards & Potter, 1992). By providing the richness of contextual detail, he created the impression that he, as a speaker, knows what he is talking about and that the account is something that he remembers with accuracy (Edwards & Potter, 1992). His account consisted of providing direct quotations based on what each of them said and how they talked to each other (e.g., “Ken, get your suitcase organized, do it **now**” and I said “listen, I don’t need to do it right now...”). Direct reporting signals verbatim recall and hence accuracy and “objectivity” of his own description of events (Goffman, 1981). This is a standard discursive practice that supports the notion that the speaker’s version or construction of events is based on facts (Potter, 1996). Further evidence for Ken’s construction of a believable and accurate incident is the absence of any clarification questions from the facilitators until he began to say negative things about women.

Ken made reference to the sequential order of events and referred to specific, chronological time. By making specific reference to the order of events and times (e.g., “at 9:30 and thirty seconds I start to do it”), he built his identity as reliable and blameless. On the other hand, when he used vaguer and non-specific terms (e.g., ‘she starts ragging on me about something and I can’t remember exactly what it was’), he avoided positioning himself as being worthy of criticism by not providing any valid or contextual reasons for why his wife was upset with him. Thus, he again positioned himself as reasonable and without blame for the conflict or abuse.

Throughout Ken’s detailed and convincing account, he continually switched between constructing a situation where his wife instigated and perpetuated the verbal abuse and a situation where they mutually engaged in the verbal abuse together (i.e., “she starts ragging on me ...and we just started yelling at each other...and then she claims...and she just starts going

off...”). Notably, the talk of both mutual and wife-driven abuse came first and then shifted so that Ken became the reasonable one attempting to end the conflict (i.e., It’s not appropriate that we are fighting...If you want to fight like this or have a conversation then we need to step outside and go for a walk”). Thus, he positioned himself as rational, stating that they needed to go outside and take a walk to resolve the fight.

At this point, Ken described his wife as “basically [**pushing**]” him out of the way, stomping down the hall, and saying “fine let’s go for a walk”. Interestingly, Ken’s use of the modifier word “basically” limited the inferences available from the information he presented (Drew, 1992). “Basically” qualified the push and minimized his wife’s actions. He also described her as “stomping down the hall”, which implied an angry exit. Ken worked throughout the excerpt to offer a credible narrative that others would believe. Given male-female size differences, to say that someone smaller than he “pushed him out of the way” might not be credible. Nevertheless, a push is a provocative action inviting retaliation from Ken. Ken then positioned his wife as being like her mother, whom he had previously positioned as abusive. He labeled his wife’s pushy behaviour as “BS” and positioned himself as angry towards both her and women in general when he stated that “I could throw you out of a window” and “Like I’m a strong guy but **you women** you’re acting like, you’re wearing the pants, **you** have the balls, like you know? Like what the hell is going on?”. While constructing the abuse account, Ken drew on the membership category of “women” (Sacks & Jefferson, 1995) to point to the inappropriate reversal of gender roles (i.e., “women having the balls and wearing the pants”), which reinforced his positioning of his wife as engaged in unusual and possibly abusive behavior. As Sacks and Jefferson (1995) propose, categories are inference rich and can be used as rhetorical devices because “the assignment of a person to a category ensures that conventional knowledge about the

behaviour of people so categorized can be invoked or cited to interpret or explain the actions of the person” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 214). In this case, Ken utilized the gender category to position his wife as gender inappropriate (i.e., masculine and powerful) and thus, to bolster his positioning as a man dealing with an unusual situation for which his wife is responsible. Despite having the physical upper hand within a gendered context where men should do the pushing instead of the women, he claimed that he did not take up the invitation to engage in abuse. Rather, he remained the reasonable one within a situation where gender roles have been reversed and supported his positioning as a victim and a reasonable man.

In response to Ken, Linda focused on a particular phrase “you women” that might be interpreted as sexist or misogynistic. She did not openly accuse him of sexism and instead inquired whether his use of “you” applied specifically to his partner. Thus, rather than engage with Ken’s detailed and vivid account of what had happened, she held him to account for his possible sexism. The other facilitator, Ted, followed up in a similar vein, i.e., with a clarifying question that again oriented to Ken’s use of “you”. Ken’s defense (“No no, I didn’t mean to **rampage all females**”) was an interesting misnomer (presumably he meant “disparage”), as it oriented to the idea of his being abusive toward all women through sexist talk, which signaled that he understood the facilitators’ concern as being sexism. Thus, he distanced himself from Linda’s positioning him as potentially being inappropriately aggressive and angry towards all women, which also served to maintain his positioning as a victim of abuse.

In summary, this excerpt is an example of the men’s vivid and detailed abuse accounts, their positioning themselves as victims and at times as participants in mutual verbal abuse, and their re-positioning themselves as reasonable men who work to end the conflict. As part of these lengthy accounts, the men drew on numerous rhetorical strategies (e.g., use of detail, direct

quotation, sequential order or events, gender categories) to provide convincing accounts of the abuse (i.e., what had happened to them was inappropriate and abusive). The facilitators calling Ken on sexist language underscores the challenge the men faced in having their accounts heard by others as accounts of being victims of abuse.

The following excerpt (Session 2, 19:05) provides another lengthy, detail-oriented, and vivid account of the abuse that Neil reportedly experienced. In this excerpt, he constructed an account of physical abuse perpetrated by his wife. This occurred during the beginning of the second session where the men were asked to re-introduce themselves to the members of the group who were not present during the first session and to share the nature of their abusive relationships with their partners or ex-partners.

- 1 **Neil:** ...and she was seeing a psychologist weekly, and we had to call the police, well **I**
- 2 had to call the police to to house one time because she has explosive uh anger and the
- 3 hitting got bad that time and the counsellor told me to call the police if she hit me, and
- 4 (3.0) I had a **really** hard time doing that, and I was real close a couple of times but I just
- 5 couldn't do it, but that time she **wacked** me **really really** hard, she just **nailed me**, and I
- 6 got really pissed off and I just went to the phone and called the police on her (4.0)
- 7 Luckily there was a recording that that no operators and police were available at that
- 8 moment to hold on and at that moment it scared me and I thought that maybe I was
- 9 making a bad decision, so I hung up and proceeded to go to the car to get my **son** out and
- 10 put him to bed and meanwhile the police called **back** (1.0) and my partner confessed that
- 11 she had **wacked** me and so the police were obligated to come out, no charges were laid, I
- 12 didn't press any charges or anything else but um, ever since **that**, um (2.0) there hasn't
- 13 been any hitting, because the police said if it happens again it's in the system. And uh she
- 14 will be **charged**, by the police, and she will not be allowed to stay in the house and will
- 15 not have no contact with our kids, we have two sons. And uh, **yeah** I think this was a
- 16 major major wake up call, so in a **way** I called but it was **good** because she confessed to
- 17 the police herself so it's not like a tattle-tale sort of thing for me. But **yeah**, so, this
- 18 accident has literally turned our lives upside down
- 19 **Ed:** Yeah, it sounds like there was a lot more physical violence like that after the accident
- 20 **Neil: Yeah** yeah, you know, there was you know **some** you know, hitting you know
- 21 before, but it was **rare**, so maybe a slap or whatever, but after the accident things
- 22 changed for sure (4.0) So if I have to stand it's because my spine hurts or whatever
- 23 (laughs) so that's me
- 24 **Linda:** So about your decision to make the call, it stopped, but it must have been tough
- 25 **Neil: Yeah** yeah it was tough

Neil's statement that his partner was seeing a psychologist weekly provided evidence that she had a mental health issue and bolstered his claim that he was a victim of an abusive partner. He positioned himself as following his counsellor's directions to phone the police when his partner was physically abusive (i.e., "she has explosive anger and the hitting got bad that time"). Through this claim, Neil positioned himself as being the recipient of repeated physical abuse, but that it only "got bad" enough during the incident being described. Thus, he defined abuse based on the severity of the hitting, rather than the sole action of hitting itself. Neil then claimed that on other occasions he was "real close" to calling the police on her but that he "just couldn't do it", although he did not explain his reluctance to do so.

He used extreme case formulations (e.g., "she **wacked** me **really really** hard, she just **nailed me**") when describing the incident where he did call the police, emphasizing further that only in extreme circumstances was he willing to report the abuse. Extreme case formulations are defined by Pomerantz (1986) as descriptions or assessments that use extreme terms to defend against counter-challenges to the legitimacy of the speaker's claim. He then continued to disclose further details (i.e., that he hung up the phone when he got an answering service, had second thoughts about his behaviour, and was scared that he made the wrong decision). By noting that his partner confessed to her aggressive behaviour when the police returned the call, he further bolstered his victim position and his positioning of his partner as abusive. Because of his partner's confession, the police were obligated to come out but did not lay charges – in including this detail, Neil avoided blame for the police involvement. He further reported that "since **that**, there hasn't been any hitting" due to the severe consequences if she re-offended. Near the end of his account, Neil drew attention to the possibility that others might see him as a "tattle-tale", making it clear that he was not to blame and was not the kind of person who would do such a

thing. His account then entailed management of his accountability for the police involvement while positioning himself as a victim.

At this point Ed provided a reflection regarding the frequency of violence after the accident. He was referring to a previous account where Neil indicated that his wife was relatively calm and non-abusive prior to them being in a life-threatening automobile accident. On Neil's account, his wife, as a result of the accident, experienced severe post-traumatic stress disorder, began feeling more anxious and was easily angered, which led to aggression against him. Although Neil agreed with Ed's summary, he renegotiated this account by drawing attention to the notion that even before the car accident, there was "**some** hitting", but that it was "**rare**" with "maybe a slap or whatever". In this way, he positioned his wife as having the propensity to be violent on occasion prior to the accident, and rejected the accident as the sole cause of the violence. Thus, he attributed his partner's abusiveness to her character. Linda redirected Neil's talk by reflecting on how difficult it must have been for Neil to make the call to the police, and Neil agreed ("it was tough").

Overall, the above two excerpts show the lengthy, play-by-play, and vivid nature of the abuse accounts that were common throughout the men's group sessions. As can be seen in both excerpts, orienting the listeners to specific situations that were described in chronological order helped the men support their positioning as being abused by their women partners. The rhetorical tools used in the detailed accounts in each excerpt vary somewhat but include vivid descriptions, direct reporting/quotations, chronological order of events, mutual versus women-driven abuse, extreme case formulations, gender categories, and character-building. In the next section, I focus on some of the most common discursive resources the men used to negotiate their positions as victims.

4.1.2 Negotiating victim identity. In addition to providing highly contextual, detail-oriented accounts of the abuse perpetrated by their partners, the men utilized a variety of resources to negotiate their positioning as victims and their partners as abusers. The following two excerpts indicate two common ways that the men did this. First, the men constructed accounts wherein the reactions of people with credibility, such as parents, friends, or professional psychologists confirmed that their partners' behaviour was inappropriate, outside the norm, or abusive. Second, they constructed their partners as bad mothers who victimized them and their children.

4.1.2.1 Reactions of people with credibility. The following excerpt from Session 9 (18:24) shows how the men constructed accounts that referred to third parties who labeled their partners as inappropriate or verbally abusive. This included the third parties' surprised or angered reactions to their partners. In other words, the men's stories constructed a consensus of opinions beyond their own that their women partners were abusive. In this specific excerpt, Ken oriented to the reactions of his parents to demonstrate just how unreasonable and verbally abusive his partner was. This account was part of the check-in, where each man was asked how his past week had gone with respect to abuse.

- 1 **Ken:** ...so on Father's Day I just talked to my dad and he just **exploded**, Kathleen wasn't
- 2 there, they just refused to see Kathleen actually, he was outraged that she wouldn't speak
- 3 with respect, with respect to parental figures, to respect authority. And Kathleen does not
- 4 know how to do that, she has this arrogant, snotty nose, snippy way about her and uh
- 5 **Ted:** He said this on the phone
- 6 **Ken:** Yeah that's what my dad was saying. Well I can get into that but this is supposed to
- 7 be the short check-in so, that's Coles notes, I'd be happy to share it, but to make a long
- 8 story short (2.0) she **really** leaned into my mom hard and it **really** pissed my dad off and
- 9 my dad doesn't swear or **anything** but to me he was like "who the **fuck** does she think
- 10 she is?" you know, I was like "**Wow**, I've never heard my dad **swear** in my **life**". So and
- 11 his eyes were just bulging out of his head like, and when he did that he slammed his fist
- 12 down like that and he was **pissed** and said "Nobody, nobody can talk to your mother that
- 13 way", you know, and he was **so pissed** at Kathleen

Ken provided an account of talking to his dad on Father's Day about an incident and his father "just **exploded**", refused to actually see her, and was "outraged that she wouldn't speak with respect" to them. Thus, he positioned his parents as disagreeing and angry with the way Ken's mother was addressed by Kathleen. Ken positioned himself as agreeing with his parents' criticisms of Kathleen, as he confirmed that "Kathleen does not know how to do that" (i.e., speak respectfully). He added a three-part list to describe her communication style (i.e., "she has this arrogant, snotty nose, snippy way about her"). Three-part lists are a common feature of naturally occurring conversation and can be used to achieve the rhetorical effect of constructing descriptions that are treated as complete and representative (Jefferson, 1990). Here, it was effective in establishing his wife as particularly verbally aggressive and rude, and therefore, as potentially abusive. Through extreme case formulation (i.e., "**Wow**, I've never heard my dad swear in my **life**") and comparing how his father usually is and how he was during the conversation about Kathleen (including describing his altered physical appearance), he positioned his father as extremely angry with Kathleen and as sharply criticizing Kathleen's behaviour. By constructing an account where his father (a respected third party) disapproved and was angered by his wife's actions, he made it difficult for others to challenge his positioning of his wife as abusive. Similar discursive moves were evident throughout the men's talk where they drew on reports of psychologists or counselors (e.g., Session 2; 19:05) and good friends.

4.1.2.2 Bad mother positioning. The second common way in which men bolstered their accounts of abuse was by positioning their partners as bad mothers, whose abusiveness had negative effects on their children. This is shown in the next excerpt, Session 2 (20:12).

- 1 **Chris**:... he [step-son] was two and a half when I first met him and like, it was, he had
- 2 some **bad** experiences when I got there, I don't know about before, but (3.0) then he saw
- 3 everything in our relationship and he saw some other bad stuff as well, but I think a lot of
- 4 it was the bad stuff he saw between **us**, like watching her go **crazy** and going after **me**

5 and then she will go after **him** for even like 30 seconds and he amplifies it (1.0) as if
6 she's been going after him for three weeks straight. So, I think if I'm saying anything it's
7 that I've seen the damage that has happened with this kid
8 **Ken:** So I think that if we stay in this relationship and the kids are observing her abuse
9 continuing, it is much more harmful in the long run
10 **Chris:** I would actually suggest that you speak to someone about what even at two years
11 old happens to kids that see abuse, like my daughter was a year and a half when it ended
12 and she was like a **ghost**. She was in the room but she wasn't there. Like you never saw
13 her, you never heard from her, and that's typical of that age, right? and then all of a
14 sudden, the day after her mom left, she started talking (3.0) and her brother was in the
15 house and her mom wasn't there and three hours later she started saying (2.0) words, she
16 never spoke the day before, **never**, she never said a word, and over the course of a couple
17 of weeks, my mom stayed with me, and (3.0) then she was all of a sudden started coming
18 to people in the house and talking to them and singing to them and she never did that
19 before, she just sat in the cruck of my neck (3.0) Like she was, but that was, like people
20 said like "ohh, she was just shy" but she was following the stereotypical kids that are
21 exposed to abuse

Chris built an account about his step-son's exposure to his mother's "bad" behaviour.

That is, the boy "watched" his mother "go crazy" and "[go] after [**him**]", while Chris positioned himself as a witness to the mother "go[ing] after" the stepson on occasion and how the stepson reacted ("he amplifies it"). This account bolstered his claim of abuse, as he was not the only witness or the only one to be victimized; in this case his step-son had both witnessed and experienced abuse also. By positioning his partner as a bad mother, Chris highlighted her abusive nature. In contrast, Chris positioned himself as a concerned step-partner, who observed the effect of his abusive relationship with the boy's mother on the young boy.

Following Ken's agreement about the negative impact on children of observing abuse "in the long run", Chris provided another personal narrative about his daughter, who at a year and a half old and was "like a **ghost**". He described his daughter's presence in ghost-like terms (extreme case formulations) as seeming like she was not in the room, and no one never saw her or heard from her. His comparative account of his daughter's behaviour while she was exposed to the abusive situation and after her abusive mother left (only a day later) was formulated as an

extreme case. Remarkably, she began talking (i.e., “she started saying (2.0) words, she never spoke the day before, **never**, she never said a word”). He further pointed to her flourishing progressions in development after she was no longer exposed to an abusive situation (e.g., claiming that she was more social, coming up to people in the house, talking and singing to them). This before-and-after story bolstered the positioning of his partner as a bad mother who was abusive to her intimate partner as well as her children, both the step-son and the young daughter. The negative effects were evident through the impact on their children if not on Chris.

Men’s accounts of both adults’ and children’s reactions to the abuse took the focus away from the men alone and thus made it less likely that their claims would be challenged. Furthermore, by drawing on the gendered category of motherhood, they highlighted the inappropriateness of their partners’ actions.

4.1.3 Men assumed to be abusers. Men’s use of lengthy accounts and various resources to bolster their positioning as abused men makes sense if the men anticipated not being believed about their accounts of victimization. One of the most striking and recurring claims of the men was that abused men are not accepted. Rather, abused men are often unjustly assumed to be the perpetrators. In this excerpt, (Session 4; 19:57) Neil constructed a clear account of why another man in the group, in addition to himself, did not disclose to anyone that their women partners abused them.

- 1 **Neil:** ... the reason why you (looking at John) didn’t say anything to anyone, the reason
- 2 why **I** didn’t say anything to anyone, it’s because **men** are the **abusers**, (4.0) [It’s it’s -
- 3 **Ken:** [What do you
- 4 mean?
- 5 **Neil:** I mean, when you see a commercial about abuse, do you **ever** see a man with a
- 6 black eye saying “save the man”?

Neil clearly highlighted bias whereby it is taken for granted that men are the perpetrators of abuse and women are the victims. After Ken requested clarification of Neil’s claim, Neil

referred to popular media to bolster his point, asking if people “**ever**” see a man with a black eye on a television commercial about domestic abuse. This explicit reference to social media supported Neil’s position that men are routinely portrayed as perpetrators, rather than victims. As a result, Neil claimed that he and other men do not report their abuse. Implicit here is that divulging the abuse would likely result in other people not believing that they are victims, or potentially, lead to their being labeled as perpetrators instead.

Session 2 (19:14) includes an example of an account where the abusive female partner was described as using the wide-spread bias that men are the perpetrators and not the victims of violence as a threat, i.e., a form of psychological abuse.

- 1 **John:** I have been beaten for reasons that were the most foolish reasons. She uses
- 2 drinking and has no other outlets to let her anger out on. Uh, plus, I’m **always** in a
- 3 situation where I am being threatened or distorted, like “I will call the police on you” or
- 4 “I have bruises on my arm” like when you block a punch or something, “you hurt me,
- 5 you abused me, you assaulted me”, and I just get tired of it, and I just want it to end

John began by positioning his abusive partner as irrational, i.e., the reasons she provides for beating him are “foolish” – “drinking” and the lack of “other outlets to let her anger out on”. He then bolstered his account of being an abused man by using an extreme case formulation (“always”) to emphasize a more commonly used abusive tactic, psychological abuse, whereby she has threatened him by claiming that she would call the police and have him arrested for being the abuser. John provided a three-part list of ways his partner claimed that she was abused by him (“You hurt me, you abused me, you assaulted me”), to bolster her threat of identifying him as the abuser. Such accounts work as a sort of disclaimer, i.e., by pointing to societal perceptions about the gendered nature of domestic violence and their strategic use by partners who they are positioning as abusive, men like John work to position themselves as not the

abusers (after all, would they explicitly talk about this if they were guilty?), but instead as the vulnerable victims of abusive partners who are enabled by society.

The last two excerpts point to the men's claims of not being believed as victims but are instead assumed to be the abusers. Not only are their partners doubly dangerous by virtue of their own inclinations to be violent and of the extra power granted by society, but the men are doubly victimized by their abusive partners and by society.

4.1.4 Summary. This analysis of men's abuse accounts shows that they consisted of lengthy, detailed, play-by-play descriptions of mainly verbal abuse (although at times physical). They were constructed rhetorically, using a variety of discursive resources, to bolster the men's positioning as victims. Although mutual abuse was sometimes part of their accounts, the men positioned themselves as attempting to end the abuse in rational ways. Commonly, the men drew on the reactions of people with credibility and on positioning their partners as bad mothers to build their victim identities. As such, the men also positioned their partners as abusive, irrational, and "crazy" by relying on descriptions of credible peoples' reactions and the consequences of the abuse on their children. Finally, they pointed to biased social perceptions of men as abusers and women as victims. These biases were claimed explicitly and evident more implicitly in the positioning work, as the men often had to defend their claims about women (i.e., sexist or aggressive claims) to the facilitators who raised this as a concern.

4.2 You Are Not Alone (The Women's Group)

For the most part, the abuse accounts of YNA group participants were formulated in vague and imprecise language and while orienting to intimate partner abuse did not actually describe what had happened to them. The following excerpts explore how abuse was subtly oriented to and the consequences of doing so in the conversation that followed. This section

explores women's talk of recognizing abuse (while not describing it per se) through their orienting to notions of intuition and bodily senses. This analysis also includes a discussion of exceptions to the frequent subtle and imprecise references to abuse and what purposes that served in the talk.

4.2.1 Abuse as “it”, “what I went through” or simply “abuse”. First, and most commonly in the women's accounts, abuse was referred to simply as “it”. Thus, the women utilized the brief and simple word “it” to orient to their abuse experiences. This excerpt is from the sixth session (19:25):

- 1 **Lora:** And we did very simple things, because we didn't have a lot of money at that time
- 2 **BUT but** and it was just really fun (2.0) Anyways yeah, then he got a really stressful job
- 3 aaand the whole dynamic changed because he was gone like three weeks of the month at
- 4 work and um **when** he did come back, he was really stressed out (2.0) so, (3.0) **and** then I
- 5 took a job where um I was stressed out, and, so, I should work **less** at the job I was doing
- 6 and focus more time on my art which is what I went to school for, so I mean at the **time** it
- 7 was probably not the best idea financially because I couldn't really (2.0) **do** it by **myself**,
- 8 so that's probably **when it started**. That's when **it** (1.0) got (2.0) **bad**, well okay
- 9 **Adam:** How were you dependent on him?
- 10 **Lora:** Well I moved in with him and....

“It” was used throughout this excerpt to refer to Lora's life with her partner (“it was just really fun”; “**do** it by **myself**”; “it (1.0) got (2.0) **bad**”). As a word with no direct referent, “it” can be used in a flexible way. At line 2, “it” referred to the “we” in line 1, who despite lacking money had “fun”. At line 7, “it” referred to a time in the relationship when her partner worked out of town, both were stressed, and financially, she was unable to manage on her own. At line 8, one may substitute the phrase “abusive relationship” for “it” (i.e., “**it started**”). Using the uncertain label of “it” rather than elaborating on “it” was a remarkable conversational move. That is, in order to make sense of what she was saying, the other participants, including facilitators, drew on shared knowledge about intimate partner abuse (and I as researcher in analyzing this excerpt am doing the same thing). To follow the conversation required “insider

knowledge” of intimate partner abuse, i.e., taken-for-granted resources or knowledge that the women and facilitators drew on to make sense of the conversation without having the particulars outlined in the talk (i.e., who did what to whom). As can be seen in line 9, Adam did not question how “it got bad” or what “it” meant. Instead, he focused on asking how Lora was dependent on her partner, interpreting her conflict about paid work versus pursuing her art and explicit references to financial implications as implying that she became dependent on her partner and dependency leads to abuse. Thus, the facilitator drew on his knowledge of intimate partner abuse and his position as facilitator to move the group discussion toward how Lora ended up, thereby taking for granted that what Lora experienced constituted abuse and that she was the victim.

The following excerpt, from the first session (18:20), shows the use of another expression, “what I was going through”, often utilized by the women in providing accounts of their abusive experiences.

- 1 **Adam:** We will also be examining resources like family and friends, the government, so
- 2 that’s one more thing
- 3 **Elyssa:** Girls at work knew what I was going through and she (daughter) was the one
- 4 person I would have never told
- 5 **Adam:** One thing I noticed in women’s groups is that they have difficulty bringing the
- 6 emotions out because for a long time the people in their lives were abusive by not
- 7 wanting to listen, not being affirmative. So use this group to connect with your feeling

In this excerpt, Elyssa referred to her abusive relationship as “what I was going through”. As can be seen in such examples, the speaker did not provide an account of the abuse, yet the conversation continued smoothly, as if everyone, including the facilitator, Adam, knew what Elyssa was going through. That is, Elyssa’s positioning as a victim of abuse was a taken-for-granted discursive event. Her interjection led to Adam proposing that women who have been abused need to connect with their feelings so that they can express their emotions. This built on Elyssa’s difficulty

in telling her daughter, while she was able to talk to her co-workers. Again, neither Elyssa nor any of the other participants, including the facilitator, questioned her victim status or asked for more information.

Other times, the word “abuse” was used directly in conversations among the women, as can be seen in the following excerpt from Session 4 (18:32):

- 1 **Jody:** I’m just wondering what that’s like taking that power, taking a look at that internal
- 2 strength and using the power of the internal voice?
- 3 (10 sec)
- 4 **Tara:** Well like you go to that place, **well** it’s it’s comforting to know that you don’t have
- 5 to **live** like this. That you (2.0) come here some of us come to this realization that, we don’t
- 6 (1.0) we don’t want to live in the **abuse** anymoore or that we know that we have a
- 7 problem here.

Like “it” and “what I was going through” (another example was “what happened”), use of the word “abuse” did not lead to elaboration or clarification. The conversation simply continued smoothly. For the women, then, victim status was assumed and non-negotiable in the therapeutic talk. Furthermore, the speakers did not provide detailed accounts of their experiences of abuse, nor did the other group participants request such details.

4.2.2 Recognizing Abuse: Drawing on feminine intuition and bodily responses. When constructing accounts of recognizing both abuse and potential abusers, the women oriented to the notion of feminine intuition and bodily responses (i.e., the five bodily senses), without explicitly describing the abuse itself. This allowed the women to position themselves as victims and claim that the situation was abusive. In the following excerpt from the sixth session (19:01), Diana positioned Katy as recognizing abuse:

- 1 **Diana:** You recognize it (abuse)
- 2 **Katy:** Yeah I do
- 3 **Diana:** You know when you’re being abused and you don’t want to be a part of that
- 4 anymore, so you know when you sense it, you smell it, you touch it, you feel it, you can hear
- 5 it, even if it’s just **way** down the road, **way** before you ever used to, and so when you see it,
- 6 you can go “ahhh”, you recognize that
- 7 **Tara:** Yeah that’s how you know it is abuse, but back to problem solving, when you go back
- 8 to see him you document....

Diana's use of the ambiguous "you" at the start of this excerpt was interpreted by Katy as applying to her and she readily agreed with Diana that she can recognize abuse. Diana then continued referring to "you", which could refer to all of the women in the group, including herself. She positioned "you" as knowing when they're being abused and not wanting to be a part of it anymore. Her elaboration pointed to the senses as the source of this knowledge. By simply smelling, touching, feeling and hearing, the women recognize it. She attributed a metaphysical nature to this process of recognition, i.e., the women carry this knowledge with them even before they have experienced abuse. This construction of abuse recognition is uncontested by the women, as Tara first supported her claim before changing the direction of the conversation.

In the following excerpt (Session 6, 20:07), the women who speak co-constructed Tara's experience as abuse and positioned Tara as the victim. Tara positioned herself as "knowing" through her senses that her partner is being manipulative.

- 1 **Tara:** See, the big problem is communication. He doesn't **like** to communicate and I'm a
- 2 **huge** communicator (2.0) and so he takes his stand to take it back
- 3 **Jody:** And you can't change that about him
- 4 **Tara:** Well and for me I have to remember that with the communication piece, he's
- 5 playing with the communication. He mixes the communication with manipulation and so
- 6 **I know** that, I can **smell it**, I can **feel it**, I can **see it**
- 7 **Adam:** Yes he does, so Tara, do you have to fight the battle on his terms then? If he feeds
- 8 a piece of line, uh, provokes that action, do you need to throw one back at him
- 9 **Tara:** No, I don't

Tara positioned herself as a communicator and her partner as someone who does not like to communicate and instead "takes his stand". Jody built on this by attributing the actions of Tara's partner to his character, i.e., something that cannot be changed. Tara then elaborated on her partner's actions, describing him as "playing with the communication" and "mixing" it "with manipulation". No one requested details or identified the partner's actions as a form of abuse.

However, in asking Tara about how to respond, Adam, the facilitator, clearly interpreted her account as an account of abuse where the important question is not what happened but how one deals with such abuse. Importantly, Tara identified her senses as the source of her knowing that there is a problem with her partner's communication with her. Again, no one questioned this claim, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of such bodily knowledge.

In the following excerpt (Session 2, 18:15), Jen returned to a previous topic, involving Katy who denied recognizing abuse in her relationships, especially because the abuse became increasingly and unpredictably more severe over time. She positioned herself as not recognizing any "red flags" in the beginning stages of their relationship and equated "red flags" to intuition and bodily feelings. Thus, she claimed to be caught off guard and surprised when, later in the relationship, her partner treated her inappropriately.

- 1 **Lanette:** Well I just really don't know what's normal?
- 2 **Adam:** Sorry to break into this conversation but it's time for a break, so do we want to do
- 3 that or should we continue?
- 4 **Jen:** Can I just say a thing, it's um this is to, um, what's your name?
- 5 **Katy:** Katy
- 6 **Jen:** To Katy, um, about the red flags, this is towards anybody, so when this person is
- 7 treating you not properly, even when you don't know what properly **is**, when something's
- 8 in their actions that is **disrespecting** you or **harming** you, it's like something like a red
- 9 flag from from within, and looking back, I would always pay attention and listen to the
- 10 feeling in my **stomach** (3.0) when things would feel **crazy** or **awry** or or different. And
- 11 to **me**, that's my red flag, and **now**, that's what I listen to, "how does that make me feel
- 12 on the inside?", so it's like a feeling you get, if I get that feeling that it's like "get the h
- 13 out of there" type of feeling, and so, and it would be for **every** situation also, whether you
- 14 think it's normal or not. So I just wanted to say, that that's basically what the red flag is.

Lanette agreed with Katy's previous discussion about uncertainty regarding what is normal versus abnormal in relationships. Although the facilitator suggested a break, Jen negotiated a continuation of the conversation by seeking permission ("Can I just say a thing ...?"). Jen constructed "red flags" as knowledge coming "from within", i.e., based on physical or embodied reactions. She positioned herself as "always" paying attention and listening to the

feeling in her stomach “when things would feel crazy or awry or or different”. Thus, she claimed that being able to distinguish what is normal or abnormal is not as important as feelings. Feelings communicate danger. Positioning herself as knowledgeable on this topic, she didactically re-stated “that’s basically what the red flag is”.

Overall, although the specific abuse accounts were vague here (i.e., as abuse was oriented to but not explicitly described), the women’s references to feminine intuition involving the senses served to strengthen their abuse claims. They drew on the notion of female intuition and bodily senses (i.e., feelings or red flags/warning signs) to claim recognition of abuse and danger. This recognition process, which was described as metaphysical in nature, was never contested. Rather, it was agreed upon by the women and the facilitators.

4.2.3 Negotiating the dangers of remaining in an abusive relationship. On occasion, the women discussed abuse in detail. These were infrequent exceptions to the vague and imprecise referencing of abuse (i.e., labeling of abuse as “it” or “what happened”) that focused on avoidance of revictimization. In particular, physical abuse was raised as a topic when women positioned themselves as indecisive about whether or not to leave their abusive relationships. In the following excerpt (Session 2, 18:25), the women explicitly positioned themselves as victims of physical violence in response to Katy’s debating whether or not to leave her abusive relationship.

- 1 **Katy:** The thing that I’m scared of, is, that I **want** him to get help. The reason why I’m
- 2 here (i.e., still with her partner) is because I want him to get help because he’s the father
- 3 of my baby. So if I am going to leave him or **not**, I mean he’s going to my daughter’s
- 4 place sometime and I don’t even want her to be hurt
- 5 **Pam:** (Crying and inaudible) If they wanna get you they’ll get you (6.0) I locked him out
- 6 of the house and that didn’t even work (inaudible because crying)
- 7 (Tara, the lady sitting beside Pam, grabbed a Kleenex from Adam and then walked out of
- 8 the room. Jody followed her)
- 9 **Katy:** I know but I don’t know what to do, like I want to avoid all the damage, but no
- 10 matter what you do you, I can’t control that

11 **Elyssa:** If he's not okay for **you** than why is he okay for your kid?

12 **Katy:** (Inaudible)

13 **Elyssa:** But then **why** then, **why** are the **courts** involved? They (the courts) are clearly

14 putting restraining orders on these men but why are [they]

15 **Katy:** [But it's] not criminal, it's family

16 court

17 **Elyssa:** Yeah it's hard

18 **Katy:** I'll end up, I'll end up (1.0) be back in a **corner** alone with a **baby** and (2.0) I

19 **can't live** like that

20 **Diana:** I'm going to and tell you that, you do whatever you want, you can do

21 nothing...you know what? If you're not with **him** (2.0) at least the child has a good life

22 when they are with **you**. Whatever happens with daddy, you **can't** control (2.0) what

23 happens when they are with him, that's the sad part. But when they are with you they,

24 like my child already knows at four years old, that like I believe in all the natural stuff,

25 and he would say "mommy I want to kill daddy" and I would say "Tommy, don't talk

26 like that", you know, like he tried, but, like I know, from **my** experience, like this might

27 be like that for you too, but I don't know what it was like for you (2.0) but I've been

28 abused all my life, from my father at **two** years old, **I** had nothing but abusive men (2.0)

29 all my life (crying). You do **not** have **any** idea (3.0) what is normal and what isn't. When

30 I ended up in the hospital or on my way to the hospital, not knowing if I would live or die

31 (Adam walks over and gives her Kleenex)

32 **Diana:** - It was like **wow** (2.0) **this** is not

33 normal. That's when I **got it**. But **before** like shooting guns and shooting and it was

34 normal. But then I got it and it was a life from hell, I was like I did not want my child

35 **seeing** all the abuse that I lived with

36 **Katy:** Right

37 **Diana:** And I'm a proud 49 year old woman and at the hospital the nurses were so nice

38 and they were all like **why** did you put up with it? **Why** were you there?

39 **Katy:** In the hospital they see a lot and I, they were very cold about it and you leave there

40 feeling (2.0) like garbage, I like, they make you feel like crazy, I think, in my opinion

41 anyways

42 **Diana:** From my opinion anyways, my experience was **unbelievable**, so, the doctor there

43 said "Diana, I, can, not **believe** that a man can throw you that hard, and injure you that

44 much. I never dealt with injuries so severe without it being a major car accident"

In response to Katy's expressed hope that her partner could change his abusive behaviour and thus remain in the relationship, Pam cried and provided an account that emphasized safety concerns and the impossibility of being safe. Although not entirely clear due to inaudibility, Pam's account pointed to the physical dangers associated with abusive men, and the risks when women stay in such a relationship. The sensitivity of this topic for all of the women in the group

was further evident when Tara also began to cry and left the room, with the female facilitator following her, presumably to offer support.

When Katy again declared that she did not know what to do and was helpless to control the situation, both Elyssa and Diana proffered arguments emphasizing the necessity of leaving the relationship. In response to Elyssa highlighting the potential dangers for Katy's baby and the involvement of the courts, Katy defended remaining with her partner because it is a family matter and not a criminal matter but also pointed out the difficulties of being a single mother. At this point, Diana entered and offered a detailed account of her experience of abuse that was formulated as an extreme case. Describing herself as having been abused since the age of two, she recounted how only at age 49, when taken to the hospital with life-threatening injuries, did she come to understand that her life was not normal. She also invoked the consensus of experts, the nurses and doctor who cared for her, to support her claims regarding the serious nature of her condition. Katy however distanced herself from Diana's account by describing her own experience in hospital as different. Katy reported that the nurses were cold and she left feeling "like garbage" and "crazy". Diana, however, returned to her account, quoting the doctor as comparing her injuries to those of a victim of "a major car accident". Thus, the women went to great lengths to emphasize the dangers should Katy remain in an abusive relationship. Clearly, throughout the excerpt no one doubted the women's victim status and the more detailed conversation about the experience of physical abuse (and its life threatening consequences) was aimed at countering Katy's expressed ambivalence. Furthermore, these lengthy moments of conversation took place among the women participants with no involvement of the facilitators. Thus, the discussions were driven by the women, for each other, rather than directed or negotiated by the facilitators as part of the group agenda.

The following excerpt further illustrates how the women's accounts focused on physical violence when they challenged another group member about her decision to return to her relationship with a previously abusive partner. Like the previous example, abuse was described explicitly only when the talk turned to avoiding revictimization. Physical violence was constructed as an abusive, dangerous, and feared experience that was clear and uncontested by the participants. By orienting to physical violence, the speakers constrained and encouraged other women to reconsider their decisions and to question their voiced hope that the previously abusive men had changed and were no longer a serious threat. In this excerpt (Session 7; 18:24), Adam, the facilitator, and Lora began by exploring her current situation and recent decision-making during group check-in. Shortly prior to this discursive interchange, Lora had shared how her previously abusive partner was now acting in socially appropriate, non-abusive ways, and that she would be moving back in with him. She explained that both of them have benefited from therapy that focused on their relationship and on the abuse, and that she has instructed her nanny to call the police if she hears "screaming or yelling or anything at all". Her expressed concern was her daughter.

- 1 **Adam:** Sounds like you're doing a lot of self-care
- 2 **Lora:** Yeah and (2.0) my dad gave me money if we ever got separated. So that money is
- 3 away in savings so if anything else happens it's just going to be done effectively and
- 4 quickly and (3.0) yeah. Because if anything happens after this point, because he's gotten
- 5 a lot of help and there's not (2.0) more help, so that's where I'm at right now. And I've
- 6 been having nightmares about saying that in the group (covers her eyes with her hands)
- 7 so
- 8 **Amanda:** Why, what do you afraid of?
- 9 **Lora:** I don't **know** I just I think my biggest fear of **all** of this has happened, is just
- 10 getting judged by everybody right? It's my **biggest** fear, I mean, I have friends whose
- 11 husbands have cheated on them or whatever and I had my own opinions about them in
- 12 my head and **now** I realize I had no **right** to think that of them because I was never in
- 13 their situation, you know? So, I guess, that's my biggest fear
- 14 **Pam:** But you never gave him the chance before in your heart, that it's right, you did the
- 15 right thing
- 16 **Lora:** Well I **feel** that I am

17 **Pam:** Yeah
18 **Lora:** And if I didn't feel that, if I didn't feel that I wouldn't be doing this so
19 **Pam:** That's right and you may wonder in the future if you should have given him the
20 chance
21 **Elyssa:** Well was he physically violent before?
22 **Lora:** Before?
23 **Elyssa:** Like when you were together the last time
24 **Lora:** Well I mean I **charged** him right
25 **Elyssa:** He has potential to be extremely violent
26 **Lora:** Yeah violent but not extremely violent. Like he's been charged and there's a court
27 case coming up in July (2.0) um (2.0) that's going to be really awkward. But I made it
28 really clear that that's **his** problem not mine. But I don't know what's going to happen.
29 So
30 **Elyssa:** Well you know how he can be right? He **can** beat you up again, leave you
31 bleeding
32 **Lora:** Yeah well yeah I am definitely never drinking around him ever again. Because last
33 time I couldn't react, I **felt** like I couldn't react. That's why I quit drinking, to drink. So I
34 will never drink around him **ever** again, that's for sure. So I don't know, it's definitely
35 different you know (2.0) but
36 **Pam:** I don't know

Prior to this excerpt, Lora positioned herself as wanting to work on her relationship with her previously abusive partner, and do this in a cautious way. Adam summed up Lora's positioning as engaging in "self-care", thereby giving her further opportunity to elaborate. She described in some detail her contingency plans for leaving the relationship should her partner be abusive in the future and closed this turn by positioning herself as being afraid of sharing her intention to return to her partner with the group (i.e., "And I've been having nightmares about saying that in the group (covers her eyes with her hands) so"). This shifted the focus from Lora and her partner (along with the facilitator who had taken a non-judgmental stance) to the group and Lora's relationships with the other women. Not surprisingly, one of the other women, Amanda, asked for clarification of what Lora feared. Using an extreme case formulation, Lora identified "being judged" as her fear ("I think my biggest fear of **all** of this has happened, is just getting judged by everybody right? It's my **biggest** fear..."). Clearly, Lora anticipated criticism from the other women, despite having detailed her reasons and her safety plans. This was a tricky

comment as, on the one hand, by acknowledging that the other women in the group might disagree with her, she made it more difficult for them to voice that disagreement, i.e., they could not simply state their disagreement but would have to justify it. On the other hand, the other women could interpret her expressed fear of being judged as an accusation that they were judgmental rather than supportive of one another, potentially leading to conflict among the group members. Lora, however, smoothed this over by using herself as an example and telling a story with a moral ending. Although she had “opinions” about her friends who had cheating husbands, she now understood that she had no right to do this because she did not understand their unique context/situation. In this way, she positioned herself as no different from the other members of the group, who might now be judging her as she had judged her friends. Thus, Lora anticipated that the other women might be skeptical of her remaining hopeful that she and her partner could create a non-abusive relationship and worked to criticize their doing so in such a way that would make it difficult for them to openly criticize her.

Lora’s strategic, implicit criticism of the group was initially effective in eliciting support from one of the group members, Pam. Elyssa, however, challenged Lora by asking about physical violence. Lora did not answer directly and instead stalled the conversation by asking for clarification of what point in time Elyssa was asking about (“before”) and then responding indirectly by stating that she had charged him. Using an extreme case formulation, Elyssa noted that Lora’s partner has “potential to be extremely violent”. Use of the word “potential” implied that the problem with Lora’s partner (i.e., that he is a physically violent person) is deep-seated and not readily amenable to change. How does one eliminate a “potential”? Lora’s initial response was to moderate the criticism of her partner by re-positioning him as “violent, but not extremely violent”. For the remainder of the excerpt, Lora continued to defend herself.

Acknowledging an impending court case, which she described as “awkward” (presumably, because they would be living together when the case went to court), she worked to re-position herself as being realistic and knowing how to take care of herself. She distanced herself from taking any responsibility for the outcome of the court case and declared that she would not drink alcohol in her partner’s company so that she would be able to “react” should he become abusive. This allowed her to state that “...it’s definitely different”, despite Elyssa’s utilization of vivid language, emphasizing the life-threatening consequences of physical violence (“leave you bleeding”). Nevertheless, she lost Pam’s support (“I don’t know”).

Thus, the threat of physical violence was used as a counter-argument in cases where women entertained the possibility that their abusive partners would change sufficiently to allow for the relationship to continue in the future. Within the women’s groups, it was only in this context that the nature of abuse (mainly as a physically violent phenomenon) was described or discussed in any detail. This discursive work focusing on physical violence and danger occurred despite women’s strategic employment of strategies to avoid criticism.

In some cases, detailed discussion of physical violence focused on its life-threatening nature to bolster the seriousness of the abuse. As in the last two excerpts, these conversational turns occurred after one group member minimized the serious nature of abuse or contemplated returning to an abusive partner or remaining with an abusive partner. In the following excerpt from the tenth session (19:51), Diana was questioned about whether her partner was truly abusive.

- 1 **Jen:** Well is your husband really calculating?
- 2 **Diana:** I don’t know? Um (4.0) maybe
- 3 **Jen:** Is he like that?
- 4 **Diana:** I don’t know
- 5 **Tara:** Have you ever seen him act like that?
- 6 **Diana:** I, that, (3.0) maybe?

7 **Tara:** Like does he get violent physically or?
8 **Diana:** Well like sometimes
9 **Tara:** Like once a day or once a week?
10 **Diana:** Well it **depends**, if I challenge him then it's more frequent and if I **don't** then
11 yeah
12 **Tara:** So if you get in his way than he [gets all
13 **Diana:** [Yeah (grabs her water bottle)
14 **Lora:** Well he **strangled** you right? You said that once before, right? He put his hands on
15 your neck
16 **Diana:** Yeah
17 **Jody:** Well **that's** something to be careful of
18 **Diana:** **Yeah** well he didn't **mean** to choke me, like (all women started saying something
19 in negative tones) he just put his hands around my neck
20 **Lora:** But that's choking, that's somebody trying to kill you
21 **Diana:** It is a threat
22 **Lora:** That is somebody trying to cut off your circulation, right? and **that's** why, in my
23 situation it's aggregated assault because that's trying to kill someone and (2.0) the intent
24 to kill someone, strangling is the intent to kill someone, it's not just to, it's serious
25 **Pam:** That's when mine did that to me, that's when I left him
26 **Diana:** He didn't do that
27 **Pam:** Well
28 **Tara:** It's just like why do they touch you, like why is his hands on you anyway?
29 **Lora:** Yeah
30 **Lanette:** That's really scary in a relationship isn't it?
31 **Diana:** Yeah that really changed our relationship when he did that
32 **Tara:** Um hm
33 **Elyssa:** Yeah
34 **Diana:**...yeah, he will get back at me, if I challenge him and then...

The conversation began by Jen and Tara asking Diana if her husband is “calculating”. On each occasion as she attempted to answer the question, Diana, perhaps not understanding the meaning, paused for a rather long period of time and offered a “maybe”. Tara then asked directly about his being violent, which oriented the conversation to physical abuse. Diana however continued to use tentative language (e.g., “Well like sometimes”). What followed, was a conversation in which a number of participants sought to clarify the nature of the abuse that Diana had experienced. This took several turns, as Diana minimized the violence. She initially clarified that he was violent more frequently when she challenged him. Lora then negotiated the conversation away from the implication that Diana was somehow responsible for the physical

violence by mentioning Diana's previous report that he had strangled her. Diana however minimized his actions ("he didn't **mean** to choke me"). At this point, almost all members of the group jumped into the conversation with disagreeing phrases ("uh", "no, not at all", etc.) that were difficult to decipher and transcribe. When Lora described this as him "trying to kill you", Diana again minimized ("It is a threat"). Lora then offered a more detailed explanation of how strangling constitutes an intentional attempt to kill someone. This account of physical violence as life threatening was bolstered by Pam's statement that she left her partner when he strangled her. Nevertheless, Diana continued to deny that her husband had tried to kill her, and Tara redirected the conversation to the question of physical contact generally. Although Diana agreed that this can be frightening and changed her relationship, she concluded that it is only a problem when she challenges her partner. In this case, then, the group was unsuccessful in convincing Diana that she was in a dangerous relationship.

4.2.4 Summary. Brief and nondescriptive terms (such as "it", "what happened", or simply "abuse") were used commonly to refer to abuse, which was generally not described in detail. The women drew on the notion of intuition and direct experience through bodily senses to account for their knowing when they were abused. Thus, the women positioned themselves as victims of abuse without offering detailed accounts to justify that positioning. Importantly, this positioning was taken for granted by other participants and the facilitators. However, this did not disrupt conversation, as all group participants and both facilitators shared insider knowledge about intimate partner abuse. This demonstrated how victim status was taken for granted and descriptions of the abuse were not required or requested. An exception to the absence of detailed talk about abuse were moments when the women negotiated the danger or risk of revictimization. In these conversational contexts, group members provided graphic descriptions

of the physical abuse they endured, the consequences of that physical abuse, and the intended life-threatening nature of the physical violence. Mainly, such conversations focused on discouraging a specific woman from re-engaging in a relationship with a former abusive partner or choosing not to leave, and running the risk of revictimization. Thus, they worked hard to convince one another that they need to be careful (hence the detail-oriented descriptions of past abuse). It was not always successful at moving women past their ambivalence however.

4.3 Comparison of Men's and Women's Abuse Account Discourse

The level of detail and the nature of the details that the men and the women provided clearly differed. In the TFTB group, the men spent the majority of their group talk describing their reported experiences from different angles and negotiating their subject positions in relation to the specific context. The construction of chronological accounts served to build a reasonable case that they were abused, even if part of the conflict was mutual. Women's accounts of their experiences, on the other hand, were considerably more vague, imprecise, and non-descriptive. The vagueness in their abuse accounts, however, did not cause trouble in the conversational flow. The absence of questions or challenges in the YNA group implies that there was a consensus or mutual understanding about the women's positioning as victims of abuse and the nature of their experiences as abusive.

The only times that the women did draw on extreme case formulations by focusing on physical violence was when conversations focused on avoiding revictimization. In these discursive contexts, abuse was described and the effects of physical abuse were rhetorically managed through reference to the consensus of experts (e.g., doctors and nurses) in the service of emphasizing the dangers of returning to abusive partners or convincing each other not to do so. Thus, women constructed more detailed accounts of their physical abuse (that was life-

threatening in nature) when a group member claimed that her abusive partner could change and be non-abusive, a woman declared her intention to return to her abusive partner (i.e., re-engage in that relationship); or a group member claimed that she was not abused by her partner. This contrasted with the men's detailed accounts of abuse, which were focused on what led up to the abuse and who should take responsibility.

The discursive resources used within the two groups to position the group members as victims and construct their experiences also varied, yet some were shared. In the men's group, these included orienting to a specific situation, working up the chronological order of events, using direct quotations, drawing on the female gender category to highlight the inappropriateness of their partners' actions (particularly when positioning them as bad mothers who victimized not only the men but their children as well), using extreme case formulations to describe their partners' actions against them, and drawing on the reactions of credible others who judged their partners' actions as abusive. The extensive use of multiple rhetorical tools to position themselves as victims and construct their experiences as abusive fits with the men's repeated reference to the general notion of men being judged as the perpetrators instead of the victims of women's abuse. In the women's group, detailed descriptions of the abuse were rare, as abuse was referred to as "it" or "what happened". Thus, abuse was taken for granted in the women's groups in a way that it was not within the men's groups. However, the women drew on the gendered notion of female intuition and their instinctive feelings and bodily reactions to construct accounts of how they were certain they were being abused. The utilization of female intuition was never contested by the other women or facilitators, rather it was supported and built upon.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Responses to Abuse

5.1 A Turn for the Better (The Men's Group)

In this chapter, I present my analysis of the men's group talk focusing on responses to abuse, i.e., accounts about resisting abuse. This encompasses analysis of group participants' accounts of how they responded to or resisted their partner's abuse as well as how facilitators negotiated with the participants regarding appropriate and effective responses to abuse.

5.1.1 Karpman's Triangle: How not to respond to abuse. Karpman's Triangle is a psychoeducational resource and an integral element of the TFTB program. Not surprisingly, it was frequently raised in the group by the facilitators. As such, it constitutes an important discursive resource that is relevant to the topic "responding to abuse". It was introduced to the group in the following way (Session 5; 19:41).

1 **Ed:** And we have an exercise here, it's the **Karpman's Triangle** and we thought we
2 would talk about it here as a group. But his Karpman's Triangle is basically a way of
3 understanding (2.0) uh, the different roles people can take in a conflict. Sometimes
4 people can hold on for a very **long** period of time and it comes to be a big role that they
5 play, or it can be a role that people play for one period of time. So basically what it **is**
6 (2.0) is the ways that we can interact with another person in an unhealthy way that serves
7 to perpetuate the conflict as opposed to solving the conflict and being in a healthy way of
8 interacting with the person. So basically, some people know about these roles, one of
9 them is aggressive, (writing it on the board) this is one role or position that someone can
10 take on, another position that someone can take **on** is the rescuer role (writes on the
11 board), and the last one is the victim role (writes on the board)... We should also point
12 out that people can float around in the triangle. Even in one interaction you can go from
13 side to side to side.

To summarize, the male facilitator (Ed) explained that the Karpman's Triangle represents three "unhealthy roles" that a person can adopt when engaging in a conflict or an abusive situation: victim, aggressor, and rescuer. Such roles are labeled unhealthy, presumably because they perpetuate the conflict instead of solving it. Ed also explained that a role could be held for

both a short and a long period of time. Finally, one person can take on all three roles in a single interaction.

5.1.2 Construction of a gendered problem: How to respond to abuse without being aggressive. Gender norms and discourses of masculinity were taken up by the men and the facilitators to co-construct a gendered problem that was continually being worked out in the group talk, particularly when addressing men's responses to abuse. Session 1 (19:42) is an example of repeated references to the gendered norm that boys/men should never hurt or hit women.

- 1 **Richard:** To me this means, like, well because a **man** is stronger than a woman, like in
- 2 most cases, so like when she tries to (3.0) take you by force, it just doesn't seem **fair** that
- 3 you can't use that **same** force back. It's always this fear in your mind that if you do
- 4 anything you are in deep deep shit, so then your hands are tied behind your back, and you
- 5 are thinking "great, you know, I used to work out you know and do all this stuff you
- 6 know and this chick is steering me" and there's nothing I can freakin do. It's BS you
- 7 know, so

Richard's claim drew on discourses of masculinity as he oriented to the notion of chivalry. That is, as a man, who is physically stronger than most women, he ought to not use physical force towards a woman, but instead protect her (Connell, 1996; Lea & Auburn, 2001; Stobbe, 2005; Wood, 2004). Employing the metaphor "hands tied behind his back" and asserting his muscular physique (i.e., "I used to work out"), he emphasized his helplessness in the face of women's abuse. In this way, he maintained a masculine identity as being strong, while also positioning himself as a victim. He claimed that although he is a strong and fit man, he is prevented from utilizing his strength to protect himself from his partner, despite it being a "fair" and reasonable response ("it just doesn't seem **fair**") to his abusive partner's control over him ("this chick is steering me"). Although he did not state it explicitly, he implied that there would be a problem if he responded physically to his partner's abuse ("if you do anything you are in

deep deep shit”). Richard neither elaborated on this, nor was called upon by the others to elaborate, an indication that the reasons behind the problem were readily understood. This taken for granted knowledge clearly involved the norm forbidding men to be physically aggressive with women (Richard had referred to this at lines 2-3), but also the likelihood that when men are physically aggressive toward women, the immediate reaction of others is to assume that he is the abusive partner. By referencing and challenging the gendered norm that men should not hit women, Richard constructed a dilemma that men face with regard to responding appropriately to abuse without using aggression.

5.1.3 Mobilizing Karpman’s Triangle: Discouraging aggressiveness. Throughout the men’s groups, the conversation frequently centered on the dilemma Richard constructed in the previous excerpt, i.e., how to respond to a partner’s aggression in non-aggressive ways. Thus the men’s accountability became a major focus of the group talk. In subtle ways, the facilitators positioned the men as accountable for their own conduct and responsible for the ways that they responded to the abuse. They frequently did this by asking questions.

The following excerpt (Session 5; 20:34) in which the facilitators explicitly drew on Karpman’s Triangle provides an example of how responding to someone who is being aggressive and abusive was worked up as a problem.

- 1 **Ken:** I (2.0) here’s the problem side of this, it’s when you’re in an abusive relationship, I
- 2 find that when I’m in it I almost **mirror** that behavior? So if she’s aggressive I’m
- 3 aggressive back, it’s **tough** to stay in a healthy triangle when you’re living in an
- 4 unhealthy triangle. (**Linda** hands out sheets) Do you know what I mean?
- 5 **Chris:** I I totally know what you mean, it’s almost like you’re **forced** into it, because you
- 6 can’t communicate with crazy
- 7 **Ken:** No (laughs)
- 8 **Chris:** So you just decide to stop
- 9 **Ken:** (laughs) **That** that makes me see that you understand. You can’t communicate with
- 10 crazy. When you’re trying to be a **rational** person trying to communicate on a **logical**
- 11 plane and you’re **not** getting through, that’s why, because they are on a **completely**
- 12 different realm

13 **Ed:** So where does that put you on the triangle? If they are?
14 **Ken:** They are judgmental and I I guess that's where I feel like I'm judgmental because
15 I'm calling them on their crazy.
16 **Ed:** **Exactly**, if you're calling someone crazy you're being aggressive, you're acting
17 aggressively. Um, I think that when people interact (1.0) in these roles (2.0) they're
18 **inviting** those other people they're with into these roles, I think what you're saying is, if
19 my partner is acting aggressively, it makes **me** want to act aggressively back
20 **Ken:** Yeah
21 **Ed:** And (2.0) you're saying that when someone is acting in that role that's inviting you
22 into that triangle
23 **Ken:** Yeah totally, exactly
24 **Linda:** So how do you **choose** not to go into that triangle?
25 **Ken:** Exactly?
26 **Chris:** But **they** may decide not to disengage no matter what you do
27 **Linda:** Your partner may not
28 **Chris:** Yeah (2.0) so you can be trying to be in the good triangle for hours and hours and
29 hours and (4.0) you know, and then it might not help

Ken worked up the problem of being in an abusive relationship as his tendency to mirror his partner's aggressiveness (i.e., "if she's aggressive, I'm aggressive back") and the difficulties of responding in a healthy, non-aggressive way. Chris built on Ken's construction of the problem by positioning himself as "knowing" what Ken knows and positioning his partner as "crazy". He provided a justification for their aggressive responses and claimed that they had no options ("you can't communicate with crazy"). Ken confirmed that Chris understood and elaborated by contrasting their being rational and logical with their crazy women partners who are "on a completely different realm". This reproduced traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, i.e., logical, rational men vs. emotional, irrational women, and reinforced Chris's claim that non-aggressive responses do not work.

Ed, the facilitator, then used the Karpman's Triangle resource by asking "So where does that put you on the triangle?" which worked to redirect the conversation to the men's accountability in the abusive situation. Overall, Ed's contribution to the conversation involved building on the problem that Ken and Chris had co-constructed (i.e., that when one acts in a

particular way that invites the other person to act in a similar way). He invited Ken and Chris to reflect on their actions in response to their partners' aggressiveness, effectively calling into question the appropriateness of the men's stated responses to the abuse. Ed also refocused the discussion away from the specifics of the men's interactions with their partners to what they were doing within the group (i.e., speaking aggressively by labeling their partners as "crazy"). Ken initially positioned himself as "judgmental" in "calling them on their crazy", but Ed positioned him as aggressive (i.e., "**Ed: Exactly**, if you're calling someone crazy you're being aggressive, you're acting aggressively"). As the conversation continued, Ken accepted responsibility for being aggressive and agreed with Ed. Linda then joined in with a question that challenged the men to consider alternatives to going into the triangle. Ken responded with a question and Chris constructed a further problem related to the partner's lack of cooperation. At this point, the conversational topic shifted and the questions that were raised were not followed-up on. Importantly, the problem that was raised was never directly answered. Moreover, Linda and Chris worked up the alternative as a problem in lines 26-29.

The above excerpt illustrates the working up of a gendered problem (i.e., how men are to appropriately respond to women's abuse) through the facilitators' questioning that drew on a specific therapeutic tool (i.e., Karpman's Triangle). More specifically, it points to how the facilitators held the men accountable for being aggressive and encouraged them to consider non-aggressive alternatives. Finally, although an alternative response was suggested and encouraged, neither the facilitators nor the men constructed this alternative regarding appropriate, non-aggressive ways that men can respond to women's abuse. The excerpt ended with no practical solution to the men's problem.

When the men were accounting for their actions during abusive interactions with their female partners, their responses were often defensive, which underscores the difficulty of solving the dilemma of responding non-aggressively to someone's aggressive actions. Excerpt Session 9 (20:04) is another example of how referring to Karpman's Triangle raised the question of the men's accountability but also was not always helpful in exploring alternatives to an aggressive response to their partner's abuse. Here, the group was discussing Chris's family patterns that he shared in a genogram activity. Specifically, Chris stated that his father tended to have infrequent "blow ups" due to stress at work and the rest of the group compared Chris's current character and actions to his father's.

- 1 **Ken:** Yeah like your dad had those **blow ups**, and stuff like that, like so you chose not to
2 take that route?
3 **Chris:** Yeah I don't, well, I **can't** really say that, because like I said, like after several
4 hours of being screamed at, like after she told me that I wanted to sleep with my parents
5 **Ken:** What?
6 **Chris:** Yeah she was just (Ken laughs) And she would just get incredibly angry and I I
7 would **explode** as well, I mean there's **lines** that people just can't cross, right? [so
8 **Ken:** [I just
9 can't believe that somebody would say that
10 **Chris:** Yeah (2.0) and so I mean I I **would** explode, yes, so she would just be coming at
11 me and attack attack and attack, and she might be at this level up here (puts arm up), like
12 for seven hours or eight hours loong, and then for just like this two minute window I
13 was at this level (puts arm up higher than where he had it before)
14 **Ken:** And so you would just lose it, and you've had enough
15 **Chris:** Yes and I would just **lose** it, I I remember like I would be sitting at the computer
16 and after she had been yelling at me all morning, from like 7 o'clock in the morning to
17 noon, and then I would have a shower, and then from one until two she would start again,
18 and said that I want to be in bed with my sister, and I was with the mouse, like, I just
19 **smashed** it (quickly and firmly hits the floor with his hand and then snaps his fingers)
20 **Ken:** Like you snap
21 **Chris:** Yeah I just lost it
22 **Ken:** And **then** did she point out how "Oh, look at how you're being"?
23 **Chris:** Yeah and then it's like "oh well you're being abusive" and I'm like "you threw a
24 **chair** at me this morning (2.0) and then you pushed me down the stairs, so I then I just
25 broke the mouse" and you know like?
26 **Linda:** But according to the [triangle
27 **Chris:** [But but], but the **problem** for **me** is like, I can **sit** there and
28 **try** to calm her down and say all the things in the world, I could hug her I could hold her,

29 I'd probably get kicked in the nuts. I would say I gotta get out of the house then I would
30 get pushed down the stairs, so you just end up just standing there and then I am just
31 taking it (2.0) And then if you start fighting back it it gets worse
32 **Linda:** Where do you think you were on the triangle?
33 **Chris: The victim**
34 **Ed:** Oh I know, and I'm agreeing, but **but** it's very hard when everything turns into
35 violence, it's very **hard** to get out of that
36 **Chris:** So that's why I can't compare that to my parents because I don't know anyone
37 else that's been in my situation

Ken compared Chris to his father and positioned him as choosing to avoid “blow ups”, i.e., as someone who responds appropriately (non-aggressively). Chris, however, rejected this positioning and instead positioned himself as exploding “after several hours of being screamed at”. He provided a lengthy and relatively detailed account of his partner’s verbal and physical abuse that in one case culminated in his smashing his computer mouse on the floor. Thus, he set up a contrast between his momentary explosive response and the more sustained abuse of his partner to warrant his aggressive response. Ken positioned himself as understanding Chris’s account, summarizing Chris’s response (“you snap”) and guessing what Chris’s ex-girlfriend said (“Oh, look at how you’re being”). Chris picked up the story and added that his girlfriend accused him of being abusive. Thus, in focusing on the actions of Chris and his partner, Ken raised the question of accountability. In response, Chris defended his action of breaking the mouse and himself as a reasonable person by listing the ways in which his partner was aggressive towards him and emphasizing that her actions were more extreme (i.e., throwing a chair, pushing him down the stairs).

Linda however challenged Chris’s positioning as a man who responded aggressively but reasonably, by referring to the Karpman’s triangle (“But according to the triangle”). Even though she did not complete her phrase about the triangle, it served as a powerful resource in that Chris immediately defended himself by arguing that he could have tried a number of non-aggressive

responses (“all the things in the world”) and they would not have been helpful. In order to do this, he had to draw on shared knowledge regarding Karpman’s Triangle and ways of responding that are deemed to be appropriate. Linda, however, did not let Chris conclude this conversational turn with his explanation and repeated her triangle reference (“Where do you think you were on the triangle?”). In this way, she once again challenged Chris and held him accountable for his stated response to his partner’s abuse, effectively ignoring his argument about the ineffectiveness of non-aggressive responses. Chris responded by identifying himself as “**the victim**”, thereby focussing on his partner’s actions. Ed then intervened by agreeing with Chris’s positioning as victim and stressing the difficulty in dealing with conflict when one’s responses are consistently met with violence. Ed’s use of “but, **but**,” in between these two sympathetic comments placed emphasis on the challenge of responding non-aggressively (it’s very hard) but implied that it is possible as he described it as “very hard” instead of as “impossible”. Thus, Ed, as the male facilitator, supported Linda’s attempt to hold Chris accountable and to prompt Chris to consider alternatives that would work. He did so however by trying to first establish some common ground between himself and Chris, a different tactic than the one used by Linda (a direct questioning of Chris’s actions through the program’s educational tools). Both facilitators, however, ignored Chris’s arguments about the ineffectiveness of alternatives that he was familiar with. The upshot was that the conversation about responses to abuse shut down. Notably, Chris did not agree or disagree with Ed. Rather, he concluded this discussion by returning to the original topic, a comparison of his relationship with his girlfriend to his parents’ relationship, claiming that his relationship was unique and bringing the conversation full circle. Thus, the facilitators were unsuccessful in re-positioning Chris from the victim role within Karpman’s Triangle to the role of agent responding non-aggressively outside the triangle. Engaging with

Chris regarding the non-aggressive responses that he identified might have had a different outcome.

The following excerpt from Session 8 (18:38) again involves a facilitator questioning one of the men's accounts in terms of his responsibility for perpetuating the abusiveness in the relationship. The facilitators were leading a check-in, where each man was asked how the previous week went. John provided a detailed account of "a serious run-in" with his girlfriend who becomes angry and abusive when she drinks.

- 1 **John:** Yeah, so that was Tuesday night (2.0) uh, Wednesday night we had a **repeat** of
2 that **again** but this time we got stupid, this time we decided that we would consume
3 **massive** amounts of medications and drugs with the intent to kill herself
4 **Linda:** What about **your** response to that? I'm more interested in **your** changes than the
5 continuing behaviour of your partner. What made the change in perhaps what you did? In
6 the way that she's acting and what you're doing, what made the change, perhaps, in what
7 **you** should do?
8 **John:** Yeah but she's so ignorant, I **tried** to **help** her, like to get her to throw it up and
9 then she seemed to treat me like she was on the streets, like I don't know what the heck
10 she was doing, she was taking the medications, and was right out of it (3.0) falling down,
11 blacking out, even though I was trying to help her. And then finally I said "if you really
12 want to kill yourself you should just walk out in the night with your (Inaudible), instead
13 of doing it like a little **wuss**" with her pills and stuff. And that got her [mad
14 **Linda:** [So did] you think you went
15 back to the triangle?
16 **John:** Yeeeah, I just, yeeeah, you know, something like that, I just thought ["no"
17 **Linda:** [I'm]
18 wondering if that's more you know, aggressive
19 **John:** **Yeah** I was a bit **aggressive** and then of course (1.0) she **responded** by removing
20 her clothing (chuckling), running outside, and standing on the porch, and yelling and
21 screaming and flopping around and passing out and collapsing (2.0) **so** bad that the
22 neighbours ended up calling the police, so at midnight there's a knock on the door,
23 there's about four police at my door, and I thought "Oh Christ, here we go again" and
24 they said something like "We understand there's a problem **here**, there's someone being
25 panicked or something" and I was like "no no, my girlfriend is trying to commit suicide
26 like I tried to call 911 but she pulled the phone **off** the wall and she's acting like a fool
27 running outside, you know, naked"

John provided a vivid and detailed account of an incident where his girlfriend over-dosed on drugs, presumably in an attempt to commit suicide. He distanced himself from her actions and

belittled her by using the pronoun “we”. In addition, he positioned her as “stupid” and used maximizing language that emphasized the extremeness of her actions (“**massive**”) and the repetition of such behavior (“**repeat**”, “**again**”). Not surprisingly, given that John’s language would fit the aggressive role within Karpman’s Triangle, Linda refocused the conversation from the partner’s actions to change and growth in relation to John’s actions, i.e., how they were different from previous occasions or, if they were not different, how they “should” be different. John initially defended himself (“yeah but, she’s so ignorant”) and emphasized that he tried to help her (“I **tried** to help her”). He offered a detailed account of the assistance offered and his partner’s unresponsiveness. He ended the story (“And then finally”) by describing how he taunted her about killing herself.

Linda’s reference to the triangle challenged the appropriateness of John’s reported actions during the Wednesday incident and positioned him as acting aggressively. If she had agreed with his actions, likely she would have offered some recognition that he had changed in a positive direction. Although she put it in the form of a question about what he thought (“So did you think you went back to the triangle”), the implication of the question is that he ought to have been thinking about his actions in terms of what he was learning in the TFTB program. John clearly recognized Linda’s question as a worthy criticism, as he provided a drawn-out “Yeeeah...something like that” but did not explicitly comment on the appropriateness of his actions. Linda put it explicitly, although still adopting an open style (“I’m wondering if that’s more you know, aggressive”). At this point, John acknowledged his aggressiveness but used minimizing language (“a bit”) and refocused on his girlfriend’s conduct. In describing the interaction with the police, he first oriented to the fear of being mistaken for a perpetrator (“Oh Christ, here we go again”) and then positioned himself as being a responsible person in calling

911 but unable to do more due to his girlfriend's actions. Similar to the example with Chris, the facilitator was unsuccessful in positioning John so that he would be accountable for his actions and not continue to place the blame on his girlfriend. Again, one might argue, that if Linda had picked up on the details of John's account and thoroughly discussed the assistance he offered as a means of both recognizing and undermining his self-positioning as the "good guy", she might have had more success.

As the analyses of these excerpts show, when the facilitators held the men accountable for their contributions to the abusive relationships and labeled some of their actions aggressive, the men resisted the facilitators' positioning. In subtle ways the facilitators put into question men's victim status as they questioned the men's accounts in terms of their responsibility for perpetuating the abuse in the relationship and questioned the men's language use which often fit with an aggressive role. These conversations ended with the men returning to the topic that led to these critical interactions, without any resolution to the question of how they might have responded differently to their partners' abusiveness and whether it is possible to avoid aggressive actions altogether. Overall, the talk pointed to the facilitators' difficulty in positioning the men as accountable for their actions.

5.1.4 Walking away as the assertive response. On occasion, the facilitators and other men proposed explicit alternative responses to abuse that did not involve reciprocating with aggression. One of these was "walking away". In the following excerpt from Session 7 (18:52), the facilitator constructed an account of "walking away" as the most assertive and effective response for men when being abused by their women partners. Prior to this excerpt, John provided an account of emotional and verbal abuse where his woman partner was telling him that his children secretly dislike him.

1 **John:** ... now I'm more calm you know now I **say** something to her I say "well you're
2 full of BS" you know "you're just saying this, I know for a **fact**, in my **heart** that what
3 you're saying isn't the truth". You know I was **hurt**, and I can actually put it **aside** and
4 realize that it's a very very childish weapon that she uses against me to to psychologically
5 shake me or to cause me to be emotionally (2.0) upset or unstable. And I know she used it
6 to a great effect and no, I sort of, I just **shrug** it off now
7 **Linda:** You talk about a very powerful way of being resistant (**John:** Yeah) in terms of
8 knowing that it's not true
9 **John:** I just step away from it, I know that it's just a way she and I realized that this is
10 just the way she is, uh, it's a tactic that she probably used in the past with her other
11 relationships. And uh, she figures, it works **good** and I think I was falling for it in the past
12 year or so and it caused some (2.0) some issues within myself and now I just realized it's
13 just it's just the only weapon she really has to reach for, like she's very **defenseless**
14 without it [so I
15 **Linda:** [So you] said that you're able to walk away from it now, how were you able to
16 do that now?
17 **John:** Oh I wouldn't say anything now, my last response is (2.0) that "you're telling me
18 that I'm a loser because I got laid off and all this stuff, and this is from a person who
19 hasn't worked in 10 years" you know, that kind of shut her up.
20 **Linda:** What about, would you **choose** to respond and stop that abuse and and, instead of
21 telling her that you haven't worked in 10 years or whatever and not having that
22 **aggressive** jab back
23 **John:** I started yeah putting her in her place and she would say "you silly bastard you
24 shouldn't be making fun of me" and she would say other things
25 **Linda:** So it spiraled a little bit
26 **John:** It **spiraled** a little bit, and then she sort of, I stepped, I think I stepped away a little
27 and was like whatever, and I left the room
28 **Linda:** When you were thinking about that, the first part of that resistance it sounds like
29 it was very assertive (**John:** Yeah) but then walking away, would you think that would be
30 **more** effective?
31 **John:** Oh I've **done** that quite a few times (2.0) but she just keeps blaming and blaming
32 and you can sort of tell when she's in the mood to start and get abusive and so I would
33 just leave the room or I would get out of the house (2.0) and just let her sit there and fret
34 or whatever
35 **Linda:** That's **powerful** because you make her responsible for her own behaviour
36 **John:** Sometimes it works (2.0) like it didn't work two weeks ago when she was arguing
37 with me about something, so I went to my room and I finally got to sleep, and then when
38 I woke up in the morning (2.0) there she was at my door. God I couldn't believe it, the
39 argument **continued**. Like I she was up all night uh um and so I basically walked, I had
40 to get dressed and went to work. And left her standing there

John positioned himself as a changed man – now he is “more calm”, knows that his partner does not speak the truth, and is hurt by what she says but able to “put it aside” (“shrug it off”). He positioned his partner as an immature aggressor, using a “childish weapon” that once

had “great effect”. He contrasted his emotional state now with his partner’s intent – to “psychologically shake me” and make him emotionally upset. Linda redefined his experience in psychological terms as “being resistant” and used maximizing language to emphasize its importance (“very powerful”). John then redefined his response to the abuse as “stepping away from it” and offered a psychologizing account that again positioned his partner as relatively insignificant. He referred to her abusiveness as “a tactic” that she acquired in previous relationships where it was effective. In his case, it had also worked - he “was falling for it”, a choice of words that emphasized the absence of truth in his partner’s abusive talk, and it caused “some issues within” him. He then returned to the “weapon” metaphor and positioned her as being “defenseless” without this abusive tactic. Effectively, John positioned himself as a victim and focused on his partner’s abusiveness, positioning her as the perpetrator who used a single weapon against him.

Linda, however, worked to return the conversation to the topic of walking away, requesting more information about “how” he does that now. Interestingly, John responded that he “wouldn’t saying anything now”, but then offered a “last response” that involved insulting his partner. Linda held John accountable for this aggressive response by posing a question regarding choosing a response that would “stop the abuse” and defining his “last response” as an “aggressive jab back”. At this point, John positioned himself as having been aggressive, describing his actions as “putting her in her place”. Linda introduced the metaphor of a “spiral” to describe what happens when two people respond to one another with aggressive comments. Both she and John used minimizing language in describing what happened to John (i.e., “it spiraled a bit”). Linda followed up John’s talking about leaving the room by returning to the notion of resistance and asking him to elaborate on the effectiveness of walking away. Referring

back to John's initial act of resistance – remaining calm – as “very assertive”, in her question, Linda implied that walking away might be even better (note her stressed intonation on the word “**more**”). John's initial response denied the effectiveness of walking away in relation to changing his partner, but Linda again worked to construct walking away as a useful response, emphasizing that it was “powerful” because it made his partner responsible for her own actions. John's agreement with this was partial at best however. He responded that “sometimes” it works but then gave an example of it not working, and again constructed the problem as his partner's resistance to change. Thus, John and Linda talked past one another and constructed different problems – for John the problem was a partner who continues to be verbally abusive and for Linda the problem was John's continuing to verbally engage with his partner rather than refuse to become involved in an aggressive dialogue and walk away. Here, the topic changed with neither problem being resolved.

Looking at this through the discourse of gender, one might interpret Linda's language of resistance, assertiveness, and power as strategic in also speaking the language of masculinity. John did not oppose any of Linda's claims made with this language, but he also did not embrace her claims with any enthusiasm. It seems that this discourse was not a useful resource for either Linda or John to re-articulate the problem of John's relationship with his partner in a way that would lead John to accept responsibility for finding a new way of responding to relationship conflict and perhaps walking away from an otherwise abusive relationship.

In Session 4 (18:50), the facilitator and another man in the group, Ted, suggested leaving the situation as a response to abuse. Both Ken and Chris however resisted the therapeutically-preferred outcome of leaving their partners as a way of effectively responding to the abuse. The

excerpt began with Ken responding to the facilitators' discussion of the men needing to be appropriately assertive in their interactions with others rather than aggressive.

1 **Ken:** Can I ask you a question though? Because I think that's what **I'm** doing? Like I'm
2 (1.0) very direct and outspoken sometimes, and (1.0) you know, that, maybe I am a little
3 bit of gasoline on the fire, or **a lot** of it, so she gets violent and I try to be assertive and
4 call her on what's going on, and **express** it and in a courteous sort of way. So if you're
5 **not** supposed to do that, then what are you supposed to do?

6 **Chris:** I don't have that, like I don't have that **answer**. But I can tell you in **my**
7 experience what I found was, when I started being assertive or trying to be, it was like
8 she turned me into a complete (3.0) dick (3.0) like if she started yelling at me for **seven**
9 **hours** and if all of a sudden I started yelling back for 3 minutes, she was saying like I was
10 being so abusive [and

11 **Ken:** [Yeah]

12 **Ted:** But you didn't do anything wrong

13 **Chris:** Yeah but all of a sudden you're feeling **bad**, and guilty, I was like "oh my **god**
14 what have I **done**", and they've gotten off like scott free. [So]

15 **Linda:** [So do] you feel like being
16 assertive in that situation (2.0) it could beeee a number of things. It could be standing up
17 and saying what you're feeling, it could [be]

18 **Chris:** [Yeah but] you get bashed down though, very
19 quickly. Like if you say, hey "I feel like **this**", it just (2.0) gives them an opportunity to
20 run right over you

21 **Ken:** You said the answer was like bartering

22 **Richard:** Yeah it's like bartering, it's just asking about the asking thing, one of the self
23 esteem programs I took was talking about (1.0) making a reinforcement bartering thing,
24 every day you are bartering. You barter with your boss, with your coworkers, and at
25 home. So you know, the idea **is**, I don't have the right to be in your hair, unless you give
26 me **permission** to do that, so it's like how much do you want to say?

27 **Chris:** I also think it comes down to (2.0) what is the genetic, or emotional make-up of
28 that person and what, like, in my situation there **was** no bargain. Like if there was a
29 bargain to be **had**, well it's like okay, like lets not continue this until you eventually
30 relent. Well and that could be until six o'clock the next morning, you know? So I mean,
31 I'm not, like you're, in fact, there's a lot of **evidence** that she's had a lot of **problems**,
32 like

33 **Linda:** So the problem with assertiveness is if it's not reciprocated in the way you need it
34 to, if it's not being accepted that invitation to to bargain or not bargain, are there other
35 ways to deal with it?

36 (5 second pause)

37 **Chris:** You know I don't know the answer to that one, I just know that with her, it was
38 very, it it would have been **impossible**. Except for on a **good** moment

39 **Linda:** I'm wondering if you can't seem to bargain with someone, saying like you know
40 I'm not okay with this, like I'm going to take a time out, **I'm going to leave**

41 **Chris:** And and **that** would be fine with most people, but with **my** ex, that would mean I
42 would just be chased around the house and pushed down the stairs, you know

43 **Ken:** And that's dangerous too
44 **Chris:** Yeah (2.0) so in my situation it was either **cave** or –
45 **Linda:** What could you have done, I was wondering if when your partner was doing that
46 and (Inaudible)
47 **Ted:** **You can just walk away**
48 **Chris:** Yeah but the thing though is that **they** won't let you. Like
49 **Ted:** Well then you have to take the initiative
50 **Ken:** But yeah like Kathleen would stand in the **doorway** (**Chris:** Yeah) and wouldn't let
51 me **leave** (**Chris:** Yeah) the house, you know, and if you're trying to push "oh, you're
52 pushing me?" you know, no it's like I'm not going to push you but then you're your own
53 prisoner in your own house, like frick
54 **Chris:** Yeah

At the beginning of the excerpt, three of the men negotiated the meaning of being assertive. Ken positioned himself as "direct and outspoken sometimes" and "a little bit of gasoline on the fire", minimizing the negativity of his conduct that could be interpreted as aggressive. He also positioned himself as "assertive" and "courteous" when responding to his partner's violence. Ending with a question, "So if you're not supposed to do that, what are you supposed to do?" Ken pleaded ignorance of any alternatives. His use of "supposed to" oriented to questions of morality. As in the other excerpts, how to respond appropriately to women's aggression was constructed as a problem. Chris built on Ken's construction of the problem through his account where being assertive resulted in him being labeled as abusive by his abusive partner. This elicited a sympathetic response from Ted who pointed out that Chris did nothing wrong. Chris elaborated by positioning himself as feeling bad about his three minutes of yelling and his partner as manipulative in absolving herself of blame through blaming him. By this point, then, the men had worked up assertiveness as a problematic response to abuse. Here, Linda intervened and suggested that there might be multiple ways of being assertive, such as "standing up and saying what you're feeling". Chris rejected this suggestion as ineffective, implying that expressing his feelings would position him as weak and allow his partner "to run right over" him. Notably, this is an argument that fits with traditional discourses of masculinity

in emphasizing strength and domination as well as reason over emotion. It also shifted the focus back to the abusive partner's actions and challenged the notion that being assertive is an effective way to respond to abuse.

The conversation then turned to an alternative way of handling abusive relationships, i.e., bartering, which involves a negotiation between people. Chris rejected this suggestion, however, transforming “barter” into “bargain”, positioning his partner as the problem (using pathologizing language) and arguing that she would simply continue to harass him until he relented. Linda, again, intervened, identifying the topic as assertiveness and formulating the problem as a lack of reciprocation, i.e., having a partner who refused the invitation to bargain. She worked to keep the conversation going by inviting additional ideas. When Chris returned to a critique of his partner, Linda proposed leaving or a “time out” as a way of responding when bargaining fails. Both Chris and Ken argued against leaving as a solution, while Linda and Ted worked to convince them otherwise. In claiming that their abusive partners would not let them leave, Chris positioned himself as powerless and his partner as being violent in an effort to prevent him from leaving. His account highlighted an abusive power relation with a victim (himself) and a dominant aggressor (his partner), which contrasted with the notions of being assertive and bartering/bargaining that imply more equitable power relations. Finally, Ken's account oriented to the norms against men being aggressive toward women. He positioned his partner as taking advantage of this in blocking his way and refusing to move so that he would have to push her out of the way in order to leave. Thus, while Chris and Ken might be described as uncooperative in continually criticizing the option of non-aggressive responses to their partners' abuse, they might also be described as working to construct accounts that took power relations into account. As in

previous excerpts, the “two sides” did not seem to understand one another, constructing the problem and therefore the possible solutions in quite different ways.

Finally, in Session 6 (19:54) walking away was constructed as a potential response by the facilitators but was challenged by the group. Linda utilized the triangle resource in her questioning about how the men could “walk away” into a healthy relationship (i.e., triangle of communication) as opposed to staying in the abusive, unhealthy Karpman’s Triangle.

- 1 **Linda:** Well when we think about the Karpman’s Triangle, is there a way to walk away
- 2 into that healthy triangle? As opposed to unhealthy?
- 3 **Ken:** It’s like saying “I need some time to figure out what’s going on, I feel like this is an
- 4 unsafe situation and I need 20 minutes to cool down myself and I ask for your
- 5 permission” like Richard says “I, you know, ask for your permission to leave this
- 6 situation, if you want to address it then I need some time” and then you just walk away
- 7 **Ed:** That’s a way of determining when to walk away it’s a way of working this situation
- 8 so you’re avoiding the other triangle
- 9 **Neil:** And then they just say bad things to you
- 10 **Ken:** Yeah like you don’t care
- 11 **Neil:** And so they leave just this **really** (1.0) **bad** feeling in you
- 12 **Ted:** I find that when you try to walk away that they try to pull you back in
- 13 **Ken:** They make you feel like a **bad** person
- 14 **Ted:** Yeah, like he would hate it when I needed my space, he would want me back, and
- 15 then he would call me crying (2.0) and make me feel guilty and bad and then we would
- 16 be good for two weeks and then we would start all over **so**

In this case, the proposed appropriate response to abuse, walking away and avoiding the unhealthy triangle, was resisted by three group members, who argued that doing so would bring about a significant amount of guilt and bad feelings. The consequence of walking away was constructed as ineffective as it would result in the abuser trying to pull the men back into the relationship by making them believe that they are bad people for leaving. Here, they used feeling talk to counter the facilitators’ more rational suggestion about walking away. In addition, they positioned themselves as victims but also as vulnerable to being drawn back into the relationship or at least feeling badly about walking away from it, if only temporarily. Thus, the men built a

case that walking away is not helpful in responding to abuse. Again, the men's concerns were not addressed by the facilitators or other men in the group.

5.1.5 Summary. The men gave accounts of responding to their women partner's abuse in many different ways, from avoiding the situations and attempting to leave, to verbally retaliating and physically engaging in the abuse. Their accounts were worked up to justify their responses and in many cases to level blame at the abusive partner. They also constructed a number of problems that made it difficult for them, as men, to respond effectively or appropriately to their partner's abuse. One of these was the norm that men should never hurt or hit women. A considerable amount of the group talk focused on negotiating how men should respond to women's abuse without using aggression. The facilitators utilized the therapeutic resource, Karpman's Triangle, to hold the men accountable when they gave accounts of responding to their partner's abuse with physical or verbal aggression and for their language use in session that they labeled as aggressive. The question of "how should a man respond to or resist woman abuse?" remained a discursively difficult one, as the threat of a man being labeled as a perpetrator remained implicit in the talk but was sometimes made explicit in men's accounts of abusive incidents. Frequently, the men resisted alternative means of responding to abuse and conversations ended with no resolution. Throughout the groups, the facilitators raised the possibility of men "walking away" or "leaving" and defined this as a form of assertiveness and power. Thus, the alternatives were constructed in ways that fit with masculinity, strength, reason, and power. This, however, led to further negotiations of what assertiveness means, which were similar to the original discussions of how to appropriately respond to woman abuse without using aggression (as men are not to harm women). For the most part, the men maintained that walking away had emotional and at times physical consequences, leaving them at risk (once again) of

being labeled as abusive or aggressive by their women partners. Furthermore, the men oriented to the notion that all proposed appropriate responses (usually labeled ways of being assertive) did not address the lack of unequal power relations in abusive contexts. There was no constructed resolution when facilitators and group members constructed the problem in different ways.

5.2 You Are Not Alone (The Women's Group)

This section presents the analysis of the women's group talk that specifically focused on responding to or resisting abuse. I analyze the gendered resources that are drawn on and patterns of positioning that the women and facilitators engaged when the topic was how the women responded to, or "ought to" respond to, their partner's abuse.

5.2.1 Karpman's Triangle: Victim status assumed. The "Karpman's Triangle" was also used as a psychoeducational activity in the women's group and potentially served as a discursive resource for the facilitators and the women in the group. It was introduced briefly and quickly taken up in the talk in Session 6 (19:35):

- 1 **Adam:** Yeah, I was just wondering if you wanted to **share** the Karpman's Triangle
- 2 (looking at female facilitator)
- 3 [**Jody** goes up to the board to draw the triangle on the board and write the words
- 4 "victim", "perpetrator" and "rescuer"]
- 5 **Jody:** There are two models, this is the **unhealthy** relationship model, and I wanted you
- 6 to think where you find yourself in this triangle?
- 7 **Amanda:** I'm the rescuer, I'm **always** trying to make peace in my relationships. James
- 8 **came** from a reserve and he doesn't know his dad, his mom had like ten kids with
- 9 different fathers, spent many years in foster care, had a brother with FAS who he took
- 10 care a lot of times. Damn that triangle
- 11 (4.0)
- 12 **Adam:** I think Amanda used the word mother-figure, I think rescuer can also be a
- 13 mother-figure
- 14 **Amanda:** But I've been that person, I was that person **before** I met him, I was always the
- 15 like the caregiver not only to the kids but also to all the other camp helpers and that's just
- 16 how my personality is
- 17 **Adam:** So with the kids I can understand but with a **grown** man
- 18 **Amanda:** I've always grown up like that, putting other people first
- 19 **Adam:** Putting other people first (4.0) The others? Where do you see yourselves on that
- 20 triangle?

21 **Lora:** Well **now** I would say I am the rescuer and before I was a rescuer but when I was
22 in that relationship I was a victim
23 **Adam:** You were a victim, how did you **feel** as a victim, when you were in that role as a
24 victim, what were you feeling?
25 **Lora:** I was feeling taken **advantage** of but I wasn't (3.0) who I was, I was the same
26 thing, I always liked to be taking care of others and I always liked to be involved in
27 always **happy** and being there for people
28 **Adam:** Ok, being taken advantage of, what else?
29 **Tara:** Um he was a perpetrator, he was someone who judges (2.0) and hurts
30 **Jody:** Can you explain?
31 **Adam:** Yeah please explain
32 **Lora:** Want to talk to my ex? (giggles)

In the women's group, the triangle was not explicitly explained in any detail. Rather, it was presented on the white board, along with a statement indicating that it was an "unhealthy relationship model". The members were asked where they found themselves in that triangle. Amanda positioned herself as the rescuer, mother-figure, and caregiver while she was in the relationship as well as prior to her relationship. Adam questioned the appropriateness of being the caregiver for a grown man (compared to being so for children). As a consequence, Amanda repositioned herself as generally putting other people first. The language used to define the rescuer is highly gendered with the focus on care of others and the mother as an exemplar.

Adam then solicited responses from other women in the group as to where they found themselves on the triangle. Lora positioned herself as a rescuer as well, but also as a victim when she was in the relationship with her abusive partner. Adam then requested more information about Lora's feelings when she was in the victim role. Lora distinguished between feeling taken advantage of within the abusive relationship and who she "always" was, i.e., someone who was happy and "like to be taking care of others". Adam highlighted Lora's "taken advantage of" response by repeating it and asked for greater elaboration. Tara added that "he" was the perpetrator, which she then described as someone who "judges and hurts". Both facilitators requested a fuller explanation, to which Lora made a joke that deflected attention from her giving

an account to another source, i.e., her ex. Thus, while the facilitators focused on the women's experiences as victims, the women did not seem keen to offer an account.

The triangle resource was only utilized once within the women's group, suggesting that it was not particularly useful. Importantly, when it was raised, the women who spoke oriented to the rescuer role, while the facilitators oriented to the victim role.

5.2.2 Focusing on safety and protection. Throughout the sessions, the women participants constructed a variety of accounts of responding to and resisting their partners' abuse. One such way involved the women positioning themselves as responding to abuse by provoking their partners to make the abuse happen. In the following excerpt (Session 4; 18:26), Lora talked about pushing her abusive husband when he was "getting darker".

- 1 **Lora:** My husband is starting to get darker (3.0) right now. He's starting to get
2 (7.0)
3 **Adam:** Your husband is getting darker? Are you concerned about your safety?
4 **Lora:** No, but (Inaudible)
5 **Jody:** So you have an anxious kind of feelings?
6 **Lora:** Yeah (5.0) when he starts to get like that I start to push him, like I start to (3.0)
7 push him and we fight a lot more often (5.0) I get him to yell and then after he will be
8 nice. It was really terrible, I know it happened enough times, so lots of, you know, back
9 and forth (inaudible) and last week, I don't understand my feelings of guilt, like it's
10 irrational, but they are so strong and then you realize, it was like kind of like what you
11 said about being numb (Coughing) but the last one (fight), it was [like a]
12 **Jody:** [Do you] start to
13 wonder, when he is getting darker, well one thing you might feel is how things are very
14 calm now, but if I feel like if I do something it's going to happen and it might take the
15 attention away (2.0) from maybe your kids, but it's like that feeling like, what might
16 happen tonight, tomorrow or the next night. Maybe it's a strategy to being able to take
17 back a little bit of power [by]
18 **Jen:** [It's] almost better to be controlling (2.0) the situation when it
19 happens, it's better than it happening at an inopportune time, it's just going to happen. So
20 coming here helps us prepare for it almost, subconsciously
21 **Tara:** So you'll deal with it when you are ready to deal with it
22 **Jen:** Yeah, as opposed to it being thrown in your face
23 **Tara:** Yeah. I'm ready to deal with it **now** so you can make it happen instead of it
24 happening when you don't want it to happen
25 **Jen:** Like, but it wasn't so much **me**, but I don't know, it was like, I just wanted to be
26 **exposed** to it so I could deal with it, I didn't want to wait for it to surprise me

27 **Steph:** Well and you know the **triggers** and you know that you won't have to walk on
28 eggshells for a week, it will just be done and over with
29 **Jen:** Yeah
30 **Steph:** So you just deal with the triggers and help it along

Adam raised the topic of safety in response to Lora's silence (i.e., extended pause of seven seconds) following her claim that her husband was "getting darker". Although Lora denied that safety was a concern, the rest of this conversation was implicitly about safety in the context of women exerting some control over when and where the abuse happens. The women worked together, with the intervention of the facilitator, in constructing the problem of their partner's control and how they could manage the situation to their own benefit.

Lora positioned herself as having "anxious feelings" in response to Jody's question and as being responsible for initiating the fighting and her husband's yelling ("I start", "I get him to yell"). However, she also positioned herself as feeling "guilt", which she described as "irrational" (after all, he is the abusive one) but "so strong". This reference to guilt also positioned her as accountable and orienting to the morality of her actions. Thus, her feelings of guilt were constructed as beyond her control and a response to her role in the cycle of violence, i.e., first he yells and "then he will be nice". Rather than negotiating Lora's responsibility in the abusive interactions or questioning the morality of her claimed response (like Lora began doing herself), the female facilitator, Jody, intervened and positioned Lora in a specific way. Although formulated as a question, Jody suggested what Lora might be feeling and what her motives for provoking the violence might be: 1. protecting her children (i.e., "... and it might take the attention away from maybe your kids"); and 2. taking charge of the timing of the abuse so that she would not be left to wonder when it will happen (i.e., "but it's like that feeling like, what might happen tonight, tomorrow, or the next night"). Taking charge of the timing and being more prepared implied that these actions would increase Lora's safety. Jody then tentatively offered an

explanation of the function of Lora's provocation by orienting to power in abusive relationships (where the women victims lack power and the perpetrators of abuse have all of the power). She did so by proposing that Lora's actions constituted "a strategy to being able to take back a little bit of power", constructing them as positive and reasoned. Notably, the facilitators and the group participants took for granted that the husband's increasing darkness meant that abuse was inevitable, and in so doing positioned Lora as an inevitable victim, who could nevertheless exercise some control over the situation.

The focus on the purpose of Lora's provoking abuse as a way of ensuring her safety was readily taken up by three other women in the group. Through multiple conversational turns Jen, Tara, and Steph bolstered the notion that it is "better" to control the timing of the abuse so that it does not happen at an "inopportune" moment and they can be prepared ("ready to deal with it") and "not wait for it to surprise me". Steph specifically positioned them as have the knowledge necessary to take charge, i.e., they knew "the triggers" and could avoid having to "walk on eggshells for a week". Thus, they constructed waiting for the inevitable abuse as an unpleasant event and positioned themselves as knowing when their partners were on the brink of being abusive. By claiming that Lora's action of pushing her husband to provoke a fight and make the abuse happen was appropriate and served a positive purpose, the female facilitator and the other women warranted such actions. Thus, women's reported involvement in the initiation of an abusive incident was justified as a means of exerting some control over the situation and protecting themselves.

The following excerpt (Session 6; 20:01) provides another example:

- 1 **Lanette:** But I'd be pushing him and pushing him. And you know what? This is when
- 2 this is when (1.0) I started thinking (1.0) of how stupid it all was. I'll **push** him and **push**
- 3 him until he whacks me in the head or punches me in the arm. Oh my **god**, I can't believe
- 4 I just said that, that's how high it goes

5 **Jody:** Here is another **dynamic**, where, sometimes, the abused person in the relationship
6 will **invite** the abuse, but has control over where it happens, how it happens
7 **Adam:** It's like you are **seeking** to take **control** of the **situation** by inviting (2.0) that
8 abuse (**Lanette:** Um hm), by saying "go ahead do it" and you'll get charge, get in charge
9 **Diana:** Why do we do that?
10 **Tara:** Because we want to end it
11 **Diana:** Yeah
12 **Tara:** Because we wanna wanna uh **control** when it happens, right? We want to control
13 **when** it happens because you have plans right? Like you have plans for tomorrow you
14 have plans and you know what? I just wanna get it over with and by the time the weekend
15 comes I'm happy
16 **Elyssa:** I didn't
17 **Tara:** I used to do that, I used to do that
18 **Lora:** I know it's hard to hear you say that but like it's **true** (**Tara:** Yeah) it's just sad
19 though
20 **Tara:** Yeah
21 **Lanette:** And it's like he is bigger and stronger but at least I got to do that, and then
22 somebody's like hey and you want to stop it

Lanette positioned herself as pushing her partner ("I'll push him and push him") until he becomes physically aggressive with her (i.e., "until he whacks me in the head or punches me in the arm"). Similar to the previous excerpt, this was accompanied by self-criticism and accountability, that is, she labeled it "stupid" and stated her disbelief in sharing this with the group (i.e., "Oh my god, I can't believe I just said that, that's how high it goes"). An interruption by Jody, the facilitator, initiated the repositioning of Lanette and the reconstruction of Lanette's reported experience by drawing on the discourse of the psychoeducational program and using generalizing language to construct a general "dynamic" within abusive relationships, i.e., "the abused person in the relationship will **invite** the abuse, but has control over where it happens, how it happens". Adam then bolstered Jody's claim by referring to the women being in control when they invite the abuse and highlighting the purposeful intent of this action by stressing the phrase "**seeking** to take **control**". By generalizing the account, both facilitators positioned the women's uttered experiences as an accepted and documented "abuse dynamic", despite the possibility that it may be interpreted as women victims being responsible for their victimization

(made explicit in Lanette's last turn: "and then somebody's like hey and you want to stop it").

Positioned as experts in the area of abuse given their facilitator roles, Jody and Adam oriented to the "official" discourse or version of how domestic violence in intimate relationships occurs and how victims respond to abuse in order to protect themselves.

Rhetorically, the generalizations served to build a stronger case that Lanette's initial account reflected a protective and useful purpose. This was made evident when Diana questioned why "we" would invite abuse and most group members defended the original claim. In turn, they argued that inviting abuse is a way to end abuse and controlling when it happens so that it does not interfere with their plans. Despite Elyssa's rejection of this applying to her, the others positioned themselves as inviting abuse. Notably, while the women constructed inviting abuse as strategic and useful, they also constructed it as "sad" and putting them at risk of being blamed for perpetuating the abuse.

The above two excerpts are examples of women's frequent accounts of perpetuating their partner's abuse as a general response to abuse dynamics. Consequently, the women held themselves accountable or questioned their reported behaviour (e.g., positioned themselves as feeling guilty for doing so, questioning why they do that, labeling their accounts as "stupid"). Another consequence was that facilitators raised the topic of safety and positioned the women as acting in such ways to protect their safety. Rather than negotiating responsibility or holding them accountable for their potentially aggressive or morally questionable account, the facilitators drew on established domestic violence discourse (focusing on the abuse dynamic). In doing so, the facilitators maintained the women's victimhood.

The next two examples point to how safety concerns were associated with accounts of other responses to abuse: walking away and being aggressive. Session 4 (18:20) was part of a

longer discussion where the women discussed how they acted in response to abusive interactions. Pam compared how she responds to abuse now (i.e., by walking away), as opposed to what she did in the past (i.e., fight and struggle to work things out).

- 1 **Pam:** Well I (3.0) just walk away now I just walk away now. And I used to get **really**
2 mad and fight, then struggle and grumble like you said and think “we can work this out
3 we can work this out”, and I used to yell so that he could hear me but no it was not good
4 enough. Now I just stay quiet and I look like I disagree, and I’ve learned how to humor
5 him and I just smile and then I just walk away
6 **Tara:** You have more patience than I do. I couldn’t do that
7 **Pam:** Well I [have to
8 **Adam:** [Well it] sounds like you have all used a lot of powerful strategies to
9 protect yourself
10 **Pam:** Well I’ve had to, I’ve been hit in the face more than enough times. If knock knock
11 knock (with her hands makes knocking movements on her head) you learn, no more hits

Pam’s account laid out a number of possible responses to abuse, including getting “really mad” and fighting, struggling and grumbling, thinking that the conflict can be resolved, yelling, staying quiet and looking like she disagrees, smiling, humouring her partner, and walking away. Her response “now” is to “just walk away”. The “just” as used here was a minimizing term pointing to the simplicity of her response. When Tara positioned Pam as patient and herself as less patient and unable to respond in this way, Pam replied that for her it was a necessity (“I have to”). Thus, Pam resisted Tara’s positioning of her as a patient person and instead focused on her circumstances – she does this out of necessity and not because of the kind of person she is. Notably, all of the responses included in Pam’s account, current and past, were articulated by the other women in the group at one point or another, and in the majority of cases, the facilitator’s responses focused on how the women’s actions increased their safety. This is also evident in Adam’s response to Pam and the rest of the group: “Well it sounds like you have all used a lot of powerful strategies to protect yourself”. His use of the word “powerful” implied that they are successful in protecting themselves and use of the word “strategies” implied that they are planful

and have specific goals in mind. Thus, he positioned them as strong women exercising their agency through this use of empowering language. Again, Pam resisted the positioning on offer. Instead, she positioned herself as having to learn how to avoid physical abuse (i.e., “I’ve been hit in the face more than enough times...you learn”). Thus, while the facilitator emphasized the women’s personal qualities in praising how they had protected themselves, Pam emphasized her circumstances and pointed back to the abusive relationship.

The women frequently built accounts of responding to abuse by retaliating, yelling, and mirroring their partner’s aggressive actions. The facilitators constructed these actions as adaptive, because the function of this aggression was to protect the women. This next excerpt (Session 6; 19:58) provides an example of this. Tara’s account covered abusive interactions from the following night.

- 1 **Tara:** And like last night I was **up** in his **face** and he’s all drunk and he was like “you’re
- 2 **upset**”, like “yeah I am” (5.0) We are like yelling like yelling at each other on the street
- 3 (laughs), “yes **yes** you are right, I’m angry”
- 4 **Jody:** So you were [angry]
- 5 **Adam:** [That’s] good, you were angry
- 6 **Tara:** Yeah I am but you know what? I didn’t like losing control but I wasn’t ashamed to
- 7 say “yes you are right I’m yelling at you” (4.0) so (1.0) I guess I felt deserted because so
- 8 I walked up my driveway and I got my phone out and I called the police, so I felt like
- 9 “yes I’m **angry** and yes I did lose control”
- 10 **Jody:** So those actions helped to protect you, that’s good, you fought back against the
- 11 abuse. How old is your little one?

Tara positioned herself as yelling and acting on her anger towards her partner (i.e., being “up in [her partner’s] face”). First, Jody positioned Tara as angry and then Adam praised and supported her stated anger rather than questioning it or holding her accountable for her involvement in the abusive interaction. Tara continued to position herself as angry, but also added that this meant losing control. At this point, Tara made two moves – first, she positioned herself as not liking to lose control, which oriented to social norms against it and thus involved

her being accountable, and then, she positioned herself as not “ashamed” to acknowledge her loss of control. Throughout this turn, she positioned herself as an agent, who ultimately “called the police”. This time, the female facilitator, Jody, positioned her as “fighting back, taking action to protect herself, and having done something “good”. In switching the focus of the conversation to Tara’s child, Jody reinforced the significance of Tara’s protective actions. Here, then, the facilitators worked to position the women as active in dealing with their abusive situations, even if it meant being aggressive, the objective being to protect themselves and their children.

The previous four excerpts explore how the facilitators positioned the women as victims and constructed their responses to abuse (aggressive or otherwise) as necessary and encouraged because they protect the women. While the women often questioned, criticized, or held themselves accountable for their potentially aggressive responses, the facilitators worked up accounts where these responses represented “powerful strategies” that maintained safety. They did so by drawing on generalized, domestic abuse discourse.

5.2.3 Identity work: Positioning women as strong, defiant, and independent. In this section, I analyze in more detail how the women were positioned as independent, defiant, and strong. The following excerpt (Session 4; 18:46) involved an account of revenge. Elyssa explained to the group that recently she had learned about her now ex-husband’s relationship with a woman and they had had a baby. She positioned herself as extremely upset, because she could not conceive when they were married, and this, she argued, led to stress in the relationship and her husband’s physical violence. The excerpt begins just after Elyssa recounted seeing her ex-husband, his girlfriend, and their child, together while driving with a friend. She noted that this was the first time she had seen him since he assaulted Elyssa and they separated.

1 **Elyssa:** (Crying) Yeah it's just hard to see them, but to see the three of them, it was just a
2 vision
3 **Tara:** Yes a vision you had
4 **Elyssa:** (Crying) It was a vision I had in my mind, and my friend was there and she was
5 saying "get in the car, get in the car right now" because I was just, freaking out, we didn't
6 want them to see me because I was not poised (3.0) but we **did** do something else though
7 (starts laughing and puts her head down, everyone begins laughing very loudly)
8 **Tara:** **Oh oh, look at you, tell us**
9 **Pam:** You didn't run him over? (Elyssa playfully and gently slaps Pam)
10 **Tara:** Yeah, **right**
11 **Jen:** What did you do?
12 **Elyssa:** No, well, **okay**, well we went to the convenience store, and we had to do, nothing
13 that would cause too much noise because um we didn't want to get caught, we got some
14 black hoodies, and we got some eggs (everyone laughing including facilitators) and we
15 couldn't do anything that would make too much noise, so we got cat food, mustard, and
16 hot sauce and mixed it in some cups, and she had her niece with her, she's older, like 20
17 and her mom was driving (all women laughing), and I was doing this in tears but I had to
18 do that, and we just and we threw it all over the house and in the mailbox. We didn't even
19 touch the stuff, but we all reeked after, but anyway I never did anything like that in my
20 life
21 **Jody:** And what did it feel like?
22 **Elyssa:** It was just something great to talk about that night and the next day (laughing)
23 **Jen:** Or the next year
24 **Elyssa:** Well and he would never know that it was **me** because we were in disguise and it
25 was in the dark. And the fact that we saw him, like that night, the fact that we saw him
26 that very moment we figured out... (explained how she knew which house was his)...So
27 I had that old address, mom checked up if he is still there, and that was him right there,
28 the timing was **unbelievable**, so now I know where he lives...(laughs)
29 **Elyssa:** But it's still like, I just, you know, I still love him. (starts crying) I-
30 **Tara:** -I don't I know I
31 don't want to see my ex because I know I **was** in love with him and am still attracted to
32 him, but I don't, I don't I like, I don't like the person inside
33 **Elyssa:** I feel like if only I need to have one week with him, if only I could have **one**
34 week with him and remember how hard it was I could get past it. But I **had** like nothing,
35 it was just cut off (2.0) We had our very little, like, in my world, my life was going on,
36 like, I thought I had an alcoholic in my on my hands but he was going to treatment. He
37 assaulted, the police called, he was gone the next day. That was **it**, there was no build up,
38 no build up, just so **random**. It just happened
39 **Tara:** It just happened
40 **Elyssa:** It just happened, it was like click, it was cut off and everything was taken from
41 me, it was gone, everything I had I had to pack up all of our stuff but I couldn't afford
42 storage. I had to quit my job and he just **never** helped me, he just **never** bothered to help
43 me, never
44 **Adam:** Do you want to go back to that?
45 **Elyssa:** (Crying) I just want to go back to where, (**Adam:** No) I was happier then than I
46 am now. That's what's so horrible about it

47 **Adam:** Do you **like** being in that kind of a [situation?]
48 **Elyssa:** [No, but I don't] know, [this]
49 **Adam:** [Because] right now
50 you are trying to discover who who you are
51 **Elyssa:** Well, it's not fun
52 **Adam:** It's not fun, but ah ah I love what I saw, that act of defiance that was fantastic
53 (laughs) Tells me there's a lot of bravery, there's a lot of courage in you, that act was
54 fantastic
55 **Elyssa:** And it's totally immature
56 **Adam:** I'm not thinking of it as immature, I'm I'm thinking of it as an act of defiance
57 **Katy:** That really was big of you (laughing)
58 **Tara:** It was a really big F-U

Elyssa's positioning moved rapidly from a victim who was freaking out and not poised to an agent (i.e., "but we **did** do something else though"). Her pause and laughter signaled the change and the other group members responded with laughter, creating a bond among them in anticipation of the full story. Pam even joked about running him over. Within Elyssa's narrative of revenge, she positioned herself as "in tears but [she] had to do it". She further positioned herself as a good person ("but anyway I never did anything like that in my life"), for whom such actions were not the norm and implied that this act of revenge was a one-off occurrence. She had already provided justification for her revenge in her account of how she and her ex-husband came to be separated and the problems associated with her inability to conceive. Notably, neither the other group participants nor the facilitator questioned her motives or the morality of her actions. In addition, while positioning herself as an active participant in this scenario, she also positioned herself as a victim, not only of physical abuse, but as someone who continued to love her ex-husband, a point that was implied by her being "in tears" during the act of revenge and made explicit at line 29.

Following Elyssa's account, Jody, the facilitator, oriented to Elyssa's feelings about "it". Elyssa's immediate response built on her construction of the event as an underground operation and the general support of the other group members as she responded that it was "great to talk

about”, a point that Jen emphasized by extending the timeline to a year. Elyssa then continued to discuss details, emphasizing the importance of her ex-husband’s ignorance that she was the perpetrator and the great lengths she had taken to ensure that they attacked the right house. This positioned her as a rational person, who was acting in a planful matter. At this point, Elyssa declared that she was still in love with her husband, a positioning also taken up by Tara, who articulated a complex, contradictory relationship with her ex-husband. She did not want to see him, had loved him and was “still attracted to him”, but did not “like the person inside him”. Elyssa did not respond directly to Tara, but she built on Tara’s construction of the difficulties associated with leaving one’s partner, stressing the uniqueness of her situation. Initially, she positioned herself as a victim of abuse, who wanted to return to the relationship for one week to remind herself of the reasons for no longer being in the relationship (it had been “hard”). She then explained her reasoning – the relationship had ended abruptly (“it was just cut off”, “no build up”, “just so random”, “It just happened”), her husband was an alcoholic in treatment, and then when he assaulted her, the police came and “he was gone the next day”. She offered this account with no embellishment, working to establish the basic facts of her case. In repeating “It just happened”, Tara drew attention to the unusual nature of Elyssa’s case as many abused women have lengthy histories of abuse within a relationship before they leave. Elyssa then elaborated that her husband had abandoned her. She had to pack their belongings, could not afford to store them, and had to quit her job. Implying that it might have been different, she positioned her husband as not helping with this and not bothering to help, a choice of words that positioned him as not wanting to help. Here, she used maximizing language to emphasize her further victimization as the abandoned wife. This portion of the excerpt then dealt with the topic

of ending relationships, and both Tara and Elyssa constructed this as a difficult and conflictual process.

The facilitator then oriented to the topic of returning to an abusive relationship, first asking whether she wanted to return to the relationship and then asking whether she liked to be in an abusive relationship. In response to the first question, Elyssa began to cry and side-stepped the issue of returning to an abusive relationship by claiming that she wanted to return to a time when she was “happier” than she was now. The facilitator did not let her talk, interjecting (line 47) and overlapping (line 49) with Elyssa’s responses. Adam’s questions challenged her account, but his agenda became clear at lines 49-50, where he positioned her as a person who is “trying to discover who [she is]”. This re-oriented the conversation from looking back in time to the present. When Elyssa declared that it was “not fun”, Adam agreed and returned to the topic of her act of revenge, praising her (“ah ah I love what I saw”) and defining it as an “act of defiance”. He positioned her as brave and courageous, and when Elyssa identified her actions as “immature”, he disagreed and repeated that it was an “act of defiance”. At this point, two of the other group participants joined in support of Adam’s positioning of Elyssa.

The above excerpt shows how women who positioned themselves as victims also questioned the morality of their behaviour towards their abusive partners and were re-positioned as strong, defiant, and brave by the facilitators. Acts that might be considered aggressive (or even illegal), such as Elyssa’s act of revenge, were defined consistent with this positioning, e.g., acts of defiance. Thus, aside from the women who provided their own accounts, no one questioned or challenged their motives or appropriateness of their responses to abuse.

The following two, briefer excerpts show a similar pattern of the facilitators repositioning the women from identities as weak and self-blaming to identities as strong and independent.

Session 2 (18:27)

- 1 **Adam:** You sneaked around to have friends?
- 2 **Katy:** You know if I wanted to go out with the girls to have coffee, because he thought I
- 3 was cheating [or
- 4 **Jody:** [There] comes that rebellious part of you, that independence

Session 4 (19:52)

- 1 **Adam:** Is this about lying and acting out? Or is this about preserving yourself, how did
- 2 you say?
- 3 **Katy:** Self-preservation
- 4 **Adam:** Self-preservation, is this about lying or is it about self-preservation?
- 5 **Elyssa:** Yeah that's true
- 6 **Adam:** Yeah you have to look at it differently now

In the first excerpt, Adam redefined “sneaking around” as “rebellious” and a mark of “independence”. In the second excerpt, he redefined “lying and acting out” as “self-preservation”. He also oriented to the need for a changing perspective between the past and present (“Yeah you have to look at it differently now”). Thus, he argued that being in an abusive relationship warranted actions that in other circumstances might be regarded as morally questionable.

5.2.4 Summary. These accounts indicate a general assumption of women’s victim identity as neither the facilitators or the other women questioned their responsibility using resources like the Karpman’s Triangle. The analysis of the women’s accounts of their responses to abuse and how this issue is managed suggests two main patterns of positioning. First, the women built their accounts in ways that were consistent with being positioned as victims, yet involved an acknowledgement that their actions may be judged as inappropriate (e.g., that they provoked the abuse to make it happen when they start feeling as though their partners are likely to become violent soon; acted aggressively in response; sought revenge). Thus, this acknowledgement served to take responsibility or accountability for their responses. The facilitators responded to these accounts by orienting to abuse and power dynamics and

constructing the purpose of such potentially “questionable” conduct through a discourse of safety and protection of themselves and their children. Even when women’s accounts of their responses to abuse did not involve aggression (e.g., walking away), the facilitators built accounts of the important function of women’s actions (i.e., to increase safety and protect themselves). At times, the facilitators worked to reposition the women individually as carrying out these actions in a strategic way to empower themselves or take control of a largely unpredictable abusive situation. Other times, the facilitators moved away from the women’s individual experience and referenced general, documented, or “official” functions of such conduct based on a shared knowledge of domestic violence (e.g., referring to their claims as “another abuse dynamic”). In short, the women were positioned as victims who did what they had to do in order to survive and stay safe. The second main pattern of positioning involved repositioning the women as strong, independent, defiant, and brave, i.e., as the opposite of victims, who are powerless, weak, and scared.

5.3 Comparison of Men’s and Women’s Responses to Abuse Discourse

Both men’s and women’s accounts of their responses to abuse varied in nature, from attempting to de-escalate the abuse, leaving the abusive situation, retaliating and behaving aggressively back both physically and verbally, etc. However, the ways in which these constructed responses to abuse talk were worked up and then managed by the facilitators and the rest of the group members differed between the men’s and the women’s group conversation.

In the men’s group, talk about responses to abuse was continually connected to and negotiated around a gendered problem – how should men appropriately respond to abusive women while upholding the common gendered notion that men should never hurt or harm women. In other words, the men’s negotiations of their responses to women were enabled and

constricted by the common gendered notion that men should never be aggressive with women. For example, the men oriented to the gendered notion about men not hitting women when defending their helplessness in the face of their partner's abuse by claiming that they would have to "push the partner" out of the way in order to leave, which they were reluctant to do, or that after enduring hours of abuse when they shout back, their partner accused them of being abusive. Interestingly, the men worked up their response accounts in rhetorical ways so as to have their responses seem reasonable given their constructed abuse contexts, while the facilitators followed up on these constructions by holding the men accountable and questioning whether the men were inappropriately aggressive (often through the use of the therapeutic tool of the Karpman's Triangle). The facilitators also held the men accountable for their language use that could be interpreted as aggressive, sexist, or misogynistic.

In the women's group, however, the gendered notion of "men shall not harm women" was not relevant. Instead, when women built accounts of their responses to male abuse, they tended to question their own responsibility in perpetuating the abuse and the morality of their behaviour, especially when they were discussing times they were aggressive back or provoked the abuse. In response to the women's talk, the facilitators encouraged the women to construct an understanding of their aggressive behaviour based on its adaptive and necessary function or purpose (i.e., to ensure safety and increase protection). They repositioned the women by drawing on both the women's individual experiences and on referenced, generalized, and documented shared knowledge of domestic abuse, which includes various ways women victims maintain safety in dangerous situations. Thus, compared to the men's group, the facilitators did not hold the women accountable or question whether their responses to abuse were appropriate or aggressive. Instead, they encouraged the women to focus on the protective function of their

actions, which implies their assumed victim identities. While in the men's group the Karpman's Triangle was repeatedly used as a tool to question the appropriateness or morality of the men's positioned behaviour in response to the abuse and at times to question their victim identities, this tool was never utilized in the women's group to explore the positioning of the women (with the exception of its original introduction). That is, the women were not asked to reconsider if they were victims, rescuers, or aggressors. Rather, the only time that this triangle resource was referenced in the women's group, it served to make the women's victim positions explicit. In other words, the women's victim status was largely assumed and unquestioned in their talk. Thus, the women's reported resistance and actions in response to the abuse were not put to question and instead praised as resisting the abuse or showing their defiance and independence.

The responses to abuse discourse for both men and women led to certain identity positioning, as alluded to above. In the men's group, the issues of how men should respond to abuse remained a discursively difficult one, as men oriented to the notion that men should not hit women and because any use of aggression led to the risk of being labeled as the abusers instead of the victims. Although the language of masculinity was used by the facilitators to provide various alternative responses to abuse (e.g., assertiveness), this too was often challenged and negotiated. The facilitators repeatedly offered walking away as an appropriate way for the men to respond to the abuse. However, the men resisted. Through their resistance, the men critiqued these alternatives as not addressing the unequal power relations in their abusive contexts and claimed that nothing they try works in de-escalating the abuse. As such, from the beginning to the end of the group, the men and facilitators grappled with the dilemma of how men should appropriately respond to women's abuse.

On the other hand, in the women's group, unequal power relations were taken for granted as the facilitators oriented towards the inevitability of the men's perpetration of abuse towards the women group participants and hence their constructed support of any response to abuse so long as it served to protect them. Overall, the women's diverse stated responses to abuse (including constructed accounts of being aggressive or provoking the violence) were not challenged by the facilitators. The women routinely held themselves accountable and were critical of their own responses to the abuse. The facilitators encouraged the women to engage in any response (aggressive or otherwise) in a way that constructed a case that enhanced their safety. In doing so, the facilitators also positioned the women away from victimhood and towards strong, defiant, and powerful identities. For the most part, the women took up and went with this strength-based positioning when it was raised by the facilitators and the other women. However, this too was a continual process as the women frequently in therapy questioned the morality of their varied responses to abuse, stated running the risk of returning to their abusive partner, and thus identified with a weak, powerless, and victim-like identity position.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The independent analysis of the men's and women's group talk as well as the comparison of those analyses show striking differences in how the abuse accounts and participants' identities were constructed. In this chapter, I explore these patterns further by interpreting them within the context of the literature to highlight their significance within the domestic violence literature and to clinical practice.

6.1 Abuse Account Constructions

The abuse accounts constructed by the men and the women, respectively, were qualitatively different. That is, not only was the construction of these accounts unique in each group, but the topics and concerns dealt with were distinctive.

Even though the women generally did not provide explicit details of their abuse, their language pointed to the seriousness of intimate partner violence when men are the perpetrators and women the victims. This was particularly evident when the women described life-threatening physical assaults. For the women, the topic to which everyone oriented, both facilitators and group members, was safety. Thus, abuse accounts were interpreted in light of an assumed need for women to protect themselves and their children. Similarly, the women positioned themselves and were positioned by others in relation to these concerns with safety and protection. The men, on the other hand, constructed abuse as problematic in various ways, but they never positioned themselves as fearing for their lives. When their accounts included physical contact, the meaning of this contact became a matter of debate and negotiation. These results are consistent with the intimate partner abuse literature that stresses the differing contexts of abuse for men and women and the claim that, compared to women perpetrators, men's perpetration of abuse involves a pattern of control over their partner's lives as well as multiple

forms of abuse that include those leading to extreme harm (e.g., Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg & Walker, 1990; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Swan & Snow, 2006; Straus, 2005).

In constructing abuse accounts, the men were detail-oriented and offered lengthy narratives of what occurred, using a variety of rhetorical strategies to position themselves as abused and their women partners as their abusers. Thus, for the men, it was not a straightforward matter to position themselves as victims of intimate partner abuse. As already noted, the women in general did not do this, with one exception, that is, when a group member positioned herself as ambivalent about the abuse, participants offered detailed accounts of physical abuse, as part of a group conversation aimed at re-positioning the ambivalent woman. This is a qualitative difference that is consistent with existing research and common knowledge. One could argue that men's victimization at the hands of their women partners remains under-researched territory (Outlaw, 2009; Migliaccio, 2002). As yet, there is no clear definition or set of discourses that the men or group facilitators could readily draw on. The clinical literature however has increasingly recognized the possibility of men being abused by women, and claims have been made about its prevalence (Straus, 2010). Nonetheless, with a few notable exceptions (Cook, 2009; Migliaccio; 2002; Zverina et al., 2011), men's perspectives have not been explored and are not commonly available in public discourse. Not surprisingly, then, the men's group grappled with the fine-grained descriptions of their experiences and the specific context (i.e., who said exactly what and under which circumstances), which involved positioning themselves as both active participants in the abuse as well as clear victims at times. This detailed positioning makes sense when considering the men's claims of their victimization not being believed by others as a result of the general notion that men are the perpetrators of abuse, not the victims. Additionally, the rhetorical

strategies evident in the men's abuse accounts were the same as strategies documented in discursive research of the talk of men who perpetrate abuse (e.g., use of feminine categorization to depict women as having breached the normative moral order, LeCouteur & Oxland, 2004). Thus, for the facilitators, who participated in the conversations with an agenda of guiding the men to a "better" future and were knowledgeable about the field of intimate partner abuse, distinguishing between victimization and perpetration would have been a challenge. These results build on my Master's thesis research (Zverina, 2009), as abuse accounts were constantly negotiated and renegotiated between the men and facilitators. This study here, however, explores the rhetorical strategies used and situates the various subject positions taken up within the broader literature.

The women's abuse accounts, on the other hand, were for the most part limited to non-descriptive phrases (e.g., "it", "what happened", and "abuse"). The women did not build contextualized accounts of their abuse and were not called upon by the facilitators to do so. What was even more striking was that this did not create any problems in identity work or the interactions within the group. Instead, I argue that a possible reason why it was not explored in the women's group was because the group members drew on notions of abuse and women's victimization that were readily available to all of them. Specifically, the dominant story of abuse as a problem of power and control wherein women are victims and men are perpetrators was a prominent narrative embedded in the women's accounts (Augusta-Scott, 2007). Thus, the women's accounts were taken for granted and therapeutic talk progressed without the preliminary descriptive and exploratory work that took place in the men's group. Rather, the women were positioned as victims without question, and all participants shared a common knowledge of what this meant based on available discourse. The broad discourse of domestic

abuse in which women are the victims has not only been addressed in the research and clinical literatures for decades, but is also visible in the public domain through the media, counselling therapy programs, government programs, shelters for women, etc. Thus, in their group, the women responded to different discursive consequences of their accounts in contrast to the men.

6.2 Responses to Abuse Constructions

Given the differences in the ways the men and women constructed their abuse accounts, the kinds of positioning that occurred in relation to accounts of responding to abuse were also unique. Specifically, it was possible to explore here how the facilitators of each group did qualitatively different kinds of therapy work. Again, the men's difficulties in constructing abuse accounts reflected their difficulties building acceptable accounts of appropriate responses to women's abuse. That is, the men worked up a gendered problem that both enabled and constrained their accounts of responding to abuse. The gendered problem consisted of how men could appropriately and morally respond to abusive women partners while remaining in accordance with the expectation that men should protect women rather than be aggressive towards them (Wood, 2004). However, the men often used misogynistic language in constructing their responses to abuse, which put them at risk of being positioned as perpetrators (Zverina et al., 2011). Importantly, the facilitators responded to this positioning in their therapeutic moves within the groups, as they continually found creative ways to challenge the men's claims and hold them accountable. An example was their use of Karpman's Triangle. These discursive moves occurred within a relatively uncharted discursive space, given the lack of clearly established expert discourse related to men's appropriate responses to abuse perpetrated by women partners. Thus, the "response-based" approach to therapeutic interviewing, which involves a focus on both pre-existing and current abilities to respond or resist abuse, proved to be

very problematic in the men's group, as the men's accounts of their responses were inevitably challenged by the facilitators instead of supported.

The facilitators for the men's group drew on their knowledge of intimate partner abuse, but that knowledge had been largely generated from research and clinical experience with women who have been victimized by men partners. More specifically, Appendix A and B point to how both manuals were structured around intimate partner abuse themes and theories that were developed originally for abused women. My study suggests that it did not always fit for the men. The challenge for the TFTB facilitators was very evident: The facilitators did not need to empower the men to position themselves as agents working to exert some control over their lives rather than as passive, self-blaming victims. The men already used a masculine language of power when giving their accounts. They did not position themselves as doubting their abused status, but rather, worked up their problem as needing help to find ways of successfully resolving conflict with their women partners and eliminating the abuse in their lives. That is, the men positioned themselves as masculine men trying to find satisfying ways of living with women. Their accounts in many cases were interpreted by the facilitators as aggressive (which would be consistent with traditional discourses of masculinity) and while the men did not hold themselves accountable for positioning themselves as aggressive (unless talking about men hitting women), the facilitators worked to hold them accountable. Indeed, the men's accounts of their responses to abuse were similar to those documented in research on violent men's talk (Edin, Lalos, Hogberg, & Dahlgren, 2008). For instance, the men in the groups I analysed often positioned themselves within the "pressure cooker-exploding man" narrative (Edin et al., 2008), that is, they positioned themselves as fearful, weak, and insecure in response to their partner's intimidating behavior and as their various attempts to respond in a rational manner were met with failure, they

eventually exploded and became verbally abusive or aggressive in return. The facilitators' moves to hold them accountable is understandable given the similarity in the accounts of men positioning themselves as victims of abuse and men positioning themselves as perpetrators of abuse. Similarly, in his clinical work with men perpetrators of intimate partner abuse, Augusta-Scott (2007) reflected on his tendency, as a therapist, to immediately interrupt when the men discussed their own experiences of being abused, which he interpreted as their attempt to avoid responsibility. Interestingly, we see a similar pattern in the men's groups I analysed. Thus, the facilitators' efforts to work with the men in understanding their experiences as victims of intimate partner abuse and developing successful strategies for dealing with these experiences were constrained by existing discourses of intimate partner abuse that position men as perpetrators who use claims of victimhood to avoid positioning themselves as perpetrators. Similarities in the accounts of men positioning themselves as victims and men who have been positioned as perpetrators create a challenging environment for therapy work.

The facilitators were creative in addressing the problem of how the men could live different lives, as they worked to construct walking away as a masculine, assertive option. However, the men challenged this proposed action, were defensive in response to the facilitators (but not when it came to physical violence), and pointed to the lack of acknowledgement of abusive power dynamics when it came to men being abused as well as failure to position their partners as wrong. The men's concern with power in their relationships was formulated as the claim that no matter what they did, their abusive partners would exert control over them, leaving them without an effective option. This claim makes sense in the absence of any clear consensus regarding the defining features of intimate partner abuse perpetrated by women. Just as men's victimization tends to be constructed through discourses arising out of women's victimization,

women's perpetration tends to be constructed through discourses arising out of men's perpetration (Dasgupta, 2002; Miller, 2001; Simmons, Lehmann, & Collier-Tenison, 2008). In one study that employed a narrative analysis, men often did not recognize women's violence as wrong (e.g., they did not consider it to be abuse, Migliaccio, 2002). Although this is not consistent with the accounts of the men in the groups that I analysed, it is consistent with the argument that there is a discursive gap when it comes to men being victimized by women in intimate relationships. Overall within the men's group, the conversations related to responding to abuse and focused on how to resolve conflict that leads to abuse and how to de-escalate the abusive situation (mainly by walking away), rather than analyzing the dynamics of the abuse. This makes sense given the discursive gap but did not directly address the problem of abuse as worked up by the men. Thus, the conclusions here extended the analysis of similar positioning work described in Zverina (2009).

The facilitators' work within the women's group with regard to responses to abuse related closely to the already established discourse on women survivors of abuse, that is, it focused on women's resistance (Coates & Wade, 2004). This was clearly demonstrated when women constructed accounts of provoking abuse as a response to the abuse dynamic, and the facilitators constructed these as acts of resistance. Thus, the facilitators drew on a resistance discourse in the feminist domestic violence literature that dates from the 1980s. For example, Liz Kelly wrote the following in 1988: "Many women found the tension and fearfulness when they sensed a violent incident was brewing unbearable. Some consciously continued an argument in order to get the violence over with and move into a period of relative calm" (p. 131). It should be noted, however, that the facilitators first constructed the meaning of such accounts as resistance, and then the women supported this claim. Thus, rather than questioning the morality or

appropriateness of the women's constructions, the facilitators focused on the protective function of the women's reported responses. In general, the women's varied accounts of responses to abuse were endorsed by the facilitators and constructed as serving protective functions. In contrast, the women held themselves accountable for their potentially inappropriate or morally questionable responses *prior* to the facilitators drawing on the discourse of abuse resistance to position the women as powerful. That is, the women both provided reasons for being aggressive and opened up a space for questioning those actions. The facilitators however ignored the moral questions and emphasized the women's agency and the protective function of their actions. As already noted, reports of aggressive conduct were never accepted in the men's group and the men were encouraged to question the appropriateness of actions interpreted as aggressive. This difference may be understood within discourses of gender, i.e., the gendered problem for women who are victimized is passivity and dependence, whereas the gendered problem for men is aggressiveness and a negative attitude toward women and femininity. In each case, however, a potentially productive conversation was foreclosed.

The different ways in which participants in the women's and men's groups were positioned with respect to victimhood, responsibility, and gender contributes to and extends the literature on victim blaming in cases of intimate partner abuse. The literature, which primarily draws on women's experiences as victims, bears out that blaming the victim occurs in various forms, particularly when there is an exit focus (i.e., "Why didn't she leave?"; e.g., Leisenring, 2006; Mahoney, 1994). In my analysis, victim blaming was worked up in different ways within the men's and the women's groups. The women positioned themselves as accountable and challenged their victim identities (i.e., blamed themselves); the facilitators then countered the women's positioning by working to re-position them as survivors who did what they needed to

survive as victims of abuse. The men, however, positioned their women partners as accountable (with the exception of physical violence) and themselves as helpless to respond effectively; the facilitators then countered by refocusing attention on the men's actions and working to re-position them as responsible for their own actions and capable of effective responding. Recognizing the differing contexts for women and men who are abused by their partners is useful in understanding these differences. Specifically, women who position themselves as survivors risk having their victimhood called into question (Dunn, 2005; Leisenring, 2006), and therefore, it is understandable that within the therapeutic context of the group, the women themselves questioned their victimhood and facilitators worked to re-position them as victims and survivors. However, because the meaning of men's victimhood is still being negotiated among experts and people in general and the men formulated their accounts in ways that positioned them within normative discourses of masculinity (i.e., as agentic and sometimes misogynistic), it makes sense that the facilitators called their victimhood into question and tried to negotiate more appropriate ways of responding.

My analysis is consistent with the very limited reference in the literature to services for men who identify themselves as abused by female partners. That is, Worcester (2002) referred to personal communications with others who led groups for men perpetrators of abuse and concluded that "the services needed by heterosexual men who identify themselves as abused seem to be different from those needed by women because safety is less of an issue and leaving the relationship is not usually associated with increased danger as it is for abused women" (p. 1402). This claim was based on an extension of Worcester's (2002) critique of the literature on women's use of force, which concluded that any analysis of women's use of violence in intimate relationships must be "through a framework that keeps power and control central to the

definitions of domestic violence” (p. 1390). Thus, Worcester’s (2002) hypothesis about the possible gender difference in groups held for men perpetrators of abuse is consistent this study. Furthermore, my study shows how men’s claims are explicitly worked up in therapy talk but goes further in showing how the facilitators first positioned the men as accountable for their own actions prior to exploring possible alternatives. It then shows how the men responded to the facilitators’ interventions.

My research is also relevant to the critiques of psychology and psychotherapeutic practice in the context of domestic abuse therapy. For example, Hook (2002) argues that through a psychologization of the problem, gender-based violence is constructed as a problem of the self (i.e., of the abuser or of the victim who should have left) and ignores the social and political contexts. This analysis points to ways in which the social and political contexts or common notions of women’s victimization and the inappropriateness of men hitting women is strategically interwoven in the language used by facilitators, which in turn impacts their positioning work. I argue that the language of group therapy and psychology draws on the gendered contexts of abuse and uses these contexts as important resources.

6.3 Relevance of Gender

The material analysed in this study was gendered through and through. The group structure divided participants based on sex, the two facilitators were always gender balanced, and the participants (including the facilitators) often made gender relevant in their positioning and their accounts. That is, the participants drew on discourses of masculinity and femininity as resources to perform their identities.

In the women’s talk, women as victims was a taken-for-granted notion, therefore making it acceptable to position all responses as serving to keep one safe without being challenged. In

particular, throughout the women's accounts of abuse, the notion of feminine intuition served a significant purpose of supporting their claims of being victims of abuse. This gendered notion made it difficult to challenge their claims, as there is no way to independently confirm feelings that abuse is happening or about to happen. It also contradicted other research suggesting that women often report being surprised at their inability to recognize abuse or define their experience as abuse (Jackson, 2001; Wood & Rennie, 1994; Williston & Wood, 2009). Claims to knowing through intuition may be problematic because the concept of "emotional reasoning", defined as "you think something must be true because you "feel" it so strongly" (pg. 119) is a frequently documented cognitive distortion in cognitive therapy (Beck, 1995), and often raised in women's therapy groups. Thus, there are other contexts in which claims to knowing through intuition may be met with sharp critique, and therefore, the absence of any challenge to their claims of "just" knowing may not always serve them well. Notably, this resource was not accessible to the men. That is, the men never positioned themselves as being able to "feel" the abuse, and the facilitators never introduced this idea as one way of recognizing abuse. This highlights one way in which gender differentially shapes how women and men may position themselves within their accounts of abuse and how facilitators or other therapists may work to re-shape those accounts.

The men also worked up their problem in a gendered manner (i.e., how to respond to women's abuse without using aggression). This shaped how the men positioned themselves and how the facilitators worked to re-position them. It also shaped how the facilitators negotiated appropriate responses to abuse with the men. Additionally, the men's language use was consistent with their positioning within traditional discourses of masculinity, which led to the facilitators questioning their victim status and the appropriateness of their responses to abuse.

The men also utilized gender categories to position their women partners as abusers by emphasizing how their reported actions challenged gender roles or harmed their children. Finally, the facilitators made gender relevant in their constructions of appropriate responses to abuse for men. For example, they utilized terms that are consistent with traditional discourses of masculinity, such as assertiveness and power, to describe the action of walking away from abuse. Despite these positioning attempts, however, the men continued to challenge this proposal.

There was no single way that gender was topicalized or performed within the men's and the women's groups. Rather, for the women, victimhood was assumed and the notion of women as victims was utilized in such a way as to negotiate all responses to abuse as protective. For the men, the assumption that men are aggressive and often the perpetrators of violence was associated with the gendered dilemma of how men may respond to abuse without being aggressive. Gender became relevant in the differing ways in which abuse was recognized in each group, and finally, it was a resource drawn upon by the facilitators to position the men as taking responsibility for their aggressive responses.

6.4 Implications for Clinical Practice/Contributions

This study highlights specific group therapy features that may be particularly helpful for women but not men and vice versa. Although both the YNA and TFTB facilitators' manuals (see Appendix A and B) serve to guide the therapists in introducing topics and encouraging the participants to focus on their resiliencies and the goal of non-abusive futures, my analysis makes clear that *how* the content of the manuals was taken up was restricted and enabled by the gendered problem of abuse. The manuals for each group resemble each other in terms of their focus on theories and practices developed largely through the study of the abuse of women, and this analysis points to a need to incorporate an explicit sensitivity to gender.

Based on my analysis, the facilitators of the men's group faced an implicit therapeutic dilemma. On the one hand, the men had come to this group voluntarily and positioned themselves as victims. It would be unethical to assume that they did not experience abuse, based on the ethical standards of general respect and non-discrimination in the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (Canadian Psychological Association, 2000), and their accounts should be taken in good faith. On the other hand, at times the men's use of aggressive language was similar to the talk of perpetrators. As evident in my analysis, the facilitators responded to such talk but did not explicitly address the topic of gender and how that might be shaping the men's accounts. This was one moment in the therapeutic process where such a topic might have been introduced as a way of opening up possibilities for envisioning a different future. Additionally, the men tended to assign blame to their partners and avoided taking responsibility for their own actions, either within their accounts of abuse or as they talked within the group. As a result, the facilitators frequently challenged the men and worked to hold them accountable (e.g., using the Karpman's Triangle). The Karpman's Triangle resource served, then, as a challenging strategy rather than an educational tool, which was evident from the men's resistance to it when it was raised. Although its use served a subtle yet strong purpose, explicitly referring to gender might have been an alternative move that would have opened up the conversation. Furthermore, although the men positioned themselves outside of traditional discourses of masculinity in claiming to have been hurt by their women partners, they did so in ways that reproduced traditional masculinity (e.g., through aggressive talk). Consequently, they positioned themselves as potential abusers, to which the facilitators responded. This was a very difficult tension that the facilitators worked to manage. Making such a dilemma explicit and visible may help facilitators better understand the dynamics of their group work, and making gender relevant

related to how problems and solutions are worked up in therapy may contribute to the development of evolving therapy approaches addressing men's victimization and women's perpetration of abuse. In fact, this may be relevant to any sort of therapeutic work with men who hope to engage in new ways of doing relationships.

Another potential contribution to the men's therapy process involves the positioning work of the facilitators. As explored in the analysis, the men's repeated challenges to facilitators' proposed alternative ways of responding to abuse drew attention to the absence of talk about power within abusive relationships. The lack of fit between the discourse of power and control that has a long history in understanding women's victimization and men's perpetration may have been an obstacle to such conversation. Related to this, Augusta-Scott (2007) has suggested that therapists first acknowledge how the women partners are responsible for their abusive actions and then move away from the victim-perpetrator dichotomy and instead acknowledge both when the men were hurt by the actions of their women partners and when they provided accounts of hurting their women partners. This, however, "does not necessitate concluding that women and men perpetrate abuse equally, in terms of degree, frequency, or effects of the abuse" (Augusta-Scott, 2007, p. 198). Whether it would be more helpful to the therapeutic process if men first held themselves accountable for their actions within an abusive encounter or if facilitators engaged in explicit acknowledgements of men's victimization by pointing to the women partners' responsibility for their actions remains unclear. What does seem clear is the need to explicitly address power relations within abusive relationships, and this may only be possible once there is a clearer sense of how abuse works when men are the victims and women are the perpetrators.

A third implication for clinical practice includes being aware of the pitfalls of drawing on traditional discourses of masculinity to negotiate the meaning of various strategies for responding to abuse perpetrated by women and re-positioning men as “real men” despite their avoiding tactics learned over a lifetime (e.g., constructing walking away as assertive and powerful). In the groups analysed, this strategy was not successful. I suspect that the problem lay with the failure to address power relations, which affected the men’s cooperation in negotiating new meanings. Addressing these dynamics within abusive relationships may be an important first step needed prior to discussions related to responding to abuse.

Finally, the analysis has implications for the limitations associated with adapting a gender-specific model based on discourses of women’s victimization to men who are positioned as victims of intimate partner abuse. First, the facilitators faced challenges in positioning the men consistently as victims or survivors as opposed to perpetrators. Second, through their accounts, the men identified different concerns within their abusive relationships compared to the women. Third, both discourses of gender and the relevant power relations differed for women and men. Programs for men need to incorporate these distinctive features.

Implications specific to the women’s group are fewer, yet also impactful. First, I question the usefulness of positioning women as having the intuitive ability to recognize abuse. Interestingly, the women introduced this category and its common-sense nature made it a subtle yet powerful resource. However, it also reproduces discourses of traditional femininity and may put them at risk of further victimization, especially in light of literature noting the difficulties women have in recognizing and labeling abuse as such. Second, the lack of descriptive accounts of abuse within the women’s group was not necessarily a positive feature, as it may have prevented their exploration of the aspects of women’s lives that make them vulnerable to abuse

and the various ways they have responded to improve or escape abusive situations. It may be useful to take a step back in therapy, prior to going forward with the assumption of the women's victimization, and take time to explore the abuse accounts in a more detailed manner (similar to the men's work) in order to acknowledge and address both responsibility and victimization in their accounts.

6.5 Limitations and Future Research

As noted in the introduction, using discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodological approach makes it possible to explore intimate partner abuse talk through a contextualized lens. The discursive analysis of these therapy group videos where a research agenda had not been imposed on its participants creates both obvious strengths and some limitations. Although the therapy group talk itself was not impacted by certain research goals or perspectives, the analysis was limited by my agenda. Ongoing reflexivity throughout the analysis was a challenge, as I recognized that my reading of the text was likely influenced by my discourse analytic conclusions from my Master's thesis that also focused on men's group therapy talk. This ran the risk of me "looking" for similar patterns of talk in this study given my experience with the last. In making this challenge explicit, I decided to involve myself fully in the women's group conversations first as they were more unfamiliar to me. I then took on analyzing the men's group. It was an ongoing analytic process of "letting go" of discourse established already in the literature and remaining focused on what the group talk brought forward. Nevertheless, reflexivity became both a strength and a challenge, in that my past research helped guide future work in a specific way, while I needed to resist and challenge interpretations that neatly fit with previous work. Most importantly, despite my previous research (in Zverina 2009), I successfully

identified novel patterns in the men's group talk and explored new patterns of positioning among the women's group.

Practical limitations included difficulty hearing individual speakers and thus adequately transcribing portions of the group talk. These omitted sections were likely important to positioning work within the group as they occurred most often during times when the participants were doing emotion work. For example, particularly the women participants often cried and spoke quietly or quickly and simultaneously, making it difficult to grasp what they were saying. As a result, I was only able to analyze the audible portions of the tapes. This was less of a problem in the men's group as no participant cried during the sessions and most men spoke in clearly distinguishable ways (i.e., loud and clear).

The extensive quantity of available conversational material presented an analytic challenge due to the rich opportunities for analysis. Thus, other researchers looking at this same material might have focused on other themes or patterns that would also contribute to research and practice related to intimate partner abuse. Additionally, throughout my reading of the transcripts, I identified other important topics and discursive manoeuvres within the talk that have not yet been adequately explored in the literature and should be investigated further (e.g., the positioning of child and family services as abusers by the women and as helpers by the men; the process of working up various therapeutic activities such as genograms as part of abuse talk; etc.)

There is an ongoing need for research that considers the process of therapy in the area of domestic abuse. Although victimization groups were examined here, therapy talk in groups targeting men perpetrators of abuse and women abusers is also needed. This could further shed light on group participant and facilitator construction of identities and how movement towards

“abuse-free” or survivor identities may be accomplished in these groups. The use of a process-based research perspective that is made possible through discourse analysis is needed to examine how therapy is actually performed and the implicit and patterned ways facilitators are positioned by their therapy clients. This would help therapists identify pitfalls of therapy and develop strategies of communication that could further facilitate their aims in therapy

Probably the most important and most challenging area for future study involves the need to explore gender-appropriate theories of abuse, particularly for men. As can be seen in this analysis, the dominant power and control dynamics discourse that is readily available for men and women does not fit the men’s accounts, which in this case resulted in on-going negotiations of what constitutes abuse and how men should respond to abuse. This is particularly challenging as the men, in positioning their women partners as abusive, utilized the same rhetorical strategies as did the men in programs for perpetrators of abuse who were working to justify their aggressive responses. I have argued that this supports the notion that men’s and women’s abuse accounts and identity positioning are qualitatively different. Thus what is needed is more research on men’s experiences of abuse that will allow the development of explanatory frameworks specific to men’s lives. In adopting this view, I am assuming that the men’s abuse accounts ought to be treated as accounts of hurtful and unhealthy relationships but that the discourses informing facilitators’ work within men’s groups need to be built up in the same way that discourses about women’s victimization have been built up, i.e., from their accounts.

As it has been suggested that we need to move away from reliance on dichotomous categories (abused *versus* perpetrator) in the therapy literature (supported by this study, Zverina et al., 2011, and August-Scott, 2007), discourse analysis is an appropriate method for exploring

what an alternative (e.g., acknowledging both women's and men's responsibility) could look like in therapy. Thus, future research is needed in these areas.

6.6 Summary

The intimate partner abuse literature remains fraught with controversies regarding the nature of women's and men's victimization. One of the most predominant critiques has been that the socio-political and gendered contexts of the abuse of men within intimate relationships has not been adequately explored, running the risk of implying that men experience symmetrical abuse in intimate relationships compared to women. Discursive research has begun to explore the possibilities and constraints women and men face when constructing their experience of abuse, although nearly all such research has focused on women as victims and men as perpetrators. This study explored abuse and responses to abuse accounts among two 14-week therapeutic groups at the Calgary Counselling Centre: a) 'A Turn for the Better' group for men victims of violence in intimate, heterosexual relationships; and b) 'You Are Not Alone' group from women victims of violence in intimate, heterosexual relationships. Interview data were analysed using discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), which provided a framework for how participants and facilitators constructed their accounts of abuse and how they were positioned within these accounts.

The analysis indicated several important features of how the group participants were positioned. First, the men's and women's constructions of abuse were qualitatively different in terms of both process (i.e., the rhetorical and gendered strategies that were used) and positioning (i.e., the women oriented to fear, protection, and safety, while men did not). Second, the process of negotiating appropriate responses to abuse, which involved considerable participation on the part of the facilitators, differed for the men and women. In the women's group, the women

positioned themselves as being accountable for their varied responses to abuse. The meaning of these responses was then renegotiated by the facilitators as serving a protective function, and thus the women were positioned as strong and independent survivors. In the men's group, the men positioned themselves as victims and focused on their female partners' responsibility for the abuse. The facilitators challenged the men's failure to take responsibility for their responses to their partners' abusiveness, especially when the men positioned themselves as aggressive. In addition, the facilitators worked to re-position the men as non-aggressive within an alternative account of how to respond to abuse, i.e., "walking away". The study shed light on how gender became relevant in the talk, as talk in the men's group was negotiated around the gendered dilemma of how men were to appropriately respond to women's abuse when men ought not to be aggressive with women, and talk in the women's group drew on the power and control discourse which served to take women's victimization for granted.

This study contributes to and extends research focusing on contextualizing abuse in the case of men positioned as abused compared to women positioned as abused. It illustrates how therapy clients and their facilitators used discourse in multiple ways to position and reposition themselves with regard to responsibility when discussing being abused and responding to abuse. It also contributes to an understanding of men's and women's abuse in terms of showing how they negotiate the various, often gendered, discourses available to them within therapeutic contexts and has implications for therapeutic clinical practice. Finally, it points to the difficulties of translating abuse-related notions from women victims to abused men.

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Appendix A: Facilitator Manual Themes Raised in TFTB Sessions

All text under this section are direct quotes from the CCC TFTB manual (2002).

Session One

Theme: Contracting and establishing purpose of the group.

Important to frame the abuse as violence and the continuum of violence (p.4).

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature: Continuum of violence.

Session Two

Theme: What is abuse and what has it done to me and my family?

It is important that the group understands that all (kinds of) abuse leaves scars or some kind; all abuse negatively affects the recipients (p. 8).

Use the ‘Perception, Thought, Feeling, Behaviour’ wheel to tease out the circular process that keeps them trapped in an abusive situation (p. 8).

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature: Types of abuse, abuse cycle (thoughts, behaviours, feelings, perceptions).

Session Three

Theme: Understanding the pervasive effects of abuse

“Not only how they reacted and adjusted to the abuse, but also an exploration of their feeling about the abuse...Shutdown of affect is not a way of processing an experience – it simply means you do not have to experience emotion in a meaningful way. This means that the men cannot truly heal until they have come to terms with the pain and in some sense grieved what they have lost. It is important for facilitators to keep reaching for affect even if this triggers anger....” (p. 10).

Activity: Discussion about how they coped with the abuse: Start the discussion by focusing on what action they took while in abusive situations. Remember most abused men and women may have responded in an abusive manner, however these men will not have moved into abuser roles. Once this has been fully discussed move onto what changed in their lives as a result of the abuse (p. 10).

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature: Effects of abuse, healing from abuse (i.e., experience the painful emotions and grieve losses), response/resistance to abuse.

Session Four

Theme: How do gender and social sex roles affect me?

“Depending on their previous gender socialization, it is possible that the men may be deeply ashamed of being an abused male. It is important for the men to understand how gender proscriptions may have influenced how they view themselves and their responsibilities to themselves and their families” (p. 13).

Activity: Discussion on men’s roles in society:...Invite a fully involved discussion of gender stereotyping (p. 13).

Activity: How have gender stereotypes supported the abuse in their lives? ...This is a discussion around how restraining beliefs about gender roles may have kept them trapped in the abuse cycle (p. 14).

Activity: Difference between assertion and aggression: Many of the men may be experiencing a sense of helplessness and around how to act and must start to realize that they do have choice of response to abuse. This is the initial stage of helping the men create boundaries around what is acceptable behavior and what is not (p. 14).

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature: Role of gender and social roles in abuse, cycle of abuse and reluctance to seek help, difference between assertion and aggression.

Session Five

Theme: Making healthy choices

Focuses on the roles and dynamics of an abusive relationship.... In this way each man becomes responsible for his choices and actions.

Activity: Understanding the abuse dynamic (Karpman's Triangle)...Following this discussion of what needs to happen for the men to remove themselves from the triangle and what would need to be different about their beliefs and emotions to allow this to happen (i.e. Action Triangle) (p. 16)

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature: Abuse dynamics (Karpman's Triangle and Action Triangle)

Session Six

Theme: Revealing Victim Resistance

...helps the men understand that all victims resist violence in their lives and explores how each man in his own way did resist the violence in his life. There is also an understanding of the dynamics involved in concealing both the violence and the resistance, thus allowing the violence to continue (p. 19).

Activity: Introduce the concept of resistance: ... Most victims perceive themselves as weak and believe that they have not resisted the abuse in any way. This however is untrue. As is seen in the framework for the analysis of violence and language both the victim and the perpetrator conceal both the violence and the resistance (pg. 19).

Activity: Discussion of how to respond to violence: it is important for them to find healthy ways of responding to the abuse. Start a discussion about what the men think would help them get out of an abusive situation and then introduce the response based approach (p. 21).

References Provided: Wade, Coates, & Todd. (2001). An interactional view of violence and resistance. Unpublished paper. Alan Wade, July 2000.

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature: Resistance to abuse

Session Seven

Theme: Integrating what we now know about violence and our situations

...it is time to take stock of where the men are at in the change process. This will ensure that they grasped all of the new concepts and have started integrating them into their belief systems. Part of the integration process is to deepen the men's emotional self-awareness so that they are free to start focusing on their well being (p. 23).

Activity: Discussion about any differences in self the men are noticing (p. 23).

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature: Change process in therapy.

Session Eight

Theme: Genograms, learning more about my family

... time to give some family context to the men's experience of abuse. Each man constructs a large scale descriptive genogram of both his, and his partner's family of origin. The genogram goes back to grandparents. This often helps the men understand how they may have allowed abuse to enter their lives and may show very revealing patterns through the generations (p. 25).

Activity: Talking about my genogram:it is better to focus on relationships rather than on simply describing individuals (p. 26).

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature: Social theories of abuse: social learning, modeling, and learned helplessness.

Session Nine

Theme: Continuation of Genograms

Activity: Discussion of insight the men may have gained (p. 28).

Session Ten

Theme: Moving forward to health, choosing your future path

The men in the group now have enough information to start moving forward and making healthy choices. The men are more self aware, have better connections with themselves and should be looking forward to what they are going to do with their lives. Some may be choosing to leave relationships, while some may be considering staying or going back into their relationships.

Some of the men who are no longer in relationships may be considering a new relationship (p. 30).

Session 11

Theme: Perspective taking

Activity: Empty Chair Exercise (p. 32).

Session 12

Theme: Perspective taking (p. 33).

Session 13

Theme: Maintenance.

At this time consideration needs to be given to learning to be self aware with respect to abuse entering their lives and how they can retain and use what they have learned. While it is true that

their belief systems have been changing it is very simple to slip back into old patterns of thinking and behaving in moments of stress and crisis (pg. 34).

Activity: Discussion of what is different in the men's lives (p. 34).

Activity: Discussion of how the men can maintain the changes and continue to move forward (p. 5).

Session 14

Theme: Termination

The men should be reviewing their progress and beginning to look forward to the future.... This session is meant for review of the changes, a realization of progress and a commitment to an abuse free future. While it is possible to have some sort of celebration of the end of group, it should be noted that this is really a beginning for the men – a new opportunity. It might be more important to have some sort of ritual to end the group – some way of validating and sending to men forward on the next part of the journey toward an abuse free future (p. 36).

Appendix B: Facilitator Manual Themes Raised in YNA Sessions

All text under this section are direct quotes from the CCC YNA manual (2002).

Session one

Theme: Engagement, contracting, and safety.

It is essential that the facilitators strike a balance between being supportive and empathetic, and challenging the women to make the changes necessary for them to have an abuse free life. This is not a support group, it is a change oriented therapy group and facilitators need to balance hearing the narratives of the women's lives with asking what their goals for group are (p. 3).

-Safety is of major importance for the women in this group. Facilitators must ensure that the women are safe from physical harm. No woman should leave the group to go home to a physically abusive situation. If necessary the facilitators should coordinate shelter and police help. At this stage of therapy it is unlikely that the women will be emotionally safe in their homes. It is necessary for this to be acknowledged and that the facilitators start to foster a safer atmosphere in the group setting (p. 4).

Activity: Brief discussion about what constitutes abuse: It is possible that the women may not be aware of the full gamut of abuse and violence they may have experienced. While it is not usual to share the continuum of violence with clients, facilitators must have a clear understanding of all aspects of violence in intimate relationships. Use this knowledge to elicit a full exploration of violence and do not allow minimization (p. 5).

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature: Types of abuse (safety from physical violence; continuum of violence.

Session Two

Theme: Safety and resistance to violence.

Many women who have been abused in intimate relationships perceive themselves to be immobilized victims. They have a sense of helplessness and shame about their situation. It is important early in the group to bring a sense of agency and proficiency to the women. This will move them from a state of learned helplessness that they may have entered. It is however of vital importance that facilitators ensure that any actions the women may take in their relationships does not further endanger them (p. 7).

...focus on the fact that the women have resisted the violence in many different way and they have probably done this in a way that has kept them safer than some other types of resistance may have done....This should start the women seeing themselves differently. That is no longer helpless and inactive. They have indeed responded to violence with resistance (p. 7).

Activity: Introduce the concept of resistance: Most of these women will believe that they have simply allowed the violence to happen and will perceive themselves as weak. This however is untrue. As is seen in the framework for the analysis of violence and language, both the victim and the perpetrator conceal both the violence and the resistance. The notion that they did indeed resist in some form, albeit in a safe manner, may be a new concept and given the low self worth evident in this population may be difficult for them to grasp. It is essential that facilitators introduce this concept in a way that allows the women to accept and consider the possibility that they did indeed resist the violence. The best way to introduce this concept is to frame questions around how the women responded to the violence. Use of the word responded will elicit more response than the use of the word resist (p. 8).

References Provided: Wade, Coates, & Todd. (2001). An interactional view of violence and resistance. Unpublished paper. Alan Wade, July 2000.

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature: Victim resistance, learned helplessness, concealed violence and resistance.

Session Three

Theme: Safety and resistance to violence.

Continuation of the work started in the previous session.

Activity: Discussion of how to respond to violence: ...Begin to challenge victimhood. It is however important that safety in being a resistor is recognized. Resisting does not mean responding to violence with violence; that is dangerous and does not work.... Once the women become more aware of what has kept them trapped in the cycle despite their resistance, it is time to move into what needs to happen in a response based approach. It is important to help the women understand that it is beliefs that they need to change. Action may be dangerous at this time (p. 11).

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature : Resistance – response-based approach

Session Four

Theme: What is abuse and how has it affected me and my family

...full discussion of all the different types of abuse. There will be a variation in abusive experience, but it is important that the women fully understand the more subtle types of abuse.

Perpetrators may cease the physical violence, but will often increase the more manipulative controlling behaviours. Facilitators should have an extensive knowledge basis of the continuum of violence, although this is not used as a tool with the group.

Activity: Discussion of the effects of abuse on participants and their children: ...should introduce the Perception, Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviour wheel to tease out the circular dynamics that can keep them trapped in an abusive relationship (p. 16).

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature: Types of abuse; continuum of violence, abuse cycle (thoughts, behaviours, feelings, perceptions).

Session Five

Theme: Relationship with self.

...focuses on self-relational therapy... Women who have been abused lose the ability to trust themselves and find themselves thinking and acting from the abused or neglected self. This is the part that has been under the influence of negative sponsorship, the “alien attack.” Usually the message that comes through is that the person is unlovable. The abused woman internalizes the “alien beliefs” as her own. The healthy relational field is broken and there is a break in, or loss of the relational field (p. 18).

Activity: Discussion of “alien attacks” or negative sponsorship: This is an introduction to the idea that the emotion and physical abuse comes from an external source and that these “aliens” directly attack the somatic self. The abused woman “mistakenly identifies the alien presences [beliefs] as her own and rejects her basic self as alien and untrustworthy” (Ibid, pp. 66-67). This phase of the group therapy is an identification of the negative sponsorship (p. 19).

Activity: Discussion of what happens when an abused woman starts to internalize the negative sponsorship (abuse).... Three major consequences of the break in the relational field when clients experience negative sponsorship: (a) “Cognitive self is constricted, dissociated, fragmented or otherwise inaccessible (when the abuse is happening the cognitive self goes); (b) the somatic self is gripped in a state of ‘neuromuscular lock’, a frozen state of fear distinguished by out-of control emotions, hyperarousal and hypervigilance, somatization and regression; (c) the woman cannot shut out the intrusive images and voices of negative sponsors that define the self as bad, unlovable, and deserving of violence” (Herman, 1992).

Externalization and validation of the experiences (many women believe they are crazy) will start to free the women from the “alien beliefs.” It is important as withal [sic] of the sessions that the information of experience comes initially from the women and that only when this has been fully discussed and fleshed out that the framework be given. Facilitators should listen carefully to the language used by the women and try to build the framework using their words and not the therapeutic language above. Each group will use different words; they carry the same meaning. (p. 20).

References Provided: Gilligan, S. (1997). *The Courage to Love*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. The essential portions for this session can be found in Chapter Three (p. 48-70); Ibid, (p. 66-67); Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence from domestic abuse to political terror*. New York: Basic.

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature. Effects of abuse (i.e., internalizing abuse messages; changed relationship with self, women’s lack of trust in themselves; confusion about how they feel; “crazy-making”; loss of self-esteem); physical reactions to physical trauma, healing from abuse (i.e., Self-Relational therapy; externalizing the problem – narrative therapy ideas).

Session Six

Theme: Relationship with self (continuation).

...time to turn to developing a healthy relational field. Gilligan, (p. 67) reminds us of the importance of having clients carry and acknowledge their competencies. The thrust of the therapy is to help the women regain their sense of “beingness,” that is a healthy identity.

Activity: Discussion of competencies: These competencies will be known to the cognitive self but will not be felt by the somatic self which has been under the attack of negative sponsorship.

The discussion is around how to use the clients' competencies and resources, which have appeared to be inaccessible to the somatic self. Some women describe the split in knowing as "crazy making." They have a cognitive sense of their worth and competencies, however as a result of the negative sponsorship they have no feeling or belief in their cognitive knowledge (p. 22).

Activity: Shifting knowledge from the cognitive to the somatic self: The women in the group have been using guided imagery or hypnosis, which has been focused on ego strengthening. Now these skills will be used to help the women get in touch with their own center or what Gilligan calls "the tender soft spot". It is important to differentiate between dissociation and this focused accessing of self. This is a purposeful transference or reconnection between the cognitive and somatic selves. It is a process whereby the cognitive self can validate the somatic self (p. 23)

References Provided: Gilligan, S. (1997). *The Courage to Love*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature. Healing from abuse (i.e., Self-relational therapy, self-esteem – ego-strengthening).

Session Seven

Theme: Relationship with self (continuation).

Activity: If you have a healthy relationship with yourself, what differences will this make to your relationships and your ability to access outside resources: The third objective in healing the tears in the relational field is to re-establish healthy connections with external resources (p. 26).

Session Eight

Theme: Making healthy choices.

...focuses on the roles and dynamics of an abusive relationship. Once the women have a solid understanding of the beliefs and emotions that keep them trapped in an abusive relationship, they begin to see that they do indeed have choices in how they respond (p. 28).

Activity: Understanding the abuse dynamics: Karpman's Triangle....Following this is a discussion of what needs to happen for the women to remove themselves from the triangle and what would need to be different about their beliefs and emotions to allow this to happen (p. 29).

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature. Abuse dynamics (Karpman's Triangle and Action Triangle).

Session Nine

Theme: Genograms, learning about my family.

...give some family context to the women's experience of abuse. Each participant constructs a large scale, descriptive genogram of both her and her partner's family of origin. The genogram goes back to grandparents. This often helps the women understand how they may have allowed abused to enter their lives and show very revealing patterns through the generations (p. 31).

Action: Discussion of insight the women may have gained.

Concepts Raised in the Psychological Literature. Social Theories of Abuse: Social learning, modeling, and learned helplessness.

Session Ten

Theme: Moving forward to health, choosing your future path.

The women in the group now have enough information to start moving forward and making healthy choices. They are more self aware, have better connections with themselves and should be looking forward to what they are going to do with their lives. Some may be choosing to leave relationships, while some may be considering staying or going back into their relationships.

Some of the women who are no longer in relationships may be considering a new relationship (p. 36).

Activity: Discussion of where the women see themselves going in the future (p. 36).

Session 11

Theme: Perspective Taking

Activity: Empty Chair Exercise (p. 38).

Session 12

Theme: Perspective Taking (continuation).

Session 13

Theme: Maintenance.

The women should now be in a position to be able to make healthy choices with respect to intimate relationships. At this time consideration needs to be given to learning to be self aware with respect to abuse entering their lives and how they can retain and use what they have learned. While it is true that their belief systems have been changing it is very simple to slip back into old patterns of thinking and behaving in moments of stress and crisis....What would the danger signals be and how would they respond (p. 43).

Activity: Discussion of what is different in the women's lives (p. 43).

Activity: Discussion of how the women can maintain the changes and continue to move forward (p. 44).

Session 14

Theme: Termination.

The women should be reviewing their progress and beginning to look forward to the future...This session is meant for review of the changes, a realization of progress and a

commitment to an abuse free future. While it is possible to have some sort of celebration of the end of group, it should be noted that this is really a beginning for the women- a new opportunity. It might be more important to have some sort of ritual to end the group- some way of validating and sending the participants forward on the next part of the journey toward an abuse free future (p. 46).